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### NARRATIVE POETICS OF MINDREADING<sup>1</sup>

In my article I would like to discuss the relation between literary narrative, its poetics and some abilities of embodied human mind. My project refers to literary studies and consciousness/mind studies. I am focused on cognitive theory of intersubjectivity and its role in creating and reading of literary narrative. The investigation contributes to a new and dynamic subdiscipline of literary studies: cognitive narratology (Herman 1997, 2003, 2007). This will be a methodological frame of my study presented here.

I analyze how a literary narrative becomes a useful cognitive tool. It enables us to experience what we would not be able to experience – a variety of fictional states of mind, feelings, and sensations different from our actual mental states. Narrative has the power to place a reader right into someone else's experience (Cohn 1978). While reading, one can explore, how it is to be a human being of different sex or a murderer. On the other hand, narrative has its origins in our everyday mental activity and some particular capacities of human mind. The link between known and unknown is our ability to take other person's mental perspective. I argue that literary "mindreading" is not only the very act of reading about fictional people, but it is the process of application of some innate cognitive mechanisms as well. There are also many everyday situations, when we use "mindreading" as a basis of our verbal and nonverbal communication and cooperation within the society.

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To lay a groundwork for my topic, I will begin with a cognitive, empirical definition of intersubjectivity. In what follows, I discuss certain properties of a novel and their function of representing intersubjectivity. I trace some intersubjectivity figures inscribed in the level of poetics. I will present some narrative models of taking someone else's perspective inscribed in different narrative forms and techniques. My aim is to isolate some historical literary models of "mindreading" that reflect the human capacity of perspective taking.

### **Intersubjectivity**

For the purpose of narrative poetics of mindreading, a crucial category of intersubjectivity must be applied to narrative studies. I refer to its empirical, cognitive meaning. Intersubjectivity is one specific mode of working human consciousness. In short, intersubjectivity is our constant awareness of other human subjects present in the field of our perception and conscious experience. The other modes of working human consciousness are self-consciousness and consciousness of the outer world. What makes intersubjectivity so important to a human subject and human society? Intersubjectivity may be considered as an extraordinary cognitive tool to compensate a singularity of our own cognitive perspective. We are able to *share* it, which means we mentally represent someone else's forms of mental states: emotions, desires, intentions, perceptual or attentional focus, beliefs about actual states of environment (Gärdenfors 2007). Taking another person's perspective means that I attribute to this person the same cognitive abilities that I have. I also suppose, the other has the ability to take my perspective as well. I take into account that their desires, knowledge or intentions may be completely different from my own. And I am able to pretend some inner states or not to show my actual feelings as well. This intersubjective level of human consciousness makes us mutually aware of communicative value of the presence of other human beings. We make meaningful links between perceptual data (somebody else's behaviours, actions, gestures) and its mental background: other people's states of mind. "Mindreading" or "theory of mind" (Nichols, Stich 2003, Astington, Baird 2005) is one of the well-developed competence for recognizing and predicting what the other may know. And this knowledge is a crucial element of the context of our social interrelations. We *read* people in everyday interactions. Intersubjectivity is connected to many mental dispositions or abilities: empathy, identification, and simulation. As bodily creatures we participate in "corporal communion" with otherness by the fact of embodiment, sensual

perception, we share “innate intercorporeality” (Merleau-Ponty’s term). At the very basic level we know how it is to be someone else, since we identify bodily expressions of emotions, moods, somatic experiences as a shared subjective realm and we have some kind of access to it – at least to some extent.

Intersubjectivity does not mean a *real and full access* to someone’s thoughts, emotions, sensations, but it is an operative system of human consciousness. We do not have a clear knowledge of the content of someone’s mind (thoughts, inner speech). This is a mediating process between introspection and external expression or verbal description (or visualization), shared representation of self and the other, even in the case of imagined actions of self and the other.

This form of cognition was confirmed by empirical studies on human mental and psychological development (Diamond, Marrone 2003) and by neuroscience (Stamenov, Gallese 2002). The interpersonal space is primarily established by pre-verbal bodily communication between a newborn and a caretaker – humans have an ability to imitate movements and facial expressions of emotions very soon after being born.

#### **A novel and the imagery access to other’s mind – a cognitive value of the genre**

Novel represents subjective experience, it is its essential aspect, usually taken for granted. The development of introspection techniques is of great interest in literary theory and the history of the genre (Watt 1957, Scholes, Kellogg 1966). They were used from the infancy of the form of modern European novel. A notable characteristic of the genre as a major and mature form (18th century) is the first person perspective of fictional autobiography, diary or epistolary novel, in which a character describes her/his own internal life. One can mention a few main European works of this kind – Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, Richardson’s *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, Goethe’s *Werther*. But some new problems appeared, when a new kind of narrator was introduced – a fictional and anonymous impersonal voice telling the story of characters’ actions and their thoughts, feelings or internal states. The main question of that form is – how a narrator is to know anything about someone else private and intimate experience? In order to get closer to the multitudinous thoughts and feelings, images and inner speech passages that pass through the hero’s mind many new conventions of self-introspection were developed. Representing a direct access to speech and thoughts of fictional person by means of internal

monologue, point of view strategy or stream of consciousness technique was believed to be much more psychologically “realistic” than traditional modes of introspective writing. The question of uniqueness and privacy of human consciousness received a boost with Modernists’ “turn inward” (Micale 2004). Approaching multidimensional reality of human mind gave an impulse to the subjectivisation of narration, which introduced the vivid development of literary forms exploring the momentary flow of emotional, visceral, and sensual components of consciousness. The Modernist writers abandoned universal perspective of the omniscient third person narrator at the same time when psychology turned to exploring raw data of moment-by-moment private experience of an individual (Robinson 1982). A privacy of individual consciousness was a key notion in Modernist psychology, highly influenced by William James and Henry Bergson theory of inner experience. According to his stance, there is a unique sense in which one’s consciousness is private to each human being, since one’s consciousness is related to his or hers feelings, somatic reactions, emotional responses to the environment, and biography. For the above reasons, a privacy of consciousness was equated with the whole realm of subjective experience. Moreover, one can deal only with a single personal consciousness operating in absolute isolation from the others and this kind of inevitable pluralism has to be stressed strongly. When it comes to literary critics’ evaluation of new narrative forms, they were considered as the proper literary modes for representing an individual consciousness in literature. Is this imagination and the imagination alone that saves us from this kind of represented solipsism?

This idea is grossly oversimplified, since it excludes from the topic many mechanisms inscribed in the very act of *telling a story about another human being*. In contrast, cognitive narratology seeks to promote a redefinition of “literary representation of consciousness” by including intermental elements of consciousness representations (Palmer 2004). Sharing other persons’ states of mind is inherent and inseparable from human existence. It involves sensitive responsiveness to other human being. We read someone else’s mind not only while reading a fictional story, but narrative always stimulates our intersubjective ability to share other individuals’ inner worlds. Intersubjective cooperation extends far beyond language and it involves emotional and sensual reactions to a literary work - it is a promising way for deepening our understanding of the role of literature/ a novel. If our brain is stimulated while doing/observing/imagining the action this might be a link between reading about human psychosomatic experience, visualising it and

responding bodily to the description and its mental image. Narrative is one of the most sophisticated outcomes of the neural basis - of our imitative brain. Knowing the innate state and knowing that particular behaviour is linked with it in our own experience, we make inferences about visible signs and invisible inner cause. This is not only "known meaning" - this is also "embodied meaning" (Spolsky 1996, Zunshine 2006).

### Narrative mind

Is there something empirical, basic, and universal in fictional narrative what appeals to us, stimulates our cognition and reflects how our mind works?

Narrative reveals human ability to manipulate and to organize multiple points of view and this is a mental operation human beings are especially good at. I would like to modify the concept of "narrative perspective" and connect it with our particular mental skill to represent the inner world of others. I argue, that narrative perspective is directly connected with intersubjective functioning of human consciousness - in other words, it is not only a literary device or fixed and stable textual feature, as literary critics explain the term (Stanzel 1984). Narrative perspective is a representation of shared psychosomatic experience, inscribed in every act of talking *about someone else or talking as someone else*. Perspective-taking is not a simple narrative product - it is rather the real genesis of narrative. The notion of perspective was usually ascribed to a narrator or a character - in the latter case it was one of the main markers of the process of subjectivization of the prose in its evolution. Decline of omnipresent and authoritative narrator gave rise to a personal, character's vision of storyworld and these narrative forms were given the priority as hallmarks of modern literature (Booth 1983). Contrary, I assume, that narrative perspective is an amalgamatic category and it represents a mutual flux of mental space shared by narrator and character and, on the other hand - by an author and a reader. All these subjects take part in narrative communication and must take the perspective of fictional character to understand their motivation and deeds. In my approach, I treat a narrative perspective as a basic narrative mechanism, inscribed in even the most traditional narrative forms, strictly connected with a mental ability to represent someone else's inner states. The quotation below comes from *Little Dorrit* by Charles Dickens:

*He was waiting to be fed, looking sideways through the bars that he might see the further down the stairs, with much of the expression of a wild beast in similar expectation. But his eyes, too close together, were not so nobly set in his head as those of the king of beasts are in his, and they were sharp rather than bright-pointed weapons with little surface to betray them. They had no depth or change; they glittered, and they opened and shut. (Dickens 2008: 3)*

Let me express the mechanism of the constant flux of perspective-shifting in narrative as an example of human intersubjective ability to represent mentally someone else's inner world. I will use some symbols to show the act of perspective change:

Ch - character's perspective

N- narrator's perspective

R - mental representation of: (in) - intention, (p) perception and its object (o p), (e) emotion, (s) sensation

*He was waiting to be fed* - narrator attributes an intention to a character who is observed from the outside

[N>R(in)] -narrator's perspective dominates: a representation of intention

*looking sideways through the bars* - narrator identifies character's attentional focus and the act of perception, follows his gaze from a particular point in space

[Ch>R(p)] - character's perspective dominates: a representation of perceptual act

*that he might see the further down the stairs* - narrator describes only one particular object in space, following the act of perception of the man

[Ch>R(o p)] - character's perspective dominates: a representation of an object of perception

*with much of the expression of a wild beast in similar expectation* - narrator describes the man's appearance, his facial expression observed from the outside

[N>R(e)+R(s)] - narrator's perspective dominates: a representation of inner states- emotions and sensations

Reading a narrative, a reader is made wonder whose sensations, thoughts and beliefs, feelings or emotions this particular part of a story (a sentence or even one deictic marker) represents. There is no stable and fixed narrative perspective (personal or authorial), since this is not only textual feature, but most of all it is an effect of human mental operations and mental abilities. To use Mark Turner's concept, narrative perspective can be defined as a product of conceptual integration, a blend (Turner 1996). A literary narrative appears to be a sequence of perspective shifts. This in turn reshapes readers' affective response towards fiction, since they may change the subject of identification processes (Miall, Kuiken 2001).

Empirical narrative studies need to use the new model of human mind to explain the very process of creating a fictional character and understanding them in the actual act of reading. My project calls for a new model of narratological description and this model is needed to re-define some crucial elements of narrative poetics and narrative studies, reader-response theory. This model implies "we-centered" (Gallese 2003) intersubjective mental space as a cognitive background of narrative, in which an author and a reader *project themselves into fictional being or indentify with fictional being, or simulate their fictional experience*. In short - all these mental activities engages different intersubjective dispositions. Narrative offers many literary means to establish, maintain, and modify other person's perspective. An author and a reader assume the multiplicity of epistemological and ontological beings as the most important feature of narrative itself. Both of them have to fill up "a paper human being" (fictional character) with their own experience and their own non-textual knowledge. It is possible due to working of our intersubjective mind. Compared to traditional structuralist narratology, this model includes variety of mental subjects inscribed in narrative instead of one-dimensional and logocentric author - reader relationship.

How does this narrative mind operate within fictional story? An author and a reader find themselves participating in some kind of mental experiment of perspective-taking and shifting. A writer creates a fictional speaker - it may be a person or an anonymous voice speaking from the outside of storyworld who transmits the story. Narrator can identify with the person he talks about or he/she can stress the perceptual/ emotional/ moral distance from a character. The narrator represents fictional people - their thoughts, feelings and action and he/she quotes their words. Within narrator's speech fictional people's

perspectives are established - how they perceive one another, what they feel about themselves. On the cognitive level narrative multiplies embedded perspectives (van Peer and Chatman 2001). When a reader reads a narrative they have to track the perspective-shifting all the time (Emmott 1997). A reader keeps on tracking who is speaking, whose thoughts/feelings/impressions/emotions are being represented. While reading, we connect our own experience (its emotional and sensual content, memories) with the mental representation of the other - a fictional person. We enter a fictional world through this activity. Doing so, we are likely to treat literary reading as experience - not only the act of recognizing stylistic features of the text or decoding an inscribed meaning. In many cases, the experience is so vivid and intense that it resembles transportation: an integrative melding of attention, mental imagery, feelings and sensations focused on fictional events and characters. (Nell 1988, Gerrig 1993). This is also "felt meaning", "embodied simulation" in literary experience.

Narrative provides us with some proofs, that counter-factuality of stories has an evolutionary value. The evolutionary success of the mankind has depended on natural ability to read other minds and to take this knowledge into account in everyday interrelations with the others. And to lie or to create fiction (to use language not only to represent the objects and to communicate, but to speak indirectly, in terms of what it is one's interest to say) is also very important in this context.

### **Intersubjectivity and some categories of cognitive narratology**

In the paragraph that follows, I will mention shortly some most important narratological trends, that have been developed under the rubric of cognitive narratology. I would like to point out how my own project is connected with them. I think many of contemporary narratological concepts may be gathered together under the idea of empirically defined intersubjectivity, which I have briefly described. Using this definition, we can see narrative as a product of our ability to take another human being's perspective. Generally speaking, the narrative act may be considered as a process of embedded roles changing. The act of telling a story implies such a situation: *I am talking to you* (a reader or an addressee) *as someone else* (a narrator - personal or anonymous) *about somebody else* (a character). I would argue, that telling a story is a linguistic product of mental cooperation between a teller and their addressee. The object of this cooperation is another antropomorphic being - a human-like fictional character.

I do not treat narrative as first and foremost linguistic structure of abstract functions or sequences connected by universal rules of joining the units together. Narrative, according to cognitive theorists, is most of all a human mode of thinking (Bruner 1986, Turner 1996) and human strategy of sense-making by establishing relations between agents and their actions. One of such evident relations has its origins in human disposition to reconstruct a mental background of the someone else's perceived action. In other words - we explain behaviours, bodily expressions or verbal utterances of people around us in terms of their inner motivations. In case of fictional people, we attribute to them the same human abilities and inner processes to predict their actions, understand their deeds and emotions (Pollard-Gott 1993, Culpeper 1996). We refer to their inner life automatically, as if they were real humans we deal with in our normal social life. Doing so, a reader is able to identify with a fictional hero, it is not strange to get involved in a very strong emotional response toward a literary character. As Mary-Laure Ryan puts it, narrative involves the reconstruction of minds and we see its participants as intelligent agents who have their own mental life (M.-L. Ryan 2007). What is more, even if the literary convention is not realistic, we still use the same strategy while reading - we use our everyday knowledge of human everyday world to build a mental representation of fictional agents<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, narrative itself gives us an imaginary access to a verbalized (or implied only) inner experience of a fictional being.

The theoretical stances I have just recount bear wider meaning of consciousness in literature than it was used in traditional literary narrative studies. Structuralist critics or narrative forms historians tended to narrow the topic to conventional inner speech and thought representations (usually variety of internal monologue techniques). The role of private inner speech as a core of inner life has been overestimated and the other forms of mental functioning (emotional or sensual responses, perceptual acts, nonverbal forms of thinking) have been almost neglected. From the perspective of today's cognitive narratology, this approach is insufficient - it leaves many problems out of scope. The most important is *intermental* dimension of consciousness (Palmer 2004), which means that narrative not only gives a reader an insight in the individual flux of conscious experience of a character, but it also reveals

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<sup>2</sup> She labels this strategy "the rule of close departure". See M. -L. Ryan 2001.

cultural and cognitive mechanisms of social perception. Every narrative enables a reader to make inferences about mental life of a character, even if conventional forms of thought and inner speech report have not been used. I would add one explanation to Palmer's subtle argumentation - it is possible on the basis of intersubjective narrative cooperation.

In my point of view the notion of narrative cooperation is based on one important premise - the multiplicity of mental subjects taking part in it. Such subjects as an author, a narrator, a character and an addressee of the narrative are of great concern of narratology as a part of literary studies. However, empirical research on reader's processing of narrative suggests, that readers do perceive narrator or a hero as something more than a product of some textual and linguistic features. In contrary, according to structuralist poetics it was the one and only way to differentiate some types of narrators. None of the participants of literary communication was considered as subjective or human-like category. What is more, the distinction between a real author and a narrator was seen as crucial for an artistic autonomy of the text. The reader was defined similarly as a textual role projected by variety of narrative means, inscribed in language and poetics of a narrative work.

I see the relationship of these main narratological instances from different point of view. Using the concept of intersubjectivity, I want to describe narrative as a perspective-taking and perspective-shifting management. One of the main objectives of this project is to show narrative as a very special mental activity that reflects the functioning of human mind. The activity which is rooted in human ability to mentally represent the inner world of the other human or human-like subject. The very act of narrative communication is always established in „we-centered” mental space shared by an empirical author and an empirical reader. They both are to take a perspective of a narrator and - within the stream of narrator's speech - they build mental representations of multiple and changing perspectives of many characters. Although there is professional agreement between literary scholars that it is essential not to bring a real flesh and blood author into his literary work, empirical research suggests that readers include a notion of anthropomorphic speaker in the act of reading (Bortolussi, Dixon 2003). Even if they do not identify him or her with a real existing person, such a speaker is represented as a human-like subject: *someone who is telling a story*, a personal source of a story. That is why they attribute to him or her human characteristics: the readers ascribe to narrator mental states and the ability to have an insight into the inner experiences of characters they

talk about. This is the core of intersubjective communication in (and *by*) narrative. It is very unlikely, that the readers interpret the teller of a story as merely textual impersonal construction, so that many of sophisticated narratological typologies of intratextual author - narrator relation can be simplified.

Similarly, that situation is repeated in case of a reader. While reading, she or he takes into account inner motivations, emotions, feelings, perceptual perspective of a narrator and activates the same mental operations to make inferences about fictional characters' minds. So the basic cognitive effort is the same - narrative can be seen as an outcome of intersubjective perspective-sharing ability. It takes multiple human and quasi-human subjects to establish and maintain this kind of dynamic mental cooperation. Such a narrative theory is in opposition to an impersonal, linguistic-oriented stance of structuralist narratology.

#### **Narrative poetics of mindreading**

The most important consequence of what I have just said is a possibility to use consciousness-connected categories to all types of literary narrative. Since a narrative as a mode of thought and its verbal outcome has its origins in intersubjective activity of perspective-sharing (that is a core of my narratological project), every narrative consists of some literary means of representing other people's minds. I would like to point out the main models of narrative mindreading. I connect them with the main historical types of literary narrative. The narrative poetics of mindreading is a way to outline and describe all the literary features implying narrator's access to characters' minds. To repeat an earlier argument, every narrative provides a reader with some kind of direct or indirect insights into fictional hero's mind. The problem is to recognize the elements that may have an effect of making a reader take fictional human being's perspective. Such elements are present in every historical type of literary narrative, but they are morfologically completely different.

Here, I offer an overview of narrative models of accessing the fictional character's mind. I will also discuss some of their narrative markers. I would like to pay special attention to these forms of narrative that are not usually connected with literary representation of consciousness, for example literary behaviourism. Using the concept of intersubjectivity, it is possible to depict many more aspects of working human mind that it used to be analyzed in traditional narratological studies, much more concerned with inner speech and thought represen-

tation (Cohn 1978). There are no typical literary techniques connected with inner monologue or point of view in many text, but they still may be interpreted in the context of consciousness representations. I use the term “narrative model of intersubjectivity” to refer to different styles of presenting the inner experience of narrator and fictional character. Following cognitive narratologists, I argue, that this represented inner experience can not be restricted to verbal level of thought and speech. What is more, I apply to narratological studies the notion of collectively accessible (intersubjective) mental states as markers of someone else’s perspective. To sum them up, I will list them once again: narrative representations of emotions of others, desires of others, attentions of others (directions or object of somebody’s look or the act of hearing), true or false intentions of others, beliefs and knowledge of others<sup>3</sup>. According to my analysis of their textual markers, they are functionally equal to over-estimated narrative modes for presenting the verbal dimension of consciousness in literature.

My proposal will distinguish several narrative models of intersubjectivity: projection, simulation, identification, separation, and externalization.

Projection model enables a narrator to have an easy access to characters’ mental states and inner speech. A narrator projects him/herself onto many different characters’ situations. Their inner life is conceptualized as psychologically similar for every character. The narrative perspective is not restricted to a particular character and a narrator has a full insight into experience of everyone in his/her story.

Simulation model is quite different since a narrator has closer access to a particular character’s mental acts and he/she builds the image of other fictional people and the storyworld through this person perception, emotions and knowledge. This model can be compared with the mental experiment “how it is to be the particular person in the particular situation”, so a narrator is not projecting him/herself onto a character, but simulates someone else’s individual psychosomatic experience. What is more, the other characters’ perspectives are embedded within this character field of consciousness. Since the main character’s competence in mindreading is restricted to perceptual data, a reader must rely on their interpretations of body language and emotional communication. Affective states may be expressed as vocalization, gesture, movement,

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<sup>3</sup> These capacities have been enumerated and discussed by Gärdenfors.

and influence other sensory modes. The body itself becomes the socially accessible sign of deep intersubjectivity (Butte 2004).

Another model I would distinguish is separation. Although a narrator stresses his/her uncertainty of other person's perspective, she or he still uses the same mental operations to make inferences about people around. So the body language of a character and narrator's perceptual data are even more important than in a narrative that offers a full and easy access to characters' minds. This model of narrative intersubjectivity I would connect with Modernists' disbelief in any claims of ultimate knowledge about perceived reality or human psychology. These domains seem to be completely blurred, there is nothing transparent about the other human being and this thesis is underlined in narrative discourse.

The last narrative model I would like to select is the most interesting. It is externalization, the model I connect with a problem of consciousness representation in behaviourist narration. Although this type of narration was hardly described in this context (Lodge 2002, Palmer 2004), there is no reason to exclude it from the narratological analysis of consciousness or rather from the wider field of working mind representations. It is important to point out that this model is based on morphologically different but functionally equivalent figures of intersubjective cooperation. Even though the narrator (first-person or impersonal) is focused only on character's bodily actions, verbal utterances, there are many sights of their mental background that activate readers' mental abilities. For example, readers may project their own knowledge of certain physical or psychical experience onto the character's situation to interpret the motivations of character's gesture, facial expressions, body language and many other nonverbal information. It stimulates reader's activity of tracking the action-thought connection. Readers usually do not have any special difficulty gaining this kind of knowledge on the basis of textual features. Let me quote one excerpt from a short story of Tadeusz Różewicz, *Thirst*. The narrator, a Polish partisan of World War II, observes an old German soldier sentenced to death. *The old man moves unsteadily [...] now he is looking at a coffee I have put aside. He is looking at a coffee and he is licking his lips with his tongue. [...] The old one is fumbling around, he is looking for his cane. Now, the German's little eyes are sweeping over my mess tin of coffee. I am the only one to know about it* (Różewicz 2003: 42-43, my translation - M. R. P.).

There are no traditional literary forms of representing consciousness in the example (no inner monologue, quotation of thought or inner speech, point of view technique). But the narrator perfectly identifies mental activity of the observed man. He tracks the direction of prisoner's look and identifies an object of his visual perception (and desire). He projects his intentions (looking for a cane). Having read about some bodily actions (licking lips), reader has no doubt the German is thirsty, but does not ask for a drink. The whole fragment gives a very good insight into his psychosomatic situation.

My article was to show new directions of textual narratives analysis. My general aim was explaining which textual features and narratological concepts might be re-evaluated in the light of cognitive theory of intersubjectivity. This project may be characterized as rebuilding narratological discourse and testing some new terminologies and analytical methodologies for literary narratives.

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**ABSTRACT**

In my article I discuss the relation between literary narrative, its poetics and some abilities of embodied human mind. I refer to literary studies and consciousness/mind studies. I am focused on cognitive theory of intersubjectivity and its role in creating and reading of literary narrative. Literary “mindreading” is not only the very act of reading about fictional minds, but it is the process of application of some innate cognitive mechanisms as well. I present some narrative models of taking someone else’s perspective inscribed in different narrative forms and techniques.

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