When Social Minds Get Into Trouble: The Narrative Dynamics of Externalist and Internalist Modes of Cognition

Narrative Dynamics of Social Minds

Fictional minds have taken a central role in cognitive narratology, from Lisa Zunshine's appropriation of the debates around so-called "theory of mind" (2007) to Alan Palmer's work on "fictional minds" (2004), and more recently, his discussion of Social Minds in the Novel (2010). Palmer brings to the fore instances in which characters think collectively, such as the "Middlemarch Mind", but he also acknowledges the possibility of interplay between externalist and internalist perspectives on fictional minds. The present article proposes to extend Palmer's discussion to include not only successful social minds but also those that fail in ways interesting to narrative study. Drawing on texts by Sarah Fielding and Edward Gibbon, written in the eighteenth century, a time when the boundaries between the public and the private were renegotiated, the article develops an account of the dynamics of social minds between internal and external modes of cognition. It shows how these dynamics relate to the development of plot and how they come to the fore in narrative strategies, such as opaque embedded intentionalities, polyphony and narratorial irony.

In his book Social Minds in the Novel (2010), Alan Palmer proposes to consider instances of social thinking in Victorian drawing-room chatter and in the collective prejudices of an entire village community (such as George Eliot's Middlemarch) through a series of examples from nineteenth- and eighteenth-century novels. Early on in the study, he states that 'A fierce debate took place within the nineteenth-century novel in particular on the nature of social minds' (2010, p. 4). It revolves around the question of whether we can have knowledge of other minds and, if we can, what kind of use we may make of it? In order to negotiate this debate, the nineteenth-century novel, so Palmer, foregrounded instances of what he calls the 'social mind' for the ways in which it made the fictional world accessible to readers. However, the nineteenth century was certainly not the first moment in literary history when novelists considered the social situatedness of human thinking and actions. The present article turns back to the eighteenth century and asks what its novels and histories can teach today's narratologists about the workings of the social mind in fictional and factual narrative. The texts we will discuss, Edward Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire ([1776] 2005) and Sarah Fielding's Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia ([1757] 1994), take us back to eighteenth-century debates around the relation between the individual and the social, around what J.G.A. Pocock calls 'civic virtue' ([1975] 2003),1 with its delicate balancing act of contributing to the new commercial society without succumbing to its luxuries, and around what Jürgen Habermas calls the 'public sphere' ([1962] 2008), with its negotiation of private, individual values in the social venues of the coffee houses, the journals and the novel. Despite the proverbial optimism of the happy eighteenth century, its writers show acute awareness of how precarious the successful collaboration of minds is and explore these problems both in their fictional and in their non-fictional narratives.

1 See Pocock (1976) and the four-volume follow-up Barbarism and Religion (1999-2005) for the role of civic virtue in Gibbon.
Sarah Fielding, presenting the challenges of the social in her sentimental novels, and Edward Gibbon, bringing to the fore the contemporary relevance of the model of ancient social order, were both key contributors to these wide-ranging debates. After a brief introduction to the issue of ‘social minds’ in philosophy and cognitive narratology, we will turn to Gibbon and Fielding to see how these eighteenth-century writers get social minds into trouble, how they negotiate the tension between external (social, collective) and internal (private, individual) modes of thinking, and how they create narrative dynamics out of this tension.

From Middlemarch to Alexandria: Top-Heavy Social Minds

I took the Place of the God, and was seated in public on a golden Throne, placed on a Scaffold, overlaid with Silver, and surrounded by People on every Side.

(Fielding, [1757] 1994, p.105)

In her narration of the triumphal procession after Marc Anthony’s victory over the Armenians, Cleopatra makes clear who is queen to the readers of Sarah Fielding’s Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia ([1757] 1994). She ‘takes the Place’ of Jupiter Capitolinus, the guardian god of the Roman republic, she informs us, ‘for whereas at Rome the Procession ended at the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitol, here it ended at the Person of Cleopatra’ (ibid).

We can think of the triumph as an instance in which social minds are displayed in the organised form of a ritual, with particular roles and particular scripts, and Cleopatra is changing these roles and scripts to her advantage, creating what I call a 'top-heavy social mind.' Generally speaking, social minds become 'top-heavy' when an individual perspective, plan or strategy comes to the fore that works against the primarily collaborative nature of the social mind. Throughout the 'Life', as we shall see in the third section of this paper, Fielding inscribes Cleopatra's highly egotistical first-person narrative in the set-up of the social mind and foregrounds how individual thinking is bounded by social cognition.

The cognitive-science thinking behind many of the concepts which Lisa Zunshine and Alan Palmer use falls under the category of 'social cognition', that is, the mind as it works in concert with other minds (see Roloff, 2012 for an overview of the field). 'Theory of mind', to take the concept which has gained most visibility but also most opposition (see the responses to Palmer, 2011) as my example, unfolds its 'levels of embedded intentionality' as relations of knowledge and expectation between different minds thinking about each other. The cognitive sciences provide a whole array of perspectives on such social cognition: at times, social cognition leads to amiable cooperation that enables human language and culture (see Tomasello, 2009); at times, selfish and 'Machiavellian' features are foregrounded (see Byrne and Whiten, 1988; Vermeule, 2010).

In cognitive narratology, such 'social cognition' tends to be applied to individual minds (see Zunshine, 2007; Palmer, 2004). Palmer’s Social Minds (2010), in turn, makes a distinction between internalist and externalist perspectives and shifts the attention almost entirely to the latter. According to Palmer, the ‘internalist perspective’ comes to the fore in narrative strategies such as focalisation, stream of consciousness, interior monologue, first-person attributions, etc. The narrative strategies contributing to the 'externalist perspective' that Palmer works out in Social Minds are aspectuality (the sense that the fictional world can be experienced in different ways), continuing consciousness (readers create the sense of a fictional mind from dispersed mentions in the text), Bakhtinian dialogicality, third-person attribution, etc. (Palmer, 2010, pp. 40-41).
Palmer's turn to the social comes at a time when also the cognitive sciences and their philosophical exegesis speak more explicitly about the mind in terms of an embodied interaction with other minds and with the environment. Clark and Chalmers (1998), for example, suggest that our cognition extends into the world around us. Their (by now very well-known) example introduces Otto, who has slight Alzheimer's, and Inga. While Inga relies on her memory to find her way to the museum, Otto consults the notebook into which he has written directions to the museum. For Otto, so Clark and Chalmers, the notebook serves the same function as Inga's memory and this material object hence becomes part of Otto's cognitive processing. Judging by one's own habit of note-taking, jotting down telephone numbers and reservation codes, and the ever-present smart phones, it is presumably not just invented people by the name of Otto who rely on external objects for remembering. Instead, all our minds extend into the environment in the course of our thinking.

Clark and Chalmers indicate that such extended cognition could also be happening in exchange with the minds of others. Indeed, Deborah Tollefsen (2006) continues the story of Inga by introducing her husband Olaf, a scatter-brained academic who relies on his wife's good memory and sharp insights to get through his everyday business. Inga and Olaf form what Alan Palmer dubs an 'intermental unit' in Social Minds (2010, p. 47): they both know what the other is thinking and (in this case just Inga) are quick to fill in the gaps in what the other person says. The married couple is a 'small intermental unit'; there are also larger ones, extending to teams at work and entire village communities like that of Middlemarch. The philosophical debate around extended minds has also moved into what Sean Gallagher calls 'the socially extended mind', where 'tools, technologies and institutions shape our cognitive processes' (2013, p. 7), or what Mason Cash calls 'socially and culturally extended cognition' (2013, p. 61). Gallagher, Cash and Tollefsen et al. (2013) engage in a debate of how the 'dynamics of coordination' (Tollefsen et al. 2013, p. 37) between minds and their environments play out.

Gallagher takes as his example for 'socially extended cognition' the legal system with its institutions, written rules and social scripts. He suggests that such social norms and infrastructures might 'work from the outside in' (2013, p. 7), informing our cognition and perhaps even leading to changes in the neural structure of the brain through its plasticity. The Armenian triumph in Fielding's 'Life of Cleopatra' seems to represent a similar instance of 'socially extended cognition'. As a ritual to celebrate military victory, it features particular roles for the participants, scripts of actions for these participants and the larger institution of Roman state religion. Individual minds are embedded organised in larger social contexts both through the legal system and through the ritual of the triumph.

But it is a long way from Middlemarch to Alexandria. Fielding's narrative acknowledges the importance of the ritualistic setting (by mentioning the 'Temple of Jupiter'), but at the same time, it elevates the individual protagonist beyond her role in the triumph (by stressing the 'Person of Cleopatra', rather than a potentially ritualistic role as a representative of the gods). Instead of highlighting group thinking or mutual understanding, narratives might choose to foreground tensions within a social mind. Indeed, as Palmer acknowledges (2010, p. 144), internalist and externalist perspectives on cognition (and its treatment in fiction) cannot be entirely divorced. Cognitive scientists like Charles Fernyhough have suggested that 'intramental minds need to be viewed as social as well' (2011, p. 273), because there is a polyphony of voices within the individual mind. Arguably, the social mind is not entirely uniform either and not necessarily organised on equal terms. Narratives like Fielding's and Gibbon's can help narratology to work out the tensions and dynamics within the social mind. I propose that instances in which the social mind develops and enacts hierarchical structures,
and develops 'top-heavy social minds', are a good starting point for considering the dynamics between internalist and externalist perspectives on fictional minds.

One caveat before I go into further discussion: Even if social minds are hierarchical, they are not necessarily 'top-heavy'. If every member of the social community is playing the role assigned to them and do not appropriate foreign competences and powers, then inequalities can actually contribute to a social mind performing well. We see this in Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* ([1776] 2005). However, if a member of this social community changes social scripts and appropriates the ritual through their own thinking and strategising (like Cleopatra in Fielding or Commodus in Gibbon), this might tilt the delicate balance of these arrangements and create a 'top-heavy social mind' -- tumbling toward its destruction and providing the complications pertaining to a gripping narrative. In the ways in which these narratives present fictional minds to readers, externalist and internalist perspectives are at odds.

The present article outlines how hierarchical arrangements play out in social minds in narrative fiction and non-fiction. It devotes particular attention to the moments in which such hierarchies develop into 'top-heavy social minds' and, in turn, to how these 'top-heavy social minds' give the narrative its impetus, by discussing the juxtaposition of Cleopatra (as the usurper of the social mind) and Octavia (as the supporter of the social mind) in Fielding’s *Lives* and the role of the Roman army across the first volume of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*.

Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

Edward Gibbon’s monumental history of the Roman Empire, covering the time from the rule of the Antonines (180 CE) to the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks (1453), does not tell the history of 'great men'. Indeed, he describes the conquest of Britain as follows:

After about a war of forty years, undertaken by the most stupid, maintained by the most dissolute, and terminated by the most timid of all emperors, the far greater part of the island submitted to the Roman yoke. (Gibbon, [1776] 2005, p.33)

Emperors like Claudius, Nero and Diocletian (as identified by Gibbon in a footnote) are not what makes the empire great. We have to look elsewhere for the reason why the Roman empire lasted for centuries. Gibbon suggests that the 'civic virtue' of the Romans found its expression in the army (see also Pocock, 2003, p.422), and that the discipline and cohesion of the army enabled a well-functioning social mind. A closer look brings its hierarchical nature to the fore.

And yet so sensible were the Romans of the imperfection of valour without skill and practice, that, in their language, the name of an army was borrowed from the word which signified exercise. Military exercises were the important and unremitting object of their discipline. [*Here follows a long and detailed account of the different kinds of exercises, which the new recruits, veteran soldiers, and their officers pursued.*] It was the policy of the ablest generals, and even of the emperors themselves, to encourage these military studies by their presence and example; and we are informed that Hadrian, as well as Trajan, frequently condescended to instruct the unexperienced soldiers, to reward the diligent, and sometimes to dispute with them the price of superior strength or dexterity. Under the reign of those princes, the science of tactics was cultivated with success; and
as long as the empire retained any vigour, their military instructions were respected as the most perfect model of Roman discipline. (Gibbon, [1776] 2005, p. 40)

Gibbon presents a rather detailed description of the workings of the social mind of the Roman army, and its highly embodied exercises. It is the role of the generals and the emperors to 'instruct' and 'reward' the soldiers, and to measure their prowess against theirs. In turn, the 'science of tactics', that is, the generals’ skills in military decision-making, is sharpened, and the respect due to them is enhanced by these interaction in the social mind of the Roman army.

Similar to other historians of his day, especially David Hume whose History of Britain features sections on 'manners and beliefs' of society, and Montesquieu whose enlightened approach sees development on the level of the social system, Gibbon is interested in the machine, not the cog. Still, Gibbon does not write histoire raisonée focusing exclusively on the stages of social development like for example Adam Smith in Wealth of Nations (see Pocock, 1999), but finds moments in which the personal (internalist) and the social (externalist) collide.

Individual emperors might fail to play their role in the social mind of the Roman military order properly, as for example the emperor Commodus. Commodus fancies himself the new Hercules. He adopts the club and the lion’s hide as his insignia and decides to display his fighting skills in the arena. From what has gone before, it is quite clear that Commodus’ actions go against the well-tuned machine of the social mind of the 'exercitus Romanus'. He does not work to 'instruct', 'reward' or 'dispute [...] the price of superior strength or dexterity' with his soldiers. Instead, Commodus turns the exercises into a spectacle to satisfy his individual vanity, and the social mind threatens to turn 'top-heavy'. However, Gibbon reminds readers that even the emperor cannot elevate himself above the social mind.

In all these exhibitions [in the arena], the securest precautions were used to protect the person of the Roman Hercules from the desperate spring of any savage; who might possibly disregard the dignity of the emperor or the sanctity of the god. (Gibbon, [1776] 2005, p. 118).

Gibbon’s irony is a topic much discussed. In this particular instance, it signals that Gibbon is at least as ambiguous about the 'dignity of the emperor' as he is about the 'sanctity of the god'. Without pretending to encompass the debates on the subject,² it seems to me that Gibbon uses irony here to reinscribe Commodus into the social mind of the Roman people in his narrative. The 'secure precautions' of those invisible members of the social mind who operate behind the scenes in the arena make sure that the 'Roman Hercules' does not get harmed in his exploits. Gibbon’s Commodus is not aware of how much he depends on the social mind for his triumphs, but the narrator’s voice draws out the limitations of the individual and asserts the primacy of the social mind through the use of irony. As we shall see in the following section, Fielding chooses a similar strategy to deal with Cleopatra's role in the social mind.

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² Mostly, Gibbon’s irony is discussed with reference to his treatment of Christianity (Wootton, 1984). However, as we have seen, it is a stylistic feature present throughout Decline and Fall.
One whimsical emperor is not enough to bring down the Roman empire. It survives Commodus by several hundred years. However, throughout *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon presents instances in which the social mind of the Roman army and its discipline are turned 'top-heavy' as the key moments that contributed to the eventual decline of the empire. Augustus, drawn in signally ambiguous terms by Gibbon, installs a smaller group as the elite of the Roman men at arms: The Praetorian guards answer directly to the emperor and sit at the heart of the empire in Rome. Gibbon describes their dynamics as a social mind as follows:

The advantages of military science and discipline cannot be exerted, unless a proper number of soldiers are united into one body, and actuated by one soul. With a handful of men, such an action would be ineffectual; with an unwieldy host, it would be impracticable; and the powers of the machine would be alike destroyed by extreme minuteness, or the excessive weight of its springs. [...] a body of ten or fifteen thousand guards will strike terror into the most numerous populace that ever crowded the streets of an immense capital. The Praetorian bands, whose licentious fury was the first symptom and cause of the decline of the Roman empire, scarcely amounted to the last mentioned number. (Gibbon, [1776] 2005, p.127)

Even though they work according to the same principles as the social mind of the larger 'exercitus Romanus', their elevated position, controlling the centre of power, turns the social order of the entire empire 'top-heavy'. The Praetorian guards are not integrated in the social mind of the Roman army, but left to the command of the emperor, and in time, since they effectively control the capital, they will come to elect the emperor (in exchange for an adequate donative). The 'top-heavy' social mind does not rely exclusively on the interplay between internalist and externalist perspective. A group like the Praetorian guard might establish itself at the top of the hierarchy, and by divorcing its strategies from the interest of the overall group (in a process of fission; see Anderson forthcoming), turn into an agent disturbing the overall balance.

It seems rather straightforward to connect the dynamics of the social mind, its 'top-heaviness' (and its fusions and fissions), with the insights into story structure due to Tzvetan Todorov (1969), as they work to bring about imbalance in the 'equilibrium' of Gibbon's historical narrative and thereby get the plot of the narrative going. Gibbon does not lay the blame for the decline and fall of the Roman empire at the door of the Praetorian guards alone (his history is far more complex), but the 'top-heavy' social mind that comes with their establishment threatens the stability of the empire repeatedly. Severus, 'the principal author of the decline of the Roman empire' (Gibbon, [1776] 2005, p. 148), reinforces the power of the Praetorian guards by quadrupling their number and putting their prefect in control of the entire army, jurisdiction and administration of the empire. Throughout the narrative of *Decline and Fall*, the state of army declines from the ideal model of 'exercitus Romanus' which we have encountered earlier on. Claudius struggles to reform the army. Its lack of 'a sense of order and discipline' puts the empire in jeopardy, its increased numbers are a 'luxury' supported by the payments of the populace, and its 'military order of despotism' in the capital endangers both the rights of the citizen and the security of the emperor (Gibbon [1776] 2005, p. 299). It turns out that Claudius, 'the most stupid [...] of all emperors' (according to the quotation which opened this section), cannot set things right. Yet as he discusses Claudius’ reformation attempts, Gibbon takes the opportunity to expound the consequences of a
malfunctioning Roman military. The social mind is no longer founded on mutuality between its different (and hierarchically distinguished) members. Instead, the individual strategies of the higher echelons of hierarchy, namely the Praetorian guards and its prefects, unintentionally, lead to a worse situation for everyone. Only when the Praetorian guards are degraded in status by Diocletian ([1776] 2005, p. 386) and disbanded by Constantine (not until the second volume of Decline and Fall [1776] 2005, p. 609), does the time bomb which Augustus has laid at the foundation of the empire get defused. Constantine, however, almost immediately introduces another dangerous inequality into the Roman army by distinguishing the legions in the centre of the empire from those of the periphery, thus bringing about 'another innovation which corrupted military discipline, and prepared the ruin of the empire' ([1776] 2005, p. 619).

Gibbon treads a middle ground in history-writing between the chronicle of emperor’s deeds and the histoire raisonné of the Enlightenment, between narrative impetus and philosophical reflection. His social minds are frequently top-heavy, but sometimes this is due to individuals (like Commodus) and sometimes to smaller groups (like the Praetorian guards). The narrative imbalances that eventually lead to the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire come from a complex set of social minds with their processes of fission and their top-heavy hierarchies.

Fielding’s Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia

Fielding, on the other hand, chooses to explore the workings of the social mind in relation to the biography of an individual. When Fielding’s Cleopatra interferes with the ritual of the Roman triumph, this is only the most visible mode in which she creates a 'top-heavy' social mind. Her entire life narrative, told from beyond the grave in Cleopatra's fictional autobiography, is laced with her schemes in social cognition. Cleopatra’s inner thinking is constantly played off against the externalist social mind. We do not have to look much further than the passage on the Armenian triumph, which continues as follows.

When Artabazes [the Armenian king] and the other Prisoners were presented to me in Chains, I expected they should have kneeled down before me; and my Flatterers pressed them much to pay me that Adoration; but they too well remembered their former Dignity to comply with so low and mean a Submission. This Refusal of theirs cost them very dear; for I had no Notion that any Mortal should presume to imagine he could attain to any higher Honour than that of being my Slave; and so enchanted was I with Pride, that I had an Inclination to keep it entirely to myself: For which Reason I was determined to punish any Person severely, who had the Insolence to be my Rival; and therefore I took care to have these audacious Prisoners treated afterwards as I thought they deserved, for daring to suspect I was not a real Goddess. (Fielding, [1757] 1994, p.105).

When Artabazes declines to pay homage to Cleopatra, she decides to pursue her revenge privately rather than coerce the Armenian king publicly. The social ritual brings to the fore embedded intentionalities: not bending their knees, the Armenians defy the authority of Cleopatra, assert their own value and challenge her claim to godhead. Cleopatra, on the other hand, 'had an Inclination to keep it entirely to [herself]'. Only Fielding’s readers gain access to her thoughts. To the other characters, she appears in her public role as Egyptian queen and goddess. If we think of this passage in terms of the 'levels of embedded intentionality' in
social cognition that Lisa Zunshine (2007) discusses, then Cleopatra prevents others from inferring her intentions. She has a reasonable degree of access to the intentions of the Armenians, and knowing about their minds, she can tailor her own actions accordingly. Her own mind, however, remains opaque, so that others cannot predict her actions easily. By keeping her intentions masked, Cleopatra ensures that she keeps the top position in the cognitive foodchain of the embedded intentionalities of the fictional social mind. Not only the physical set-up of the ritual, but also her strategies as part of the social mind considered as a whole place Cleopatra on a 'Scaffold'.

In the 'Life of Cleopatra' we certainly do not find the kind of textbook 'social mind' that Palmer describes in Social Minds (2010) and that Octavia, who tells the second 'Life' in Fielding’s Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia, displays. Fielding brings together the perspectives of Cleopatra, lover of Marc Anthony and threat to the Roman empire, with Octavia, wife to Marc Anthony and exemplary Roman matron, in the tradition of Plutarch’s Parallel Lives. Octavia’s relationship to her first husband Marcellus is described as follows

We lived together with the utmost Simplicity. Artifice and Cunning were banished from our Bosoms; where there was nothing we wished to conceal; where no lurking Disguises were necessary; since mutual Confidence, Sincerity, and Truth were the constant and invariable Rules of our Conduct. [...] Our common Friends (for we had nothing separate) rejoiced in our Company, as they were gladdened with our Happiness: For to good Minds, Happiness, like Colour to the Camelion, is chiefly communicated by that of others. (Fielding, [1757] 1994, p.130)

Octavia and Marcellus form that happy 'intermental unit' which Palmer imagines in Social Minds. Their 'Thoughts were perfectly known to each other, before the Tongues could express them' (ibid.). Moreover, this harmonious interaction extends to the larger social circle of family and friends and contributes to communal 'Happiness'. Octavia, Marcellus and their social circle express the kind of sentimental 'fellow feeling' which Adam Smith in Theory of Moral Sentiments ([1759] 2009), building on a great number of earlier thinkers, presents as the fibre and fabric that will keep the new commercial, capitalist society of the eighteenth century together and which is of signal importance for the eighteenth-century novel (see Brissenden 1974; Mullan, 1988; Ellis 1996; Skinner 1999).

Cleopatra, on the other hand, forms a very different kind of 'intermental unit' with Marc Anthony. She severs Marc Anthony’s links with his wife Fulvia and their children, his country and his advisers. In their exchanges, she frequently plays tricks on him: in one instance, she has slaves attach salted fish to the hooks of Marc Anthony’s angling rod in order to show up his boasts about fishing ([1751] 1994, pp. 68-9). In another instance, she bet that she can lay on the most expensive meal, serves average fare and, when Marc Anthony seems certain that he has won, dissolves a priceless pearl in vinegar for a drink ([1757] 1994, p.

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3 This “cognitive foodchain” looks something like this: “Cleopatra (1) knows that the Armenians (2) disrespect her.” Since she masks her own intentions, we do not get this one: “The Armenians know (1) that Cleopatra (2) intends to avenge herself for the (3) disrespect of the Armenians”. See Kukkonen 2014 for a discussion of mind-reading dynamics in social masquerades of eighteenth-century novels, including Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones.
Cleopatra’s little plots are doubtlessly amusing, but they also show the profound imbalance in the intermental units that she enters: she always conceives of herself as standing on a superior level. Cleopatra has no ‘friends’, but only ‘slaves’, ‘spies’ and ‘monkeys’. Caesar, Marc Anthony (and potentially Augustus), are entirely defined in relation to her social strategems (see e.g. [1757] 1994, p. 98; ‘having it in my Power thus to make a Man, a Roman General, one of the Three Lords of the Universe, a Monkey for my sake’).

The features of a top-heavy social mind are clear: individual strategies prevail over the interests of the social mind, intermental units are imbalanced by the opacity of the mind of one of its members and their elevation in the exchange. In the 'Life of Cleopatra', these features of the top-heavy social mind that Cleopatra establishes in the fictional world of her narrative directly contribute to the defeat of Marc Anthony and herself at the battle of Actium ([1751] 1994, pp. 112-115). She leads Marc Anthony to antagonise the Roman allies that remain with him, to reject the advice of his councillors, and when she pursues one of her plots in the midst of battle, abandoning the field, she loses the contest. Here, we have a close link between the way in which the social mind operates and the development of the narrative plot. While Cleopatra’s mental masking might not have immediate consequences when she punishes the Armenians, it does lead to the defeat of her larger plan when she pursues her private strategems in the collective, collaborative effort of warfare.

In 'Life of Cleopatra' Fielding treats of a social mind just as much as in her 'Life of Octavia'. Cleopatra, as the narrator, however, fails to understand it as such. While she makes use of others for her purposes, she does not see that she needs the help of these 'slaves', 'spies' and 'monkeys' to pursue her plots. She can only dream of an empire of her own because Marc Anthony leads the Roman army in her cause. Seeing Marc Anthony as a tool to be exchanged when needed, she hopes to charm Augustus. Cleopatra does not conceive of the intermental units she enters as mutual, but rather adopts a superior stance and assumes that the partners are exchangeable. That is her fatal mistake.

But Fielding’s exploration of the top-heavy social mind, and the stand-off between externalist and internalist perspectives, goes further. As I will show, 'aspects of the whole mind [...] are revealed through the externalist perspective' in the Cleopatra narrative, and thereby Fielding enacts the very definition of Palmer's social mind (2010, p. 39). Let us revisit the passage of the Armenian triumph and imagine it were narrated from a third person perspective:

When Artabazes and the other Prisoners were presented to Cleopatra in Chains, she expected they should have kneeled down before her; and her Flatterers pressed them much to pay her that Adoration; but they too well remembered their former Dignity to comply with so low and mean a Submission. This Refusal of theirs cost them very dear; for she had no Notion that any Mortal should presume to imagine he could attain to any higher Honour than that of being her Slave; and so enchanted was she with Pride, that she had an Inclination to keep it entirely to myself: For which Reason she was determined to punish any Person severely, who had the Insolence to be her Rival; and therefore she took care to have these audacious Prisoners treated afterwards as she thought they deserved, for daring to suspect she was not a real Goddess. (Fielding, [1757] 1994, p.105; changes emphasized).
The simple change of the pronoun shifts the passage from one that is largely internalist (private, interior, focalised) to one that is largely externalist (situated, dialogic, aspected). At the same time, it makes salient the irony in this passage. The language of Cleopatra’s narrative turns from strident (in the first-person version) to overreaching and delusional (in the third-person version). Who indeed would ‘suspect she was not a real Goddess’? Cleopatra seems to be in the same position as Commodus here. Now, of course Fielding did not write the 'Life of Cleopatra’ in the third person. In this instance, she chose to give the narrative voice to her heroine and to depart from the model of Plutarch’s Lives. However, through various strategies, she makes sure that her readers do not forget the externalist perspective and the ironic load that comes with this embedding of the individual in the social mind.

First, Fielding’s introduction to the Lives takes a mock-heroic stance, as the author recounts her journey to the underworld in order to interview these ancient heroines. Placing herself in the tradition of “Homer, Virgil, Aristophanes, Lucan” (1757) p. 55), she trades favours with Pluto to gain her narrative. The only Shadow the imperious Queen of Egypt retained of her former Royalty, was the Permission granted her to place of Octavia in the Recital of her Story’ (ibid.). Cleopatra, still believing in appearances, demands precedence ove Octavia in telling her story first. Her narrative starts immediately after this mocking introduction, and at least for some time, the ironic effect will last on readers’ minds.

Fielding’s second strategy to put her readers in mind of the third-person perspective depends on their intertextual knowledge. The modern editor of Fielding’s Lives, Christopher D. Johnson, shows himself surprised in his introduction and in his notes that Fielding, who had command of the ancient languages, should take large swaths of text from contemporary translations of the classics rather than from her own readings. Johnson for example shows how closely Fielding adopts Charles Fraser’s version of the first meeting between Cleopatra and Anthony in his (very popular) translation of Plutarch’s ‘Life of Anthony’ (1994, p. 21). The changes amount to little more than switches in the pronoun. Fielding draws on ancient (like Dion Cassius, Suetonius, Appian and Pliny) and modern historians (Catrou and Rouille, Rollin and Lockman), as well as fictional treatments of the story of Cleopatra and Marc Anthony by Shakespeare, Dryden and Cibber (see Johnson, 1994, pp. 20-22). It seems to me entirely possible that Fielding would have consciously chosen to echo these earlier versions of the narrative, because they would be well-known to her readers. The intertextual resonances create a polyphonic effect (or effect of ‘Bakhtinian dialogicity’, as Palmer calls it) within the first-person narration of Cleopatra, posing it against a larger, quasi-externalist perspective. Closely connected to this is the fact that Fielding’s readers would know how Cleopatra’s narrative is going to end. Indeed, Fielding chooses to foreshadow the outcome for example with Cleopatra’s ‘Scaffold’, which will also figure when she retreats into the monument -- well-known from the Shakespeare play -- shortly before her death. Fielding’s strategy introduces a shadow-layer of embedded intentionality to the ‘Life’ and reasserts the limits of the individual within the social mind. If I may be allowed the fanciful expression,

4 In the article Social Minds in Criticism and Fiction, Palmer remarks that focalisation and aspectuality ‘complement’ each other (2010, p. 212). There is an important case to be made for the constant interplay between both perspectives in narrative texts, and top-heavy social minds are just one example of this phenomenon.
Fielding’s strategy of irony whispers ‘memento mori’ to the triumph of Cleopatra’s strident narrative.

Fielding’s use of irony has been discussed in some detail for her novel *The Adventures of David Simple* (and *David Simple: Volume the Last*) by Sara Gadecken. In this sentimental novel, Fielding traces issues of moral complexity through irony, for example when characters have the appropriate sentimental impetus (i.e., an emotion that would prompt a charitable deed) and fail to act on it. According to Gadecken, Fielding uses irony to show the limits of sympathy, or in the terms of the topic of this special issue, she shows the limits of the workings of the (sentimental) social mind by highlighting the internalist perspective within it. In *Life of Cleopatra*, in turn, Fielding seems to use irony to show the limits of the individual mind by drawing our attention to an externalist view. She introduces Cleopatra in a mocking style, she draws on well-known versions of the narrative to achieve a polyphonic effect and to foreshadow her end, and thereby directs readers back to a distancing, ironical third-person perspective on Cleopatra’s first-person account. Fielding’s *Life* complicates the irony which we have already seen with Gibbon’s Commodus (who also does not know how much he owes to the social mind) through these strategies of mocking style, polyphony and foreshadowing and narrativises the dynamics of the social mind throughout the text.

Conclusion

For the study of narrative, social minds become particularly interesting when they do not behave. I do not think it is a coincidence that Palmer picks — tongue in cheek — the episode on Box Hill in Jane Austen’s *Emma* as the starting point of the history of the social mind (2010, p. 5); a chapter starting with the uneasy coexistence at the picnic, Emma’s elevation to mistress of the assembly by Frank Churchill, and ending with her realisation that she hurt Miss Bates. In fact, Emma shares some features with Cleopatra here, and the group on Box Hill show potential as a top-heavy social mind. We have Churchill requesting that everyone tell their thoughts to Emma, Emma’s responsiveness to flattery as well as her own (presumed) superiority in the chain of embedded intentionality (assessing the Eltons’ marriage, Frank Churchill’s request for a wife as referring to Harriet, etc.). By the end of the chapter, Mr Knightley makes it clear to her that her grasp of the social interactions is insufficient, and the fuller realisation of this ironic reversal — with respect to Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax — will follow soon.

Of course, Austen did not invent the social mind, and neither did Sarah Fielding or Edward Gibbon. Instead, considering the social mind in eighteenth-century fiction and history-writing invites us to extricate, from this rather dense texture of contemporary issues, features more generally useful for the discussion of social minds across the centuries. The ‘top-heavy’ social mind is particularly relevant in a century when the social contract is renegotiated for the ‘polite and commercial’ society (see Langford, 1980). But well beyond the eighteenth century, social minds in fiction and historical narrative often have hierarchical structures. We can trace these hierarchies in the embodied relation between the individuals making up the social mind, in the symbolic arrangements of rituals, and in the layers of embedded intentionalities of ‘theory of mind’. When these hierarchies of social minds turn ‘top-heavy’, we find individuals that strategise to remain on top of the chain of embedded intentionalities or to appropriate social rituals for their own benefit. Narratives like Fielding’s and Gibbon’s bring the dynamics of the top-heavy social mind to the fore by devising narrative strategies that put internalist and externalist dimensions of social cognition at odds, such as unequal intermental units, opaque embedded intentionalities and irony. These processes of turning a social mind
'top-heavy' often lead to a disturbance in the balance of the narrative and entail plot development. In some instances, the social mind can redress the flaws of the individual. In the case of Commodus, for example, the operations behind the scenes of the arena reinscribe the emperor into the workings of a social mind that he is not aware of. In the case of Cleopatra, Sarah Fielding’s strategies of irony foreground that the queen of Egypt is mistaken about her role, as the implied author reinstitutes the social mind. Top-heavy social minds can elicit one narrative arc, as in Fielding’s Lives, or they can contribute to various, intersecting narrative developments, as in Gibbon’s Decline and Fall. They work across both fictional and factual narration. In the eighteenth century, the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction are only in the process of being drawn (see Gallagher, 1994 for a discussion of this issue and the texts assembled in Nixon, 2009 for the range of eighteenth-century views). While Fielding inscribes herself into the literary tradition with her preface and the fictional conceit of narration from beyond the grave, she also draws extensively on historians. Gibbon, writing the quintessential 'history', employs narrative strategies informed by literary fiction, such as Henry Fielding’s (see Braudy, 1970) and considers an immersion in ancient literature necessary for understanding the period (see his Essai sur l’étude de la littérature). Both Fielding and Gibbon relate themselves to the ancient world, and all its literature, and both Fielding and Gibbon find similar narrative strategies of the social mind to address the contemporary issues of ‘civic virtue’ and the relation between the individual and the public sphere. Fielding, in her Lives, which have been considered 'historical fiction' (Oliver, 2011), focuses on the relation between the individual and the social mind, and the conflicts this might bring. Gibbon in his history, on the other hand, explores the interactions between individual and social minds, as well as between smaller social groups, larger groups and individual actions, thus developing a rather detailed tapestry of the mutual interdependences of minds in a society.

Both Gibbon and Fielding takes us beyond the canonical examples of social minds, such as those found in Middlemarch or Enduring Love. They show that both historical and fictional narratives deal with social minds, explore their tensions (perhaps more explicitly than the canonical examples) and thereby allow us to develop the narratological concept of the ‘social mind’ (that has relevance beyond literary periods) further.

Works Cited:


