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### **Mind reading, mind guessing or mental-state attribution?**

The puzzle of John Burnside's *A Summer of Drowning*

John Burnside's *A Summer of Drowning* (2011) is a perplexing novel with perplexing representations of minds. In fiction, third-person narrators liberally exhibit thoughts, feelings and minds of all characters, yet in Burnside's novel, it is the first-person narrator Liv, a teenage girl who steps forward as a seasoned reader of minds. However, the novel is not a strong case for such a "folk-psychological" capacity to understand other minds, possibly with the help of the "Theory of Mind", suggested in different versions by Lisa Zunshine (2006), Alan Palmer (2004) and David Herman (2011), among many others. There is the unnerving problem that Liv seems to read minds all too perfectly, even the minds of people she has hardly met, while at the same time failing drastically to understand the two people she knows and loves most – her mother and her surrogate father and neighbor Kyrre Opdahl. Daniel Hutto (2008, 46) suggests that "by far the best and most reliable" way of attaining knowledge about other people's reasons is the horse's mouth method, yet precisely this basic folk-psychological approach of conversation is interpreted by Liv as "intrusion". To add confusion and complexity, the more unnatural the events of the novel become, the less reliable and the more paranoid the narration becomes. As an attempt at fostering some clarity, I develop an idea of "mind reading" – or more exactly mind-attribution – as a discursive-mental strategy in the service of diminishing the value of present partners of social interaction.

The story takes place on the distant Norwegian island of Kvaløya, which is situated near Tromsø and the Nordic Circle, during a short summer. Liv's mother is a prominent artist who achieved her position after withdrawing from Oslo to the solitude of the island. The teenage girl adores her mother as much as she despises all the banality of life in Tromsø and, in general, everywhere outside her home and the island. The story begins just after Liv has finished school and is considering what to do about her future. Two brothers, Mats and Harald Sigfridsson, both from the same school, about the same age as Liv, are found mystically drowned within a few weeks, during calm weather, without any plausible explanation or even a reason why they had been rowing a stolen boat at night. A British tourist, Martin Crosbie, comes to hire a nearby cottage, only to disappear later without a trace. Liv's only friend, Kyrre Opdahl has a history of telling Nordic folklore stories to Liv; and he suggests now that *huldra*, an infamous magical female character of folklore fame, who is able to enchant gullible men and drown them is behind the tragedies. Even though Kyrre and other locals, and even the narrator herself, continually repeat that *huldra* is more of an idea than

a real person, as the summer proceeds, Liv begins increasingly to identify *huldra* with a real girl of her own age, Maia.

In addition to the incidences of drowning, a much more personal and profound turbulence shakes Liv in the form of letters she receives, hides and wants to burn in the midsummer bonfire. A woman called Kate Thompson writes from England, informing Liv that her father is seriously ill and wants to meet her. Liv succeeds in delaying her visit so long, however, that her father dies on the night before her arrival at the hospital. There, a peculiar contrast between high-level mind reading and systematic ignorance of folk-psychological expectations characterize her meetings with Thompson.

On one level, the novel offers cues to reading it as a romantic – and unmistakably unnatural – saga about the puzzling Nordic midsummer light, a great artist flourishing in the solitude of the island, the magic figure of *huldra* enchanting and destroying naive men, and only a single girl being perspicuous enough to see through all of this tragedy. After the summer, Liv decides to continue living with her mother, and devote her life to mapping the landscape between her mother's house and Kyrre's now empty house. Drawing maps from stone to stone, from tree to tree may possibly qualify as art for art's sake; at least it completes Liv's withdrawal from the trivia of the social world. "I have no wish to do anything, no wish to create. I am a witness, pure and simple, an unaffiliated, lifelong spy", as she has it (50). From another perspective, this closure can be configured as a foreclosure of life and mind.

On a darker level of reading, one can thus identify a series of phenomena that gradually abolish – or at least seriously undermine – the story of the Romantic North. The first of these is Liv's disturbingly quick and detailed mind-attribution. I begin by analyzing some of the most blatant cases. The second theme is Liv's recurrent strategic use of mind-attribution in protecting herself from genuine encounters in emotionally demanding situations. The third feature, in support of the previous ones, is the realization that once and again Liv *misreads* her mother and Kyrre, the two people she should actually know most thoroughly, on central issues concerning her own life. The fourth problem is Liv's reluctance to share the facts about her visit to England, even with her mother and Kyrre, and finally her wild visions of Maia as *huldra*, including the visions of *huldra* catching and destroying Kyrre. In a rather paradoxical way, and in contrast to the invasive reporting of other minds, Liv fails to report adequately on her own tragedies of the summer, her *qualia*, as well as her own potential participation in Martin Crosbie's or Kyrre Opdahl's disappearance. In a worrisome way, she seems to resist contributing to any "social" or "intermental" mind (Palmer 2004, 2010); and equally, the "social mind" of her nearest environment resists confirming her unnatural version of the events.

## Moments of mind reading

As Dorrit Cohn (1978, 7) maintains, “[N]arrative fiction is the only literary genre, as well as the only kind of narrative, in which the unspoken thoughts, feelings, perceptions of a person other than the speaker can be portrayed.” Later theories of mind-attribution have challenged the validity of this “exceptionality thesis”, by acknowledging the continuous sensitivity humans regularly have as regards the intentions and emotional states of their partners of conversation (see Zunshine 2006; Palmer 2004, 2010, 2011; Herman 2011). David Herman (2011, 11) most explicitly argues against the exceptionality of fiction by first noticing how “fictional minds are accessible but not transparent”, and secondly, that “[e]very-day minds are not transparent, but they are accessible” (also Palmer 2010, 44).

The key argument of this chapter is that these general claims do not go far enough in clarifying the issue of accessibility of minds. Instead of mere abstract claims about equal or differing accessibility, we most obviously need arguments about *degrees* of accessibility. Burnside’s novel (from now on, *Drowning*) provides us with excellent material for testing empirically credible, everyday mind-attribution, taking place within the storyworld of the novel. The narrator’s own mind is far from transparent, to the point that it seems to be only minimally accessible even to the narrator herself. The whole interpretation of the novel depends on how far the reader is willing to trust in Liv’s sincerity and capacity for reading minds. The most critical point is still not about reading minds, occasionally, incorrectly, not even about resorting sometimes to wild mind guessing. The issue is about the *strategic malevolence* of mind-attribution, a kind of mind projection in the service of one’s own imagined world (see Tytti Rantanen, in this volume).

Departing from many of the early works on mind reading (Zunshine 2006; Palmer 2004), my discussion is not based on the cognitive “Theory of Mind” (here, I largely follow Iversen 2013). One particular problem with the Theory of Mind is the obvious difficulty of drawing its limits of credibility. If Liv has an excellent Theory of Mind, as daughter of a major artist, on what grounds could we challenge her expert capacity to read other minds so fluently? In this chapter, I discuss the understanding of other minds from the more general perspective of folk psychology. A broad meaning of the concept of folk psychology is outlined by Jerome Bruner (1990), who uses the term to describe the script-like cultural knowledge about canonical sequences of events, and the narrative means of dealing with the deviations of the expected. The more narrow meaning of the terms only refers to the understanding that people have different desires and reasons motivating their action. Mind-attribution, in this strict meaning, also focuses in evaluating the desires and reasons of the studied person. Hutto (2007) argues, in his Narrative Practice Hypothesis (NPH), that children originally learn that human agents have desires and reasons for actions by listening to fairy tales and other narratives. To understand oneself as an agent, in other words, is a narrative achievement for Hutto. This socio-cultural understanding of folk psychology, and the consequent capacity to understand

minds, allows questioning the credibility of Liv's mind reading. I am well aware that this reading is based on the use of my own folk-psychological knowledge, simply because there is, and cannot be any scientifically composed handbook of folk psychology. The purpose is to make of the mind readings *topoi of argument*, as something that can be argued, negated, or further elaborated. This kind of argumentation is possible because folk psychology is based on shared cultural knowledge, not on any theory package working in the mind.

Alan Palmer (2004, 130–169) suggests the useful concepts of “mind beyond the skin” and “social mind”, in defending the “externalist” understanding of mind against the old idea that mind is confined inside the brain and skin. “An important part of the social mind is our capacity for *intermental thought*. Such thinking is joint, group, shared, or collective, as opposed to *intramental*, or individual or private thought. It is also known as *socially distributed, situated, or extended cognition*, and also as *intersubjectivity*”, as Palmer (2010, 41) recently argues. However, I am not primarily interested in locating such intermental units, as Palmer seems to be. In *Drowning*, one of the chilliest aspects of the narration is the realization of the gradual disappearance of the intermental confirmation of reality.

Hutto (2004, 2008) specifically criticizes mind reading as “spectator sport,” meaning a distant third person perspective on other minds. In most cases, he argues, the most reliable understanding of other minds is achieved from second-person encounters and actual conversation. Liv looks out of her window one night and sees the Englishman, for the first time. In the light of the midsummer night, she finds something akin to a ghost-like unreality in him: “at the first glance, it seemed to me that he was a man without substance, not a ghost so much than an illusion, *a phantasm in which he himself scarcely believed*” (*Drowning*, 45, italics added). It is not merely Liv's own perception; it is as if it were Crosbie himself having these ideas of not believing in his own existence. Looking at Crosbie, from some distance in the light night, Liv continues her appraisals:

If Mother had been there, she would have said he was sensitive, or delicate, but to my mind there was more to it than that, something that had to do with my first impression of his being hurt or lost, like some animal that has strayed from its own habitat and finds itself exposed... (*Drowning*, 46)

The narrator takes the liberty to employ *thought report* (Palmer 2004, 75–86) or psycho-narration in accounting for the people she meets. Using side-shadowing (Morson 1994) and hypothetical narration (Riessman 1990), Liv invites the image of her mother's mind and evaluates the visitor and his character from her mother's supposed perspective, before suggesting her own interpretation. The essential difference between these separate moments of mind reading is between the second-person and third-person perspectives, in the sense that Liv has a long and intimate second-person history of observing her mother, interacting with her, making her observations largely but not exclusively reliable, while she neither

has previous knowledge about Crosby, nor does she have a history of dialogs with him. The reported thoughts, in other words, cannot carry along any layers of Crosby's own speech. Nevertheless, she is fast in appraising Crosby already from afar. During their first and only proper conversation, Liv makes further evaluations:

He laughed, rather sadly I thought. Though *it was always hard to know, with Martin Crosby*, how real any of his supposed emotions were. *He had worked long and hard on seeming innocent*, I think.  
(*Drowning*, 56, italics added)

Liv and Crosby meet only a few times and discuss properly only this single time, yet the narrator knowingly uses the expression "it was always hard to know, with Martin Crosby," as if they had a long history of sharing thoughts. The observation concerning the difficulty of detecting real emotions remains distantly within the range of potential capacities even during a short encounter, by adeptly reading the *embodied* emotional states. The second part, "he had worked hard on seeming innocent," is connected to the time of narration in the present tense. Nevertheless, it is such a complex statement about the history of Crosby's control of emotions that it is not credible without a real history of conversations and observations. How, indeed, do you tell people apart, who simply look innocent, and those who have worked hard to achieve the ability to look innocent?

Another instance of radical mind reading occurs when Liv meets a journalist who came to the island to interview her mother. The acute issues here are jealousy (her mother had better not take incidental visitors seriously) and sex (who would be worthy of her mother?). Liv stays in the adjoining room overhearing the course of the interview, and becomes increasingly worried because of her mother's tone and an intimacy she had not heard earlier (78). In other words, the mind reader already has a stance to protect, an attitude preceding the actual meeting with Frank Verne. As always, Liv is swift in her scrutiny of Verne. After a few words of tentative pleasantries, we have a powerful example of Liv's mastery in reading minds:

...and though he was smiling, I could see that he was studying me, trying to work out what I was hiding. Because I *was* hiding something. I had to be. Everybody had something they kept hidden and the only difference between one person and another was how long it took to figure out. That was what he was thinking. I could see that he was sure of this simple fact and the thought passed through my mind that I would either puzzle him or disappoint him, because I wasn't hiding anything at all.  
(*Drowning*, 81)

The passage has a truly complex propositional structure, a real private theory of other minds, presented by resorting to free indirect speech in the thought representation. Verne (like many others, obviously) believes that every person has a secret. Just by looking, it is possible to reveal this secret (as she thinks Verne

believes). Verne believes that Liv has a secret. Verne is looking at Liv in order to find out the secret. Verne will be disappointed, because Liv does not have a secret. The crucial question here concerns the particular version of folk psychology motivating these propositions. If we think for a second about a visiting journalist who is professionally, intellectually and erotically interested in the artist mother, what might he be seeking while looking at the daughter? Brunerian (1990) common sense would recommend that he – at least – is trying to figure out whether the daughter is inclined to complicate his plans, or is she already an adult-enough person to be conversed with on equal footing? Alternatively, he may simply want to have an image of her character, to learn how to possibly converse with her in future. How about gently comparing mother and daughter? From Verne's point of view, of course, Liv already has a secret, the secret worry she has because of the warmth in her mother's voice. Rather than any folk psychology, one can detect in the passage a piece of alarmingly paranoid psychology. It is, after all, Liv herself who has excelled at spying and detecting the secrets of Kyrre's visitors. In this sense, Liv is straightforwardly projecting her own mindset onto Verne's mind. There is one remarkable aspect in all these mind reading episodes. They never encourage a sustained exchange of ideas or any attempts at testing her interpretations. Rather, they work as excuses to finish the conversation.

In total contrast to the near mystical clarity in reading other people's minds, the narrator turns opaque in explaining her interest in "spying" during the summer. She used to spy on Kyrre's visitors, because they mystified her. Here we almost receive a description of folk psychology, in the sense of Bruner (1990) or Hutto (2004), but in the negative. She affirms that she does not understand the visitor's desires, fears or wishes, or what stories they wanted to recount to her. Rather than trying the horse's mouth method in understanding others, Liv chooses understanding from a distance, spying with the help of technical tools. The disclosure above equals admitting that she is not, after all, very well equipped for understanding others. Shaun Gallagher (2007, 213–214) writes that in "most intersubjective situations" we indeed have "direct understanding of another person's intentions" because they are "explicitly expressed in their embodied actions and their expressive behaviors." Visual reading of embodied action and facial gestures can indeed reveal a lot about another person's intentions, but again, the emphasis is on second-person encounters, not on the third-person reading from afar. Gallagher, of course, does not refer here to any such conceptually rich reading of another person's ideas as Liv presented above.

However, Liv seems to understand precious little about her own spying mind. She decides *not to spy* on Crosbie, yet she continues with it immediately. As a consequence, the narrator resorts to a weirdly negative narration, a technique she often uses in distancing her motivations from her actual behaviour. She proclaims that "she had no desire to watch", and watches nevertheless, and next that she "*didn't want to know*" the contents of Crosbie's shopping bags but, a moment later, reports them in detail (*Drowning*, 51).

At any rate, the recurrent negative explanation means that she does not need to give any proper explanations about her spying. This recurrent use of these negatives tell the reader that Liv may not be considered as the most reliable narrator, not at least when it comes to accounting for her own mind. A similar ambiguity shadows her relationship with the drowned Mats Sigfridsson. At first, curiously, Liv claims that Mats was “nothing” to her, he simply was a boy from her class at school. Then she mentions how “remote from the rest of the world” Mats was. Not that she knew him well, but she had thought that Mats might have been able to understand the way she “saw the world”. The bells start ringing when the narrator next declares that she is “not talking about a romance here” (30) and that she “wasn’t *attracted* to Mats” (31). Who had made such claims, and what exactly is motivating this continuous counter-argumentation? These repeated negatives invite the possibility that she, after all, was emotionally much more engaged than she was able or willing to divulge. The narrator, ten years afterward, is still working hard at speculating on the reader’s mind, in an attempt at rejecting all possible doubts about her.

#### Intrusion and interaction

Liv had received binoculars as a 13<sup>th</sup> birthday present, and since then she had been spying on Kyrre’s solitary visitors – never families, never couples. She considered this spying to be harmless and kind; indeed, she explains that her basic motivation behind the spying was that she “wanted them to be happy” (*Drowning*, 27). Nevertheless, once she sees Crosbie driving away, she is immediately at his door, “feeling slightly guilty”, but after finding the door not locked, she slips in, ready to search the house (*Drowning*, 132). She finds Crosbie’s computer unlocked, and goes on to survey the contents. She finds photographs of normally dressed girls of about her age (*Drowning*, 134). Gradually, a whole archive of high quality photographs portraying young girls is revealed, including some photos of her. There is nothing indecent in the pictures, and they were not about spying in Liv’s sense of the term. Dangerously, however, the girls were *objects of desire*, as Liv has it. Therefore, she interprets the photos as *theft*, not as innocent spying, and without a second thought she decides to destroy all the photo archives that Crosbie has on his computer. So much for only wishing those she spied on “to be happy.”

The incident highlights a fundamental contradiction in Liv’s thought. She allows herself to spy on other people, enter their homes and computers, administer corrections, and all this does not constitute any kind of ethically problematic instance of intrusion. On the other hand, she herself hates to be observed by others, and later has feelings of being followed. As a reference to the sexual theme of *huldra*, she is appalled while encountering the phenomenon of desire (more exactly, while meeting something she interprets as desire). It is not that she herself is merely not interested in sexuality, as she claims, she is actively and systematically against sexuality, despises it, and wants to censor other people’s attitudes and

behaviour when possible. The most curious aspect of her intrusion into Crosbie's computer is that Liv never considers the consequences of her intrusion, for example when thinking about Crosbie's sudden disappearance from the island. Despite the fact that Crosbie's car and belongings all disappear at the same time, Liv does not think for a second about the effects of her own agency or the consequent embarrassment or hurt, but accuses *huldra/Maia* instead.

Liv's orderly time of spying and looking at picture books is interrupted when she receives a letter from Kate Thompson, informing her of her father's illness. Against obvious folk-psychological expectations, Liv does not disclose the contents of the letter to her mother, and her mother, within the range of this somewhat exceptional family dynamics, does not ask anything about it either. Liv indeed praises her mother as a person who will not "intrude" on her private matters (*Drowning*, 65). Asking questions, showing an interest and discussing daily concerns may thus constitute an intrusion into her life. Her mother is not at all like Thompson, who wrote the letter. However, even the narrator's critical account informs one of the highly discrete way Thompson is writing, using a mode that social psychologists have called "doing delicacy" (Nijnatten & Suoninen 2014). The first letter does not ask Liv to do anything, it simply explains that her father, named Arild Frederiksen, lives in England and is seriously ill. Thompson asks Liv not to see her as an intruder, even though she is a stranger, and identifies herself as a well-intended stranger.

That struck me as funny. How could this woman think it was well intentioned, to write such a letter and send it, out of the blue, to someone she did not know? (*Drowning*, 66)

"Such a letter", constitutes in Liv's world a violation of protected canonicity, which is so self-evident that it needs no further explication. A letter coming from outside the closed sphere of her life without prior consent is questionable. If her mother does not speak about her father, no one else is entitled to do so. The choice of words is noteworthy. A letter informs her of the existence and illness of her father, yet the writer's intentions sound "funny". Ten years later, the narrator still airs her wish to have burnt all the letters in a midsummer night's bonfire. The letter indeed had been "an intrusion"; and she only wanted "to be left alone". A man is dying, yet Liv keeps thinking that telling her the facts "*was not fair*" (*Drowning*, 71).

The letters themselves do not contain any such violation of folk-psychological canonicity, which would call for an explanation of reasons, or even motivate Liv's harsh reaction. Rather, it is Liv's righteous and hurt reaction that raises questions and calls for better explanations. For one thing, at the time of the story, she is somewhat too old to be the stereotypical, sullen and totally egocentric teenager; for another, the narrator, a whole decade later, still does not take any more distance from this peculiar attitude. There is not a drop of empathy towards the seriously ill man or Kate Thompson; the only person needing to be pitied is Liv, so cruelly disturbed. She uses a lot of energy in vain speculations about the seriousness of the

illness and her father's role behind the invitations. In other words, she is not able to consider the invitation without her paranoid fears of inordinate manipulation.

In her second letter, Thompson specifically clarifies the huge significance her visit would have. Again, in a manner of carefully "doing delicacy" ("*but if you could find the time to come*"), Thompson tries to adopt Liv's perspective, even to accept her possible resistance before explaining how immensely important her visit would be to her father (*Drowning*, 120). Thompson urges Liv to see the situation from the perspective of the dying man, and uses folk-psychological arguments in the sense Bruner (1990) uses the term. Liv, on the other hand, remains totally untouched and sees the issue firmly from the perspective of what primarily *interests* herself. "What surprised me even more was her assumption that I would *want* to see my father, that I would be curious, at the very least, to know what he was like. Yet I wasn't curious. Not in the least" (*Drowning*, 120). However, only a modicum of empathy and compassion is what is requested. Liv, who in her own domestic environment is curious enough to *spy* on her neighbours and to break into Crosbie's computer and reveal his secrets, declares now total indifference as regards her own father.

Against all her expectations, her mother, after hearing of the contents of the letters, immediately and emphatically encourages her to go to England. Even in the case of her mother, she turns out to be rather a lousy mind reader. During their drive to the airport, they meet Liv's father-substitute, Kyrre Opdahl. Her mother lightly announces that Liv is going to England, in order to meet her father. This announcement discloses a new, shocking misreading of her mother's mind:

*That shocked me.* I had assumed she wouldn't want to talk about *him*. After all, she had been pretending he didn't exist for years. (*Drowning* 166, first italics added)

The "shock" reveals that Liv is working with a set of assumptions about her father that her adored mother does not share at all. After returning home, Liv remains angry at her mother – but not for the earlier "pretention", but for the way she had now openly discussed the journey to Kyrre. After the journey, Liv also learns that it was not her father who had unfairly rejected her and her mother; on the contrary, the father simply did not fit into her mother's life dedicated to the arts. Nevertheless, learning these facts does not change anything in Liv's thought; at least, there is no triggering of any self-critical reflection about her harsh reaction to her father's death. Instead, all this belongs to the information she still wants to wipe away from her consciousness during the time of the narration. Her mother, instead, now sees no problem with her meeting with Arild Fredriksen; in contrast, she keeps telling her what a good man he was. The reader cannot miss the grave incongruence in her mother's behaviour. Why did she not tell Liv about her father earlier; why was she so stubbornly evasive for years? Liv does not ponder on this. Instead she adopts the old position of forgetting the father as the natural stance, and a stance that binds her and her mother most safely together.

Eventually, Liv manages to defer her visit to the hospital so long that she never meets her father alive. While arriving during the previous night, she thinks, like a stubborn teenager, that even though she could still go to the hospital, one night would not make any difference. The big issue was not to rush to the hospital, because she “was tired” and “felt damp and slightly grimy” (*Drowning*, 175–176). In the face of her father’s coming death, the acute issue is how *she feels* bodily. At the hospital, this self-righteous girl does not want to see the body of her father (again a potential threat to her world view); instead she insists on leaving the hospital straightaway. When Thompson does not let her escape immediately, the narrator explains that it was Thompson who “needed something more” (*Drowning*, 184). Liv sticks to her strong understanding about Kate Thompson as an intruder, yet Thompson manages to have a conversation with her. During this singular personal encounter with Thompson, Liv uses mind-attribution in a determined way. She has just lost her chance to meet her father alive, ignoring her father’s wish to see her at least once before his death. These are not concerns that seem to worry Liv at all, neither at the time of the story, nor at the time of narration a decade on, because she did not want to leave her island in the first place. After all, she did not invite these people into her life. Kate Thompson wants to tell her about her father, while Liv focuses on not listening. She is not the least open for human communication; instead she thinks the whole conversation only serves Thompson’s needs. In her arrogance (“*I couldn’t help thinking*”) she translates Thompson’s attempt at talking to her only as a sign of her loneliness, of not having anybody else to talk to about the deceased. After diagnosing Thompson’s loneliness, she proceeds into far-fetched observations about the misery of their past life:

...I suddenly had an *overwhelming sense of loneliness, a sense of a sad, slightly dismayed couple* [...] but I *knew* they had come together, not because of something they had shared but out of common sense their best days were over, a common feeling that whatever they had wished for in life hadn’t quite materialised. (*Drowning*, 194, italics added)

Even though the existence, life and death of her father would not have meant anything to her, the above passage is weird, because Kate Thompson’s talk would still be entirely understandable and well-motivated: even after the father’s death, Thompson wanted to connect Liv to him somehow, to give her something to remember. However, Liv’s mind works with a different agenda entirely. Without any prior information, joint experience, communication or extensive life experience in general, she is capable of attributing loneliness and a sad life to a person who has just lost her partner. Characteristically, the narrator first minimizes her own responsibility for her own thoughts with the idiom “I couldn’t help thinking”. Nevertheless the emphatic claim that she somehow knew how “they had come together”, for definitely miserable reasons, and not for sharing something more profound. These are drastic claims and cannot be based on any mind reading (note that the whole episode consists in Liv’s rejection of all folk-psychological expectations of decent behaviour; now she should have perfect command of folk psychology in reading

Thompson's mind). Now they rather appear as malevolent mind-attribution. By attributing this sordid life to Kate Thompson (and her father), she actively closes her ears and eyes both to the actual conversation and to the death of her father, no longer needing to take these seriously. Attributing miserable histories and ideas to other minds, therefore, is for her an effective mental and discursive strategy of downplaying the relevance of the other. Desperately, she sticks to the imagined, mythical story about her mother and father, and cannot attribute any value to her father and his actual life outside the sphere of her mother.

#### Displacements and paranoia

As successful as Liv was at effectively evading her father and Kate Thompson, the trip to England was not without consequences. After leaving the hospital, a haunting feeling of being followed creeps into Liv. After all, she feels guilty, but not because of her own behaviour; she feels guilt towards her mother. She suspects that, just by listening to Kate Thompson, she has been part of an attempted betrayal towards her mother (*Drowning*, 203). In the hospital, Liv had offered her gravely misleading explanation of Arild's disappearance from her mother's, and her own life. Yet, Liv is not the least worried about having understood the facts of the story incorrectly, she is worried about Thompson's (presumed and attributed) thought that her mother had misinformed her about her father (*Drowning*, 244). So far, she had built all her reactions to her father's state on her fictions about her parent's story, whereas now she only feels guilty because she was listening to a story that might compromise, somehow, the integrity of her mother and her stories.

Before leaving her hotel, while having her breakfast, Liv sees, outside in the garden, a small girl lingering there, despite the wet weather. At first glance, the girl's face looks angelic and pleasant but, suddenly, "the look of her face turned to a grimace of utter, violent hatred, not just of me, but everything and everyone" (*Drowning*, 220). Liv feels that the girl is somehow familiar, but does not understand how. When she raises the alarm for the personnel to check out the girl, no one can see any child around. Again, the outraged and hateful little girl is *out there*, haunting innocent Liv, and observed only by Liv. What she did or said during her visit is not the slightest problem; the real problem is the experience of being followed, the "preposterous" ideas of Kate Thompson, and the hateful girl who comes to disturb her on the last morning.

No wonder then that the next section of the novel is entitled "*huldra*". Liv returns home, but does not want to share her experiences with anybody. "The last thing I wanted was a meaningful conversation about Arild Fredriksen's death" (*Drowning*, 229). Liv wants to remain unseen, even abandoning her spying. Yet, she happens to see Crosbie – and now with *huldra*. Of course, what she perceives is Martin Crosbie in the company of Maia – who is now tightly identified as *huldra* – and an obvious affair is blossoming between the two. Alas, this is not the only affair that comes to shock her (*Drowning*, 230– 231).

The narrator keeps insisting that her mother does not live in full solitude, because every Saturday afternoon she has an artistic tea party, gathering a small group of local artists and intellectuals. Liv's attitude towards the group is twofold: ironically and condescendingly she calls the men "suits", seeing them as necessary but slightly comical pawns who witness her mother's grandeur as an artist, thinker, and desired beauty. In this game, her mother is the one who sends the men off, lightly, and concentrates then exclusively on her artistic work. Of course, the very name "suits", semi-consciously, invites the image of the eventually returning Odysseus. After Arild's death, this is of course not going to happen. In contrast Ryvold, one of the most valued regulars comes to the house to say goodbye, and purposefully when Liv's mother is absent. By coincidence, he had met the lover of his youth, and they had decided to give a try to a new life together. Liv's reaction to this news is intense, emotional and negative. She is disappointed with Ryvold and blurts out: "And I always thought it was Mother you were in love with" (*Drowning*, 254). Liv sees his departure as "betrayal", not so much of her mother, but of himself, as "if he had settled for something less than he deserved" (*Drowning*, 255).

Ryvold is committing the same mistake as Liv's father, accepting something less valuable than her mother. In order to be honest with himself, Ryvold should have preferred this once-a-week meeting with an admirable but inaccessible woman to a real-life spousal relationship. Later, when Liv tells her mother about the visit, she curiously omits the part about the "girl", as if it were a purported insult to her mother. On the same evening, her mother confirms that she had never wanted marriage, with Arild or anybody else. Instead of trying to think or talk through these new facts of life, Liv swiftly moves to the delusional side of her world. She wakes up in the night, looks at the meadows and feels that a new story has started, being part of an unknown world and unknown logic. For Liv, stories seem to take place following their own intrinsic logic, existing before the narrators and narration. The possibility that her own mind would be the primary source of this emerging story never occurs to her.

As a consequence, Liv takes her binoculars, offers her regular disclaimer on Crosbie's boring and "tawdry romance", and then nevertheless starts spying him. What she sees is that Crosbie has taken out Kyrre's boat, in the company of Maia, and is radiating of unnatural happiness. In this troublesome happiness, Crosbie seems to be the double of Ryvold and her father. While Liv looks away for a second, Crosbie has disappeared and the surface of the water is calm. Liv runs to the shore, being sure that Crosbie has been drowned, but without raising the alarm. Later, there is a weird encounter with Maia, Liv and her mother, but clearly no shared account emerges of what has happened. Liv tests her story about the drowning, but her mother is not convinced. Liv realizes that her mother no longer believes her but is rather convinced that Liv is "seeing things" (*Drowning*, 269–270), and begins, accordingly, to treat Liv as a patient. It is worth comparing the speed with which Liv has intervened in Crosbie's supposed drowning with her slow reaction and even resistance to her real father's illness and dying. One possible way of explaining this incongruence

is that the mere existence of her father, independent of her mother, seriously threatened her phantasy, while the whole “drowning” takes place within her safe phantasy world.

Earlier in the day, Liv had witnessed Ryvold leaving the suitors. She hears her mother confirm Kate Thompson’s version about her separation from Arild. Her image about the small social world she mostly – and exclusively – appreciates, turns out to be based on phantasy. Despite her expert capacity to read alien minds, she has failed drastically in understanding the social world nearest to her. Instead of considering this rupture, her interest turns to the malevolent *huldra*, the vicious and dangerous principle of female sexuality. From this night onwards, her world grows increasingly apart from her mother’s, and from everybody else’s world as well. As the narrator, at the end of the novel reveals: “I’m not crazy – I know enough, after all, not to talk about these things to the living...” (*Drowning*, 328). Surely, we readers do not inhabit the same world as those living in the novel.

#### Her mother’s betrayal

In Liv’s world, Crosbie is drowned and dead, Maia an enemy and a grave threat to her peace. While Liv is recovering from the previous encounter, resting in her room, her mother brings Maia into the house, to sit for her as a model. The narrator frames the setting like a true horror story, full of danger, having an alien, hostile presence with alien odours inside the house. This is one of the few instances when Liv is both angry and disappointed with her mother, who simply ignores Maia’s dangerousness, asking plainly if Liv does not like her (*Drowning*, 279). They soon enter into a discussion about the night when Liv “saw” the drowning. The negotiations about reality are delicate and careful here. Liv’s mother agrees that something awful had happened, but she insists that it had happened to Maia as well. Liv quickly discounts this existence of diverging versions of reality by explaining that Maia must have been able to tell her own version of events earlier and more convincingly to her mother. The paranoid logic<sup>1</sup> is watertight, and so no further argument or observation can challenge the phantasy about the vicious *huldra* any longer.

Within her paranoid script, Liv soon decides to “reclaim her house”, that is, to drive Maia out of the house. This activity, of course, is somewhat absurd if we believe that Maia is the dangerous and powerful *huldra*; if she is simply a girl sitting for her mother, the activity is both needless and crude. The reclaiming of territory indeed leads to a hostile conversation in the garden. According to Liv’s phantasy, Maia is – due to the sitting – emotionally dependent on her mother, and she rejoices in advance of the idea of her mother nonchalantly sending Maia off. Here, the lonely daughter of the artist is probably revealing her most vulnerable point, being rejected too early and often; the experience beyond reflection. Be that as it may,

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<sup>1</sup> On the diagnostics of paranoia, see Leader (2011). Leader claims, interestingly, that “[d]elusion is thus a positive rather than negative phenomenon, an attempt at healing rather than a pathology in itself” (2011, 70). This makes the timing of the delusions an even more intriguing issue.

the idea is a blatant case of mind-attribution, of projecting her own fears and priorities onto an entirely different mind. The encounter is presented in a way that offers entry into two, radically different worlds. Liv remains exclusively within her paranoid scheme, and uses mind-attribution to keep her story intact. When the girls start to provoke each other, Maia turns out to be much more poignant:

‘Tell me,’ she said. ‘Did you ever *fuck* anybody?’ She glanced at me sideways, still smiling her sweet, practiced smile. ‘Or are you just as cold as your nice, cold house...?’ (*Drowning*, 285)

This is a crude question, of course, but it nevertheless gets to the point: does Liv ever touch anyone, mentally or physically, or does she exist only inside her cool detachment of a phantasy world? Liv tries to hurt Maia by asking whether her mother is still *using* her or not, with little influence. Instead, Maia soon hits much harder by hinting that Liv’s mother, being “a complicated woman”, has “some things she needs to think over” (*Drowning*, 286). With this short comment, Maia presents herself as one of the few persons, who are not ready to join in with the unreserved adoration of her mother, airing the issue about the real woman beyond the official portrait. The comment, alarmingly, also hints at some real conversations that may have occurred during the sitting sessions. Be that as it may, this competition in ridicule again foregrounds a massive contradiction in Liv’s mind reading. Earlier, I documented her obviously unlimited capacity to “read” other, adult minds (Crosbie, Thompson). Now she meets a girl of her own age and school, and she appears totally at a loss to read Maia’s reasons and desires.

Liv’s delusional turn finds its apex during the episode of Kyrre’s disappearance. Liv has, after her trip, realized that Kyrre is the only person besides her mother whom she really loves. This, however, does not include sharing the experiences of her journey with Kyrre. Of course, Liv does not reveal to Kyrre her intrusion into Crosbie’s computer, and does not even think about it while Kyrre, for his part, is angry about the disappearance of his visitor. In the decisive scene, Liv, Kyrre and Maia meet in the meadow near Liv’s home. In Liv’s phantasy, Kyrre has decided to attack *huldra* directly and disregards the risks because he wants to protect the people he loves most in the world, and lead *huldra* away from their house. Nevertheless, Liv is appalled by Kyrre’s enchanted politeness towards Maia, by the old man’s ridiculous offer to give shelter to the young, homeless girl, and the two of them walking away as if lovers. Liv tries to stop them, but badly imprisoned by her own mind, she tells Maia that her mother has, after all, some unfinished business with her, and she should go to meet her immediately. In her phantasy, both Kyrre and Maia are planets circulating around her mother, as she is, not independent humans with their own desires and reasons. In reaction to their disappearance, Liv has a series of most unnatural perceptions and experiences, which I consider to be psychotic. After running around the woods and meadows in heavy rain, Liv collapses immediately upon arriving at home. The narrator adds one telling detail: even though she was

seriously ill, only her mother nursed her during the coming weeks, and no medical expert was ever invited to check examine her. The mental nature of her collapse needed no further witnesses.

Disturbing novel, disturbing mind

On my reading, the novel is so confusing because the narrator herself is so confused and increasingly paranoid in the storyworld. This is clearly a novel with two separate worlds (see Ryan, this volume), but because of the unreliable narrator, the reader has an unending task in checking details that are somehow confirmed or solely told from within the psychotic phantasies of the narrator. The novel is fine-grained in showing the complex texture of natural and unnatural elements in the mind of the girl during her worsening crisis. The novel provides a number of hints about Liv's history, about how her artist mother left her alone for days on end, in order to be able to concentrate on her own creative work. Both with Frank Verne and Maia, Liv nurtures the pleasant thought of her mother "sending off" the visitor. This is what Liv does – she spies on people from afar, imagines their minds, and sends them off rather than make any effort to connect with them by using the folk-psychological horse's mouth method. The psychological level of the novel is densely crafted and credible, but cannot be fully explored within the range of this chapter.

The novel problematizes both the benevolence and the nature of mind reading, as well as assumptions about automatically or naturally existing social or distributed minds. The issue is not primarily about the correctness of mind reading, it is about the performative difference between mind *reading* (as if trying to understand) and mind *projection* (attaching various contents for various reasons to other minds). The novel effectively undermines the assumption about the self-evidently well-intended process of mind reading. Equally, the reader of the novel has to struggle with de-constructing the assumptions about shared, social minds and shared worlds as the story becomes increasingly supernatural and delusional. At the end of the novel, Liv's mind is effectively distinct, not only from the minds outside the island, but also from the minds of Kyrre, Ryvold, and her mother.

As I have tried to argue above, the first-person narrator's mind reading indeed seem to require such folk psychological checking and evaluation that we tend to do in everyday interaction. The interpretative dilemma seems to concern Herman's (2011, 11) second claim. Within the novel's story world, Liv seems to think and behave as if other minds were more or less transparent for her. The use of such discursive forms as thought report and free indirect speech, prior to any history of actual dialogue, surpasses the credible accessibility of other minds in everyday interaction. Paradoxically, the novel foregrounds both the constant everyday mind reading, and the qualitative difference between representing minds in fiction and everyday situations. This suggests that there is possibly a much longer way from the everyday guessing and knowing

of other minds to the explicit, immediate and verbally rich representations of the minds of fiction, than is often admitted.

In recent literary theory, “conventional” tends to be quasi-automatically attached to “conversational” and “natural” narratives (e.g. Richardson 2013, 16). This recurrent juxtaposition gravely simplifies the place of the unnatural in many narratives, and the ways the unnatural is highly conventionalized in contemporary culture. When Liv’s understanding of her life breaks down, she discursively resorts to *conventional* Norwegian folktales, which provide her with a distinctively *conventional and unnatural* language for her paranoia and psychosis. The immersion into the mythic unnatural/supernatural contains very little by way of life experimentation; rather it works as a shelter against other people and against both maturation and sexuality. Burnside, on the other hand, provides his readers with a rare and nuanced vision of a mind growing increasingly confused. The novel does not offer the two worlds and realities as neatly separated and opposite; instead, the reader has to struggle back and forth inside the already flawed mental map of the narrator.

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