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Consciousness in *Thinks...* by David Lodge

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Introduction

The concept of consciousness has caused a lot of debate in the last four centuries. Fields such as psychology, in which the mind is always related to the brain and its faculties, and philosophy, with prominent figures like Locke and Descartes, have been keen on studying and analysing the nature of consciousness. Defined by Locke as “the perception of what passes in a man’s own mind”, consciousness has also interested those working in the field of literature. In fiction, the reader is allowed to know what other people (or characters in this case) are thinking, which would be something impossible in real life. This is closely related to “the theory of the mind” which, as Lodge states in his book *Consciousness and the Novel*, is the effort to try to understand what other people feel and think and to communicate our feelings to them (41-42). This process, which as Lodge claims is “a crucial stage of ordinary human development” (293), usually starts around the age of four, when children realise that the others have a different interpretation of the world than theirs. Being able to put oneself in other people’s shoes is what helps to develop the feeling of empathy in real life (Lodge, *Consciousness* 41-42). By means of this feeling, in literature, characters are able to make the reader identify with them.

As Lodge claims, the fact that nobody can get to know our thoughts is a huge challenge to scientific research and that is why consciousness is particularly interesting to some novelists (*Consciousness* 40). In the novel, authors can create characters who express their feelings and thoughts using different techniques. Some of these techniques are inspired by the “stream of consciousness”, which represents “the continuous flow of thought and sensation in the human mind” (Lodge, *Art of Fiction* 42). The concept was coined by William James in his work *Principles of Psychology*,

published in 1890. In his chapter “The Stream of Thought”, James establishes five premises on which thought is based: thought is something personal; it is constantly changing; it is not linear; it deals with different matters; and, finally, it chooses some parts of these matters while discarding others (James 495-496). The concept of the stream of consciousness has been borrowed by many authors in the field of literature, especially in modernism, when new methods were required to express the new socio-historical circumstances.

Modernist authors like Virginia Woolf or James Joyce tended to focus their narrations on the consciousness of the characters and, therefore, tried to represent their thoughts and feelings in a subjective way, rather than describing them from the outside (Lodge, *Consciousness* 57). As Woolf claimed in her essay “Modern Fiction”, reality cannot be defined from the outside as it is constantly changing, but it depends on what each human being perceives: “look within and life, it seems, is very far from being ‘like this’” (9). This subjective view is related to the psychological concept of ‘qualia’, which is defined by the psychologist Daniel Dennett in *Consciousness Explained* as “the subjective, private, ineffable, properties that constitute the way things look to us” (373). The concept has been applied to literature and indeed, Lodge makes use of it in his novel *Thinks...*, where the protagonist Helen Reed defines qualia as “the specific quality of our subjective experiences of the world-like the smell of coffee, or the taste of pineapple” (*Thinks...* 36). However, though the existence of ‘qualia’ has not been scientifically proved, as Helen states, these perceptions “seem real enough” (36) since they are different for each human being. Joyce also made use of the subjective, fusing it together with the objective combining both first and third person narration (Lodge, *Consciousness* 55). According to Lodge in *The Art of Fiction*, this technique raises the emotional intensity of the characters, allowing the reader to identify with them (10).

One of the most remarkable manifestations of “the stream of consciousness” in fiction together with free indirect discourse is the technique known as the interior monologue. As Lodge states in *The Art of Fiction*, the interior monologue consists of an “I” who verbalises his or her thoughts as they pass through the mind (43). It is like “monitoring an endless tape-recording of the subject’s impressions, reflections, questions, memories and fantasies, as they are triggered either by physical sensations or the association of ideas” (47). The representation of consciousness can also bring time-shifts reproducing how memory works. (77). Thus, the novels that employ the interior monologue technique are prone to be experimental since they deviate in form to represent a fragmented vision of reality caused by the workings of the mind (105).

In *Thinks...*, published in 2001 by David Lodge, consciousness plays a very prominent role, as its title suggests. Although the novel deals with a story set on a university campus, the real focus of *Thinks...* has to do with the depiction of the consciousness of the two main characters: Ralph Messenger, a professor of cognitive science, and Helen Reed, an English novelist and teacher of creative writing. Thematically, the novel also deals with the controversy about the nature of consciousness as being a business of either the humanities or the sciences. Besides relying on the convention of the external narrator, Lodge makes the thoughts of the two protagonists accessible to the reader through the use of different narrative techniques and voices. Whereas Helen’s is a conventional diary, Ralph’s is an experiment that consists in tape recording his thoughts as they come to his mind. It is the use of such different techniques and voices that makes the novel an experimental one, as it “deviates from the received ways of representing reality” (Lodge, *Art of Fiction* 104). Although, as previously said, it is impossible to know what other people are thinking, the fictional world of *Thinks...* offers the reader the illusion of being in the minds of the

two main characters. In this dissertation, I am going to focus on the concept of consciousness in Lodge's novel on a thematic level, as it is a topic that interests both protagonists, at the same time that I deal with the techniques Lodge uses to make the thoughts of the characters accessible to the reader.

Consciousness and William James's Premises of Thought

Consciousness has been a traditional focus of study for philosophers. However, the study of consciousness in the field of literature is something more recent, starting in the last couple of centuries. The era of modernism, which according to Virginia Woolf and others began in 1910 (*Character in Fiction* 38), meant a new way of relating to the world, a new "Weltanschauung". This new approach implied a response to the new circumstances which was developed by authors like Virginia Woolf or James Joyce. Modernist novels undergo important changes like the disappearance of the traditional omniscient narrator in favour of the subjective representation of the mental life of the characters. As Virginia Woolf states in her essay "Modern Fiction", reality is constantly changing and, therefore, very difficult to depict in an objective manner. For this reason, the novelist should focus on how each individual character perceives reality, that is to say, in the subjective experience (9). Both Woolf and Joyce, two of the main modernist writers, combine an objective, external narrative voice, which is quite unobtrusive and detached from the characters, with a strong focalization on the minds of the characters. Because of these innovations, intense feelings arise in readers, allowing them to feel empathy for the characters. The combination of an external perspective with an inner focus also characterises *Thinks....*, as we shall see.

Thinks... is more than a novel about the affair between Helen and Ralph, it is actually a novel about consciousness. According to James's first premise, thought is something personal and unique (497). Antonio Damasio states in *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion, and the Making of Consciousness* that, "the human consciousness is the consciousness of the "I" (qtd. in Lodge, *Consciousness* 23), as we, human beings, are aware of the experiences that we undergo. As William James claims in his masterpiece *The Principles of Psychology*, "the universal conscious fact is not

'feelings and thoughts exist,' but 'I think' and 'I feel'" (499). Thus, the truth for each human being, according to James, lies in his or her own thoughts. In Lodge's novel, when Ralph asks Helen about the novel his wife Carrie is writing, Helen answers "I think it's promising" (171), expressing her own personal opinion, independently of the objective merit of the novel. The same can be said of Ralph's supposition of Helen feeling comfortable to go to the Horseshoes (a game that consists in tossing horseshoes on a stake set in the ground) in Ralph's absence "I suppose Helen felt easy about going out there knowing I was away" (214). Another important example of the personal dimension and uniqueness of thought is when Ralph imagines examining the minds of different people in a concert hall when they listen to music: "Five hundred people all listening to the same piece of music, I bet you'd get five hundred totally different totally unique thought streams" (181). Ralph concludes, reinforcing James's first premise of thought, that all these people's thoughts on that music would be totally personal and thus unique (181).

The second premise of thought is its constant and total changeability. As James claims, no thought "can recur and be identical with what it was before" (*Principles* 506). In *Thinks...*, the thoughts of the characters are depicted as in constant flux. Ralph Messenger's tape recording experiment is one of the clearest examples in which the changing stream of thought is shown: "ONE, two, buckle my shoe...It's Wednesday 12th March, 5.30 p.m. ...I've got the Voicemaster up and running and it's brilliant" (113). However, the constant change of thought is not only shown in the way Ralph's mind passes from one thought to another, but he even talks about it himself when he mentions "you begin to feel rather possessive, protective about your thoughts, anxious to get them down on paper before they fade away" (148). The change of thought in Ralph's transcript is expressed by the ellipse "... " which, as he claims, "put dots for a

short pause” (2). Dots could also imply that consciousness never stops but it is continuously flowing. In Helen’s diary, a more orderly rendering of ideas, the switch from one thought to another is shown by means of a change in paragraph. For instance, whereas in a paragraph she is talking about her new neighbours “I have new neighbours: a young couple have moved into the maisonette next door”(145) —, in the following one her mind changes as she starts thinking about Anabelle Riverdale “I saw Anabelle Riverdale at the Library this morning” (146).

The third premise of thought, its non-linearity, makes reference to the time-shift, a useful device in modern fiction that shows how memory works (Lodge, *Art of Fiction* 77). As Ralph shows in his tape recording experiment, the mind is able to recover and reconstruct the past as the human being recalls a past experience. An example of this mind shifting is found when Ralph tries to recall the experience of his first sexual relationship as his mind shifts from present to past “My first fuck, how about that, yes, no problem, her knickers...” (73), showing the non-linearity of consciousness. Regarding Helen, her thought, despite being more orderly rendered, is neither lineal nor continuous, as seen in the first entry of her diary. She begins writing on Monday, 17th of February, talking about the house she has settled in “I’ve been allocated a little house or ‘maisonette’ [...] An open-plan living room with ‘kitchenette’ downstairs, and a bedromette and bathromette upstairs” (10). Afterwards, she digresses and starts thinking about the university campus “how Americanized universities have become since I was a student” (10).

The ability of human thought to deal with different ideas is the fourth premise of thought (James, *Principles* 587). In Ralph’s tape recording, his thoughts are not logically connected, which points to James’s idea that human thoughts are independent from each other: “Another full stop. . . well death is a full stop . . . enough of that

enough of that . . . the campus is deserted not supr . . . now that's interesting, I've been gazing out of the window for some time but not thinking about what I'm seeing" (5). Ralph is thinking about Isabel Hotchkiss, a woman whom he had had an affair with, who is now dead. Suddenly, there is a quick change of thought as he starts thinking about his surroundings.

According to William James, the last premise of thought is selection according to relevance (*Principles* 610), meaning that the mind chooses the most real sensation or perception which is put ahead of all the rest (615). On the one hand, a thing may be present a lot of times in life and still remain unnoticed for the human being. On the other hand, "a thing met only once in a lifetime may leave an indelible experience in the memory" (616). An instance of this can be the first day Helen meets her students in the new university, which is a day recorded in her memory because of its relevance: "I met my students for the first time this afternoon" (14). However, there are many other events she may not remember and therefore, not mention because they do not have enough relevance in her life, as, for instance, her daily routine.

The nature of consciousness in *Thinks...*

Besides recording their own thoughts, the two protagonists also discuss the nature of consciousness from their two very different stances, generating a controversy about whether consciousness should be a business of either the humanities or the sciences. Working in the area of Creative Writing, Helen Reed, defends the traditional view of consciousness belonging in the field of the humanities as she states “I suppose, that consciousness was the province of the arts, especially literature, and most especially the novel. Consciousness, after all, is what most novels, certainly mine, are *about*” (61). She despises science as being something cold and without mercy since it “doesn’t attempt to represent consciousness at all” (62). Helen states that science only deals with “describing behaviour and appearances, reporting what people say to each other, but never telling the reader what the characters are thinking, never using interior monologue or free indirect style to let us overhear their private thoughts” (62-63). She takes her opinion to the extreme claiming that “literature is a written record of human consciousness, arguably the richest we have” (316). As Lodge claims in *Consciousness and The Novel*, the reason is that, whereas science deals with universal laws, the works of literature reflect personality “which is always unique, because each of us has a slightly or very different personal history, modifying every new experience we have” (10-11).

By contrast, Ralph Messenger claims that consciousness is a business of the sciences. He defines the mind as being like a computer since it is “running lots of programs simultaneously” (37). Ralph is comparing the complexity of a computer dealing with different functions with that of the human mind dealing with thoughts. The high amounts of thoughts that are constantly passing through the mind are so complex that it is really difficult to grasp them in the same way that it is difficult to manage all

the interactions that take place in a computer system. As Ralph claims, “the subsystems and possible connections and combinations between them are so multitudinous and complex that it’s very difficult to simulate the whole process” (38).

The fact that the two main characters explicitly talk about how to translate the stream of consciousness into words in a novel that is doing exactly this is a proof of the metafictional character of *Thinks...* As Lodge states in *The Art of Fiction*: “METAFICTION is fiction about fiction: novels and stories that call attention to their fictional status and their own compositional procedures” (206). In fact, Lodge himself admits his interest in metafiction in an interview with Craig Raine, the director of the magazine *Aretés*: “I’m a metafictional novelist, I suppose” (*Consciousness* 296). The metafictional aspect in *Thinks...*, besides the fact that the novel employs different narrative techniques that draw attention to themselves, can be seen in the protagonists’ discussing the concept of consciousness, each defending his/her own point of view on it. For instance, in addition to the quotations previously mentioned, Helen deals with the scientific view of consciousness later on, as she states when she and Ralph are discussing the topic: “As a human being and as a writer, I find that view of consciousness abhorrent” (Lodge, *Thinks...* 319). As Lodge claims about his writing practice, nowadays, “we’re all very conscious of what we’re doing” (296).

For novelists, it is fascinating that, in literature, we have access to the feelings and thoughts of other people, something which is not possible in real life. In *Thinks...* Ralph Messenger acknowledges the difficulty of depicting first-person, subjective thoughts in an objective way (42) and, agrees that the character’s consciousness can only be known in literature, as it is the author who invents the character. Otherwise, the author would never get to know what is going on in the character’s head (43). As Helen cites the opening sentences of Henry James’s novel *The Wings of the Dove*, narrating the

protagonist's thoughts and feelings, Ralph reinforces his point of view claiming that if Kate Croy, the protagonist of James's novel, were a real human being, James could not really know what she was thinking and how she felt. However, as the protagonist in *The Wings of the Dove* is just a fictional character, James is able to determine the way she thinks and feels, which would not be possible in real life. Thus, human beings are only able to know what other human beings think or feel thanks to either background knowledge or assumptions. If not, it would not be conceivable.

In order to reinforce this idea, Ralph introduces the concept of "folk psychology" (43), a term coming from the field of science which "means received wisdom and commonsense assumptions about human behaviour and motivation, what makes people tick" (43). As he claims, it is quite useful in ordinary life as it allows people to imagine what others are thinking or feeling (43). Related to Ralph's concept of "folk psychology", in *Consciousness and the novel*, Lodge speaks of the "theory of the mind" which consists in trying to understand someone else's thoughts and feelings, developing the feeling of empathy for others (44). However, the realisation that the others have a different way of thinking also offers the chance of deceiving them (294). This may be one of the reasons of the many infidelities that are presented in the novel like Sandra Pickering's affair with Martin (Helen's husband now dead) or Ralph's with Marianne and Helen. Helen refers to transgressive thoughts as a natural phenomenon and claims that "the fact that we can suppress them, conceal them, keep them to ourselves, is essential to maintain our self-respect" (*Thinks...* 189), otherwise, civilisation would not be possible.

The 'theory of the mind' is clearly reflected in the novel when the two protagonists send emails to each other and Ralph proposes Helen to "swap journals" (*Thinks...* 186) with the intention of knowing Helen's thoughts and the other way

around. This experiment of “reading minds” that Ralph proposes to Helen comes from the realisation that both of them have different interpretations of the same events, which is the basis of the “theory of the mind”. This theory is quite present throughout the novel since both Helen and Ralph are all the time trying to know what the other is thinking or feeling. As seen in Ralph’s stream of thought, he is trying to know what Helen feels, as when he claims “she’s still grieving for her husband” (59). In Helen’s narration, the reader is also able to know how she enquires into Ralph’s feelings for her: “[he] seemed pleased to find me in his house” (67).

The use of narrative techniques for depicting consciousness in *Thinks...*

Despite the difficulty to depict the character's consciousness, different techniques have been developed throughout the years in order to render the thoughts and feelings of the characters in a novel. The two basic techniques used for depicting consciousness in prose fiction besides the traditional omniscient narrator are the interior monologue and free indirect discourse. The interior monologue, first used by a French novelist called Edouard Dujardin in *Les Lauriers sont coupés* published in 1888, was taken to the extreme by writers like James Joyce, as he included a forty-page interior monologue with only one punctuation mark in his masterpiece *Ulysses* (Cuddon 919). From that moment onwards, this technique has been exploited by other writers like Virginia Woolf or William Faulkner (920). In the interior monologue technique, the subject consists of an "I" who expresses his or her thoughts as they pass through the mind (Lodge, *Art of Fiction* 43). "We become acquainted with the principal characters not by being told about them, but by sharing their most intimate thoughts, represented as silent, spontaneous, unceasing streams of consciousness" (47). As for free indirect discourse, thought is represented through reported speech using the third person and past tense but keeping the character's own lexicon and eliminating the tags that introduce the narrative discourse (43). "This gives the illusion of intimate access to a character's mind, but without totally surrendering authorial participation in the discourse" (Lodge, *Art of Fiction* 43). The use of these narrative techniques and some others is clearly reflected in David Lodge's novel, which tries to capture the stream of thought of the two protagonists Ralph Messenger and Helen Reed.

Lodge conveys what the characters are feeling and thinking by means of different narrative techniques. A minor technique that Lodge employs is the figure of the external, impartial third-person narrator, who, simply describes and narrates the

situation so that the reader is able to set the action: “ON the Wednesday of the second week of the semester, Ralph Messenger and Helen Reed happen to meet in the University’s Staff House, at lunchtime” (32). Apart from introducing the setting, the presence of the third-person narrator can be seen in the tags in the dialogues: “he says at her shoulder, making her jump” or “he says, surveying the pictures with his head cocked appraisingly” (32). According to Susan Hamilton’s definition of third-person objective narrator in her work *Essential Literary Terms*, “we are left to infer the characters’ feelings from the spare, matter-of-fact report of their dialogue and their actions” (126) which is what happens in Lodge’s novel as the narrator reports the characters’ acts: “She laughs” (32). Sometimes the third-person narrator can be omniscient, but this is not the case in Lodge’s novel since he just talks about the characters from the outside. For instance, in the first lunch Ralph and Helen share together, the narrator adds “she seems startled, and not particularly pleased, by this information” (33) or “she looks shocked, then angry” (34). However, not being inside Helen’s consciousness, s/he does not know what she is really thinking or feeling.

The transcription of Ralph’s experiment recording his thoughts is the most prominent narrative technique that Lodge uses throughout the novel. Being like a kind of version of the interior monologue, Ralph’s experiment is quite similar to the modernists’ attempts to express the stream of consciousness in the novel. It is really important to relate the emergence of a narrative technique to the historical and social context of the time in which that technique emerges. For instance, the development of the epistolary novel in the eighteenth century is related to the relevance of letter-writing at that period. Similarly, the interest in the “stream of consciousness”, in the early twentieth century, “has to be related to the development of modern psychology and the increasing interest in mental operations that accompanies it” (Hawthorn 76). In the

novel, Ralph's use of a technological device (a tape recorder) to record his thoughts can also be related to the technological context that surrounds him since he works as the director of the Holt Belling Centre for Cognitive Science. As Hawthorn states: "Modern readers are fortunate in that they live in an age of tape-recorders. They can thus study normal, unselfconscious conversation in a way that our ancestors could not" (110). Following the same pattern, it is quite logical that Helen, being a novelist, expresses her thoughts by means of a diary since it is a traditional device already used in the early novels.

Since the very beginning of the novel, the reader is presented with the transcription of Ralph's tape-recorded thoughts. His purpose, as he states, is no other than "to record as accurately as possible the thoughts that are passing through my head at this moment in time" (1). In the transcription of Ralph's stream of consciousness, the reader notices the use of the subject "I" talking and changing from one thought to another: "the thought of an electrical fire breaking out in the Brain in the middle of the night is scary, unlikely as it is. . . So I called Carrie to say I'd be late and settled down to do some work on staff assessment I've been putting off..." (57). Through his thoughts, the reader gets to know Ralph's personality, like, for instance, the fact he is a womanizer: "Isabel Hotchkiss, no not her [...] What a lot of pubic hair she had" (2), "I snogged Marianne yesterday" (118). He even fantasises with Helen after meeting her "Helen Reed, yes, I'd like to fuck her too" (118).

Almost at the end of the novel, Ralph suggests that Helen gives a lecture about the literary perspective of consciousness at the Cognitive Science Institute (313). He wants to record Helen's speech, despite her reluctance, –"Oh. Sorry. I'm not used to these gadgets" (317). Although the lecture is a formal genre and therefore, more neatly organised than ordinary speech or thoughts, what the transcript shows is that Helen's

mind also changes from one thought to another and she even digresses, as Ralph does in his informal tape recording experiment. Nevertheless, the main technique through which Helen expresses her thoughts is the conventional diary. It is a very ancient narrative technique already employed in the origins of the novel. In fact, in *Robinson Crusoe*, considered the first English novel (it was published in 1719), the diary technique was already used. Robinson Crusoe, the protagonist, narrates his life and adventures from the very beginning using the first person “I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York” (Defoe). The diary usually begins by stating the date in which the narration is set.

The diary technique has been used in many masterpieces throughout the history of the novel, as is the case with James Joyce’s first novel *A Portrait of The Artist As a Young Man*. In the last chapter of Joyce’s novel, the narration changes from third-person to a first-person in the voice of Stephen Dedalus, in which he narrates his deeds in the form of diary: “MARCH 20. Long talk with Crany on the subject of my revolt [...] MARCH 24. Began with a discussion with my mother” (310-311). In Lodge’s novel, the diary technique is used to convey Helen Reed’s thoughts, which can be explained by the fact that she is a novelist. Helen draws on the diary as a therapeutic means to convey her feelings and thoughts and therefore, to ease her grief after her husband’s death. The diary is written in an accurate way, without any mistakes in the construction of sentences. As Hawthorn claims: “People in novels tend to talk in complete sentences, with few indicated hesitations, mistakes of grammar, ‘ums’ and ‘ers’, and so on” (111). At the beginning of the novel, Helen starts giving a first-person account of the day she arrives at Gloucester University as a writer-in-residence: “MONDAY, 17TH FEBRUARY. Well, here I am, settled in, more or less” (10). The change of thought in Helen’s diary is usually indicated by a blank space, which makes

the diary more visual and easy to read. In the diary, there are also dialogues in which the words spoken by the characters are directly reproduced. The main purpose of these dialogues is to give a more detailed account of some situations in the novel, as is the case with the Richmond's dinner party to which Helen is invited: "I've been watching rather a lot of TV lately", I said" (22).

It is at the Richmond's dinner party that Helen meets Ralph and Caroline Messenger for the first time and also where she gets to know that Ralph is an important figure: "He's something of a star here, Professor and Director of the prestigious Holt Belling Centre for Cognitive Science" (24). In a way, it is Helen who provides the reader with a description of the main characters, as she describes Ralph as "in his late forties [...] with a big handsome head" (24), and Carrie: "Caroline, or Carrie [...] is American" (24). Moreover, the reader gets to know Helen's first impressions of them after the first meeting. For instance, Helen regards Carrie as "very easy to talk to as well, open and friendly" (24). As the narration goes on, the reader is also able to know more about Helen's personal life like the fact that she was married to Martin and that she has children. Later on in the narrative, the reader is shocked when Helen realises, on Tuesday 1st of April, that her student Sandra Pickering, also Martin's research assistant, had had an affair with her husband: "I wasn't the first", she said, "or the last" (201). As Lodge claims in the interview with the director of *Areté*, at the beginning, the reader feels sympathy towards Helen but in the end, he or she realises that it is Ralph who is more open in conveying his thoughts and feelings (288), for instance, in the e-mails they exchange: "I enjoy your company" (185), he writes to Helen.

Apart from Helen's diary and Ralph's tape recording, there is a whole chapter (chapter twenty one) in which both protagonists share what they think and feel by sending e-mails to each other, quite an innovative practice when *Thinks...* was

published, dating from the 1970s, when the first e-mail application was created. In the novel, the e-mail exchange allows the reader to know the characters in a deeper way, like Helen's desire of not meeting Ralph for some time since she knows about his feelings for her, which she can't return: "you have made your feelings very plain [...] I can't reciprocate, for reasons you know" (185). However, Ralph insists on the fact that he is just pleased at spending time with her (185). Despite Helen's refusal of Ralph's proposal of "exchanging thoughts", Ralph manages to read Helen's journal at the end of the novel. It is in the very last chapter that the reader is told that Ralph reads it because "it was a unique opportunity to break the seal on another person's consciousness" (335), which again reflects the curiosity of the human being to know what someone else is thinking or feeling. However, at the very end, the novel's main idea is emphasised: it is impossible to know what other people are thinking or feeling, and one should not intrude on the other's privacy, since Ralph and Helen's last meeting ends in an unfriendly way after Helen realises that Ralph has been reading her journal: "I can't believe it. It's despicable" (337).

Conclusion

Consciousness has been one of the central topics of debate in some fields of study like psychology and philosophy. However, many novelists have also found it interesting as an object of analysis in literature. The relevance of dealing with consciousness in literature resides in the possibility of entering somebody else's mind and knowing what he or she is thinking or feeling, something not possible in real life. In novels, by means of different techniques, the author makes the thoughts of the characters accessible to the reader. The majority of these techniques evolve around the umbrella term of the "stream of consciousness", which was first coined by William James in his masterpiece *Principles of Psychology*, published in 1890. Defined by Lodge as "the continuous flow of thought and sensation in the human mind" (*Art of Fiction* 42), the concept was exploited by authors like Virginia Woolf or James Joyce during the period of modernism, when there was a change of focus from the objective to the subjective subject matter. Apart from the free indirect discourse, the main technique used in literature to represent the "stream of consciousness" is the interior monologue. As the interior monologue deals with the character expressing his or her thoughts spontaneously, the reader is able to know about the character's feelings and thoughts.

The universe of Lodge's brilliant novel *Thinks...*, published in 2001, revolves around the concept of consciousness. Just by looking at the title, the reader is already immersed in an atmosphere of consciousness and thought. Although it is a campus novel, the real gist has to do with the topic of consciousness, both formally and thematically. Thematically, both Helen and Ralph, who have different points of view, discuss the nature of consciousness being a matter of either the humanities or the sciences. Whereas Helen defends that consciousness is better represented through literature since the reader is told what the characters are thinking, Ralph objects to

Helen's view by claiming that consciousness is a matter of the sciences as the mind functions like a computer. Lodge himself backs Helen's point of view in *Consciousness and The Novel*, as he claims that literature reflects personality in a unique way (10-11). Regarding the form of Lodge's novel, it is by means of different narrative techniques that the reader gets to know about the feelings and concerns of the main characters: Ralph Messenger, a professor of cognitive science, and Helen Reed, an English novelist hired by Gloucester University as a teacher of creative writing.

The reader soon realises that the story revolves around the transcription of the protagonists' thoughts in different ways: whereas Helen's consciousness is conveyed by means of a conventional diary, Ralph's tape records and then transcribes his thoughts. The devices both protagonists use to render their thoughts are related to different contexts. While Helen's conventional diary is closely related to her being a novelist, Ralph's technological device is linked to his work as the director of the Holt Belling Centre for Cognitive Science. It is through Ralph's tape recording, a kind of version of the interior monologue, that Lodge mainly translates into the novel form James's concept of the "stream of consciousness". This experiment allows the reader to become acquainted with the character's personality, like the fact he likes women. Ralph does not only feel attracted by Helen, but he even proposes swapping journals (186) in order to know what she thinks and feels. As Helen believes that consciousness is something private, she refuses the proposal, which makes the reader think that indeed, it is impossible to have access to someone else's consciousness. By means of a third-person narrator, the reader witnesses the last meeting between the two main protagonists in the very last chapter, which does not have a happy ending. It is the attempt to enter into someone else's consciousness that puts an abrupt end to Ralph and Helen's relationship. In a way, this final event reinforces the idea that, although you can try to imagine what

someone else is thinking or feeling, it is really impossible to know it for sure in real life. Following “the theory of the mind”, Ralph could have just imagined the reasons why Helen changed her mind about having an affair with him. However, tempted by curiosity, he crosses the boundaries of her mind and reads her diary written and saved in her laptop. As an experimental novel, *Thinks...* wraps the reader in the world of consciousness and thought, providing him or her with the opportunity of being in the characters’ minds. As noticed at the very end of the novel, Lodge reinforces the message he has been communicating to the reader throughout the novel: we can never get to know what someone else is thinking or feeling in real life. However, in fiction, everything is possible.

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