

Trabajo Fin de Grado

**TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN DAVID
LODGE'S *THINKS...*:
A STUDY OF THE CAMPUS NOVEL AND
THE TWO CULTURES DEBATE**

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ABSTRACT

In *Thinks...* (2001) David Lodge rescues some of the classical generic conventions of the campus novel, a genre considered by many experts worn out and old-fashioned, in an attempt to reopen C.P. Snow’s two-cultures debate and to uplift the realm of arts in the world of academia. Lodge manages to play with a large variety of narrative strategies that suit to perfection character types and ideas. In this dissertation I intend to analyse *Thinks...* as a contemporary campus novel and to explore its contribution to the debate between science and humanities, taking into account both the formal and thematic aspects of the novel.

I. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation aims to study David Lodge's *Thinks...* —published in 2001— as both a contemporary instance of the campus novel and as an update on the debate of what C.P. Snow famously called “the two cultures”, that is, the ongoing conflict between sciences and humanities in the academia and the intellectual world. The indepth analysis of both the formal and thematic aspects of *Thinks...* will allow me to study its classical conventions along with some of the innovations introduced by Lodge.

I will briefly comment on David Lodge's previous academic novels: *Changing Places*, *Small World*, and *Nice Work* —set in the 70s, and 80s of the past century, since a certain knowledge of his previous campus trilogy will serve to contextualise his latest contribution to the genre and trace Lodge's variations and innovations in terms of form and content.

In my approach to *Thinks...* I will particularly focus on the study of its most important narrative techniques in relation to one of the major themes of the novel: consciousness. This is a subject that interests both Ralph Messenger, the representative of science, and Helen Reed, the character that stands for the humanities in the novel. Although the traditional campus novel is characterised by its realism, David Lodge already demonstrated in his earlier novels that the subgenre is perfectly compatible with narrative experimentation. *Thinks...* is a further proof of this.

This dissertation is structured around two main parts. In the first, and after a brief introduction to the origins and evolution of the campus novel, I deal with *Thinks...* as a contemporary example of the subgenre. In the second one, I study Lodge's novel in the context of the two cultures debate.

II. *THINKS...* AND THE TRADITION OF THE CAMPUS NOVEL

II.1. The Campus Novel: Origins and Development

The campus or academic novel emerged in the decade of the 50s as a variation of an earlier subgenre referred to as Varsity novels: works of fiction that moved around the intrigues of university students, usually at Oxford and Cambridge, like Evelyn Waugh’s *Decline and Fall* (1928) and *Brideshead Revisited* (1945). The academic novel consolidated as a subgenre with the works of some of the most representative writers of the so-called ‘The Movement’ or the ‘Angry Young Men’: a new generation of playwrights and writers disillusioned with the traditionalism of British society. Two of the most celebrated campus novels of the decade were Randall Jarrell’s *Pictures from an Institution* (1954) and Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954).

These pioneer works of fiction focus on the personal and professional intrigues of faculty members —particularly, those which feature a male university professor, from a lower-middle class or working-class background, who tries to find a place in society. There is then a switch in the protagonist role from the student to the lecturer. As Wiegenstein says (1987: 218) “one of the noteworthy qualities of the academic [novel] is the near-total absence of significant student characters in roles other than sexual prospect or enemy”. In these novels, most of the characters function as caricatures or types that eventually help the conformist male protagonist to rise to action and change his current unsuccessful personal and professional situation. According to Wiegenstein (1987:25), these episodic-structured narratives revolve around certain public gatherings such as the committee meeting or the party. They constitute comic social encounters in

which the most relevant character types —the manipulating professor, the phony artist or the helpful wife among others— display their personal quirks. In these scenes, little emphasis is given on plot but rather on the satirical tone and critique of certain social conventions.

David Lodge started writing in the wake of *The Movement* (Lodge, 1988:105), and felt particularly attracted to the work of Kingsley Amis, especially his novel *Lucky Jim* (1954). *Lucky Jim* is a realist comedy about a young lecturer, Jim Dixon, involved in a troublesome relationship with the mentally unstable Margaret Peel and tied to the requirements of the head of his department —Ned Welsh (Wiegenstein, 1987:52). Non-realistic elements such as the exaggerated depiction of character traits and the ease with which the protagonist's problems are solved at the end are used to criticize the pomposity and hypocrisy of the British establishment. Jim abandons the realm of academia and moves to London with Christine Callaghan, his new girlfriend, and the prospect of a good job.

Lodge's own career as university professor and literary critic at the University of Birmingham allowed him to explore and reframe some of the classical conventions of the subgenre, as his famous campus trilogy shows.

II.2. David Lodge's Campus Trilogy: *Changing Places*, *Small World* and *Nice Work*

The critic and novelist David Lodge is considered one of “the genre's most significant practitioners” (Womack, 2005:333). His trilogy of campus novels —*Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses*, *Small World: An Academic Romance* and *Nice Work*— not

only brings to perfection the traits of the academic novel but also significantly covers the major social changes in the sixties, seventies, and eighties of the past century.

Changing Places (1975) depicts the lives of two male university professors: Philip Shallow and Morris Zapp. The former is a dull professor from fictional University of Rummidge (located in the centre of England and modelled upon Birmingham University) and the latter is a successful, extrovert professor at the fictional University of Plotinus (State of Euphoria, a thinly disguised California). The two are participating in an academic exchange and Lodge focuses on “the ease and alacrity with which they exchange the emotional and sexual discourses of their respective lives” (Womack, 2005:334). Moreover, the British author subtly introduces some of the most relevant social issues of the decade of the 60’s and early 70’s in the realm of the academia, such as the sexual revolution, drugs experimentation or the claim for equal rights by different minority groups in society.

The sequel, *Small World* (1984), shows the life of globetrotting scholars that meet at different conferences and display their personal and professional quirks. As the novel proves, the conference constitutes the perfect realm for all kinds of personal relationships. According to Robbins (2006:259), “the conference [...] exemplifies ephemeral sex that does not interfere with established social arrangements”. Lodge explores the changes that the two main characters of his previous work, Philip Swallow and Morris Zapp, have undergone after so many years.

Nice Work (1988), the last novel of the trilogy, examines the uneasy relationship between the feminist university professor Robyn Penrose and Vil Wilcox, the CEO of an important engineering company, who participates in a shadow program. Lodge

explores the differences between the world of the academia and the industry realm in a decade full of economic tensions under Margaret Thatcher's rule.

Lodge's Trilogy draws on the generic conventions of the campus novel with the purpose of questioning and criticizing some of the most controversial social issues of the time in which they were published. Lodge cannily uses some of the characters of his first novel *Changes Places* in order to maintain a story line and thread of development throughout the three novels. *Changes Places* is a clear example of David Lodge's interest in postmodernist experimentation and even though his concern dwindled after the publication of *Small World*, his later novels retain a certain degree of formal innovation. *Thinks...* is a case in point.

II.3. *Thinks...*: A Contemporary Campus Novel

Thinks... (2001) is Lodge's most recent academic work of fiction. The novel —set at fictional University of Gloucester¹— explores the affair between the womanizer Ralph Messenger and the writer-on-campus Helen Reed, recently widowed to BBC documentary reporter Martin. Helen accepts the job as lecturer of a Creative Writing course at Gloucester University and leaves her home residence at London for one academic course in an attempt to overcome her depression. Along the year, the people she meets and the events she is involved in make her reflect about her own personal situation and beliefs. Ralph and Helen, the two protagonists, also pick up on and update what is known as “the two cultures debate”, that is, the split between the realm of arts

¹ Currently University of Gloucestershire: Cheltenham (UK)

and the field of scientific knowledge in the intellectual world—one of the major themes of the novel.

The way the novel follows the generic conventions of the campus novel at the same time as it challenges its traditionally realistic narrative form will be analyzed in detail. Structure and narrative voice will be examined in order to show how they contribute to characterizing the two protagonists and the personal evolution that they undergo throughout the novel. Finally, I will tackle the most important thematic elements in the text, in particular the concept of consciousness and the binary pairs that stand for the two poles in the ‘two cultures’ debate: the two main character’s tools to keep a record of their thoughts, the complete separation of the buildings of the faculty of arts and science on campus and the two views on consciousness voiced in the closing speech at the International Conference held at Gloucester University.

II.3.1. *Thinks...* and the Conventions of the Campus Novel

According to Moseley’s classification of types of academic fiction (2007:110), David Lodge’s *Thinks...* can be referred to as a satiric academic novel on faculty members. In his own words: “the genre satirizes the professoriate because of its mental quirks, its pointless activities, its neuroses, its perversity”. Professor Lodge certainly satirizes two completely opposed university lecturers in order to question C.P. Snow’s “two-cultures” debate. Following Wiegenstein’s criteria (1987:25), the most important characteristics of this particular type of academic novel can be found in *Thinks...*: the university campus setting, the use of character types and the episodic structure used to emphasize the events that take place in certain public gatherings.

The narrative takes place during the academic year 1996-1997 at the University of Gloucester. Although the date is not mentioned explicitly, several cultural, political and social events of the time are mentioned. For instance, there are references to The Troubles in Ulster, the spread of AIDS or Tony Blair's landslide victory: "If the Wirral result is replicated in May, Labour will have a majority of over two hundred and fifty" (Lodge, 2001:129).² The narrative revolves around the lives of faculty members, in particular the writer-on-campus Helen Reed, the Messengers and other minor stereotypical characters. Gloucester University is described as provincial, sleepy and in decline: a red-brick university conceived during the 60's which gradually lost founding and prestige for academic research. Next, I will offer a description of some of the characters, drawn according to the conventions of the genre.

Helen Reed is a popular writer in her early forties with a strong moral sense because of her Catholic upbringing. She is described as an "[...] intriguing woman, smart, quick on the uptake, a good arguer, prepared to stand up for herself" (78). She studied at Oxford but she could not pursue her PhD because she accidentally got pregnant. Mother of Paul and Lucy, she decides to move to Cheltenham to overcome her depression after the sudden death of her husband Martin. She gets a job as lecturer of Creative Writing at the University of Gloucester and becomes involved in a relationship with scientist Ralph Messenger. The female protagonist undergoes a personal evolution in the course of the novel: from being depressed to publishing a new novel and beginning a new relationship.

Professor Ralph Messenger is the director of the Holt Belling Centre for Cognitive Science. He is "in his late forties, [...] with a big handsome head: thick,

² David Lodge (2001) *Thinks...*: I will only include the page in the quotations taken from the novel under analysis in order to avoid repetition.

grizzled hair combed back from a broad brow, a hooked nose and a strong chin” (24). Ralph is married to Carrie and is the father of four children: Emily, Hope, Mark and Simon. He enjoys popularity and an affluent lifestyle—he owns a house in Cheltenham and a cottage called Horseshoes. With loose ethical mores, he has an absolute belief in science. At the end of the book, the exuberant male protagonist is on the verge of losing everything important in life: his wellness, his family and his professional reputation. Ralph eventually manages to solve all of his problems and he grows more humble and prudent.

Carrie Messenger is Ralph’s wife. She is the stereotypical supportive and helpful wife. She “still has a lovely face, with big cow-like eyes, and braided blonde hair” (24). She knows too well her highly sexual, libertine husband and she decides to have a one-year extra-marital relationship with Professor Beck. Caroline supports Ralph when he falls ill and they remain married. She intended to write a novel about San Francisco but ended up opening a small, clay-sculpture art gallery.

Sandra Pickering is one of the students in the MA in Creative Writing. Pickering writes a work-in-progress novel in which the main character resembles Helen’s in her book *The Eye of the Storm*—and thus her husband. Helen took some of the personal traits of her husband to characterize the protagonist of her novel. In this subtle way, Pickering lets Helen know that Martin was unfaithful to her. Pickering reveals the truth about her husband in an appointment at her office. In Helen’s words: “It seems that Martin had a reputation for sleeping with his research assistants” (201). Sandra Pickering is one of the stereotypical troublesome students that force the female protagonist to rise to action: Helen overcomes the mourning for the death of her husband mainly thanks to this unexpected, disappointing revelation. Ludmila Lisk is yet another example of the troublesome student type. The doctoral student from Poland has

an affair with Ralph in order to be invited to read a paper in the International Conference held at the University of Gloucester and eventually get a grant from the British Council. She threatens Ralph with the publication of their affair and Ralph decides to grant her permission in order to avoid public scandals: “Perhaps I will write all about what we did in Prague together and post it on the Internet” (287).

Professor Douglass is Messenger’s scientific researcher rival at the Hot Belling Centre. Douglass is a solitary, devoted scientist who does not enjoy the popularity of his fellow colleague. In Ralph’s words: “his research record is outstanding, narrower than mine, but more original... but [...] it requires charisma [...]” (114). He eventually commits suicide when the police officers discover that he downloaded pornography in his office. Professor Nicholas Beck is Messenger’s rival in the personal realm. The non-exceedingly manly professor of Fine Art has an affair with Caroline Messenger. He is depicted as the sensitive phony artist, interested in interior decoration and auctions. Ralph’s pride is highly damaged when he learns the truth in Helen’s diary.

Thinks... is structured in thirty-four episodes, many dealing with the main public encounters of these faculty members —another noteworthy characteristic of the campus novel. Ralph’s birthday party, a charitable duck race and an International conference held at Gloucester University constitute the three main social gatherings in which characters display their personal traits. Others focus on Ralph and Helen’s private encounters, characterized by the use of a satirical tone. The two protagonists mainly discuss their views on consciousness and life: completely opposed worldviews that make the reader reflect about their ethics. As Chandra says of *Thinks...* (2010:23): Ethical concern is exposed by a display of a number of characters with varied opinions and varied outlook towards life.

As I have just shown, *Thinks...* encapsulates the conventions of the classical campus novel; however, its narrative playfulness and the discussion about the two cultures debate make Lodge’s work remarkably innovative.

II.3.2. Structure, Narrative Voices and Characterization

Thinks... is divided into thirty-four episodes that move around the intrigues and reflections of Ralph Messenger and Helen Reed. I propose the division of the novel into three main parts —‘background’ section, ‘revelations’ and ‘problems’— according to the main events narrated. The first section gives background information about the lives of the two protagonists, the second is about the disclosure of many truths and personal self-discovery and the last is about the resolution of all the professional and personal problems.

In the ‘background’ section (chapters 1-9), professor Messenger is introduced as a womanizer and a man of science —practical, rather cold and even frivolous. Ralph recalls his teenager job as a sheep farmer and his early sexual experiences with the owner of the barn —a mature woman called Martha: “I knew she liked me all right, but after all she was a married woman twice my age...” (76). Helen Reed is introduced as a depressed writer who finds it difficult to settle on her new residence and to write fiction again: “Coming here was a terrible mistake, I want to run away, I want to scuttle back home to London” (13). In chapter 9, Ralph and Helen kiss at Horseshoes’ cottage. This moment constitutes the beginning of their flirting and Helen’s rising to action.

‘Revelations’ (chapters 10-25) revolves around Helen’s sexual arousal and the overcoming of her mourning for the sudden death of her husband. Chapter 17—the central chapter of the book— constitutes one of the climatic moments of the novel when

Ralph and Helen have a nap together and they almost have sex: “he was trying to get me into bed and I was resisting temptation. [...] He’s the first man I’ve met since Martin died that I have felt physically attracted to [...]” (177). Helen is unwilling to hurt Carrie or to dishonor the memory of Martin as she vividly remembers her comfortable sexual life with him. Later on, Helen learns that Martin was unfaithful to her with her student Sandra Pickering and that Carrie has had an affair with Professor Nicholas Beck running for over a year. These events free Helen of any possible moral dilemma. Helen proves to undergo an evolution: evolving from mourning to sexual awakening and from repressing her desires to feeling both disappointed and liberated.

‘Problems’ (chapters 25-34) deals with Ralph’s sudden professional and personal instability: a pornographic scandal and the leaking of confidential documents to the press, a possible liver cancer and the fear of a divorce. Ralph’s secure life is shaken and his main concern is to solve all of the problems and remain married to Carrie: “I feel a sense of achievement this evening, satisfaction and serenity. I feel that my life is back under my control” (329). Even though Messenger has been chasing Helen throughout the whole academic course, little emphasis is given to their three-week affair. Ralph also discovers that his wife has been unfaithful to him—which hurts him enormously. Chapter 34 functions as an epilogue in which the reader is told that Ralph has become a rather more modest man and Helen has resumed her life back in London with the publishing of a new novel and the beginning of a relationship with a literary biographer. As Waugh says (2005: 75): “Ralph becomes more empathetically human and Helen somewhat more Stoical and capable of detachment”.

Three types of narrative voices are randomly alternated—Ralph’s narration, Helen’s and an external omniscient third person narrator— along with an updated

epistolary narrative technique in the form of an exchange of e-mails. These three types of narration help the reader to characterize the main protagonists of the novel.

Helen’s narration is full of insecurities, moral dilemmas and a profound personal trauma that heals gradually thanks to the disclosure of certain truths and the passing of time. Ralph’s narration, on the other hand, is free from any ethical concern. His narrative is a constant recall of some of his sexual experiences, his current sexual drives and desires and his fear to lose his safe, stable life. The moment in which the two main characters have sex constitute a clear example of their different perspectives on the same event: “I fucked one of England’s finest contemporary novelists” (250), in contrast with: “he crept into her room and her bed in the middle of the night [...] and they made love” (258). Ralph seems to feel triumphant about his new ‘achievement’ whereas Helen’s narration is much more ornamental and full of sentiment. Thus, two different angles on the same event are always given and therefore the reader is able to create a mental picture about their respective personalities.

The exchanging of emails between the characters is yet another relevant narrative technique, present in chapter 20 and part of chapter 28. In the first instance, Ralph sends Helen an e-mail in order to check that she is properly ‘wired’ and to suggest the possibility of swapping their respective personal journals. The writer immediately refuses but her writing shows her incapability to write using a non-formal register —thus, reinforcing the idea that Reed is much more traditional. In chapter twenty-eight, the email correspondence is between Professor Messenger and Polish doctoral student Ludmila Lisk. Lisk is determined to attend the International Cognitive Science Conference, whereas Ralph is not particularly intrigued by this idea. Ralph uses his informal written English at the beginning to suggest that she will not be invited; however, Ralph swaps to a formal register when he is threatened with the publication of

their affair: “Happily I can confirm that we are able to accept you as a delegate at the conference” (287). Ralph’s use of informal English reinforces his libertine, practical attitude towards life.

Twelve out of the thirty-four chapters are narrated by Helen whereas only ten by Professor Messenger. The central part of the novel —that is, the section of ‘Revelations’— mainly focuses on Helen’s healing and personal evolution thanks to the company of her new acquaintances and the discovery of the truth. Reed’s narration is richer and far more elaborated and sophisticated than Ralph’s. All of these narrative techniques make Helen a much more complex, rounder character, which favours the reader’s sympathy towards her. Therefore, the reader is also encouraged to share Helen’s viewpoints in life: the importance of the realm of arts and an ethical concern among others.

III. *Thinks...*: An Update of the Two-Cultures Debate

In his famous Rede Lecture of 1959 the British scientist and novelist C.P. Snow coined the idea of the “two cultures debate”. In his own words: “I believe the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups” (Snow, 1959:2). Snow explained that the split separation of the intellectual world between sciences and humanities was a drawback for western society. Snow drew attention towards the mutual lack of knowledge of their respective fields: “a gulf of mutual incomprehension—sometimes [...] hostility and dislike, but most of all lack of understanding” (Snow, 1959:2). Snow points towards the necessity to change the educative system in order to reunite these two fields of knowledge again. National curricula have been traditionally split into these two disciplines (arts and science) and students required to choose one branch or another to become more and more specialized in one particular area. In C.P. Snow’s words (1959:10): “There is only one way out of all this: it is, of course, by rethinking our Education”.

David Lodge’s *Thinks...* reflects the lack of understanding between scientists and humanists by showing two completely opposed protagonists with two different narrative tools, two separate faculty buildings and two viewpoints on consciousness at the International Cognitive Science Conference held at the end of the academic course. It is my contention here that Lodge ends up taking sides with Helen, the character that stands for the world of the arts.

III.1. Consciousness and Narrative Tools: The Man of Science and the Woman of Arts.

The stream of consciousness —a term “coined in 1890 by the American philosopher and psychologist William James as a description of the flow of thought within the waking human mind” (Sanders, 1994:518) — has been traditionally a highly difficult concept discussed by both novelists and scientists. This problematic issue is apprehended in the novel by debating about the possibility or impossibility to recreate mechanically human’s consciousness. Ralph Messenger believes in the capability of a machine to simulate human consciousness. His thought-recording experiment is an exemplification of his viewpoint. In contrast, Helen Reed believes in the impossibility to recreate the human flesh, soul and thinking. The writer uses a personal journal to put into words her personal reflections, a technique that also supports her standpoint.

Ralph uses an ultramodern tape recorder to conduct a scientific experiment: the recording of his own stream of consciousness with the aim of disclosing the workings of the mind. The novel opens with Ralph’s narration: “ONE, two, three, testing... recorder working OK... Olympus Pearlcorde, bought it at Heathrow in the dutyfree [...]” (1) His narration is full of ellipses and dotted lines that resemble his thinking process. The scientist always records his thoughts when he is alone at the office, in his car or at the hospital. Only in this manner, he feels free to retrieve his most intimate memories that would put him in trouble if they were found out. Ralph’s experiment proves to be futile because it is impossible to let one’s own stream of consciousness flow without modeling, processing or concealing some bits of information. In Ralph Messenger’s words: “every phrase I utter [...] is the output of a complex interaction... consultation... competition... between different parts of my brain...” (58). Hence, the title of the novel

Thinks...: if every human being had a thought bubble on top of their heads, social life would prove certainly impossible.

Ralph Messenger stands for the man of science and reason. He firmly believes in the idea that “the brain is more like a parallel computer, [...] running lots of programs simultaneously” (38). According to Ralph, the workings of the mind are the same as those of a computer and thus the account of an event can be objective, impartial and neutral. Besides, he believes that there is no such a thing as a soul—an idea that strikes the Catholic brought up Helen. Following this mechanical line of thought, Ralph apparently sees personal relationships and any other kind of human transaction as free from any ethical concern. However, his view of life and his masculinity are both threatened when he is thought to have a tumor in the liver: “But cancer of the liver is bad news. [...] there’s no cure” (282), “Ever since [the doctor] uttered [...] ‘*You’ve got a lump on your liver,*’ I’ve lost interest in sex...” (293).

Helen’s narration is a personal journal— almost entirely narrated in the first person. She only swaps to the third person to write about her affair with Ralph with the purpose of distancing herself and feeling less embarrassed. In Helen’s words: “A journal is a kind of mirror in which you look at yourself every day, candidly, unflinchingly [...] and tell yourself the truth” (258). The writer uses her personal diary—a definitely subjective form—to revisit, reshape and analyze her personal experience. Helen’s narrative is certainly richer in terms of form and content mainly because it is the journal of a professional writer. Reed stands for the sensitive woman of arts—she does not believe in the possibility that machines will be able to recreate human beings’ consciousness: “Helen is extremely skeptical that any computer program could even come close to replicating the mechanics of human consciousness” (Rong, 2009:152). For Helen, the true researchers of consciousness are novelists: “Consciousness, after all,

is what most novels, certainly mine, are *about*. [...] In that sense novels could be called thought experiments” (61). Helen’s viewpoint is that people read novels “to find out what goes on in other people’s heads” (42). People need to reflect about their own existence taking into account the experiences provided by other human beings—even though they might be invented by a novelist.

The use of the classical intrusive omniscient third person narrator that comments on the characters’ feelings or functions as a witness also strengthens the idea of the impossibility to provide an objective account of a particular event. Furthermore, the parodies included in the novel (chapters 8 and 16) give importance to the figure of the writer as the real expert on consciousness. They constitute the written assignments handed in by some of Helen’s students in response to some scientific experiments represented in Karinthy’s mural at the Hot Belling centre. The trainee novelists manage to ‘reproduce’ the thoughts of a bat and those of Mary Willingdon—a girl brought up in a monochromatic world— whereas scientific experiments failed to attain so. In Lodge’s (2002: 241) own words: “Necesitaba [...] una imaginación literaria que jugase con las ideas del científico, sólo que de un modo imprevisible, y que se las devolviera transformadas”. These parodies imitate the writing styles of well-known writers such as Martin Amis, Salman Rusdhie or Gertrude Stein—proving Lodge’s excellent ventriloquist abilities and his interest in postmodernist experimentation.

Ralph’s thought-recording experiment proves to be exceedingly nonobjective and Helen’s personal journal is an instance of one of the most subjective literary genres. These subjective narrative strategies show the impossibility to have access to human thinking. Following this argument, a machine seems unlikely to be able to simulate the human, subjective way of processing information—thus, dismantling Ralph’s viewpoint in life. The scientist’s retreat to a quieter life-style with his family at the end

of the book points towards a slight change of personal standpoint: he seems to value a little bit more the importance of personal relationships —involving emotions and being far more complex than mere transactions. The parodies are used to make a mockery of scientific experiments about consciousness and to embrace the idea that only novelists and writers are able to recreate the stream of consciousness.

III.2. Two Faculty Buildings and Two Viewpoints at the International Conference

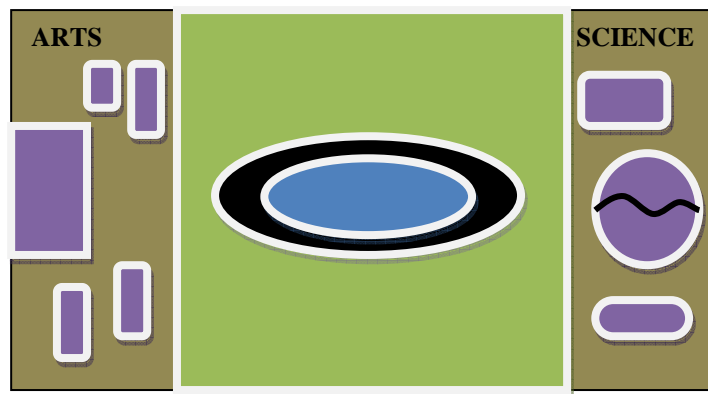


Table 1. Recreation of the map of the campus of Gloucester University

The university campus embodies the separation between the field of humanities and that of sciences. The two faculties are separated by an artificial lake and a deserted area: “They started building at each end of the site, Arts at one end and Sciences at the other [...] ‘We’re an architectural allegory of the Two Cultures’” (11). Furthermore, The Hot Belling Centre —the most important building in the faculty of science – is richly described as a prize-winner building: the dome represents the two hemispheres of the brain, “symbolizing the explanatory power of scientific research” (41) and the stair-case symbolizes the double helix of DNA. However, little description is given of the faculty of Arts. As Rong (2009: 151) claims: “the declining status of arts in higher education is

symbolized by the opposition of two school buildings at the fictional University of Gloucester”.

An International Cognitive Science Conference is held at the University of Gloucester at the end of the academic year. The conference itself is described by Helen as a complete boredom: “I’ve found myself trapped in some impenetrable boring sessions in consequence. I don’t think I’m the only one to suffer in this way” (312). The only speakers mentioned in detail are Robyn Penrose and Helen Reed —relevant enough because they are scholars from the humanities realm. Robyn Penrose —one of the major characters in Lodge’s previous academic novel *Nice Work* (1988)— is a feminist, post-structuralist university teacher.

Professor Penrose gives a lecture entitled “Interrogating the Subject” in which she upholds the belief of the instability of the human self, trapped by discourse and culture. As Waugh (2005:74) says: “Robyn [...] draws on scientific metaphors to underpin a post-structuralist conceptualization of the self”, in other words, both the realm of science and arts deny the fixed identity of the self. Helen Reed acknowledges this idea when listening to the lecture:

Both of them [Ralph and Robyn] deny that the self has any fixed identity, any ‘centre’. He says it’s a fiction that we make up; she says it is made up for us by culture. It’s alarming that there should be so much agreement on this point between the most advanced thinking in the science and the humanities. (226)

Robyn Penrose’s lecture is an instance of the proximity of some of the latest ideas in the field of humanities and in science, and her participation in a scientific conference seems to represent a point of reunion. However, some male chauvinist comments on the part of Jasper Richmond (Dean of Humanities) and Helen’s mistrust of the idea of the deconstruction of the self make this assertion problematic: “Some of my younger

colleagues were keen to have her. [...] Though I understand she’s quite good-looking too” (224). “It depressed me [Helen] that the awed-looking young people in the audience were being given such a dry and barren message” (225). Helen Reed’s speech at the closing ceremony is an explicit celebration of novelists as the great researchers of consciousness and human experiences: “literature is a written record of human consciousness, arguably the richest we have” (316). The professional writer rejects the postmodernist unstable understanding of the self: “I want to hold on to the traditional idea of the autonomous individual self. A lot that we value in civilization seems to depend on it – law [...] and human rights” (319).

Does the book offer a complete reconciliation between the realm of humanities and science? The answer is certainly not. Helen’s last speech values and supports the classical humanist conception of the subject whereas the latest scientific ideas point towards the Uncertainty Principle. Helen and Ralph’s affair seems to resemble the relationship between science and arts: they are widely different at the beginning, they find some points in common during the affair, but eventually they are separated again.

This idea can be illustrated as follows:

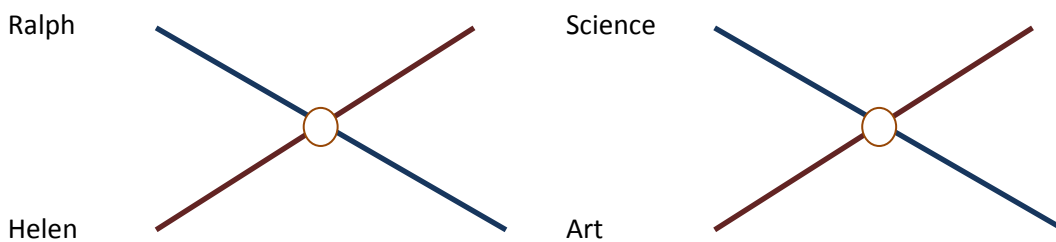


Table 2. Two Cultures Debate Diagram.

Helen Reed and Ralph Messenger support two completely opposed viewpoints regarding consciousness, ethics and life. However, they enjoy each other’s company and

learn refreshing ideas. This leads to their affair but eventually both of them resume their previous lives and worldviews: Ralph goes back to his stable marriage and Helen publishes a new novel using the most classical conventions: “Helen published a novel [...] set in a not-so-new greenfields university, and entitled *Crying is a Puzzler*” (340). The discussion between humanities and science seems to follow a similar path: there is a fleeting encounter in so far as they share a common ground regarding the understanding of the self in Robyn’s lecture; however, Lodge clearly favours the classical humanist conception of the self, made explicit in Helen’s closing speech. In the words of Waugh (2005:63), *Thinks...* is a “pedagogical comic novel of (partial) consilience”, in other words, the realm of science and humanities find some points in common, but not enough to become reconciled.

IV. CONCLUSION

David Lodge’s *Thinks...* has been proved to be a contemporary instance of the campus novel, drawing on the intrigues of the faculty members of Gloucester University and featuring stereotypical characters in an episodic structure. Helen Reed’s complex characterization created thanks to the use of varied narrative techniques invites the reader to sympathise with the female protagonist and therefore, to share some of her viewpoints in life, such as the impossibility to simulate human consciousness by a machine or the role of the novelist as true researcher of human experiences.

The narrative is a reflection on human thinking and the stream of consciousness. Ralph Messenger and Helen Reed are the two main narrative voices and they use different strategies to put into words their thoughts: a thought-recording experiment on the part of Ralph and a personal journal on the part of Helen. Both techniques prove to be highly subjective, reinforcing the idea of the impossibility to have access to human thinking.

Thinks... discusses the split separation between the realm of science and arts in the realm of the academia, using polarized viewpoints. The affair between the two main characters and Robyn Penrose’s lecture at the end of the book seem to point towards the reconciliation of the two realms. However, the favouring of Helen’s viewpoint in life, the end of the two character’s relationship and her final speech at the International Conference suggest that the reconciliation between humanities and sciences is currently unlikely. The novel depicts two classical gender roles: the ethical, sensitive woman of arts and the cold, sensible, rationalist man of science. A suggestion for future research is the analysis of the novel taking the question of gender into account.

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ANNEXE: A Detailed Structuring of the Novel

The thirty-four episodes of the book are organized into the three main blocks explained in the section “Structure, Narrative Voices and Characterization”; that is, ‘Background’, ‘Revelations’ and ‘Problems’. The first part includes nine episodes, the second sixteen and the last one nine. The structure below illustrates the narrative voice and the main idea of each episode. The chapters narrated by Ralph Messenger are in blue, Helen’s episodes are highlighted with a reddish tone and the episodes narrated with an omniscient narrator are in black font. Green and orange illustrate the parodies and e-mails respectively. Chapter seventeen, the central episode of the narrative, is in bold.

BACKGROUND

Ch. 1 – Ralph’s: presentation of the recording as an experiment about the stream of consciousness.

Ch 2 – Helen’s: presentation of Helen Reeds as a writer and her arrival at Gloucester University.

Ch. 3 – Omniscient 3rd person narrator: first encounter between Ralph and Helen.

Ch. 4 – Ralph’s: reflection about his first impression of Helen: smart and good-looking.

Ch 5 – Helen’s: reflection about her first impression of Ralph: cold, pitiless. Meeting with the Messengers at Cheltenham.

Ch. 6 – Ralph’s: early sexual experiences with Martha.

Ch 7 – Helen’s: Visit of Gloucester Cathedral.

Ch. 8 – Parody: What is it like to be a bat?

Ch. 9 – Omniscient 3rd person narrator: dinner at Horseshoes. First kiss.

REVELATIONS

Ch 10 – Helen’s: reflections about her sexual arousal after the kiss.

Ch. 11 – Ralph’s: reflections about his sexual drives: his step-daughter Emily, Marianne Richmond.

Ch 12 – Helen’s: Sandra Pickering’s novel in progress and the possibility of plagiarism.

Ch. 13 – Omniscient 3rd person narrator: Ralph’s birthday party.

Ch 14 – Helen’s: She fantasizes about an affair with Ralph.

Ch. 15 – Ralph’s: He remembers his affair with Isabel Hotchkiss eight years ago.

Ch. 16 – Parody: Mary the Colour Scientist coming out of her monochrome world.

Ch. 17 – Omniscient 3rd person narrator: Ralph and Helen have a nap.

Ch 18 – Helen’s: remembrance of her sex life with Martin.

Ch. 19 – Ralph’s: the thought of exchanging his personal ‘journal’ with Helen.

Ch. 20 – E-mails: Ralph tries to persuade Helen to swap journals.

Ch 21 – Helen’s: Spring break at her parent’s and the discovery of Martin’s adultery.

Ch. 22 – Omniscient 3rd person narrator: talk between Carrie and Helen.

Ch. 23 – Ralph’s: affair with Ludmila Lisk at a conference in Poland.

Ch 24 – Helen’s: she visits Ledbury and discovers the affair between Carry and Nicholas Beck.

Ch. 25 – Omniscient 3rd person narrator: Duck Race and Carrie’s father heart attack.

PROBLEMS

Ch. 26 – Ralph’s: his account of having sex with Helen.

Ch 27 – Helen’s: three week affair with Ralph.

Ch. 28 – Omniscient 3rd person narrator and **E-mails**: the lump in the liver and Ludmila blackmails Ralph to be able to attend the conference.

Ch. 29 – Ralph’s: interned at the hospital, he wants to stay married to Carrie.

Ch 30 – Helen’s: anticlimax, no news of Messenger.

Ch. 31 – Omniscient 3rd person narrator: Helen’s closing speech at the Conference.

Ch. 32 – Ralph’s: resolution of problems: pornography scandal, MoD funding and Ludmila.

Ch 33– Helen’s: resolution to end the affair with Ralph.

Ch. 34 – Omniscient 3rd person narrator: epilogue.