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“Inwit of Inwit.” Review Article.

David Lodge. *Thinks . . . : A Novel*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2002. 342 pp. \$14.00 paper. *Consciousness and the Novel: Connected Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. xii + 320 pp. \$24.95 cloth.

Literary types may recognize in this involuted little title an allusion to “agenbite of inwit,” the anguished refrain eddying in the stream of Stephen Dedalus’s consciousness in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, archaic English for “remorse of conscience.” Consciousness researchers may recognize a word that once designated consciousness as well as conscience (like the word *conscience* itself), noted in Antonio Damasio’s *The Feeling of What Happens* (231-32). David Lodge is now a student of consciousness as well as an authority on the novel, and a confessed “self-conscious” (or “metafictional”) novelist himself (*Consciousness* 296), and his two latest books investigate the conscience of consciousness studies—its “challenging consequences for those whose assumptions about human nature have been formed by religious, humanist, and literary traditions” (xi). *Consciousness and the Novel*, titled after its long lead essay, focuses on “How the novel represents consciousness; how this contrasts with the way other narrative media, like film, represent it; how the consciousness, and the unconscious, of a creative writer do their work; how criticism can infer the nature of this process by formal analysis, or the creative writer by self-interrogation” (ix).¹ In *Thinks . . .*, Artificial Intelligence expert Ralph Messenger and novelist Helen Reed reflect privately on their experience with one another, in the process fleshing out an introduction to “consciousness studies,” and a concerned humanist response.

Like the bifurcated dome of Ralph’s prestigious Holt Belling Centre for Cognitive Science, the characters represent opposed hemispheres of the brain, and echo the division of buildings on the University of Gloucester campus, an “architectural allegory of the Two Cultures” (11). Ralph shows Helen a mural illustrating milestone thought-experiments bearing on cognition and consciousness (49-55), including Thomas Nagel’s “What is it Like to be a Bat?,” Frank Jackson’s “Mary the Colour Scientist,” and Roger Penrose presiding over the mysterious fate of Schrödinger’s Cat in its cabinet. It’s a fine moment. Such scenarios are cartoons distorted to make subtle conceptual points. They are dramatic in a way, and seem to invite a visual rendering to accompany reflection.² They are a characteristic staple of analytic philosophy, which at its best, as in Daniel Dennett’s prose, is breezy, cocky, sparkling, ingenious (though at times erring on the side of cute). This creative in-joke propagates others. Helen has her fiction class compose parodies of Nagel and Jackson in the style of well-known novelists. We get first-person bats à la Martin Amis, Irvine Welsh, Salman Rushdie and Samuel Beckett; then later, Mary à la Henry James, Gertrude Stein, and Fay Weldon. Do these parodies prove anything? According to Ralph, no: the bats are “hopelessly anthropomorphic” (97) and the Marys “don’t begin to address” her serious philosophical point (170). According to Helen, they

¹ *Consciousness and the Novel* includes ten other previously published pieces, on related issues of novelistic creativity. I use the following abbreviations: *Consciousness and the Novel* as CN, *Thinks . . .* as T, *After Bakhtin* as AB, *Language of Fiction* as LF, *Practice of Writing* as PW, *Working With Structuralism* as WS, the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* as JCS.

² “Mary the Colour Scientist” (21) and Searle’s “Chinese Room” (66) actually are illustrated in Rita Carter’s *Exploring Consciousness*. There are philosopher’s zombies there, too.

produce insight if not proof. Like thought experiments, they are fictions aimed at a point, but a different point: they “defamiliarize something we take for granted, [. . .] which is what good writing always does” (170). Lodge seems to see “defamiliarization” (invented by the Russian Formalists he admires) as a first stage in a common literary-philosophical enterprise: seeing something anew, or reframing, to use the cognitive term.

Consider that reframings abound in the strange and difficult science of consciousness, shaking up habits of thought dictated by lazy or moribund metaphors. Consider too that the mural suffers a conspicuous absence of Dennett. It is incomplete without some space for the author of *Consciousness Explained*. But that space might include Robyn Penrose, a character invented by Lodge, whom Dennett credits with scooping his theory of self:

This idea, the idea of the Self as the Center of Narrative Gravity, is [. . .] certainly an idea whose time has come. Imagine my mixed emotions when I discovered that before I could get my version of it properly published in a book, it had already been satirized in a novel, David Lodge’s *Nice Work* (1988). It is apparently a hot theme among the deconstructionists:

According to Robyn (or, more precisely, according to the writers who have influenced her thinking on these matters), there is no such thing as the “Self” on which capitalism and the classic novel are founded—that is to say, a finite, unique soul or essence that constitutes a person’s identity; there is only a subject position in an infinite web of discourses—the discourses of power, sex, family, science, religion, poetry, etc. And by the same token, there is no such thing as an author, that is to say, one who originates a work of fiction *ab nihilo*. . . . in the famous words of Jacques Derrida . . . “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*”, there is nothing outside the text. There are no origins, there is only production, and we produce our “selves” in language. Not “*you are what you eat*” but “*you are what you speak*,” or, rather “*you are what speaks you*,” is the axiomatic basis of Robyn’s philosophy, which she would call, if required to give it a name, “semiotic materialism.”

Semiotic materialism? Must *I* call it that? Aside from the allusions to capitalism and the classic novel, about which I have kept my counsel, this jocular passage is a fine parody of the view I’m about to present. (Like all parody, it exaggerates; I wouldn’t say there is *nothing* outside the text. There are, for instance, all the bookcases, buildings, bodies, bacteria . . .)

Robyn and I think alike—and of course we are both, by our own accounts, fictional characters of a sort, though of a slightly different sort. (410-11).

Lodge uses metafictional devices modestly, within the realist frame he favours. To paint himself into this picture might be too gratuitous for that modesty. The twist: Helen asks if Roger Penrose is any relation to Robyn, slated for a lecture visit. Ralph asks, “who’s he?” (54), though his Dennettian thinking could mark him as a brain-grandchild of Robyn’s. Her repeat performance as “one of those Theory people” (224) reveals to Helen the sinister kinship. Parody helps articulate the dialogue that is one kind of key to these

books: Lodge reframes Dennett's reframing of Lodge's reframing of poststructuralism.³

Literary engagements with cognitive science have flourished in analyses of literary form and reading.⁴ They have not yet strayed far into the appealing terrain of "consciousness studies," which is richly interdisciplinary, attracts some of the best thinkers on the planet, and contains dizzying new vistas on the mind-body problem.⁵ Both novel and essays are oriented to literary topics, especially the history and theory of the novel. Almost equally important is how the conjunction illuminates controversies over the nature of self, soul and character. Such an intersection of concerns demands a complex evaluation. It is startling to think that even with a thriving second career as a novelist, even after retiring from academia, Lodge is still visiting new intellectual frontiers. He is a sure and clear guide to the roots of consciousness studies, its major figures and debates, and the quality of these books should effectively publicize these topics and spark further inquiry. He speaks to an educated but nonspecialist audience; hence brain science and philosophical issues appear in broad strokes rather than in tiny pixels of technicality. It could fairly be said that he breaks new ground not in the accepted terms of either literary studies or consciousness studies, but in successfully articulating questions, problems, and responses worth pursuing concerning the relation between them. The essay says little about current approaches to the novel, but it does throw light on Ian Watt's classic account of its relation to the shift of cultural attention towards individual self-consciousness, upon which critics continue to rely. Lodge newly contextualizes recent fiction in the history of literary efforts to portray consciousness.⁶ And his sense of the limitations of scientific efforts does clarify literature's purpose and value. Judgments about Lodge's suggestions for consciousness studies will depend on opinions about its goals, priorities, methods and theories.⁷

³ Dennett's views are very much his own, but it's worth asking how that parodic person Robyn may have influenced the working-out of details.

⁴ See the annotated bibliography on Alan Richardson's "Literature, Cognition, and the Brain" website, <<http://www2.bc.edu/~richarad/lcb/home.html>>.

⁵ Lodge's citations list many major texts of the field. Other essential resources are the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, edited by Joseph Goguen, which has a "literature" issue (11, No. 5-6, 2004); and the tomes of proceedings of the main conferences, held in Tucson in 1994, 1996, and 1998, *Toward a Science of Consciousness* I, II, and III. The program for Tucson 2004 is online: <<http://consciousness.arizona.edu/conference/tucson2004/index.php>>. The journal "Consciousness, Literature and the Arts" (general editor Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe) bills itself as "a forum for new work relating the arts and literature to the exploration of consciousness currently flourishing in many disciplines such as philosophy, cognitive science, psychology, neuroscience, computer science, and physics," but it appears to operate on the taboo (or left) end of the spectrum sketched in note 7, below.

⁶ Strawson's just complaints about generalized "linear histories" (of consciousness studies, postmodernism, etc.), are mitigated by Lodge's introductory-interdisciplinary agenda ("The Mind's I").

⁷ There is a "status" issue here. Literature is occasionally mined for hunches and epigraphs, but humanists are marginal in the field. JCS devotes special issues to humanistic topics: introspection; first-person and second-person approaches; models of the self; volition; action, intention, and emotion; religious experience; evolution and morality; and art and the brain. But editorials recognize that literature is on the far end of the "taboo" spectrum of approaches, opposite "kosher" Philosophy, Neurobiology, and Cognitive Science, parallel to Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, Religion, and Ethics (but still further out than Botany) ("The Future of Consciousness Studies"). Varela's three axes of orientation in the field correspond to the political spectrum: on the right is neuroreductionism or eliminativism (e.g. Churchland, Crick); in the center is cognitive functionalism, which attempts to integrate models of cognitive capacities into a unified framework so as to account for experience (e.g. Jackendoff, Baars, Dennett, Calvin, Edelman); and on the left, the view that first-person accounts are essential and experience irreducible (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson,

With all these good points, I regret that both books lack an intermediate or synthetic perspective. There is little sense of the significant conflict within consciousness studies itself, between those who say that consciousness/ self/ soul is an illusion (“you’re nothing but a pack of neurons”); and those who insist that they are real. Bernard Baars’s highly influential theory even rejects Gilbert Ryle’s oft-cited critique of “ghost in the machine” notions of self/ soul: “‘I’ seem to have access to perception, thought, memory and body control. There is now a body of evidence that supports this common sense belief. Self and consciousness seem to be mutually necessary systems” (“Theatre” 307).⁸ Portents of collaboration in antihumanism between poststructuralism and cognitive science are not offset by promises of a humanist rejoinder from the latter to the former. True, there are nods to a spectrum of views (CN 15, 112); and a novel is not obliged to be representative—premature balance would drain the drama from a visceral conflict. But the resolution loses an opportunity. “Literature constitutes a kind of knowledge about consciousness which is *complementary* to scientific knowledge” (CN 16); the lesson is balance, not how they might cooperate or profit from one another. No theory or character really shares both cultures.⁹

Background

Lodge says names always signify something, even if it is only John-and-Mary ordinariness.¹⁰ His co-protagonists are baptized for onomastic contrast: “Ralph” is blunt and inelegant; intimates drop the first-person-friendly forename, and “Messenger” evokes his aggressive style of speech and argument—all reference and no sense, so to speak. “Helen” is synonymous with beauty (“the face that launched a thousand ships”); “Reed” connotes greater flexibility, musicality, and literary vocation (“read”). Contrary to the associations of his own name, however, Lodge has never stuck in one place, but keeps moving with intellectual currents. Daunting as it is to size up such an expert reader and writer, one can contextualize the new work by tracking continuities and shifts in his thinking.

His constant study has been the poetics of fiction—“a systematic and comprehensive description of the stylistic devices and narrative methods through which novels communicate their meanings and have the effects that they have upon readers” (CN ix). *Language of Fiction*, *Working With Structuralism*, *Modes of Modern Writing*, and *After Bakhtin* are touchstones of theory-practice integration, still used in graduate study (*Language of Fiction* was republished in the Routledge Classics series in 2001). Lodge’s commitment to extraordinarily clear, painstaking, yet graceful illustrations and evaluations of complex ideas, and to the writer’s perspective, contributed to his 1987 departure from an academy submerged in poststructuralist jargon.¹¹ *The Art of Fiction* and *The Practice of Writing* aim, more journalistically, to “demystify and shed light on the creative process, to explain how literary and dramatic works are made, and to describe the many different factors, not always under the control of the writer, that come

Searle, Globus, Flanagan, Chalmers, Varela himself) (Varela 31-32).

⁸ Even current AI projects recognize the need to build in some “self-system.” See Igor Aleksander and Jaak Panskepp in Carter, 180-82 and 186-88. Of course these are a far cry from the traditional self.

⁹ Lodge notes that scientists often disapprove of poststructuralist uses of uncertainty, relativity, etc., citing the Sokal Hoax (CN 90-91), but omits mention of the humanistic motivations of Sokal and others.

¹⁰ See, for example, the chapter on “Names” in *The Art of Fiction* (35-40).

¹¹ The LF Afterword sums up Lodge’s attitude to poststructuralism.

into play in the process” (PW ix).

As a novelist (since 1960), Lodge acknowledges powerful influences in Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and Kingsley Amis. This “antimodernist” tradition champions robust, well-crafted realistic narrative in a plain style. He is distinctive in using “elements of modernism and postmodernism” apparently inspired by Joyce’s technical experiments (WS 16), and in exploiting the inherent excitement of ideas and their psychological and social life to supply narrative interest and momentum. If there is one technique on which Lodge’s comedy has always thrived, it is the double-edged irony produced by balancing incongruous points of view. *Small World* captures this in the phrase “mutual misapprehension” (239). A particular episode shows how it informs situation as well as speech, and how it dovetails with Joycean parody of myth by realistic plots. It also foreshadows the satirical interest in cognitive science. The loathsome Robin Dempsey is forever feeding bile about Philip Swallow into a computer running ELIZA, an early AI program that uses psychotherapeutic bromides to mimic conversation. The programmer tells Robin ELIZA can’t really answer, is “not a bloody *oracle*” (243). The scene shifts to Philip visiting the site of the Delphic oracle, where the oracularly named Sybil Maiden hints that he may get a prestigious chair in literary theory; but warns about “knowing thyself” and losing thyself. The next scene jumps back to Robin, aghast when ELIZA also prophesies Philip’s victory (thanks to the programmer) (247). Like moments of “he said/ she said” comic irony in *Thinks . . .*, are especially pointed, given the “problem of other minds.” Ralph misreads the signals Helen intends. He thrills at the hot tub garb she chooses for its discouraging dullness (148, 145); he notices she has cleaned for his visit but supposes the knickers she overlooks are meant to entice him (180, 176). The novels flow so briskly that we can make the required leap of memory even when greater narrative distance separates accounts.

Recent novels qualify the comedy. We have less of the brisk, summery carnival driven by the wide cast of caricatural characters (as in *Small World*); and fewer implausibly impeccable place/time coincidences (as in the “Legionnaire’s disease” scare saving Rodney Wainwright at the podium from 223 pages of writer’s block (306)). The tone is more complex, tempered by darker, more private themes (aging, illness, depression, grief) and forms (fewer characters, more introspection). (“Readability” is not lost: *Therapy* makes light of existential depression.) Lodge continues to explore the poetics of the novel from within, experimenting with point of view, tense, genre and style. As before, mutual misapprehension shades into mutual modification of attitudes. This is clear with the Zapps and the Swallows in *Changing Places*, and Robyn Penrose and Vic Wilcox in *Nice Work*, but in *Thinks . . .*, modification is uncertain, and the final separation is less ambiguous and amicable than elsewhere.

This context makes it natural that Lodge should take to consciousness studies. Yet the result is surprising: further novel criticism, and an unprecedented amount of research into an unfamiliar field.¹²

¹² Lodge said *After Bakhtin* would be his last book of “academic” criticism (AB 8). He admits that for *Therapy* he read Walter Lowrie’s biography of Kierkegaard, then “only a few of his works, and skimmed through some others” (CN 269); hence most of what he knows is in the novel. By contrast, the Acknowledgements for *Thinks . . .* cite over twenty books and articles on cognition and consciousness, plus a TV series, a conference, and several academic advisors.

Consciousness and the Novel

The essay is divided into three main sections. “Consciousness and the Two Cultures” considers two kinds of interdisciplinary connection, which help explain why we have and value literature, and how it works. One connection emphasizes differences between literary and scientific discourses. The quest to explain consciousness scientifically seems mired in paradox: how to give a third-person account of a first-person phenomenon? (11). Literature seems to overcome the dilemma. It is

a record of human consciousness, the richest and most comprehensive we have. Lyric poetry is arguably man’s most successful effort to describe qualia. The novel is arguably man’s most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time. (10)

Science can only describe qualia in a third-person correlation of first-person reports. But lyric poetry uses the technique of metaphor: “by describing each quale in terms of something else that is both similar and different [. . .] the object and the experience of it are vividly simulated. One sensation is invoked to give specificity to another” (13). Science can only present historical experience in terms of abstract laws that lose its density and specificity. But narrative literature “creates fictional models of what it is like to be a human being, moving through time and space. It captures the density of experienced events by its rhetoric, and it shows the connectedness of events through the devices of plot” (14). The skeptic will deny this overcomes the limitations of other first-person reports (“partial, imprecise and relative to . . . personal context”) (11). Widespread individual experience is not objective in the required sense. Vividness and richness are irrelevant to what philosopher David Chalmers calls the “hard problem”: that is, why and how non-material consciousness should exist at all in a material universe. As Chalmers says, “In addressing the philosophical mysteries associated with conscious experience, a simple color sensation raises the problems as deeply as one’s experience of a Bach chorale” (11). Colour-blind Mary can read reams of poetry about redness and still not *know* redness.

The second connection emphasizes agreements with science, exploring the debt to literary concepts of recent scientific work stressing the narrative character of consciousness. Dennett claims that we tell stories, especially about who we are, to create and protect selves. Damasio sees the brain’s intentionality, its “aboutness,” as rooted in storytelling. Consciousness implies a self, but in its stream the “core” self changes, while the “autobiographical self” persists. Damasio is “more conservative, and to a humanist more congenial”, siding with the tradition that “consciousness is an ‘inner sense’.” The “scientific rejection of this [homunculus] model should not [. . .] entail the total rejection of the idea of the self.” Despite the limits to the unified, continuous, single self, “the tendency toward” it “and its advantage to the healthy mind are undeniable” (15). Lodge’s eye is on the language: “the word ‘healthy’ in this context [. . .] bypasses the usual opposition in the consciousness debate between ‘true’ and ‘false’” (15-16). This is an advantage, not an evasion: the self may be “the supreme fiction, the greatest achievement of human consciousness, the one that makes us human” (16). He goes on to show that even novels about scientific knowledge provide “personalistic” knowledge, analyzing potential experience (16).

“First Person and Third Person” begins with V. S. Ramachandran’s claim that the “need to reconcile the first person and third person accounts of the universe . . . is the single most important problem in science” (28). The novel’s powerful representation of private life can seem objective, as a narrator can take a third-person perspective on a character’s first-person consciousness, but Lodge admits this is specious (30). Still, “we read novels like *The Wings of the Dove* because they give us a convincing sense of what the consciousness of people other than ourselves is like. We feel we have ‘learned’ something from them; we have acquired new information” (30). We get more than platitudes about human life, more than a reflection of ourselves, more even than the virtual experience of another consciousness. Rather, Kundera says, fiction “compensates us” for the *lacunae* in the narrative structure of our memory, and even our present perception; it “allows us vicariously to possess the continuum of experience in a way we are never able to in reality” (32). Literature not only illuminates experience, it is a special kind of experience itself.

How does prose fiction create that illusion? Lodge’s answer emphasizes the development of “a technique known as free indirect speech” or style (37). He touches on cultural and biological aspects of the question. Watt’s study describes the Cartesian philosophical background: “Phenomena such as memory, the association of ideas in the mind, the causes of emotions and the individual’s sense of self, became of central importance to speculative thinkers and writers of narrative literature alike” (40). Privacy challenges both. Evolutionary psychologists speculate that human storytelling grew out of the capacity to imagine another person’s thoughts by running hypothetical scenarios. Similarly, in recognizing that others can have other interpretations, children acquire a “Theory of Mind”. Perhaps the novelist’s ability to create “characters often very different from themselves, and to give a plausible account of their consciousnesses, is a special application of Theory of Mind. It is one that helps us develop powers of sympathy and empathy in real life” (42). Archetypal novel themes of the contrast between appearance and reality, and the progress from innocence to experience, turn on this capacity for privacy and deception.

Early novelists developed various realist techniques: Defoe’s and Richardson’s first-person narrators created “realism of presentation”, Fielding’s third-person narrators created “realism of assessment”, but it was impossible to combine these effects until the discovery of free indirect style, “which allows the narrative discourse to move freely back and forth between the author’s voice and the character’s voice without preserving a clear boundary between them” (45). Lodge surveys the evolution of this and related devices in Jane Austen, the Victorians, Henry James, and the modernists. He finds intriguing conceptual echoes: James created character by trying to enter into another’s consciousness; Woolf campaigned for recording the stream of consciousness. His scrutiny of *Ulysses*, often judged the greatest rendering of consciousness, shows how formal analysis of technique can help grasp the content of such representations of qualia:

Joyce creates the illusion of representing what Virginia Woolf called ‘the quick of the mind’ partly by a technique of condensation. Since we know that our thoughts are faster and more fragmentary than any verbal articulation of them, to present the interior monologue in well-formed sentences [. . .] would be much less expressive. Throughout *Ulysses* Joyce represents the stream of consciousness by

leaving out verbs, pronouns, articles, and by leaving sentences unfinished.

Bloom registers “an old woman peeping. Nose whiteflattened against the pane.” Why does the nonce word

seem such a vivid and exact description of a common phenomenon? Because the word actually mimes what it signifies: the two key words are ‘flattened’ against each other to create the synaesthetic image. (53-54)

“Surface and Depth” considers why the first-person has recently become the “dominant narrative mode for literary fiction” (53). The Victorian realist novel concentrated on objective surfaces. Modernist reaction sought to render the world from the inside. Freud’s discovery of the unconscious encouraged this trend, and he has surprising support from some neuroscientists. But modernism foundered in the attempt to depict “parallel” thoughts. The pun comes closest to “mimicking the simultaneous input of heterogeneous information which is the normal state of consciousness before the mind takes up the task of selecting and articulating some of this information verbally.” Joyce’s wordplay in *Finnegans Wake* may be the closest approximation of the “complexity of the brain activity that goes on just below the surface of the self-conscious mind.” (Dennett sees the mind as Pandemonium: many demons shout at once, competing for dominance.) But without “the narrative cohesion which makes stories intelligible to us” (63) we have no novel. Postwar, postmodern authors react again, favouring surface over depth: “There is a return in their novels to objective reporting of the external world, and a focus on what people say and do rather than what they think and feel” (64). Hence cinematic techniques develop. The fictitious autobiography or confession has now become the most common kind of first-person novel, but it still adheres to surfaces, as it were (82-85). In an uncertain world, this may seem the only authentic expression of consciousness (87). But postmodern thinking generally rejects any “authentic” self/ soul/ human nature, as does the influential eliminativist/ reductionist view in consciousness studies:

The idea of the person, whether in real life or in fictional representations, has come under attack from both the humanities and science in recent times. There is, for instance, a certain affinity between the poststructuralist literary theory that maintains that the human subject is entirely constructed by the discourses in which it is situated, and the cognitive science view that regards human self-consciousness as an epiphenomenon of brain activity. (89)

Running through the books is a strain of hope for the soul—perhaps for dualism, “if making any distinction between mind and body is dualism” (T 318). Lodge shows how the soul persists in the literary imagination, and suspense builds as literary and moral issues line up alongside cognitive and metaphysical ones. But he argues on pragmatic rather than theoretical grounds, issuing a warning about consequences:

One must concede that the Western humanist concept of the autonomous individual self is not universal, eternally given, and valid for all time and all places, but is a product of history and culture. This doesn’t, however, necessarily

mean that it isn't a good idea, or that its time has passed. A great deal of what we value in civilized life depends upon it. We also have to acknowledge that the individual self is not a fixed and stable entity, but is constantly being created and modified in consciousness through the interaction with others and the world. It may be, therefore, that every time we try to describe the conscious self we misrepresent it because we are trying to fix something that is always changing; but really we have no alternative, any more than the physicist has any alternative to bringing about the collapse of the wave function when he makes an observation, or the deconstructionist has any alternative to using language which she claims is bound to undermine its ostensible claims to meaning. (CN 90)

This thinking may carry little weight with persons uncommonly hard of head. For overzealous reductionists, the objections will be a little too oblique, and not especially original or convincing. First, we are not necessarily stuck with the ideas about minds and selves embedded in our habits of thought and speech. Second, some of the moral consequences that follow from rejecting the self may be welcome (not all of "civilization" is good).¹³ Neither argument trumps science, anyway. But Lodge's ideas deserve careful consideration, and we can unfold them more fully.

The general point seems sound. Strawson agrees that the novel may well be "the most powerful tool we have for the recording and examination of consciousness" ("The Mind's I"). Literature is *about* conscious experience, this medium of human life, more than it is about any part of it; and more than any other form of discourse is. Literature as a whole charts the geography of possible experience, exploring its heights, depths, and breadths, capturing its qualities, drawing on them for meaning and form. Pleasure and pain correlate in certain ways with events of triumph and failure to structure works and genres. We must imagine what it's like to be Dante to see *The Divine Comedy* tracing his enlightenment and liberation by progressing through *Inferno* to *Paradiso*.

But what can we do with this conviction? How can we evoke and use what literature has to tell us about consciousness? I suggest four (very general) ways to develop Lodge's ideas, taking Paisley Livingston's view that criticism can "serve to challenge and to refine, to complexify and perfect hypotheses within the other anthropological disciplines" (260):

1. Examine how literature can capture, convey and intensify conscious experience. Wallace Stevens says poetry is "one of the enlargements of life," capable of "subtilizing experience and varying appearance" (viii). Others see "epiphany" (Joyce), "aesthetic bliss" (Nabokov), or "peak experiences" (Frye) as central. Consciousness research might speak to the theory that we respond imaginatively to art via "simulation" (Currie). How does simulation become vivid? What is the role of metaphor, or synaesthetic devices that "mime what they signify" as Lodge says?

2. Many investigators want to describe more rigorously "*the structure of human*

¹³ For example, Searle writes, "we continue to accept a traditional vocabulary that contrasts the mental and the physical, the mind and the body, the soul and the flesh, in a way that I think is confused and obsolete" (57-58). Strawson disputes the idea ("The Self"). Supreme Court Justice David Hodgson discusses what reductionism implies for concepts of responsibility and justice. See also Lanier and Wolfe. Dennett claims "The moral arguments on *both sides* of the issues of capital punishment, abortion, eating meat, and experimenting on nonhuman animals, for instance, are raised to a higher, more appropriate standard when we explicitly jettison the myths that are beyond protection in any case" (454).

experience itself” (Varela 31) as much as account for the brute fact of it. “Neurophenomenology” may study nuances of aesthetic, moral, and spiritual savour and significance.¹⁴ Since self and consciousness seem to be interdependent, the same narrative data can be relevant to analyses of the self and of experience. *Thinks . . .* balances two forms of narrative self-representation, spontaneous stream-of-consciousness recording and reflective autobiography. These perspectives seem complementary. Ralph sees value in trying to capture the stream of consciousness, despite the risks:

The object of the exercise being to try and describe the structure of, or rather to produce a specimen, that is to say raw data, on the basis of which one might begin to try to describe the structure of, or from which one might infer the structure of . . . thought [. . .]. Of course this experiment is hopelessly artificial because the decision to record one’s thought inevitably determines or at least affects the thoughts one has . . . [. . .] all these things I would normally do without thinking, I would do them ‘unconsciously’ as we say, but this morning I’m conscious of them because I hold a taperecorder in my hand [. . .]. (1-5)

Such records can be informative, if we correct for the distortion created by the media of representation and the act of representing.¹⁵ Ralph begins haltingly, trying to think in academic prose, then wanders as he relaxes. Distortion may increase with artfulness; but the highly-crafted *Ulysses*, for example, offers its own exceptional insights. Helen’s journal doesn’t try to capture the stream of consciousness; but it represents another natural view of the self, as an autobiography-in-process, focused on the contents of consciousness, processing events in relation to a certain self-concept and its emotions, beliefs, desires and memory.

We may consider generally how various rhetorical techniques portray various aspects of experience and the self, highlighting certain qualities and supporting certain views. For example, Strawson finds Joyce’s heavily punctuated Stephen Dedalus more suited to the “gappiness” of experience than the unpunctuated Molly Bloom (“Self” 422). Different kinds of literature will open windows into different aspects of experience: the realistic novel into quotidian experience, Romantic poetry into extraordinary feeling and imagination, autobiographical novels for autobiographical memory, “stream of consciousness” novels for mental “drifting”, and so on. Some authors describe unusual mystical or drug-induced states (Blake, Huxley), or the experience of reflexive consciousness itself (Stevens, Beckett).

3. Use accounts of literary narration to critique philosophers’ “literary” analogies. Dennett has two related literary theses. First, there is “no single, definitive ‘stream of consciousness’” because no Cartesian Theater with a Central Meaner audience. Rather,

¹⁴ Such studies tend to be less interested than literature in nuance. Varela examines the sense of time, with its evanescent present moment, and “threads into past and future horizons” (39).

¹⁵ A few pages before he quotes Lodge, Dennett imagines an improvement on his earlier attempt to describe his stream of consciousness: “had the author [i.e. Dennett] picked up a tape recorder while he sat rocking, and produced the text there and then—it would surely have been quite different. Not only richer in detail, and messier, but also, of course, reshaped and redirected by the author’s own reactions to the very process of creating the text—listening to the actual sounds of his own words instead of musing silently” (407). Carter describes Russ Hurlburt’s improvements in sampling. Subjects detailed their mental contents whenever a portable bleeper went off (42).

“specialist circuits try, in parallel pandemoniums, to do their various things, creating Multiple Drafts as they go.” Most drafts briefly, invisibly modulate activity, but some get “promoted to further functional roles” as circuits compete and cooperate, guided by genes and culture, to shape a mind (253-54). Second, the Self is a Center of Narrative Gravity, a construct abstracted from the stories we tell about ourselves; hence a fictional character (chapter 13).

Lodge argues more effectively in the second essay, “Literary Criticism and Literary Creation”. For Dennett, “all thought is produced through a process of expansion, editing, and revision, like a literary text, although unlike literary creation it is so fast that it seems experientially to be instantaneous” (CN 111). Lodge prefers Edelman: “We cannot construct a phenomenal psychology that can be shared in the same way that physics can be shared”—because individual consciousness “is a first person matter,” “conditioned by history,” “never self-sufficient,” and “always in dialogue with some other, even if that interlocutor is not present” (113).¹⁶ The challenge gains bite from Lodge’s anti-poststructuralist insistence on how communicative intention structures his fiction-making: “It is impossible for me to imagine doing all that work without mentally projecting its effects upon an imagined other who is the implied reader of my text, as I will be to him its implied author” (300).¹⁷ This clarifies the final lines of the first essay, which at first glance seem to change tack curiously:

My novels are the products of numerous revisions, and I know that I could have gone on revising them indefinitely, but a published novel is simply more useful as information than a collection of its various drafts would be, and certainly more useful than a novel which is never published because its author never stopped revising it. (91)

Pushing the analogy suggests that the activities of consciousness come not only from unconscious processes of reporting, revision and editing, but also from communicative desires, intentions, plans, and decisions which oversee the formation of the message. These too may evolve and be revised, but multiple drafts tend to succumb to final drafts. So a relation to addressees (perhaps hypothetical) bolsters the autonomy of the narrating self. Dennett does speculate on how a broad top-down idea of a message vets bottom-up candidate expressions to narrow down into something definite (chapter 8), but examples and analogies of fortuitous speech planning (including literary ones) tend to undermine the Central Meaner. But Lodge’s account of the composition process is richer than these hints and guesses. Of course, Dennett might reply, “well, it’s not *that* much like novel-writing.” He may discard and modify aspects of the analogy as he pleases. Perhaps fragmentary, multiple, revisable states of content-discrimination are not much like everyday stories, never mind literary ones.

There is also room for a fuller exploration of what Dennett and others say about the “extended” or “autobiographical” self as structured by its stories, a *fiction* but not an

¹⁶ Lodge sees an analogy between Edelman’s neurobiology and Mikhail Bakhtin’s view that an orientation toward the addressee helps define the structure and meaning of speech, and hence of literary works and genres. Cf. also Thompson’s view of consciousness as constituted by intersubjectivity.

¹⁷ Specifically, Lodge’s rebuttal of Catherine Belsey’s poststructuralist critique of “expressive realist” criticism in the 1984 *Language of Fiction* Afterword. I infer that Belsey is an ingredient in the discursive construction named Robyn Penrose.

illusion (CN 16). The argument that self and character are relative to the modern West needs deeper, more careful analysis on both sides. Exactly what are these Western concepts? What qualities are disputed (continuity? introspectability? unity?)? What are the alternatives (in other cultures; past and future)? We want a non-caricatural model that will do justice to ourselves and to rich characters like Odysseus and Leopold Bloom. Surely the truth lies in some combination of what is “universally and eternally given and valid” and what “a product of history and culture”, what “fixed and stable” and what “constantly being created and modified”. Novelists and others have always known that the self is neither a pyramid nor a sandstorm.

4. Use a novel’s analysis of characters to clarify the nature of the self. Literature is very effective in elaborating and deepening “folk psychology”. Investigators should consider these factors. For example:

Thinks . . .

The novel explores the moral and social implications of beliefs about the human soul and self. The critique of dogmas of consciousness studies is less overt than in the essays, but perhaps more persuasive. The title challenges first-person experience in two ways. Look at it as a revision of “I think, therefore I am,” and it implies the first-person self is a conclusion that does not follow from a third-person premise: “[the brain in this body] thinks, [therefore] ...”. Second, it imagines overcoming the privacy of consciousness: what it would be like if “Thinks . . .” bubbles hovered above people’s heads, legible by all.

Ralph Messenger is a successful, happily married serial philanderer. He presents the materialist view of the mind—based on Dennett’s, but lacking his playfulness. The brain is like a parallel computer, running many programs at once. Hence the rosy prospects for AI simulating human intelligence and even emotion (37-38). He rejects “mysterianism,” the view that consciousness is “an irreducible self-evident fact about the world that can’t be explained in other terms” (37), and “panpsychism,” the view that consciousness accompanies any kind of information processing and hence is “a basic component of the universe, like mass and energy” (97-98), and he derides the “anti-functional” morals of the mural’s scenes. Certain remarks point clearly to Dennett’s Multiple Drafts Model of consciousness: “every phrase I utter, however fragmentary and inconsequential it may seem, is the output of a complex interaction . . . consultation . . . competition . . . between different parts of my brain . . . It’s like a bulletin, an agreed text hammered out behind closed doors after a nanosecond’s intense editorial debate, and then released to the speech centres of the brain for onward transmission” (58). The self or soul is a “virtual machine in a biological machine” (102), a software program running on the hardware of the brain and body. When Helen challenges the claim that there is no such thing, he replies with the theory that the self is a Center of Narrative Gravity: “No such *thing*, no, if you mean a fixed, discrete entity. But of course there are selves. We make them up all the time. Like you make up your stories. [. . .] It’s one of the things we do with our spare brain capacity” (99). Helen mentions the man with “locked-in syndrome”—a condition in which the body is almost totally paralyzed while the mind stays conscious—who composed a book through a code of eye-blinks. Ralph sees the heroism in this, but it is “still just information processing by his brain. There’s nothing supernatural about it. No ghost in the machine” (100).

Helen Reed, somewhat prim and precious, is also successful, but recently widowed, and teaching creative writing as much to escape the memories that haunt her London flat as to pay the bills. She speaks for Lodge to some extent, expressing traditional humanist views, preferring to think that consciousness is a mystery beyond human comprehension, not to be reduced to computation or biology, and more the province of literature than science. She brings Ralph to concede that AI seems a long way off, and that “for the time being we have to settle for knowing less about consciousness than novelists pretend to know” (43-44). Ralph sets his sights on Helen, but she resists his advances (almost) as much as she does his arguments. The stakes are high: “Sometimes I think I’m struggling with Ralph Messenger for my soul—literally, because according to him, it doesn’t exist” (178). Their conversations carry them around campus, through dinner parties and hot tubs and eventually, inevitably, bed.

Helen sees herself in terms of literary characters: Richardson’s Pamela (177), a Renaissance coy mistress (178), later Lady Chatterley (261). This is a stock story of temptation of a pure female by a worldly male, and I expect Lodge is thinking of the whole history of the romance novel here, from Richardson to Mills & Boon (the Harlequin of England). But he taps a deeper lineage, and resonance, by associating the contest with opposing cultural values. Ralph is classical: he looks like a Greek god to his first lover (76), and like a Roman emperor to Helen (24). His wife is “Juno-esque” (207), and from the pinnacle of his brain-tower he records on his “Olympus Pearl-corder” fantasies wherein winning the Nobel Prize blurs into apotheosis (115), the destiny of Classical heroes. Helen is associated with Christianity, specifically a Catholic upbringing she can’t quite renounce. While Ralph is “hardwired for happiness” (213), Helen is given to depression and guilt. She approves Freud’s remark that “Civilization is based on repression” (179), and cannot even compose an unpolished e-mail. She’s surrounded with burial-and-rebirth imagery: discovering Martin’s infidelity, “I felt stifled, trapped, like someone being nailed into a coffin still alive” (194; also 31, 87, 202, 260). There is even a joke inserted about the transition from BC to AD (137). Connecting the stock story to a battle between Christian faith and pagan philosophy recalls Milton’s *Comus*—except that Helen regains her soul partly by surrendering her body.

The journals they both begin keeping (Ralph’s spoken, Helen’s typed) constitute the bulk of the story. Ralph’s is a way of generating “raw data” that may contribute to artificially simulating the structure of the stream of consciousness (idle, non-task-oriented thought) (1-8). Helen begins diarizing as a kind of therapy: she is too dumb with grief to write fiction at all, and can only handle a simple first-person journal. Ralph is shamelessly horny. Helen is less fun: more conventional, and somewhat wooden. She outlines her professional and personal experiences, including sights seen and meals eaten, elaborating according to their significance for her. Lodge sticks to the “rules of game,” presenting the characters’ minds from their own point of view only. But of course his back-and-forth arrangement of them, for comparison and contrast, generates the comic irony.¹⁸ In the very middle of the novel, there is a mutual discovery of their journalizing.

¹⁸ The confessional journal is a venerable device of the novel, but this one specially thematizes privacy. In *Paradise News*, a major plot shift is accomplished when Bernard daringly leaves his private journal for Yolande to read, as a way of explaining himself and expressing his feelings for her. In *Therapy*, Tubby’s experiments in empathy, by writing from the first-person point of view of people he knows, are suggested by his therapist, but the memoir of his first girlfriend is a step towards becoming a more serious writer.

Ralph soon makes a proposal more daring and tempting than sex: he outlines the benefits of exchanging journals:

if we do this we shall 'know' each other more completely than lovers ever know each other. They penetrate each others bodies to the depth of a few inches or so, with tongues, fingers, etc, but we would get inside each other's heads, we would possess each other as no two people have ever done before. doesn't that idea excite you? (188)

Helen refuses:

ultimately I feel that the privacy of our own thoughts is essential to human selfhood and that to surrender it would be terribly dangerous. We all have bad, ignoble, shameful thoughts, it is human nature, what used to be called Original Sin. The fact that we can suppress them, conceal them, keep them to ourselves, is essential to maintain our self-respect. It's essential to civilization. (189)

Helen may flatter her own motivations here, but her reasoning is important. She sees the capacity and privilege of secrecy and censorship as essential to the self, not a mere hypocritical mask. The stream of consciousness is only a part of the self, not more real than the whole. Helen identifies with this civilized "good copy" of herself, whereas Ralph identifies with the notes and drafts composing the secret stream.

With this in the background, they do commence an affair, but it is framed by death. It begins when Ralph and Helen callously take advantage of Carrie's visit to her dying father; it ends after the shocking suicide of Ralph's colleague "Duggers" (after being caught downloading child pornography), and Ralph's coincidental "reprieve" from a potentially fatal liver condition. Their journals patch together a composite perspective on these events, which sharply define the consequences of their views of consciousness for their perceptions and behaviour. Ralph immediately runs to his PearlCorder to celebrate his conquest. Helen can't face her journal for over a month, but when she does, she playfully writes of herself in third-person fictional style, which signals some recovery from grief. When Ralph's crisis strikes, they reason differently: he calculates possible behavioural outcomes (295); she imagines what it is like to be him (301).

Separately, both decide to end the affair. Both decisions are crystallized by intuitions of moral balance asserting itself in the universe: encounters with death show that integrity of selves depends more on deep family relationships than on passing private fantasies. But their interpretations and motives differ. Helen muses,

Douglass's suicide [. . .] put me into a state of fear and trembling. It opened up such an abyss of unhappiness and wrongdoing and pain, into which it is so easy to fall once you stop listening to your conscience. James has a fine sentence about illicit love somewhere, one of the Prefaces I think, comparing it to a medal made of some hard bright alloy, one face of which is somebody's bliss and right, and the other somebody's bale and wrong." (331-32)

Public exposure of private perversion is literally too much to bear, which starkly

illustrates Helen's sense that loss of privacy can mean loss of self. It also shows how much the self depends on its perception by other minds, and can be abandoned and lost in private. Duggers's mortal shame is an exaggerated form of the fear and outrage Ralph and Helen feel when their journals are exposed. The strengths of Helen's melancholy temperament show the weaknesses of Ralph's sanguine one: she listens to her conscience, and "coming clean" with it helps her face death and grief and betrayal because although she expects unhappiness she suspects "rebirth." While her discovery of Martin allows her to forget then forgive, Ralph's discovery of Carrie is part of what humbles him. Listening to his consciousness, he expects victory and happiness, and he can't stand the prospect of worldly failure and loss of all that he "possesses" (Carrie, her money, the children, his social status), because there is nothing more (294-97, 329). His repressed conscience returns as Duggers is exposed and dies, while he regains health and privacy:

In a way I almost feel as if he died instead of me . . . No, that's silly, delete that . . . And yet, if I were superstitious . . . if I believed in fate, providence, the stars . . . There was a strange symmetry about yesterday evening, the way my reprieve arrived [. . .] at the very same moment that catastrophe stared Duggers in the face. (327)

This is soon submerged in self-approving reveries: "I know [Helen] was amazed at my self-possession last night, the way I went through the whole dinner as if nothing had happened" (330). The last chapter brings together the two perspectives, with narration by an omniscient author in free indirect style that delves into both minds while Ralph makes the move that destroys for good any hope of a continued relationship—snooping into Helen's journal.

Let us expand on an observation by Lodge's interviewer about the paradoxical drive for both privacy from, and intimacy with, other selves (CN 292-93). Some physical pathologies are recorded that can be seen as extremes of these opposed terms: too little or too much commerce with the outside world. Those basic physical forms of self-distortion echo key features of the social self, which has moral and psychological dimensions analogous to bodily experience. Hence everyday versions of such distortion—personal isolation and violation—precipitate the crises and resolutions of the story. Helen's isolation parallels that of locked-in syndrome, and that of autism (no "Theory of Mind"). Her earlier depression involved a profound isolation from the normal world around her, as did the intense grief following the loss of her husband, aggravated by her discovery that he was not what she thought. For Ralph, to "know" another person is to "penetrate" and "possess" their consciousness, and knowing seeks to be as complete as possible. He recognizes no real boundaries of soul or self, so he does not hesitate to violate Helen's private journal. The same blindness allows him to just shrug it off: "I couldn't stop myself" (T 337). He makes no effort at restraint because he doesn't believe in it. This violation is a minor parallel of the horrifying rape Helen reads about. The victim survived by "separating her mind from her body as much as she could" (223). Helen also feels divided in various ways (17, 336).

This suggests some general hypotheses about selves. It is often observed how crucial the sense of a boundary is to the idea of self. The body is the chief boundary, but

we often speak and feel as if “our” boundaries extend or shrink, as when we sense a texture through a pencil tip, identify with the car we drive, or disavow some action (Dennett 47, 416-17; also Carter 216-21). Basic properties of the self can be profoundly disturbed through distortions of body image.¹⁹ The novel suggests that the extended self also has boundaries of some kind, related to but not identical with the boundaries of the body or awareness, and shaped by social experience. People naturally identify with their families, some of their property (homes, cars), their social status and image, and of course their own thoughts and memories (e.g. in a journal). For two people to “know” one another is for them to share their selves: the more extensive the sharing, the better the knowing and the more emotionally intense the relationship. Such confusion of boundaries is pleasurable or painful. It can fail in various ways, and the failure can be comic misapprehension or tragic aggravations of privacy or intimacy—isolations or violations. If either party (or some outside cause) prevents or forces interaction beyond a certain degree, the self may be distorted and harmed, temporarily or permanently. The mind can respond by dissociating itself from body or past selves. So there must be a range of acceptable kinds and degrees of interpenetration with other entities. It is not such a leap to suppose that body image could be the basis of a body-like self-image, which lies a little deeper than the conscious self, but can through it feel joy or pain, grow stronger or weaker, be damaged or healed, by moral and emotional means. It is not uncommon in psychology to speak of feelings of exposure/ invisibility, diminution/ expansion, dissolution/ reinforcement, devouring/ rebirth of self. These body-based metaphors for complex cognitive-emotional-physiological attitudes make intuitive sense to us, as crucial factors in the constitution and working of the self. They obtain whether we think in terms of self, soul, or other (again, it may be “healthy” to consciously tend to it, whatever one’s religious belief). The idea needs work, but it is important, and not dealt with much in the literature.

These are not new facts about selves, but facts that we can confirm from our own experience, newly organized and emphasized by dramatization. The novel generates these insights persuasively by richly simulating the interplay between private and social experience, and connecting common experience with extreme cases and general ideas. It might refine our model of the self, and what that self needs and wants and can tolerate.

¹⁹ Ramachandran shows how distortions of body-image can lead to bizarre misinterpretations of self-world relations (e.g. misattributions of body parts to other selves). Grush argues that spatial experience grounds the sense of self. Lakoff and Johnson argue that the metaphoric system for inner life is based on a distinction between a Subject (“the locus of consciousness, subjective experience, reason, will, and our ‘essence,’ everything that makes us who we uniquely are”), and one or more Selves (“everything else about us—our bodies, our social roles, our histories, and so on”) (268).

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