

Objects in Bloom

Jon Hegglund

University of Washington

“Kidneys were in his mind...”

The first thing we learn about Leopold Bloom is his taste for dishes featuring “the inner organs of beasts and fowls,” including “thick giblet soup, nutty gizzards, a stuffed roast heart, liver slices fried with crustcrumbs, fried hencod’s roes,” and “most of all ... grilled mutton kidneys” (*U* 4.1-4).¹ This introduction to Bloom, through his (decidedly non-Kosher) consumption of animal organs, motivates the opening sentence of the next paragraph: “Kidneys were in his mind as he moved about the kitchen softly,” the narrator tells us (*U* 4.6). This is a strange locution, but one that might pass our notice given the context (as it indeed had passed mine the first twenty or so times I read this section). Of course, the context asks us to interpret the lines as Bloom merely thinking about kidneys as he contemplates his breakfast options on this warm June morning. But the phrasing reverses subject and object; rather than the more conventional “Bloom was thinking about kidneys,” or perhaps, “Bloom had kidneys in his mind,” the kidneys (albeit a subject of a passive construction) nonetheless take sequential precedence over Bloom’s “mind.” The strange syntax defamiliarizes the image, and momentarily presents a literal picture of a mutton kidney stuffed into a man’s head, a brief image of absurdity that quickly dissipates into the main action of the paragraph: Bloom preparing his wife’s morning tea and contemplating his own hunger.

One of the reasons the clause “kidneys were in his mind” stands out to me is the incongruity of the two nouns. “Kidneys”: physical, visceral, bloody; “mind”: incorporeal, abstract, ethereal. (Had Joyce doubled down on his bodily organs and written, “kidneys were in his brain,” the passage would be more immediately funny, but certainly less subtle.) The narrator, in the introduction of the novel’s main character, has shown us a “mind” that comes into linguistic being only as it is filled with the material of the object world. This is no ordinary, inert, dead thing, however; it is the “inner organ” of a mammalian animal. What occupies Bloom’s consciousness, then, is a crucial part of the functioning physiology of a previously living creature (and Bloom, it should be noted, highlights his connection to the bodily function of the food he eats by commenting favorably on the “fine tang of faintly scented urine” that he savors in mutton kidneys (*U* 4.4-5)). The physiological nature of the organs that Bloom consumes stands in sharp contrast to the disembodiment of the Cartesian “mind.” Joyce’s syntactical reversal is also a subtle undoing of the priority of mind over matter. Bloom’s mind passively receives objects such as kidneys, rather than actively direct its efforts toward a rational, intentional mastery of *res extensa*.²

As I will argue, I do not think Joyce’s syntactical reversal of mental and object worlds is an accident. This brief, nearly unremarkable, example sets up a technique that will characterize the representation of Leopold Bloom’s consciousness in chapters four through six of *Ulysses* (“Calypso,” “Lotus-Eaters,” and “Hades”). I draw upon both cognitive-based approaches to narrative as well as object-oriented materialist philosophy to offer a more granular account of Bloom’s “mind” in these chapters. Bloom, I believe, embodies a truth about fictional minds that very few critics have been willing to grant: that they are contingent, networked entities that exist moment-to-moment in complex relations with other human and nonhuman objects. In her book, *Vibrant Matter*, political philosopher Jane Bennett refers to this mode as “distributive agency” (21) or (following Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari) an “assemblage” (23). Bennett’s work, though coming out of a philosophical tradition of immanent vitalism that draws from Spinoza, Deleuze, and Bruno Latour, can inform more nuanced conceptions of fictional representations of consciousness. Bennett advances a model of agency that grants agentic powers to nonhuman things *while also* acknowledging that humans are still privileged actors within such assemblages. Her work, along with other

object- and nonhuman-oriented philosophers such as Levi Bryant, Timothy Morton, and Graham Harman, can help us develop new conceptions of the novel that account for the agency, actions, and traits of characters in a more particular and persuasive way. Rather than assume that characters are pre-formed entities who have coherent and determinate qualities prior to their narrative presentation, we can use the close-reading techniques of narrative theory to discover how literary characters come to us within a network of objects and forces that we typically ascribe to a nonhuman background. Ideally, this attention to the enmeshed networks of the nonhuman and human will help readers simultaneously attend to aspects of fiction that are typically ignored and give us a more refined, dynamic picture of the characters that prompt our readerly investment in fiction.

Leopold Bloom offers an ideal exemplum for this approach. While the specific portrayal of Bloom pushes him toward a more externally constructed state than many modernist protagonists (including Stephen Dedalus, as we shall see), the genre of fiction still, unavoidably, presents a bias toward the unit of the individual human subject. To be clear, I make this assertion with no value judgement; indeed, it is hard to imagine a corpus of novels that do not feature human or anthromorphized agents in one form or another. I read Bloom, then, neither as an epiphenomenon of external objects and forces, nor as a bounded, internalized Cartesian *cogito*. With kidneys – as well as cats, newspapers, odors, corpses, and various other things – inhabiting and, I will argue, constituting his mind, Bloom can be understood as a character whose mind is constructed through a continual interface and interaction with an exterior world. Joyce writes Bloom’s networked mind unlike Stephen Dedalus, the other main consciousness of the early chapters of *Ulysses*. Stephen’s mind, in contrast to Bloom’s, is presented through a similar narratorial mode but in a markedly different style, one that represents a more conventional, interiorized, self-aware consciousness. Where the narration in Stephen’s chapters (“Telemachus,” “Nestor,” and “Proteus”) carefully guards the border between internal and external worlds, Bloom’s narration gives the effect of a device capturing impressions and sensations from an external world and reproducing them without a well-formed, *a priori* consciousness of “self.” I conclude that, ironically, it is precisely because Bloom’s mind is largely constructed through an assemblage of external objects that he is frequently cited as the most complete picture of consciousness in fiction.

My claims ultimately support the humanist position that Bloom is a singular case of narrative discourse approximating the complex processes of human cognition and consciousness. But my reasons for claiming this are quite the opposite of many: I do not take for granted that Bloom is a pre-existing *cogito* that enters into a connection with an external, objective world. Instead, I take the suggestion literally that “kidneys were in his mind”: the mind comes into being *within* a relational network of objects, and its operations can only be identified and named *a posteriori*.

Narrative theory and the distributed mind

One of the unexamined assumptions about the fictional presentation of consciousness is the ontological priority of the individual mind. Based on this premise, even radical modernist experimentation with narrative could fit comfortably within the humanist conception of the novel.

Cognitive approaches to narrative have redressed this bias toward human consciousness, mainly by questioning the guarded boundaries that seem to cordon off fictional characters within an existential isolation (represented in canonical modernism by Marlow’s assertion in *Heart of Darkness* that “we live as we dream – alone ...” (Conrad 33)). The typical mode for social interaction in this isolationist view is one highlighted by miscommunication and misunderstanding. Cognitive narrative theorists such as David Herman, Lisa Zunshine, and Alan Palmer question this inaccessibility of the mind.³ Herman sums up a significant distinction between classical narrative theory and postclassical cognitive-based approaches: as socially situated readers, we draw upon “the rough-and-ready heuristics to which [we] resort in thinking about thinking itself. We use these heuristics to impute motives or goals to others, to evaluate the bases of our own conduct, and to make predictions about future reactions to events”(253). This claim suggests that represented consciousness always has an outward-facing aspect, a condition often veiled by the emphasis on interiority given by so much literary criticism of the novel.

In *Fictional Minds* (2007) and *Social Minds in the Novel* (2010)⁴, Palmer highlights three mental “tools” that enable the mind’s distributed, extended, externalized capabilities, or what he calls “the mind beyond the skin” (*FM* 160, *SMN* 42-3): language, physically distributed cognition, and intermental thinking. His main focus is on the third of these, as his aim is

to reposition fictional consciousness as a primarily social, interpersonal entity. I would like, however, to amplify the relatively scant attention he gives to the second of these tools, physically distributed, or situated, cognition. Situated cognition presumes that thinking is impossible without the aid of tools – be they the writer’s notebook, pencil, or computer keyboard and screen, the airline pilot’s cockpit, display panels, and crew, or the musician’s instrument, sheet music, and collaborators. Many of the thinkers from which Palmer draws, including Daniel Dennett, still prioritize mind over matter (*FM* 160)). In Dennett’s view, the mind is still an interior entity existing prior to its being fanned out into an external, material environment.⁵ Palmer, however, phrases this process in a way that downplays the separation of an inner mind: physically distributed cognition simply acknowledges “the fact that our minds extend beyond the boundary of our skin and encompass the cognitive tools we use” (*FM* 160). As it applies to fiction, this model “materially affects what is considered a presentation of consciousness” (*FM* 160). Palmer then leaves off to move to his main concern, the social, “intra-mental” nature of fictional minds. Without denying the importance of this line of inquiry, I want to stay with the interrelations between mind and environment as it bears on narrative analysis. While Palmer’s theorization of “social minds” provides plenty of leverage on fictional analysis, particularly in how we read consciousness in novels that were largely perceived as externally-oriented, plot-driven, and “realist,” his bracketing off of “social minds” reproduces another binary: instead of internal and external, we now have a privileged human realm of thought and action over and against an implicitly nonhuman, background “environment.” Put in terms of Bloom’s chapters in *Ulysses*, Palmer gives us a way to understand Bloom’s mind in its relationality with the minds of people he encounters – his wife Molly, Dlugacz the butcher, his acquaintance M’Coy, the chemist who sells him soap, and the mourners at Paddy Dignam’s funeral – but he stops short of including other objects and non-human creatures that are, like the kidney, “in” his mind. There are other things that occupy Bloom besides people: his cat, the cuts of meat at the Dlugacz’s, the newspaper he wipes himself with after defecating, the communion wine and wafers he ponders at the catholic church, the odor of porter seeping out from pubs, the soap he buys for Molly, the envelope containing the letter from Martha Gifford. For Palmer, these nonhuman physical entities cannot be treated in the same category as the “minds” of other characters in the novel. I would ask, perhaps naïvely, why not?

In answering this question, we will still likely find reasons to put human minds in a privileged conceptual category. We would do so, however, without an *a priori* separation of the human from and ontological elevation above the nonhuman, material world. By broaching the tantalizing prospect of the narrative representation of physically distributed cognition, Palmer suggests this line of inquiry. Ultimately, though, he declines to pursue it, instead focusing on the intermental relationship between human minds. It is at this point where narrative theory can be supplemented by recent work in philosophy, particularly work in object-oriented ontology and other materialist approaches that grant an ontological primacy to *objects*. In the main, this move is not intended to simply reverse figure and background, pushing human subjects aside to welcome nonhuman objects to center stage, but it does aim to grant objects an existence independent of human epistemology. This does not, importantly, deny the inherent limitation of human cognition but, crucially, does not *ontologically* denigrate the object world simply because we are bound to species-based cognitive limits. The most succinct phrase that sums up this vast array of work is probably the title of Levi Bryant's book, *The Democracy of Objects*.⁶ Bryant makes the point that a democracy of objects does not imply an elevation of the nonhuman at the expense of the human:

Such a democracy ... does not entail the exclusion of the human. Rather, what we get is a redrawing of distinctions and a decentering of the human. The point is not that we should think objects rather than humans. Such a formulation is based on the premise that humans constitute some special category that is other than objects, that objects are a pole opposed to humans, and therefore the formulation is based on the premise that objects are correlates or poles opposing or standing-before humans. No ... there is only one type of being: objects. As a consequence, humans are not excluded, but are rather objects among the various types of objects that exist or populate the world, each with their own specific powers and capacities. (Bryant 20).

Bryant's claim that "there is only one type of being: objects," might jar on the human ear a bit, but it is important to stress what follows: if each object has its "specific powers and capacities," then humans have the benefit of being uncommonly complex, productive, and evolutionarily successful objects. What Bryant cuts to is the affective attachment we have to the concept of the "subject," particularly the assumption that, however much subjectivity is shaken, decentered, challenged, or vanquished, the identity of the "subject" remains an exclusively human one.

Returning to the somewhat narrower scope of fictional representation: how might Bryant's philosophical gambit work? The answer to this question demands that we reframe the fictional notion of character. Most theorists of narrative grant that some kind of human or anthropomorphized agency is a minimal requirement of narrative. But we don't need to chisel out a precise definition of narrative to know, from experience, that the overwhelming majority of narratives feature entities that we conventionally refer to as characters, to the point where most definitions of narrative include the implicit or explicit requirement of characters.⁷ But the term "character" presupposes so much: it is both, according to the OED, "A personality invested with distinctive attributes and qualities, by a novelist or dramatist," and more broadly, "The sum of the moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual or a race, viewed as a homogeneous whole" (OED). The usage of both senses dates from the 1660s, well before the advent of the novel as a popular form, suggesting that both senses have been operative since the early days of narrative fiction as we know it. Both definitions point toward a supposition of a "character" as a "homogenous whole" with "distinctive attributes and qualities," definitions that are in a reader's mind prior to encountering a specific fictional persona. In other words, to return to Bryant, we conventionally presume characters *as* pre-existing subjects rather than the "objects" that Bryant argues as the "only type of being." While I have no illusions that the habits of fictional reading can be overturned completely, an object-oriented approach to character might adopt a kind of binocular vision, through which we read fiction with one eye on the conventional notion of character as a continuous, coherent entity – a "whole person" – and the other on the construction of character as one object among others within a narrative. Viewing the fictional representation of human consciousness would thus give a more stereoscopic picture, highlighting relations, and indeed tensions, between character-as-subject and character-as-object.

The political philosopher Jane Bennett sketches out a conceptual framework that might be a useful start for an object-oriented approach to narrative consciousness. In her book *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett advocates a theory of "vital materialism" that distributes agency formerly imagined to be seated exclusively in humans to a more eclectic mesh of the human and nonhuman (13). Bennett borrows the notion of "actant" from Bruno Latour to extend the potential of agency to *all* objects, human or otherwise. An actant is simply "a source of action" that can be "human or not,

or, most likely, a combination of both” (9). Reprising Bryant’s theme, humans do not disappear in this formulation, but it does assume that “human individuals are themselves composed of vital materials, that [human] powers are thing-power” (11). We can begin to see where this ontological shift speaks to the fictional construction of human character: the “humans” that are so finely drawn in fiction lose none of their special qualities if their distinctiveness is considered within the object world. Indeed, their agency becomes more extensive: “bodies enhance their power *in or as a heterogeneous assemblage*. What this suggests for the concept of *agency* is that the efficacy or effectivity to which that term has traditionally referred becomes distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human body” (23, author’s italics). Bennett’s notion of agency resonates helpfully with Palmer’s appropriation of “the mind beyond the skin” from cognitive theory. A truly vital materialist theory of fictional consciousness, however, would need to go one step further. Bennett writes that while “[e]ach member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force,” there is also “an agency *of* the assemblage” itself (24). If we provisionally named such an assemblage “Mr Leopold Bloom,” as Joyce does in his opening words to the “Calypso” chapter, we are encompassing not only the “homogenous whole” implied by the notion of character, but also the aforementioned bits that form “Bloom”: kidneys, cats, hats, newspapers, sunshine, a Dublin street, and so on. Bennett continues: “And precisely because each member-actant maintains an energetic pulse slightly ‘off’ from that of the assemblage, an assemblage is never a stolid block but an open-ended collective, a ‘non-totalizable sum’” (24). Bennett’s “assemblage” is a better description for the ceaseless interfacing between human and nonhuman that comprises fictional consciousness because the human aspect of identity is preserved, while, at the same time, the notion of character is opened to the text in more extensive and fine-grained ways. The perception of fictional characters can be deepened and particularized by viewing them less as inward entities reaching across a wide ontological gulf to engage with the “real world” and more as shifting, contingent nodes whose boundaries are fluid and whose identities are continually remade in their contact with the world of objects.

The Object Nature of Stephen and Bloom

It remains to be seen how this abstract model of consciousness plays out at the “ground level” of fiction. How does the model of a distributed agency leave traces in the prose sentences that comprise fictional narration? I have already suggested that the narration of Bloom’s consciousness makes these interfaces particularly clear. But Bloom’s narration begins four chapters into the novel, after the first three have been devoted to Stephen Dedalus. Both Stephen and Bloom are narrated in roughly the same perspective: third-person free indirect discourse giving way, at times almost imperceptibly, to sentences or chunks of first-person direct monologue. David Lodge gives a representative summary of this mode: “[i]t is not the authorial voice who speaks in these interpolated passages of introspection and analysis, but the inner voice of the character himself or herself who is the ‘center of consciousness,’ rendered in interior monologue or free indirect style, and mingled with the accents of other discourses, written and spoken, which belong to that character’s mental world” (65). This description is somewhat broad and, taken on its own terms, does describe the majority of what is conventionally referred to as “stream of consciousness” narration. But even Lodge acknowledges that, within *Ulysses* itself, the three main characters are represented “in three quite distinctive styles – as regards vocabulary, syntax, and the type of association, whether metaphoric or metonymic, that makes one thought beget another” (56). I am here concerned with the contrast between Stephen and Bloom (with Molly’s exclusively first-person narration comprising a separate category for my purposes): while Lodge expresses the contrast as a difference in style, I suggest that we see a stronger qualitative distinction between the two characters, which has implications for the way in which Joyce represents consciousness.

Joyce himself lays some of the groundwork for my claims about the Stephen/Bloom distinction. Through Stephen’s allusions to philosophers of perception such as Aristotle, Jakob Boehme, and Bishop Berkeley, “Proteus” stages an inquiry into the relations between subjective perception and objective reality. As James Cappio argues, Stephen begins the chapter as “a solipsist trying to come to terms with the objective world” (21). Cappio posits that Stephen views this problem as a struggle between a Berkeleyan radical subjectivity and an Aristotelian insistence on a physical reality of primary substances. As much as the chapter foregrounds the

subjective cast of Stephen's perception, imagination, and memory, he ends by placing his own snot on a rock and contemplating a sailing ship moving upstream into the mouth of the Liffey. Stephen's famous question, "Am I walking into eternity along Sandymount strand?" (*U* 3.18-19), should therefore, by the end of the chapter, be answered in a resounding negative. "Proteus" suggests that Stephen's experiments in subjective withdrawal ultimately give way to an embodied, physical world of things. Or, as Cappio puts it, "Aristotle wins at the end of 'Proteus'" (21). With the "victory" of the external world, Stephen is ushered off the stage and Bloom proceeds in from the wings. Throughout the first three chapters, however, Stephen's predilection for an inward subjectivity is expressed through his narrative discourse, which typically places the veil of a unified "style" between Stephen's perception and its expression on the page.

Here is an example of Stephen's represented consciousness from the "Nestor" chapter, a moment in which he reflects upon the mystical and theological roots of the algebraic equations that he tries to teach to the dull student, Sargent:

Across the page the symbols moved in grave morrice, in the mummery of their letters, wearing quaint caps of squares and cubes. Give hands, traverse, bow to partner: so: imps of fancy of the Moors. Gone too from the world, Averroes and Moses Maimonides, dark men in mien and movement, flashing in their mocking mirrors the obscure soul of the world, a darkness shining in brightness which brightness could not comprehend. (*U* 2.155-60)⁸

Lodge suggests that what we receive here is not an authorial voice but rather a simulation of Stephen's consciousness as it perceives the text of the algebra book. On the one hand, we can ascribe much of this passage to what we know of Stephen (not just from *Ulysses* but from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as well): the references to obscure, heterodox theologian-philosophers, the personification of mathematical abstractions, the ornate syntax, and the alliterative, poetic quality of the language used. Yet, despite the plausibility that the intellectually sophisticated Stephen might "think" like this, the gap between a mimetic transcription of thought and its stylized representation here is surely too wide to ignore. If this passage finds its source in an "inner voice" of Stephen, it is one that bears the unmistakable traces of a narratorial intervention and transformation.

When we see Stephen's relationship to the object that occupies his perception – the algebra book – it becomes clear that the conception of Stephen *as* a consciousness is in fact contingent upon the grammatical and stylistic “packaging” of this consciousness by the narrator. The first sentence is a third-person description that uses words that Stephen might use – “grave morrice,” “mummery,” “quaint caps of squares and cubes” – but is too grammatically complete and crafted to pass for a direct perception of Stephen's. This perceptual sentence quickly gives way to Stephen's imaginative connection between the algebraic symbols and the scholasticism of Moorish culture. The colons lead us through the logic of the association: the dancing figures resolve into a “so” that transforms them into “imps of fancy.” But this apparent fragment resembles the movement of a logical proof rather than an unprompted association, emphasizing the rational, conscious discourse of Stephen. The long sentence that closes the paragraph is presented with a similar sense of craft: its paratactic connections from clause to clause indicate an associative pattern, but the alliteration, diction, and complex construction (“a darkness shining in brightens which brightness could not comprehend”) again signify a “Stephenization” of this perception that can only be externally achieved by the narrator. The object that prompts this brief reflection – the algebra notebook – is subordinated to the stylistic and logical traits of Stephen's mind, which, in contrast to Bryant's formulation, very much renders him as a “subject” distanced from and superior to an external world of objects.

I have suggested that Bloom's case is different; let me know amplify that claim. Structurally, many of Bloom's passages follow the same pattern, with third-person free indirect discourse giving way to bits of implied direct monologue. The fourth paragraph of the “Calypso” chapter begins to introduce these first-person fragments more fully: “Another slice of bread and butter: three, four: right. She didn't like her plate full. Right. *He turned from the tray, lifted the kettle off the hob and set it sideways on the fire. It sat there, dull and squat, its spout stuck out.* Cup of tea soon. Good. Mouth dry” (*U* 4.14, my italics). The italicized sentences, which indicate an unequivocal use of third-person narration, are lodged within fragments that are meant to approximate a present-tense unfolding of interior monologue. In Bloom's passages, there tends to be a marked distinction between third-person sentences that report action or perception in an unadorned way and first-person fragments that simulate Bloom's thought.

Several paragraphs later, the reporting third-person of “He watched the bristles shining wirily in the weak light as she tipped three times and licked lightly” gives way to the Bloomian thought, “Wonder is it true if you clip them they can’t mouse after” (*U* 4.39-41). Where Stephen’s narration tends to have a more uniform stylistic wash, Bloom’s mode typically moves from third-person declarative statements of action to a fragmented, present-tense, first-person mode that creates the impression of a “naïve” rather than a stylized representation of a fictional mind.

This alternating mode is better suited to constituting Bloom *as* an object within networks of other objects. First of all, the representation of Bloom resists the merger between an overarching style and a narrative sense of “self.” Certainly, there are plenty of third-person descriptive sentences of Stephen’s actions in the first three chapters, but the joins between the narrator and Stephen are typically effected through subtle modulations in point of view or language, as in the following: “He watched her pour into the measure and thence into the jug rich white milk, not hers. Old shrunken paps. She poured again a measureful and a tilly. Old and secret she had entered from a morning world, maybe a messenger” (*U* 1.397-400). Even the first sentence of this paragraph borrows Stephen’s discourse, namely the florid use of “thence” and the observation that sets up his next thought, “not hers.” By contrast, Bloom’s direct, monologic narration typically occurs after a more unadorned description of an object or scene. His internal speech therefore seems responsive or reactive to an external world, suggesting connection, rather than Stephen’s more withdrawn, evaluative statements, which suggest removal and abstraction. Bloom’s first-person fragments, following the fairly neutral report of his watching the cat, for example, are not terribly remarkable in terms of insight or artistry – but this response to an object in the exterior world prompts us to ascribe personality traits to Bloom: curiosity and empathy. The “mind” of Bloom does not extrude into the material realm, as many cognitive theorists would have it; his consciousness, rather, is *already* exteriorized as it is formed through his perceptual attention to objects in the world.

One way of indexing this constitution of an externalized, distributed consciousness is through the novel’s emphasis on Bloom’s sensory contact with the world. Sara Danius has written of the role of sensory perception in the novel, arguing that “*Ulysses* registers the social history of that interface between world and embodied individual known as the sensorium”

(151). Referring to a scene in which Bloom responds to the smell of onions on a man's breath, as well as the scene where Bloom visits the butcher's, she writes that "[s]ausages, onions, and the like make up a vast sensory space crowded by animated objects that actively enter into dialogue with Bloom's sensory apparatus, which they simultaneously help to define" (152). I follow Danius in her claim that Bloom's sensory faculties are a blending of subject and object; in fact, this physical, embodied merger reminds us that whatever we take to be Bloom's consciousness – the "character" of Bloom – is inseparable from the physical interface with the world. It also seems logical that the emphasis on Bloom's embodiment stands in contrast to the more cerebrally oriented representation of Stephen. What we take to be Bloom's consciousness, in other words, is often simply an awareness of his own body in the world. When he is riding in the carriage and trying unsuccessfully to avoid thinking about Boylan's assignation with Molly, he moves from looking at his fingernails to reflecting on his own aging body: "My nails. I am just looking at them: well pared. And after: thinking alone. Body getting a bit softy. I would notice that: from remembering. What causes that? I suppose the skin can't contract quickly enough when the flesh falls off" (*U* 6.203-6). This is a typical "stream of consciousness" passage from Bloom, but it really amounts to little more than a self-report on his own embodiment. Even in his most "subjective" moments, we are never far from understanding Bloom as a materialized object.

Ultimately, we assess the narrative articulation of fictional consciousness by examining how narrative conveys a particular flavor and texture of subjective experience, or what cognitive theorists call *qualia*, which might be translated, according to Palmer, as the phrase "*what it's like*" (*FM* 97, author's italics). While debates continue among cognitive scientists about whether or not humans think in language, if we take fictional narration as a figural, rather than literal, expression of consciousness, we can begin to sort out differences and distinctions. I have previously highlighted the ways in which Bloom's *qualia* contrast with Stephen's: based on their respective narrative discourse (which includes both third- and first-person sentences), Stephen appears more internalized, abstracted, self-centered, while Bloom comes to us as more externalized, engaged, and other-centered. What is striking about Joyce's method, though, is that Bloom seldom expresses "feelings" in the same way as Stephen. We are made to infer some internal emotional states through his

interactions with other people and things in the world, but these are seldom conveyed overtly. Bloom's *qualia* – “what it's like” to be Bloom – are largely left blank or implied. This restrained method pays off, for example, when Bloom encounters a situation that cannot but prompt an emotional response. In the “Hades” chapter, as Bloom rides in the funeral procession for Paddy Dignam, he is reminded both of his infant son's death and his father's suicide. Rather than dominate his attention throughout the chapter, the deaths of his loved ones are passed over in the matter of a few sentences each. Recalling the inquest into his father's death, Bloom thinks: “The redlabelled bottle on the table. The room in the hotel with hunting pictures. Stuffy it was. Sunlight through the slats of the Venetian blind. The coroner's sunlit ears, big and hairy. Boots giving evidence. Thought he was asleep first” (*U* 6.359-62). The content of Bloom's narration feels almost photographic, focused on the concrete images in his memory without any indicators of a specific emotional state. The only element that suggests emotional distress is the fragmented brevity of the sentences, as if the traumatic memories must be dispelled by the rapid movement from image to image. Bloom's trauma is conveyed through what is implied, and the *qualia* of his memories are left in the unspoken gaps between the physical objects that are narrated on the page.

Conclusion: Enmeshed Narration

According to Lodge, in *Ulysses*, Joyce “came as close to representing the phenomenon of consciousness as perhaps any writer has ever done in the history of literature” (56). While I don't feel entirely comfortable with such sweeping assessments, Lodge does express what has become a critical commonplace, especially with respect to Leopold Bloom. I would qualify Lodge's claim by saying that, whether or not Joyce “represents the phenomenon” of consciousness in a mimetically superior way, there are elements to his style of narration that are particularly effective. Ironically, perhaps, the representation of consciousness is at its most compelling when it is at its most externalized. That is, when consciousness is expressed as a contingent, embodied assemblage in ever-shifting interfaces with the external world (as it is in Bloom's case), the reader is left to *construct* a mind actively rather than receive the “homogenous whole” of a character as so many traits that might be condensed to a short list. We

are invited into the distributed agency of narrative consciousness as another actant in a tremendously complex network. The reader's construction of "character," then, never feels like the "homogenous whole" of in the definition: instead, it is a heterogeneous, messy set of connections and responses that ultimately resolves into a conceptually distinct "thing," but a thing that is never static, inert, and closed.

Finally, one implication of my reading goes beyond the aesthetic reassessment of the fictional representation of consciousness. Many of the thinkers who advocate an object-oriented approach make an implicit (and sometimes explicit) critique of the consequences of anthropocentrism and the ontological separation of human and nonhuman worlds. We have, of course, come a long way from Georg Lukacs' assertion that the modernist representation of consciousness is a celebration of the "solitary, asocial" nature of humanity (1219). But even critical endeavors to suggest the sociality of fictional consciousness, such as Palmer's, continue to maintain an unexamined divide between the human and nonhuman. Some of this is simply due to the constitutive role of human (or anthropomorphized) agents in literary narratives; narratives require characters, simply put. By examining closely how such human agents are constructed, however, we can see more clearly that the ontological divide between human and non-human, between subject and object, is at best a blurry, shifting, and enmeshed realm. Bloom, perhaps more than any other character in fiction, bears the discursive traces of this meshing of immaterial mind and material world.⁹



- 1 In-text references to *Ulysses* will be indicated by chapter and line number from the Gabler edition.
- 2 Bloom's association with bodily organs is writ large in the structural conception of the novel, as the Gilbert schema for the novel identifies each chapter, beginning with Calypso, with a bodily organ. Not surprisingly, the organ that corresponds to "Calypso" is the kidney. Significantly, Joyce does not identify any organs for Stephen's first three chapters. In the other chapter to significantly feature Stephen, "Scylla & Charybdis," the organ that Joyce chooses is "brain." On the one hand, this "anatomy" suggests the metaphor of the novel as a living being; but, on the other hand, Joyce's conception of this living being is constituted through the material components of the body rather than the disembodied abstraction of a Cartesian mind.
- 3 See especially David Herman, *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006; Palmer, *Fictional Minds and Social Minds in the Novel*.
- 4 Hereafter abbreviated in the text as *FM* and *SMN*.
- 5 See Daniel Dennett, *Kinds of Minds: Toward an Understanding of Consciousness* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).
- 6 Bryant's work fits broadly within the parameters of the philosophical movement known as object-oriented ontology, but it is not meant to stand in for a rather diverse body of thinkers, among whom include: Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, Jane Bennett, Ian Bogost, Quentin Meillassoux, and others. A helpful introduction to the main concepts in O.O.O. can be found in Harman, *Tool Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing, 2002). The literary critic Bill Brown has approached these questions from a different, though related, standpoint in his conception of "thing theory." See *A Sense of Things: Object Matter in American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- 7 While there are many definitions of narrative, some minimalist and others more particular, I prefer this by James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz: "Narrative is somebody telling somebody else, on some occasion, and for

some purposes, that something happened to someone or something”. The three “somebodies” in this definition, which roughly correspond to narrator, listener/reader, and character(s), highlight the inescapably human element to narrative. See *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*, Eds. David Herman et al. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012).

- 8 My thanks to Samantha Solomon for directing me to this particularly poetic passage of Stephen’s narration.
- 9 My special thanks to the students of my “Nonhuman Modernisms” graduate seminar at Washington State University, Fall semester 2013. Their insights about *Ulysses* helped me work through key parts of this essay and they are all, at some level, collaborators in this project.



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“Sanft ist der Amsel Klage”. Motivstrukturen bei Georg Trakl

Elisabetta Mengaldo

Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität Greifswald

1.

Ein Topos der Trakl-Forschung besagt, diese Dichtung würde oft zur Obskurität neigen. Schon Walther Killys Klassiker *Über Georg Trakl* (1960), der als erster auf textgenetische Fragen in Trakls Dichtung einging, beginnt mit dem verhängnisvollen Satz “Die Sprache dieses Dichters ist dunkel”, und setzt emphatisch fort, indem er die Hilflosigkeit des Lesers gegenüber dieser Sprache als Hindernis auf dem Weg einer existenziellen Suche nach Hilfe beklagt:

Man kann dem sinnlichen Klang der Worte, den vielen Farben und Schatten sich öffnen, aber es ist nicht leicht, dahinter mehr zu gewahren, das, was wir heute (vielleicht zu Unrecht) von Dichtung zu erwarten uns gewöhnt haben: Hilfe in der Ortlosigkeit unserer Welt, Antwort auf die Fragen nach unserem Dasein, ordnende Bilder in den Verwirrungen der Seele und der Zeit. Es ist hier nicht zu entscheiden, ob die Dichtung das, was man von ihr erwartet, leisten kann. Selbst wenn sie es zu leisten vermöchte, stehen wir doch den Versen Trakls nicht einsichtsvoller gegenüber. (5)¹

Killy zufolge entziehen sich Trakls Texte insofern der Interpretation, als ihre Bilder ein offenes System von Chiffren bilden, die einerseits aufeinander verweisen, deren Bedeutung andererseits aber auch kontextabhängig ist und sich deshalb immer wieder leicht verschiebt: