

David lodge biography and books

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David John Lodge was born on January 28, 1935, in London's lower-middle-class East End, the only son of a musician father and a staunchly Catholic mother. The family's straitened economic situation, his conservative Catholic upbringing, and the dangers of wartime London left their mark on young David. He began his first novel (unpublished) at eighteen while still a student at University College, London, where he received his B. A. in English (with first honors) in 1955 and an M. A. in 1959.

Between times Lodge performed what was then an obligatory National Service (1955-1957). Although the two years were in a sense wasted, his stint in the army did give him time to complete his first published novel, *The Picturegoers*, and material for his second, *Ginger, You're Barmy*, as well as the impetus to continue his studies.

In 1959 he married to Mary Frances Jacob; they had three children. After a year working as an assistant at the British Council, Lodge joined the faculty at the University of Birmingham, where he completed his Ph. D. in 1969; he eventually attained the position of full professor of modern English literature in 1976. The mid-1960s proved an especially important period in Lodge's personal and professional life.

He became close friends with fellow critic and novelist Malcolm Bradbury (then also at Birmingham), under whose influence Lodge wrote his first comic novel, *The British Museum Is Falling Down*, for which the publisher, not so comically, forgot to distribute review copies; he was awarded a Harkness Commonwealth Fellowship to study and travel in the United States for a year (1964-1965); he published his first critical study, the influential *The Language of Fiction* (1966); and he learned that his third child, Christopher,

suffered from Down syndrome (a biographical fact that manifests itself obliquely at the end of *Out of the Shelter* and more overtly in one of the plots of *How Far Can You Go?*).

Lodge's second trip to the United States, this time as visiting professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley in 1969, during the height of the Free Speech Movement and political unrest, played its part in the conceiving and writing of his second comic novel, *Changing Places*, as did the critical essays he was then writing and would later collect in *The Novelist at the Crossroads* (1971) and *Working with Structuralism* (1981). The cash award that went along with the Whitbread Prize for his next novel, *How Far Can You Go?*, enabled Lodge to reduce his teaching duties to half-year and to devote himself more fully to his writing.

He transformed his participation in the Modern Language Association's 1978 conference in New York, the 1979 James Joyce Symposium in Zurich, and a three-week world tour of conferences and British Council speaking engagements into his most commercially successful book, *Small World*, later adapted for British television. With his reputation growing and his financial situation brightening, Lodge donated all royalties from his next book, *Write On: Occasional Essays, '65-'85* (1986), to CARE (Cottage and Rural Enterprises), which maintains communities for mentally handicapped adults. In 1987 he took advantage of early retirement (part of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's austerity plan for British universities) so that he could work full time as a writer. Lodge soon published *Paradise News* (1991) and *Therapy* (1995).

He also published two collections of essays, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (1990) *The Art of Fiction* (1992), and a comedic play, *The Writing Game* (1991). Especially popular for his academic novels, Lodge enjoyed an increasingly strong critical reception in the 1990s. *The Writing Game* was adapted for television in 1996, and Lodge was named a Fellow of Goldsmith's College in London in 1992. In 1996 he published *The Practice of Writing*, a collection of seventeen essays on the creative process. In this text he treats fiction writers who have influenced him, from James Joyce to Anthony Burgess, and comments on the contemporary novelist and the world of publishing; the main focus, however, is on adapting his own work, as well as the work of Charles Dickens and Harold Pinter, for television.

The lodge remained a supporter of CARE and other organizations supporting the mentally handicapped (the subject of mental handicaps appears briefly in *Therapy* in a reference to the central character's sister's dedication to a mentally handicapped son). He retained the title of Honorary Professor of Modern English Literature at the University of Birmingham. In addition to interests in television, theater, and film, Lodge maintained an interest in tennis that is sometimes reflected in the novels.

Literary Forms

Mediating between theory and practice, David Lodge has proved himself one of England's ablest and most interesting literary critics. Among his influential critical books are *The Language of Fiction* (1966) and *The Novelist at the Crossroads* (1971).

In addition to his novels and criticism, he has written short stories, television screenplays of some of his novels, and (in collaboration with Malcolm Bradbury and Jim Duckett) several satirical revues.

Achievements

As a novelist Lodge has made his mark in three seemingly distinct yet, in Lodge's case, surprisingly congruent areas: as a writer of Catholic novels, of " campus fiction," and of works that somehow manage to be at once realist and postmodern. The publication of *Changing Places* in 1975 and *Small World* nine years later brought Lodge to the attention of a much larger (especially American) audience. *Changing Places* won both the Yorkshire Post and Hawthornden prizes, *How Far Can You Go?* received the Whitbread Award, and *Nice Work* was shortlisted for Great Britain's prestigious Booker Prize.

Literary Analysis

In order to understand David Lodge's novels, it is necessary to place them in the context of postwar British literature—the " Movement" writers and " angry young men" of the 1950's, whose attacks on the English class system had an obvious appeal to the author of *The Picturegoers*, the English Catholic novel and " campus novel" traditions, and finally the postmodernism to which British fiction (it is often claimed) has proved especially resistant. In addition, Lodge's novels are significantly and doubly autobiographical. They draw not only on important events in the author's life, but also on his work as a literary critic.

In *The Language of Fiction* Lodge defends the aesthetic validity and continuing viability of realist writing on the basis of linguistic mastery rather than fidelity to life, and in *The Novelist at the Crossroads* he rejects Robert Scholes's bifurcation of contemporary fiction into fabulistic and journalistic modes, positing the "problematic novel" in which the novelist innovatively builds his hesitation as to which mode to adopt into the novel. Lodge's own novels are profoundly pluralistic yet manifest the author's clear sense of aesthetic, social, and personal limitations as well as his awareness of working both within and against certain traditions and forms. *The Picturegoers* Set in a lower-middle-class area of London much like the one in which Lodge grew up, *The Picturegoers* is an interesting and even ambitious work marred by melodramatic excesses. As the plural of its title implies, *The Picturegoers* deals with a fairly large number of more or less main characters.

Lodge's title also is indicative of his narrative method: abrupt cinematic shifts between the different plots, use of a similarly shifting focalizing technique, and a stylizing of the narrative discourse in order to reflect features of an individual character's verbal thought patterns. Of the seven main characters, Mark Underwood is the most important. A lapsed Catholic and aspiring writer, he arrives in London, rents a room in the home of a conservative Catholic family, the Mallorys, and falls in love with the daughter, Clare, formerly a Catholic novitiate. The affair will change them: Clare will become sexually awakened and then skeptical when Mark abandons her for the Catholicism from which she has begun to distance herself.

Interestingly, his return to the Church seems selfish and insincere, an ironic sign not of his redemption but of his bad faith. *Ginger, You're Barmy Dismissed* by its author as a work of "missed possibilities" and an "act of revenge" against Great Britain's National Service, *Ginger, You're Barmy* continues Lodge's dual exploration of narrative technique and moral matters and largely succeeds on the basis of the solution Lodge found for the technical problem which the writing of the novel posed: how to write a novel about the tedium of military life without making the novel itself tedious to read. Lodge solved the problem by choosing to concentrate on the action and double his narrator-protagonist Jonathan Browne's story.

The lodge focuses the story on the first few weeks of basic training, particularly Jonathan's relationship with the altruistic and highly, though conservatively, principled Mike Brady, a poorly educated Irish Catholic, who soon runs afoul of the military authorities; on the accidental death or perhapssuicide of Percy Higgins; and on Jonathan's last days before being mustered out two years later. Lodge then frames this already-doubled story with the tale of Jonathan's telling, or writing, of these events three years later, with Jonathan now married (to Mike's former girlfriend), having spent the past three years awaiting Mike's release from prison. The novel's frame structure suggests that Jonathan has improved morally from the self-centered agnostic he was to the selfless friend he has become, but he's telling problematizes the issue of his development.

Between Mike's naive faith and Jonathan's intellectual self-consciousness and perhaps self-serving confession there opens up an abyss of uncertainty for the reader.

The British Museum Is Falling Down

This moral questioning takes a very different form in Lodge's next novel. *The British Museum Is Falling Down* is a parodic pastiche about a day in the highly literary and (sexually) very Catholic life of Adam Appleby, a twenty-five-year-old graduate student trying to complete his dissertation before his stipend is depleted and his growing family overwhelms his slender financial resources. Desperate but by no means in despair, Adam begins to confuse literature and life as each event in the wildly improbable series that makes up his day unfolds in its own uniquely parodied style.

The parodies are fun but also have a semiserious purpose, the undermining of all forms of authority, religious as well as literary. Parodic in form, *The British Museum Is Falling Down* is comic in intent in that Lodge wrote it in the expectation of change in the church's position on birth control. The failure of this expectation would lead Lodge fifteen years later to turn the comedy inside out in his darker novel, *How Far Can You Go? Out of the Shelter*. Published after *The British Museum Is Falling Down* but conceived earlier, *Out of the Shelter* is a more serious but also less successful novel. Modeled on a trip Lodge made to Germany when he was sixteen, *Out of the Shelter* attempts to combine the Bildungsroman and the Jamesian international novel.

In three parts of increasing length, the novel traces the life of Timothy Young from his earliest years in the London blitz to the four weeks he spends in Heidelberg in the early 1950's with his sister, who works for the American army of occupation. With the help of those he meets, Timothy begins the process of coming out of the shelter of home, conservative Catholicism,

unambitious lower-middle-class parents, provincial, impoverished England, and sexual immaturity into a world of abundance as well as ambiguity. Lodge's Joycean stylization of Timothy's maturing outlook proves much less successful than his portrayal of Timothy's life as a series of transitions in which the desire for freedom is offset by a desire for shelter, the desire to participate by the desire to observe.

Even in the epilogue, Timothy, now thirty, married, and in the United States on a study grant, finds himself dissatisfied (even though he has clearly done better than any of the novel's other characters) and afraid of the future. Changing Places Lodge translates that fear into a quite different key in Changing Places. Here Lodge's genius for combining opposites becomes fully evident as the serious Timothy Young gives way to the hapless English liberal-humanist Philip Swallow, who leaves the shelter of the University of Rumbridge for the expansive pleasures of the State University of Euphoria in Plotinus (Berkeley). Swallow is half of Lodge's faculty and narrative exchange program; the other is Morris Zapp, also forty, an academic Norman Mailer, arrogant and ambitious.

Cartoonish as his characters—or rather caricatures—may be, Lodge makes them and their complimentary as well as parallel misadventures in foreign parts humanly interesting. The real energy of Changing Places lies, however, in the intersecting plots and styles of this “ duplex” novel. The first two chapters, “ Flying” and “ Settling,” get the novel off to a self-consciously omniscient but otherwise conventional start. “ Corresponding,” however, switches to the epistolary mode, and “ Reading” furthers the action (and the virtuosic display) by offering a series of newspaper items, press releases,

flysheets, and the like. “ Changing” reverts to conventional narration (but in a highly stylized way), and “ Ending” takes the form of a filmscript.

Set at a time of political activism and literary innovation, Changing Places is clearly a “ problematic novel” written by a “ novelist at the crossroads,” aware of the means at his disposal but unwilling to privilege any one over any or all of the others.

How Far Can You Go?

Lodge puts the postmodern plays of Changing Places to a more overtly serious purpose in How Far Can You Go? It is a work more insistently referential than any of Lodge’s other novels but also paradoxically more self-questioning: a fiction about the verifiably real world that nevertheless radically insists upon its own status as fiction. The novel switches back and forth between the sometimes discrete, yet always ultimately related stories of its ten main characters as freely as it does between the mimetic levels of the story and its narration.

The parts make up an interconnected yet highly discontinuous whole, tracing the lives of its ten characters from 1952 (when nine are university students and members of a Catholic study group led by the tenth, Father Brierly) through the religious, sexual, and sociopolitical changes of the 1960’s and 1970’s to the deaths of two popes, the installation of the conservative John Paul II, and the writing of the novel How Far Can You Go? in 1978. The authorial narrator’s attitude toward his characters is at once distant and familiar, condescending and compassionate. Their religious doubts and moral questions strike the reader as quaintly naive, the result of a narrowly Catholic upbringing. Yet the lives of reader and characters as well as

authorial narrator are also strangely parallel in that (to borrow Lodge's own metaphor) each is involved in a game of Snakes and Ladders, moving narratively, psychologically, socially, and religiously ahead one moment, only to fall suddenly behind the next.

The characters stumble into sexual maturity, marry, have children, have affairs, get divorced, declare their homosexuality, suffer illnesses, breakdowns, and crises of faith, convert to other religions, and join to form Catholics for an Open Church. All the while the authorial narrator of this most postmodern of post- Vatican II novels proceeds with self-conscious caution, possessed of his own set of doubts, as he moves toward the open novel. Exploring various lives, plots, voices, and styles, Lodge's artfully wrought yet ultimately provisional narrative keeps circling back to the question that troubles his characters: " How far can you go? " in the search for what is vital in the living of a life and the writing (or reading) of a novel. *Small World*

Lodge goes still further, geographically as well as narratively speaking, in his next novel. A campus fiction for the age of the " global campus," *Small World* begins at a decidedly provincial meeting in Rummidge in 1978 and ends at a mammoth Modern Language Association conference in New York one year later, with numerous international stops in between as Lodge recycles characters and invents a host of intersecting stories (or narrative flight paths). The pace is frenetic and thematically exhaustive but, for the delighted reader, never exhausting. The basic plot upon which Lodge plays his add-on variations begins when Persse McGarrigle—poet and " conference virgin"—meets the elusive Angelica Pabst.

As Angelica pursues literary theory at a number of international conferences, Persse pursues her, occasionally glimpsing her sister, a pornographic actress, Lily Papps, whom he mistakes for Angelica. Meanwhile, characters from earlier Lodge novels reappear to engage in affairs and rivalries, all in the international academic milieu. A parody of (among other things) the medieval quest, Lodge's highly allusive novel proves at once entertaining and instructive as it combines literary modes, transforms the traditional novel's world of characters into semiotics' world of signs, and turns the tables on contemporary literary theory's celebrated demystifications by demystifying it. At novel's end, Lodge makes a guest appearance, and Persse makes an exit, in pursuit of another object of his chaste desire.

The quest continues, but that narrative fact does not mean that the novel necessarily endorses the kind of extreme open-endedness or inconclusiveness that characterizes certain contemporary literary theories. Rather, the novel seems to side with the reconstructed Morris Zapp, who has lost his faith in deconstruction, claiming that although the deferral of meaning may be endless, the individual is not: "Death is the one concept you can't deconstruct. Work back from there and you end up with the old idea of an autonomous self." Nice Work Zapp's reduced expectations typify Lodge's eighth novel, *Nice Work*, set almost entirely in Rummidge but also—as in *How Far Can You Go?*—evidencing his interest in bringing purely literary and academic matters to bear on larger social issues.

The essential doubleness of this geographically circumscribed novel manifests itself in a series of contrasts: between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, literature and life, the Industrial Midlands and Margaret

Thatcher's economically thriving (but morally bankrupt) London, male and female, and the novel's two main characters. Vic Wilcox, age forty-six, managing director of a family-named but conglomerate-owned foundry, rather ironically embodies the male qualities his name implies. Robyn Penrose is everything Vic Wilcox is not: young, attractive, intellectual, cosmopolitan, idealistic, politically aware, sexually liberated, as androgynous as her name, and, as a temporary lecturer in women's studies and the nineteenth-century novel, ill-paid. The differences between the two are evident even in the narrative language, as Lodge takes pains to unobtrusively adjust discourse to the character.

The sections devoted to Vic, "a phallic sort of bloke," are appropriately straightforward, whereas those dealing with Robyn, a character who "doesn't believe in character," reflect her high degree of self-awareness. In order to bring the two characters and their quite different worlds together, Lodge invents an Industry Year Shadow Scheme that involves Robyn's following Vic around one workday per week for a semester. Both are at first reluctant participants. Displeasure slowly turns into dialogue, and dialogue eventually leads to bed, with sexual roles reversed. Along the way Lodge smuggles in a considerable amount of literary theory as Vic and Robyn enter each other's worlds and words: the phyllo and logocentric literal-mindedness of the one coming up against the feminist-semiotic awareness of the other.

Each comes to understand, even appreciate, the other. Lodge does not stop there. His ending is implausible, in fact flatly unconvincing, but deliberately so—a parody of the only solutions that, as Robyn points out to her students, the Victorian novelists were able or willing to offer to "the problems of

industrial capitalism: a legacy, a marriage, emigration or death. ” Robyn will receive two proposals of marriage, a lucrative job offer, and an inheritance that will enable her to finance the small company Vic, recently fired, will found and direct and also enable her to stay on at Rummidge to try to make her utopian dream of an educated, classless English society a reality.

The impossibly happy ending suggests just how slim her chances for success are, but the very existence of Lodge’s novel seems to undermine this irony, leaving *Nice Work* and its reader on the border between aspiration and limitation, belief and skepticism, the romance of how things should be and the reality, or realism, of how things are—a border area that is one of the hallmarks of Lodge’s fiction. *Paradise News* centers on the quest motif and the conflicts of a postmodern English Catholic. Bernard Walsh, a “skeptical theologian,” was formerly a priest but now teaches theology at the University of Rummage. Summoned, along with his father, to see his aunt, who left England after World War II and is now dying in Hawaii, Walsh signs up for a package tour to save money. The rumpled son and his curmudgeon father join a comic assortment of honeymooners, disgruntled families, and other eccentrics; Lodge calls an airport scene “carnavalesque.”

When the father breaks his leg on the first morning, Bernard must negotiate to bring his father and his aunt together so that his aunt can finally reveal and overcome the sexual abuse she suffered in childhood. Bernard’s journey to Hawaii becomes a journey of discovery in his sexual initiation with Yolande, who gently leads him to know himself and his body. A major theme, as the title suggests, is “paradise.” Hawaii is the false paradise—paradise lost, fallen, or packaged by the tourist industry—yet a beautiful, natural

backdrop is there, however worn and sullied. Paradise emerges from within the individuals who learn to talk to one another. The “ news” from paradise includes Bernard’s long letter to himself, which he secretly delivers to Yolande, and letters home from members of the tour group.

As with Lodge’s other novels, prominent themes are desire and repression in English Catholic families and a naive academic’s quest for self. In a complex tangle of human vignettes, Bernard moves from innocence and repression to an awakening of both body and spirit—an existential journey that is both comic and poignant. Therapy centers on another spiritual and existential quest. Lawrence (Tubby) Passmore, successful writer of television comedies, is troubled by knee pains and by anxiety that leads him, after reading the works of Soren Kierkegaard, to consider himself the “ unhappiest man. ” Seeking psychotherapy, aromatherapy, massage therapy, and acupuncture, Tubby moves through a haze of guilt and anxiety.

When his wife of thirty years asks for a divorce, he seeks solace with a series of women, with each quest ending in comic failure. Obsessed with Kierkegaard’s unrequited love, Tubby launches a quest for the sweetheart whom he feels he wronged in adolescence. Lodge’s concern with the blurring of literary forms is evident in Tubby’s preoccupation with writing in his journal, sometimes writing Browningsque monologues for other characters. Opening with an epigraph from Graham Greene asserting that writing itself is “ therapy,” Lodge takes Tubby through a quest for self through writing that coincides with a literal pilgrimage when he joins his former sweetheart, Maureen, on a hiking pilgrimage in Spain.

When Tubby, at last, finds Maureen, her recollections of their teenage romance minimize his guilt, and his troubles seem trivial in comparison with her losing a son and surviving breast cancer. In the end, Tubby is planning a trip (a pilgrimage) to Kierkegaard's home with Maureen and her husband. Tubby's real therapy has been self-discovery through writing in his journal; other therapies and journeys have failed. Intertwined with existential angst, Tubby's physical and psychological journeys are both comic and sad, with an underlying sense of the power of human goodness and the need to overcome repressions.