little-known documents

# David Lodge Interviewed by Chris Walsh

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY WILLIAM BAKER

## Introduction

THE EMINENT BRITISH NOVELIST AND LITERARY CRITIC DAVID LODGE WAS INTERVIEWED IN 1984 BY CHRIS WALSH, THEN A LECTURER IN English at St Mary's Teachers Training College, now St Mary's University, Twickenham, London. Lodge spoke about his background—his Catholic education and its influence on him, his early reading of Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh—and about literary criticism and fiction. The interview was published in the literary magazine *Strawberry Fare*, produced by the English department at St Mary's, which is situated on Strawberry Hill. During its short run, from 1981 to 1989, *Strawberry Fare* published fascinating interviews with leading literary figures, including, in addition to Lodge, Tom Stoppard, Seamus Heaney, Beryl Bainbridge, and others.[1] Today copies of the journal are extremely scarce. The only complete runs appear to be in the British Library (call number ZK.9.a.41) and in the archives of St Mary's.

Lodge's little-known interview is an important statement about his work, appearing just when he was beginning to develop a high profile as a novelist. Lodge, a leading Catholic intellectual and writer, had a particular interest in St Mary's, a Catholic teachers' college and later a university that "still had some kind of official Catholic status when *How Far Can You Go?*," his sixth novel, was published, in 1980. The novel, he recently told me, "was prescribed for a course in the English Department" but ran afoul of a father who objected to his daughter's reading it. The matter even went up for adjudication before the leading English Catholic at the time, Cardinal Basil Hume (1923–99), who decided in the novel's favor (Message [20 July 2013]).

The interview with Lodge falls into two parts. The first covers general topics: Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, and their impact on Lodge; "the appropriateness of the label 'Catholic novelist'"; and the situation of the "Catholic writer in England." Lodge discusses his first novel, *The Picturegoers* (1960), as well as *Ginger You're Barmy* (1962), *The British Museum Is Falling Down* (1965), *Out of Shelter* (1970), *Changing Places* (1975), and *How Far Can You Go?* (1980). Lodge and Walsh also talk about Lodge's critical

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work, including *The Language of Fiction* (1966) and *The Novelist at the Crossroads* (1971), and Lodge alludes to *Working with Structuralism* (1981) when he observes that "as a critic I am a populariser and domesticator of structuralism."

The first part of the interview took place before the publication of *Small World*: *An Academic Romance*, in 1984. Lodge tells Walsh that he is "feeling very pleased with it, but I suppose it's a reversion to comedy primarily. I'm now seeing it through the press and teaching, so I'm not actually writing anything creative at the moment. I'm not sure what the future holds. I haven't any specific idea for a new novel at present." Two years later *Write On: Occasional Essays, 1965–1985* was published, and *Nice Work* two years after that. In 1987 Lodge, who had been at the University of Birmingham since 1960, took early retirement to become a full-time writer. Both *Small World* and *Nice Work* were short-listed for the prestigious Booker Prize for fiction.

In the second part of the interview, conducted after the publication of *Small World*, Walsh draws Lodge out on the differences between that novel and his earlier fiction, the influence of the Grail legend on him, and the "metafictional, self-referring, literary-game-playing dimension"—in other words, the "intertextuality"—of his fiction. Lodge has confirmed to me that the interview "accurately reflects my sense of my own work at the time, and there's nothing in it that I would wish to disown," adding, "My fiction and my thoughts about it have changed somewhat over time since then, of course, as subsequent interviews show" (Message [2 Aug. 2013]). Lodge calls attention to one such interview, recorded in 2005 and reprinted in *Novelists in the New Millennium: Conversations with Writers*, edited by Vanessa Guignery. In her introduction to the interview, Guignery compares Lodge to two writers referred to in the *Strawberry Fare* interview, John Fowles (1926–2005) and Malcolm Bradbury (1932–2000). Like Fowles and Bradbury, Guignery writes, "Lodge does not hesitate to sometimes break the frame of fiction, bare the literary devices and expose their artificiality in a typically postmodern fashion" (86). Bradbury, a fellow academic and novelist, was a close friend of Lodge, and Lodge partly dedicated *The British Museum Is Falling Down* to him. The other dedication in *The British Museum* reads, "To Derek Todd (in affectionate memory of B.M. days)" (5). Todd, Lodge recounts, "was a contemporary of mine (though a few years older) as an undergraduate and postgraduate at University College London in the 1950s. We saw each other frequently in the Round Reading Room of the British Museum when researching our respective thesis topics." Lodge adds that "the character of Camel in *The British Museum Is Falling Down* is partly inspired by him." Todd "taught in the English Department of Queen's University Belfast and the University of Durham before his retirement. His publications include an interesting, idiosyncratic book on Shakespeare . . . *I am Not Prince Hamlet* (1974)" (Message [2 Aug. 2013]).

The editor of *Strawberry Fare*, Brian Firth, was an honors student in the English department at University College London at the same time as Lodge. Each earned one of the five first-class (top) degrees from University College in 1955, of the six awarded from all the constituent colleges of the University of London in that year: a vintage year for the college's English department. Firth went on to spend his teaching career at St Mary's, where Walsh also taught before becoming professor of English at the University of Chester.

## Notes

The text of the interview that follows is a transcription of the copy of *Strawberry Fare* generously sent to me by the archivist at St Mary's University. David Lodge, Chris Walsh, and Brian Firth, then editor of *Strawberry Fare*, have graciously allowed this interview to be republished. I am grateful to David Lodge for his thoughts on the interview and to Peter J. Kalliney for his astute observations on this document and my editorial commentary.

1. For further information on *Strawberry Fare*, see Miller and Price 327. Stoppard's interview was reprinted in *"The Real Thing": Essays on Tom Stoppard in Celebration of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (Stoppard). Chris Walsh's interview of Lodge is briefly cited in Bruce K. Martin's *David Lodge* (117, 119).

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# David Lodge Interviewed by Chris Walsh

**Chris Walsh:** I'd like to take as our starting point a remark by Graham Greene, a novelist you've written on, whose influence is clearly discernible in your early fiction; he once denied the appropriateness of the label "Catholic novelist"—he said he preferred to be regarded as a novelist who happens to be a Catholic. Is this how you see yourself?[1]

**David Lodge:** Yes, I think that's true. Any modern novelist is likely to repudiate ideological or religious labels like that. I don't suppose anybody would like to be called a Socialist novelist or a Methodist novelist, because there seems to be some kind of contradiction between doctrinal adherence and the freedom of the imagination. But I do think there is, or was, something called the Catholic novel and it seems to me silly to pretend that there was not a distinct sub-genre of which Greene himself was an exponent in the 1940's. There was a group of novels which explored questions of morality and belief in the Catholic framework and they had quite a strong family resemblance to each other. I don't think that kind of Catholic novel is being written any more.[2]

**Walsh:** To take up the point about artistic freedom, in *The Language of Fiction* you quote George Orwell who once remarked "How many Roman Catholics have been good novelists? Even the handful one could name have been bad Catholics." But you mention this à propos of Greene, who, you go on to say, made his Catholicism a positive artistic asset. It seems to me that in *How Far Can You Go?* you've done just that. How did you feel the two roles tied in when you were actually writing the novel?

**Lodge:** Most novelists have to start with their own experience, with a milieu they know. I couldn't write a novel about ballet dancers because I just don't know enough about the life they live, so if you are born and brought up a Catholic and have a Catholic education, or if like Greene you become converted to Catholicism, then almost inevitably Catholicism is going to be one of the ways in which you will organise your experience: that's going to come into your fiction in one way or another. I think that a Catholic writer in England who wants to write about Catholic subjects has both advantages and disadvantages. In some ways Catholic experience is foregrounded against a rather wishy-washy, secular, or vaguely Anglican, kind of culture,

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so it stands out: it seems interesting, slightly exotic . . . Catholics seem to lead more vivid moral lives.[3] Perhaps, in writers like Evelyn Waugh, the whole apparatus of Catholic theology seems old-fashioned, and indeed partly a kind of lur id drama, which was good for fiction—all kinds of surprising inhibitions and prohibitions make for good fiction. The negative element, the disadvantage, is that the assumptions and beliefs on which the novel is based are not generally shared or even understood, so the Catholic novelist writing in a country where Catholics are in a minority has to address himself to a pluralistic, largely secular audience and find ways of communicating the assumptions as well as the reactions of the characters to those assumptions.

**Walsh:** Does that explain those "telling" bits in *How Far Can You Go?* when you very much don the mantle of a lay moral theologian or historian?

**Lodge:** Yes, precisely.

**Walsh:** Did that strike you as a last resort or was there no other way of doing it?

**Lodge:** I think it was like most things in writing novels, a single solution to a number of problems. The genesis of the novel was the extraordinary changes the Catholic Church has undergone in my lifetime, from when I was a teenager to the mid-1970's, and I felt that this was a subject nobody had dealt with—even Catholics of my own generation—because they had lived through it at the tempo of ordinary time they had not realised really how extraordinary the changes were. And it seemed to me to do justice to the phenomena it would have to be a kind of sociohistorical novel about Catholic sub-culture. It couldn't be a conventional novel centred just on one character or one couple with minor characters around them. It had to be about a group of characters of more or less equal status in the novel, whose fortunes would illustrate particular things that have happened in Catholicism; and I knew I wanted a priest who ran into difficulties of belief and vocation, and a nun who similarly went through a revolution of habit and practices, and then there would be problems about birth control—*Humanae Vitae* and all that controversy would figure in it.[4] I knew the kind of things I wanted to get in, and I thought that some kind of structure which would follow the fortunes of a number of different Catholics, who would start off believing in the same thing but whose ways would gradually diverge and differ, was the answer to the question; but I also wanted a very fast-moving novel, to give a sense of speeding up the process of change, to make it more visible. I didn't want to write a big saga running to about a thousand pages in which every character would be very deeply realised. So if you have a novel with a large number of characters and a short space of text you have, I felt, to use authorial narration in a very summary way to establish the characters and move the story along briskly. Also it seemed to me that if this authorial voice was to be a means of communicating to the reader what the doctrinal background was, it would have to be rhetorically interesting in itself. It couldn't just give information, so it would be ironic, it would be satirical or whatever . . . in fact, I think the authorial voice is in a way the dominant discourse in the novel; that's how it came out. And then the next stage was really to start playing games with that authorial voice, in relation to my own historical personality, and giving it a rather ambiguous status in relation to the fictional characters, particularly at the end. So that was how the book took the form it did.

**Walsh:** I'd like to return later to the authorial voice itself, but a couple of other more general points first. Do you think that in writing that novel, or maybe *The British Museum is Falling Down*, there was a kind of therapeutic or confessional dimension, or was there perhaps more of an academic interest

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behind the impulse to write, springing from your study of the Catholic novel and Graham Greene in particular?

**Lodge:** Both *How Far Can You Go?* and *The British Museum* were, in different degrees, comic novels. And I think by then I had outgrown the academic interest anyway. You haven't, I'm glad to say, been able to trace my first novel, *The Picturegoers*, but that's a novel very much written in the shadow of Greene and partly in imitation of him. So too, actually, is *Ginger, You're Barmy* a very Greenean novel although it's not about religion. But yes, in the case of *The British Museum* there was certainly an element of releasing personal exasperation over the whole birth control issue at the time. I think one of the reasons most people write is to turn negative experience to positive account. In the case of *How Far Can You Go?* it's difficult to say really. I read quite a lot of theology in preparation for the book, and spent time thinking about the Church in a way I hadn't before—being a Catholic you tend to take so much for granted—and it brought me in a way to the edges of belief, I would say, writing that novel. I would like to think that as a result I have in some ways, a more honest and profound, but also a more provisional and metaphorical religious belief now than I had before, and this was partly due to the experience of thinking about all the issues and doing a certain amount of reading around them. But it wasn't meant to be in any way a confessional book of exhibits from my own life. I've drawn on the lives of many Catholics that I know, I've drawn on bits of my own, mixed them up and put them in different combinations. I also invented a great many things which I subsequently found had actually happened to people who wrote to me and told me of their experiences.

**Walsh:** Yes, I must say, *How Far Can You Go?* for me, is easily your most impressive novel. *Changing Places* was an exhilarating, highly entertaining read, but in the later novel it seems to me you're on a different plane altogether. As you say, it's not a comic novel exactly, there's much more to it than that. Now in *The Novelist at the Crossroads* you wrote "I like realistic fiction and tend to write realistic novels myself." That was 1971, eight years before *How Far Can You Go?* in which you have a self-conscious narrator. Of self-conscious narrators generally you say elsewhere that the point of such narrators is to expose "the artificiality of conventional realistic illusion." So why the change? And why the self-conscious narrator?

**Lodge:** Well, I think there are two things here really. It's a way of resolving a kind of tension or contradiction between two equally valid views. One is that realism is only a code, a set of conventions, rather limiting the writer, demanding that the reader accept the consensus about what reality is. So there's been a movement in the last decade or so away from a completely homogeneous, seamless realism of treatment in fiction because writers felt that this was constricting. We were talking earlier, before we started the interview, about *Out of the Shelter*, which was the last novel I wrote in that kind of mode: it's watertight realism in which the attempt is to recreate a totally plausible picture of the world which the reader enters into and forgets the real world he lives in while he's reading it. And that novel wasn't very successful, and the fact that it wasn't successful is what perhaps disillusioned me about that kind of realism. So what I'm saying is that as an artistic mode, an *écriture*, unqualified traditional realism is now suspect and not particularly attractive. On the other hand, realism as a set of conventions does actually correspond to the way that in the western civilised world we organise experience. I mean, we *do* think of ourselves as individual persons, we *do* exist in measurable space and time, we *do* have biological lives and when we grow old and die—well, this *does* appear to be real. OK. And there is in me a kind of basic

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commitment to recreating the sense of how things are. And I know that a lot of readers get great pleasure from the thrill of recognition in reading. So I *don't* want to write fantasy, I'm not at all attracted to that. I *do* want to write about recognisable reality, but without pretending that there is a simple one-to-one relationship between language and reality. So to me the sort of frame-breaking devices that I use in *How Far Can You Go?*—and to some extent in *Changing Places* and *The British Museum* in that there are changes of style which signal the artificiality—what I'm doing there most elaborately is creating an oscillating movement between the illusion of reality, an almost historical recreation of reality, and occasionally suddenly breaking that illusion, usually by the intervention of the authorial voice, so the reader is jolted between total illusion and a complete uncovering of the illusion and made then to think about the relationship between reality and representations of it. It did seem to me, too, that there was an analogy between the kind of provisional assent that we give to religious ideas and the kind of assent we give to literary fictions—we can't do without them, but on the other hand they're not ever fixed and final, they're always subject to revision and change, and you can only change them if you're aware that they *are* provisional. It's a rather long answer to your question.

**Walsh:** One thing which struck me is that somewhere else you refer to the problematic link between an omniscient narrator and an explicitly Christian perspective on events, and I wondered whether, given the nature of your subject-matter in *How Far Can You Go?*, you wanted to avoid making that link? You do stress the limitations of such a narrator in the novel . . .

**Lodge:** Yes. Right.

**Walsh:** But it also occurred to me that if your principal aim was to expose fictive and religious illusions then a self-conscious narrator was obviously the appropriate formal device to use: "to reach experience you must first repudiate realism" if you like.[5]

**Lodge:** Yes, that's true. I'm glad you think so. Writing to me is a problem-solving activity basically and as I said earlier if a book works it's because you've found a way of solving several problems at once with a single device. All novels involve a crucial choice about "how it's going to be done" and this need not be to do with the narrative method, it might be the book's time-span or whatever. For example, *The British Museum* and *How Far Can You Go?* are often said to be about the same subject—Catholic moral problems concerning sexuality—but in one the action takes place in one day while in the other it takes place over twenty-five years. Formally they're very different novels, saying very different things about the general subject of Catholic belief and morality.

**Walsh:** I agree. *How Far Can You Go?* is not *systematically* a self-conscious novel, is it? As you said, you continually move in and out of the realistic mode. At one point in the novel you say:

> But in matters of belief (as of literary convention) it is a nice question how far you can go in this process without throwing out something vital.

In experimenting in this way, in breaking the illusion of realism, how far do you think you *did* go? Do you think you went far enough? Too far?

**Lodge:** That's not really a question I can answer. Obviously I was *posing* a question there. To some extent it's a "swings and roundabouts" situation. If you disrupt the continuity of reading too much, you will lose certain readers because they haven't the patience. Clearly I think I got the balance about right or I wouldn't have left it the form I did. Critics tend to take different views about this.

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Some find it a difficult, challenging, rather chilly sort of book, others find it really not very radical at all. I suppose in terms of the literary avant-garde I'm considered basically a rather traditional novelist or one who is domesticating experimental post-modernist techniques and not really using them to radically challenge accepted ideas about knowledge and the self and so on. And I wouldn't deny that. Just as a critic I'm a populariser and domesticator of structuralism. That would be a fair comment on my fiction.

**Walsh:** So the middle way really?

**Lodge:** Yes.

**Walsh:** You've just pre-empted a question I was about to ask you about the critic and the novelist. It does seem to me that in both roles you're treading the *via media*, avoiding the wilder excesses of a B. S. Johnson or a Derrida while being prepared to experiment to the extent that you couldn't be classified as firmly traditional either.[6] Do you think "compromise" would be an unfair word to apply?

**Lodge:** No, I think compromise must be part of my nature and temperament. I'm not a person who takes up extreme positions or lives at extremes of experience. You shouldn't will yourself to do something that is against the grain of your personality. For example, I've a huge admiration for Samuel Beckett, but it would be absolutely futile for me to try and write like Beckett, to will myself into those extreme positions. He is a man who obviously lives at the very edge of sanity, and I fortunately don't. I live a rather normal, conventional life in the mid-stream so my novels are inevitably rather mid-stream novels.

**Walsh:** Can we move on to the question of "endings"? Perhaps novels are never really finished—just abandoned, to misquote Valéry. Why the predilection for open endings? And do you contemplate the possibility of a reversion towards closure in any future novel?

**Lodge:** Well, endings are clearly very important because in so far as a novel is saying something in general about life through a story, then how it ends is going to determine the ultimate impact it's going to make. When I'm writing a novel I more and more think of the process being not just verbal—a matter of merely finding the right words—because in a way the process is much more than that . . . one is practising a rather God-like activity, creating people who weren't there before, putting them in motion, deciding how their various interweaving fortunes are going to turn out. Every decision one makes carries some kind of philosophical or moral implication . . .

**Walsh:** "One does not kill off characters lightly, I assure you . . ."[7]

**Lodge:** Exactly. And how one ends the reader's experience of those fictional fortunes is obviously important. I almost never know how a novel is going to end because that is part of what I'm trying to discover, really. If I had a novel completely mapped out in my head I think I'd lose interest: writing it would just become hard labour. I like the experience of reaching unpredictable conclusions. But there comes a point when one has to make up one's mind what's going to happen. And I suppose it goes with modern scepticism about solutions to questions; modern literature, on the whole, doesn't present us with resolved endings . . . I suppose you could say that I'm doing the same thing as I do in relation to realism and breaking realism: my novels tend to raise the possibility of a neat, closed ending, but then maybe disperse it.

**Walsh:** And yet open endings are often *more* realistic, aren't they?

**Lodge:** Yes.

**Walsh:** Take, for example, the endings of *Changing Places* or *How Far Can You Go?* alongside that of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. One of the striking dis-

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similarities between Fowles's self-conscious narrator and yours lies in the decisions overtly taken by each about how to end the novel. Your endings come across as both more "open" and more "realistic."

**Lodge:** I must admit that in *Changing Places* I was influenced by *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. I found that a fascinating book—particularly the idea of giving the reader alternative endings, and in a way I do the same thing in *Changing Places*, but more farcically with the characters themselves discussing how the novel might end. I took that decision because *Changing Places* was such a symmetrical novel it would have been anticlimactic to resolve the basic question of who was going to go off with whom in the end. My artistic instinct told me that it ought to have an open ending, but that one could only get away with it through a kind of formal trick—the introduction of the film scenario. As you know, I have just written a sequel to this, *Small World*, and in that there is a sort of double ending: on one level there is the ending to end all endings (a kind of *Cymbeline* ending) in which all kinds of mysteries are resolved, but on the level concerned with the hero the story doesn't end at all—he is left there with his quest about to be renewed. So I suppose I try to have my cake and eat it again! But yes, this business of endings you've raised is an interesting one . . . In the case of this last novel, I had to stop writing it as I was nearing the end because term started, so I put it aside; but when I came back to it it came very easily. I saw exactly what had to be done, and I wrote the last chapter very rapidly. Writing endings when that happens is very satisfying.

**Walsh:** In an essay in Malcolm Bradbury (ed.), *The Novel Today* (1977), you take up Kermode on the novelist aiming to appease the reader's scepticism while satisfying his credulity at the same time.[8] And you refer there to the kind of novelist who lacks the orthodox novelist's confidence in the possibility of reconciling reality and fiction and who makes the *difficulty* of the task his subject matter. To what extent would this be true of *How Far Can You Go?*

**Lodge:** I'm not sure that I was consciously doing that, but I doubt whether I would have written this kind of novel in this kind of way if I hadn't discussed *as a critic* the question which Kermode's book raised. His *Sense of an Ending* was a very important book for me personally as well as being literary criticism of considerable standing and I think it had a lot of effect on both *Changing Places* and *How Far Can You Go?* It was part of the whole complex of thoughts and experience that these novels were written out of.

**Walsh:** Can we go back a little? In your dedication to *The British Museum* you almost sound as if you needed *persuading* to write a comic novel. I find that very difficult to believe, now. How serious were you in the writing of it? And did the ability to write comically really come as something of a surprise?

**Lodge:** Yes, the dedication is to Malcolm Bradbury, isn't it, and it says something like "whose fault it mostly is that I tried to write a comic novel." This was my third novel and my previous two, *The Picturegoers* and *Ginger You're Barmy*, although they had incidental humour, were basically rather dour, serious works, very much in the mould of Graham Greene, and I had never written anything consciously comic until Malcolm came to Birmingham in the early 1960's, just after I had become a lecturer, and he of course wrote specifically comic fiction and used to write also in those days for *Punch*, and we became friends and collaborated in writing a revue—it was the days of "Beyond the Fringe," and all that. And I found I had quite a knack for this, and there were one or two sketches which were really quite successful in their own way. I became interested in comedy and the whole business of making people laugh.

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When I began to think of writing a novel about the subject of Catholic hang-ups and problems over birth-control it seemed to me that to write a serious novel about this would be deeply embarrassing, but that if it were represented as part of the comedy of human sexuality that it could work for a non-Catholic audience. So it just had to be a comic novel. That's what prompted me to try to write ostensibly comic fiction. The dedication just expresses a certain hesitancy about somebody starting a new kind of novel, about whether it will really work or not, and it's almost an indirect acknowledgement of Malcolm's influence. And *The British Museum* turned out to be easily the most successful of my three novels to date. My next novel, *Out of the Shelter* (which I had actually conceived before *The British Museum*) was much more continuous with the first two novels—more realistic, sober—and it was a complete flop. And that made me think that if I was to get my fictional career going again I ought to go back to the comic mode, so then I wrote *Changing Places*. Then I began to think that I didn't want to swing between serious, realistic novels and farcical, stylistically experimental novels, so I thought that in *How Far Can You Go?* I would try to combine both.

**Walsh:** Yes, perhaps it's the critic in you which helps you to achieve that? If it's not too fanciful, you are in this novel "deconstructing" the "text" of Catholicism, and that gives you a certain objective perspective from which you're able to be humorous—but without losing sight of the serious commitment which prompted your deconstruction in the first place . . . That really brings me to my last question. At which crossroads—as novelist and critic—do you see yourself now, coming up to 1984?

**Lodge:** I feel very uncertain, actually. *Small World*, the novel which I've just finished, I'm feeling very pleased with, but I suppose it's a reversion to comedy primarily. I'm now seeing it through the press and teaching, so I'm not actually writing anything creative at the moment. I'm not sure what the future holds. I haven't any specific idea for a new novel at present . . . I hope I'll get one . . . but until I do I've no idea what kind of novel it's going to be. What I might do is revise *Out of the Shelter*, to see if I can make something of that book which I'm personally rather attached to and which I think could be of interest to those who haven't had an opportunity to read it (only about 2,000 copies were published and it's not easily available). Really, I've reached the point where I've got to make a number of decisions about whether I can go on producing criticism and fiction in alternation, which is what I've done up to now. I suppose it's not a bad position to be in!

Shortly after *Small World* was published Chris Walsh put some further questions to David Lodge who kindly agreed to answer them.

**Walsh:** *Small World* strikes me as a compelling development from *Changing Places* and a fascinating departure from *How Far Can You Go?* Your realistic fiction seems to be receding rapidly into the past. What gave you the idea of "the novel as romance"? And how difficult was it writing such a different kind of novel?

**Lodge:** The original idea for *Small World* was for a comic-satiric novel about what I came to call the "global campus"—the community of jet-propelled academics travelling about the world, mainly to conferences, sometimes on lecture tours, meeting each other and competing with each other in various exotic locations. The idea of the same set of faces popping up in slightly different combinations in different parts of the world to talk about the same things seemed to me to have plenty of comic potential, and I soon thought of all kinds of things that I wanted to get into such a novel. Quite early on, also, I decided that it would be fun to reintroduce some of the academic characters I had in-

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vented in *Changing Places*, especially Morris Zapp and Philip Swallow. Rather as with *How Far Can You Go?* but for different reasons, I decided that this novel needed a lot of characters from many different countries. But how were they going to meet and inter-act in a way that wouldn't produce a simply episodic series of separate encounters and adventures? How could I give the novel some kind of narrative shape and continuous narrative interest? At about this time I went to see the film *Excalibur* and that reminded me of what a tremendously powerful narrative the story of the Arthurian knights was,[9] and that gave me the idea of using a romance plot to give a shape and unity to my global campus novel: I thought there was an analogy between the errant knights and the modern wandering scholars, and that the Grail legend might provide a kind of underlying myth for my novel rather as the Odyssey had for Joyce, or indeed the Grail legend itself for Eliot in *The Waste Land*. Then I began to think more about romance and to feed more and more romance motifs into the novel, from ancient romance and Renaissance romance. The difficulty of the enterprise was, I think, preserving a delicate balance between the more-or-less realistic comedy of modern academic manners and the highly artificial, partly (but not entirely) parodic or travestied romance theme.

**Walsh:** The convergence of the critic and the novelist was for me one of the joys of this book but others, perhaps, may see it as a constricting, claustrophobic movement—the novel playing with itself, to be enjoyed only by a specialist academic élite. How would you respond to such a criticism? To what extent are you consciously attempting to create the taste by which you are enjoyed?

**Lodge:** I think all my novels since *The British Museum* (with the exception of *Out of the Shelter*) have had this metafictional, self-referring, literary-game-playing dimension, and the new one differs only in degree in this respect. The particular feature of this one is what we call in the lit. crit. trade "intertextuality" and such books are always likely to be accused of being élitist or wilfully obscure or whatever—for example *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, not that I'm presuming to compare my book with those. However I try to write novels that will be accessible and intelligible to any reasonably educated reader—anyone, in short, likely to be reading my work—but that will have little jokes and allusions hidden in it that will give pleasure to the more specialised reader who can recognize the specific literary allusions involved. For example, the heroine Angelica is modelled in part on a character of the same name in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, who has a magic ring with which she can make herself invisible at will to her male pursuers. Perhaps relatively few readers will actually recognize that allusion, but most will be familiar with the romance or fairy-tale motif of magical power to make oneself invisible and will sense the point of Persse's remark on page 45, "Was there ever such a girl for disappearing? . . . It's as if she had a magic ring for making herself invisible." Perhaps some might be prompted by references to Ariosto in the text to read his epic romance for themselves and thus get more out of the allusion in *Small World* at a second reading. I try to write novels that will bear more than one reading, and one condition of this is that the meaning shouldn't be immediately obvious at first acquaintance.

## Notes

1. See Lodge, *Graham Greene*. For Lodge's subsequent reflections on Greene, see "Lives" and "Graham Greene."

2. Lodge's MA thesis was titled "The Catholic Novel in England from the Oxford Movement to the Present Day." Readers familiar with Lodge as the author of campus novels and academic criticism may not realize the extent of his engagement with Catholic doctrine early in his career. In the interview he describes how the dominant culture

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of secular Anglicanism perceived Catholicism as an "exotic" or foreign religion. Lodge is aware that his work fits uneasily in a twentieth-century canon of British writers that includes Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, and Muriel Spark. As he recently wrote to me, "From Waugh I learned mainly comic technique—I never had much sympathy with his dogmatic triumphalist Catholicism," adding, "I had certainly read and written enthusiastically about Muriel Spark at the time of the interview, and can't think why I didn't mention her—perhaps because she was such an idiosyncratic writer that I didn't feel influenced by her, though the metafictional devices in *How Far Can You Go*? may owe something to her" (Message [15 Jan. 2014]).

3. All ellipsis points are in the original text of the interview.

4. The 1968 "papal encyclical (*Humanae Vitae*) . . . effectively took the issue of birth control off the table of official discussion" (Martin 117).

5. Chris Walsh was adapting a remark of Claude Lévi-Strauss's, which Lodge quotes on page 64 of *The Modes of Modern Writing* (Lodge, Message [11 July 2015]).

6. B. S. Johnson (1933–1973) was an experimental novelist. It should be noted that Lodge frequently refers to Derrida in his *The Practice of Writing* (193, 261–63, 265, 267, 269) but does not mention Derrida once in a subsequent interview with Vanessa Guignery (Interview).

At the time of the *Strawberry Fare* interview, Lodge still identified himself primarily as a university intellectual, talking about the demands of teaching and about balancing academic and literary work. As he explains it now, "I alternated a critical book and a novel throughout the years when I was an academic to indicate an equal professional commitment to both activities, though I always regarded writing a novel as the more difficult task and therefore more satisfying when it succeeded," adding that "once I retired from the university I quickly lost interest in keeping up with critical theory, but enjoyed writing critical essays for the general readers as a break from writing fiction" (Message [15 Jan. 2014]).

Lodge's comments in the interview imply that he became more enamored with postmodern techniques as he "matured," "partly inspired by critical interest and partly by exposure to postmodernist fiction, especially the American writers" that he discussed in *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977 [236–37, 240–45]). Lodge's reconsideration of his attachment to realist narrative readings in literary theory "grew out of engagement with both critical and creative work" (Message [15 Jan. 2014]).

7. This is a quotation from page 125 of his *How Far Can You Go?* (Lodge, Message [11 July 2015]).

8. Lodge, "Novelist." Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* was published in 1966; a second edition appeared in 2000.

9. *Excalibur* was distributed in 1981.

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