

WRITING BIBLIOGRAPHIES OR THE ART OF A MINIATURIST

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David Lodge is one of the best-known contemporary British writers. His novels reflect the main changes that have taken place in British fiction in the last four decades. If his first novels, *The Picturegoers* (1960), *Ginger, You're Barmy* (1962) and *Out of the Shelter* (1970) (we include this last one here because, although published in 1970, it was conceived much earlier), were written under the influence of the realistic trend prevailing in the fifties, *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965) revealed a new concern with formal experimentation and formal self-consciousness which he developed in *Changing Places* (1975), *How Far Can You Go?* (1980) and *Small World* (1984). This movement away from any pure kind of antimodernist writing, which was just a reflection of the state of British literature at that moment, is clearly seen in the use of a variety of techniques, such as parody, pastiche, binary oppositions, parallelisms, etc. But, like many of his fellow writers, in this voyage to new fictional lands, he never relinquished those aspects of the tradition that he considered valuable and which explains why he has defined his oeuvre as "basically antimodernist but with elements of modernism and postmodernism¹." As a matter of fact, with *Nice Work* (1988) the realistic mode comes back and comes to occupy a dominant position evidenced in his two latest novels: *Paradise News* (1991) and *Therapy* (1995). And again this new shift is linked to the situation of the literary scene which David Lodge has explained in a precise way:

There was a feeling in the nineteen seventies that realism was totally finished and if you wanted to be taken seriously as a novelist you had to be antirealist or irrealist in some way, metafictional or whatever. There are people who still believe that, but I think that in some ways the whole postmodernist experimental movement has lost a certain amount of impetus, particularly in America, where it started really. There are a lot of literary novelists now writing books in which the realistic convention is not seriously questioned or undermined².

But David Lodge's reputation rests not only on his career as a writer. He is also considered one of the ablest critics and theorists of the novel, who, as is the case with

his fiction, never adopts extreme positions. So, although his concern with defending the aesthetic richness of realism has led him to structuralism, he has only assimilated those aspects of this critical practice that help to improve the tradition of Anglo-American empiricism and liberal humanism to which he belongs. Thus, notions such as the death of the author or the belief that there is no relationship between literature and reality are bluntly rejected by Lodge. And it was precisely this search for a theory capable of analysing and categorizing literary discourse that Lodge came across Bakhtin's work in the eighties. The Russian thinker and literary critic has provided Lodge with a concept of the novel which transcends the opposition of humanism and poststructuralism. There are two aspects of Bakhtin's theory that Lodge has particularly stressed: on the one hand the concept of prose fiction as a polyphonic discourse, as a multiplicity of styles and voices that prevent the author from imposing a single point of view; on the other, the defence of the subversive and revolutionary power of comedy. And it could not have been otherwise since they brilliantly describe what he does as a writer: he allows his characters to speak in their own voices and uses humour as a liberating force that makes it possible for him to undermine literary forms and criticize institutions like the academic one.

A last point must be made and it is that we cannot separate Lodge the writer from Lodge the critic, since both facets illuminate each other. Not only do his novels move towards experimentalism as his critical work inclines to structuralism, but his main concerns as a theorist are embedded in his fiction. In this sense it is interesting to note how Lodge's return to a realistic, non-problematic kind of writing in the last years has coincided with his early retirement as a Professor of Modern English Literature at the University of Birmingham and his confession that as he drifts away from the academic institution he is losing interest in keeping up with literary criticism and theory³.

This brief summary of Lodge's achievements as a critic and writer provides, hopefully, a useful prologue to better measure the book we are reviewing here, *David Lodge. An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography*.⁴ The interest that Lodge's work has always awakened both inside and outside academic circles certainly warrants attention. Schürer's text provides us with an important study of the enormous amount of material written by and on David Lodge. This Bibliography opens with a "Foreword" and an "Introduction" (both to be dealt with later) and is divided into three parts, which we intend to analyse separately and in detail.

The first part, "Primary Literature. Works by David Lodge", is subdivided into two sections: "Published Written Works" and "Other Works". The former, as its title indicates, covers all the items written by David Lodge from 1954 to the beginning of 1994. We have used the word "item" on purpose, because one of the most remarkable aspects of this section is the variety of its material, which shows the thorough research that has been done. Besides essays, novels, reviews, etc. by Lodge, characteristic of this type of work, we find a varied and interesting miscellany such as letters to editors, an announcement by Lodge that he will be the editor of the next issue of a journal including calls for collaborations, Lodge listed as a contributor in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, the afterward ("Nachwort") of the German edition of *Changing Places*, a short notice in a newspaper where Lodge corrects another's misquotation, etc.

Lodge's writings are presented in chronological order and, since it is an annotated bibliography, in nearly each case their contents and Lodge's main ideas are summarized. Such an immense effort must be underlined and praised. In this sense, Schürer's

account of Lodge's critical books deserves special mention. When he deals with a text like *The Novelist at the Crossroads* which is mainly a collection of essays published earlier and therefore already well-explained, he directs attention to the way in which the essays have been arranged in the book and if anything new has been added he offers a summary of each addition. When, on the other hand, the work is original, as is the case of *Language of Fiction* or *The Modes of Modern Writing*, Schürer gives a meticulous analysis of the main ideas explored. It is a pity, though, that the same has not been done with Lodge's novels. With the exception of *The Picturegoers*, *Ginger*, *You're Barmy* and *Out of the Shelter*, where there is a brief reference to the introduction/afterword included in the edition of the text, there is no description of Lodge's creative writing. We can understand that since it is a bibliography and not a review, any kind of assessment or judgement should be avoided, but there is no danger of falling into partiality if the plot and the main technical strategies are included in this valuable reference work, since they have been fully outlined by critics and Lodge himself.

Of special interest and help is the fact that with each writing by David Lodge the reader is informed of whether it has been reprinted or repeated at a later date. When this is the case, not only are the outstanding differences between versions explained, but the reader is referred to later repetitions which appear separately in the book. This task is brilliantly done, since even minimal changes are explained: "Repeated from NC as chap. 6, pp. 119-144, notes pp. 287-288, with the second quotation from Greene's *The Heart of the Matter Missing* (p. 30)." Particularly interesting is the thorough job that has been carried out with all the articles that were published first in *The Independent on Sunday* and their subsequent modified collection in *The Art of Fiction*.

A last and serious point must be made about this first section. The inclusion of an unseen essay in an annotated bibliography diminishes one's faith in what is supposed to be a rigorous academic product. Perhaps, only those writings that have been read should be included.

The second section of the first part, titled "Other Works", presents items by David Lodge which have not been published in publicly available form. The material covered here is interesting and attractive because it goes beyond the written word to include audio versions, documentaries, a recorded interview or a screenplay. But once this has been said, criticism must follow. It is not only that again two texts that the author has not had access to are mentioned, but that we get the impression that most of the pieces included here were never read or listened to. None of the letters by Lodge are explained, as in the previous section, and the same can be applied to his M.A. thesis. There is also a recorded interview, the contents of which remain unknown, and two tapes which "presumably" are the audio versions of two essays. What does "presumably" mean? This lack of consistency is a bit disappointing since it clearly detracts from a section that, otherwise, could have been highly illuminating.

The second part of the book is titled "Secondary Literature. Works on David Lodge" and is subdivided into "Secondary Works by Authors" and "Anonymous Reviews". While the latter collects anonymous reviews on some of his main writings, the former includes a great variety of texts: essays, reviews of Lodge's books, reviews of books on David Lodge, interviews, biographical entries, lectures, short notices, abstracts, etc. and contains many cross-references which are very helpful for the reader. Nevertheless, and in spite of the amount of material presented here, we are left with the impression that the meticulous research that was done for part one is missing.

Firstly, the author refers to reviews and essays in languages other than English and German that he has not seen and which, therefore, do not, technically, belong in an annotated bibliography. Secondly, sometimes he mentions papers he has not been able to read because he does not understand the language they have been written in; it is obvious that the help of a translator could have been sought. Thirdly, in the “Foreword” Schürer states that he has collected writings on Lodge regardless of the language in which they have been produced; therefore, we expect plenty of references to publications in various languages, but very soon we discover that the compiler’s attention is basically limited to texts written in German, his mother tongue, and English. Fourthly, and closely related to the previous point, in the “Introduction” he claims to have collected all academic writings on David Lodge, but it is obvious that he ignores much of what has been printed in Europe, specially in Spain, where the interest that the work of Lodge has awakened in academic circles has led to the appearance of books, M.A. theses, essays, etc. on his creative and critical production.

By exposing these “flaws” we do not want to diminish the great task done by the compiler, which to a certain extent is excellent, but to suggest that when a bibliography is elaborated it is necessary to establish certain limits or otherwise parts of the final product will seem poor, if not, even, misleading.

With the third part Schürer tries to provide the reader with a guide that will help locate any kind of writing by and on Lodge. And here he is certainly successful, because the variety of indexes that are being offered make it very easy to find the information we are looking for. There is an “Index of Primary Literature” subdivided into “Works by David Lodge by Title”, “Works by David Lodge by Form”, “Works by David Lodge by Periodical”, “Books Reviewed by David Lodge by Author”, “Books Reviewed by David Lodge by Title” and “Subject Index”. This is followed by an “Index of Secondary Literature”, which consists of two parts: “Reviews of Books by David Lodge” and “Other Secondary Literature”.

We said at the beginning of this review that we would leave the “Foreword” and “Introduction” for the end and there was a justification for doing so. Whereas the three parts in which the book is divided show a sound understanding of ideas and concepts, the “Foreword” and “Introduction” are characterized by what we would call their immaturity. There seems to be not only a lack of cohesion, but the notions about Lodge’s work that the author puts forward as his own and therefore original and new, like Lodge being a “Man of Letters” or there existing a close relationship between his creative and critical writings, are already clear to all those who have been interested in the writer’s achievements. The emphasis that is put on Lodge’s lack of cooperation with the author of this bibliography is also vulnerable to very serious criticism. On the one hand, it seems that Lodge is apparently responsible for the “flaws” of the book. On the other, the image it gives of a well-known writer refusing to collaborate with a young man writing his first book is rather misleading. Those of us who have had the opportunity of meeting him personally have had very different experiences. In 1989, when we were about to finish our PhD on the novels by Lodge, we sent him a letter “out of the blue” asking him if we could interview him. The reply arrived very soon and a few months later we found ourselves talking to a successful writer who was also a kind, helpful human ready to collaborate and cast light on our doubts. Again, he has often been invited to Universities to talk to students and has always answered their questions, questions he has heard thousands of times before, with such enthusiasm and amiability as if it was the first time he had heard them.

But we do not want to finish this review on a sour note. We really believe that this is an excellent book, the result of thorough and meticulous research and our aim with our comments has only been to indicate those aspects that we think should be revised in order to improve the final result.

Notes

1. David Lodge, *Working with Structuralism. Essays and Reviews on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Literature* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1986) 16.
2. Aída Díaz Bild, "On Realistic Fiction and Bakhtin: A Conversation with David Lodge," *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, 19/20 (Noviembre 1989/Abril 1990): 266-267.
3. David Lodge, *After Bakhtin. Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990) 8.
4. Norbert Schürer, *David Lodge. An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1995).