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## Campus Fiction and David Lodge

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The campus novel is a novel whose main action is set in and around the campus of a university. This sub-genre dates back to the late 1940s and may describe the reaction of a fixed socio-cultural perspective (the academic staff) to new social attitudes (the new student intake). In other words, the campus novel “incorporates an institution of higher learning as a crucial part of its total setting and ... includes, among its principal characters, graduate or undergraduate students, faculty members, administrators, and/or other academic personnel.” (Kramer ix) *The Groves of Academe* by Mary McCarthy is one of the first examples of this sub-genre which was written in 1952. However, for some C.P. Snow’s *The Masters* (1951) is the first example of this sub-genre. Randall Jarrell’s *Pictures from an Institution* (1954) gave a further thrust “to the new genre, though Vladimir Nabokov had already embarked upon the *Pnin* (1955) when it appeared. What the three novels have in common is a pastoral campus setting, a ‘small world’ free from the hustle and bustle of modern urban life, in which social and political behaviour can be amusingly observed in the interaction of characters whose intellectual pretensions are often let down by their very human frailties. The campus novel was from its beginning, and in the hands of the latter exponents like Alison Lurie, Malcolm Bradbury and others, an essentially a comic sub-genre, in which serious moral issues are treated in a ‘light and bright and sparkling’ manner.” (Johnson)

Veronika Šaurová quoting Martin Hilský who wrote about the ‘campus novel’ in *Současný britský roman* (Contemporary British Fiction) that ...its existence as an independent genre is in contemporary Anglo-American literature influenced by the ever growing importance of the universities [...] and by the fact that more and more British and American authors are teachers of English literature or creative writing at the universities and for most of them the university is the only social setting which they know in detail. The ‘campus novel’ develops in a more or less specialized community and addresses a more or less specialized public which is able and willing to appreciate the numerous elements of literary parody. The ‘campus novel’ is thus defined as a satirical comedy with strong elements of parody. Most of these novels take place in a provincial town and at a small provincial university, mostly right in the English department. [...] The main character is always a teacher of humanities (mostly of English literature of course, sometimes of history or sociology) and mostly without exception makes some scandal. Either he gives an inflammatory public lecture in which he more or less accidentally tells what he really thinks thus leading to conflict with the head of department or, more recently, often has some kind of disagreement with his students. An accompanying feature of his academic life is his inordinate and adventurous erotic life (a relationship with the wife of the department head or some of his colleagues is almost an obligate motif) and the whole range of embarrassing social situations loosely connected with the teachers’ job. (104)

There are other definitions of the ‘campus novel’ as well. For instance in *The Routledge History of Literature in English*:

In Britain, the academic as novelist tends towards comedy. [...] The setting is often a university or college, the characters often academics or writers. The problems, however, remain the standard concerns of love and money, religion (especially in Lodge, who is arguably the most significant Catholic novelist of his generation), and success or failure. Where, in earlier writing, success was seen in social terms, here the scope is often reduced to

academic success, with the result that there is a profoundly comic questioning of the whole ethos of success, failure, career, and private life, extending well beyond the English university system. Both writers (David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury) use their experience of travel and other cultures to examine the ambivalence of the attitudes of the newly educated mass readership which has benefited from the worldwide expansion in education and social awareness. Both are also highly aware literary critics, particularly strong on Modernism and modern critical theory. (513)

Or according to The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms:

Campus novel is a novel, usually comic or satirical, in which the action is set within enclosed world of university (or similar set of learning) and highlights the follies of academic life. Many novels have presented nostalgic evocations of college days, but the campus novel in the usual modern sense dates from the 1950s: Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952) and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) began a significant tradition in modern fiction including John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), David Lodge's *Changing Places* (1975), and Robertson Davis's *The Rebel Angels* (1982). (Baldick 30)

On the other hand, Showalter observes that "the genre [campus novel] has risen and flourished only since about 1950, when post-war universities were growing rapidly, first to absorb the returning veterans, and then take in a larger and larger percentage of the baby-booming population. The nature of higher education in America and Britain had a lot to do with it too. Most of our universities act in loco parentis for students, creating a complete society on the campus, with housing, meals, medical care, and social life all provided communally and institutionally. They actively foster personal relations between students and faculty. Moreover, the curriculum usually includes a program in creating writing; as a result, most faculties include a few professional writers who can observe the tribal rites of their colleagues from an insider's perspective.

"Of course, students have long been important characters in fiction; coming-of-age narratives and Bildungsromane have been numerous from early days. To me, however, the most interesting academic novels are about the faculty the lifers – what one critic called Professorromane. I found these stories entertaining, inspiring, and instructive." (1-2)

However, David Lodge is of the view that

In English "campus novel" is a term used to designate a work of fiction whose action takes place mainly in a college or university, and which is mainly concerned with the lives of university professors and junior teachers – "faculty", as they are collectively known in America, "dons" or "academic staff" in England – and to a lesser extent with their students, both undergraduate and postgraduate. In the campus novel, students are usually objects perceived by the academic staff, rather than subjects from whose point of view the story is told. This emphasis on the teachers rather than on their students is a distinctive feature of the campus novel, which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. Before that time there were many novels about student life, and university education is often an important episode in novels of the kind named by German criticism the Bildungsroman, the novel of a young man's emotional and psychological development from youth to maturity; but we do not find before the Second World War, except for a few murder mysteries, novels focussed on the professional and private lives of university teachers. An alternative name for the campus novel is "academic novel," and some critics who write on the subject prefer it. I shall use these terms more or less interchangeably. "Academic novel" is perhaps more inclusive, but "campus novel" is more expressive of the unity of place which characterises the genre.

It is significant that the campus is still considered so remote from most people's lives that the label 'pastoral' is considered appropriate, portraying an isolated society remote from the lives of ordinary people.

This is an older tradition, again. "I compare it to pastoral," says Lodge. "If you think of a comedy such as *As You Like It*, you get all these eccentric characters, all in one pastoral place, interacting in ways they wouldn't be able to do if they were part of a larger, more complex social scene. There's often an element of entertaining artifice, of escape from the everyday world, in the campus novel. Quite interesting issues are discussed, but not in a way which is terribly solemn or portentous." (Edemariam)

"Campus" is, of course, an American word, and David Lodge makes the distinction between the campus novel and the varsity novel – the latter being set at Oxbridge, and usually among students, rather than teachers, thus disallowing the joys of Zuleika Dobson, or Jill, or *Brideshead Revisited*; he claims Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) as the first British campus novel, and a template. (Ibid)

To all the standard elements, Lodge explains, Amis added that "the English comic novel tradition, which goes back through Evelyn Waugh and Dickens to Fielding; that is, an element of robust farce later elaborated by Tom Sharpe in *Porterhouse Blue*, for example, or by Howard Jacobson in *Coming From Behind*(1983)." (Ibid)

NO doubt, the campus or university or college or academic novel (as some call it because it deals with the lives and follies of academics) proper doesn't start until the mid 20th-century, but "there are some 19th-century precursors. Anthony Trollope's comic masterpiece *Barchester Towers* (1857) is the great ur-narrative of academic politics, even if it is about the bickering of provincial Anglican clergy over preferment and evangelical reform. Trollope's wrangling, rivaling Victorian clerics remind us of contemporary academics, with assistant professors, deans, and provosts standing in for curates, deacons, and bishops; and many authors of academic fiction, from CP Snow on, have been Trollope scholars." (Showalter 6)

However, "the supreme 19th century academic novel remains George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872), and Eliot's Mr Casaubon is the most haunting spectre of the academic as a grim pedagogue, the scholar as the spirit of all that is sterile, cold and dark. Casaubon has no small talk, but only a large, sad, musty talk of dead things." (Showalter 7)

"Another novel along the same lines, one that must have been influenced by George Eliot, is Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* (1925). Cather too writes about the midlife crisis of a male academic, Godfrey St Peter, burned-out although he is only fifty-two years of age. Unlike Casaubon, St Peter is a historian, whose life's work, an eight-volume study of the Spanish Adventurers in North America, has won him acclaim, even the Oxford prize for history. But the meaning seems to have gone out of his life and his teaching; at the novel's conclusion, he is resigning himself to spending the remains of his days without delight." (Showalter 8)

Likewise, James English argues that the post-war writers incorporated the controversies of education and culture in their novels, but "there existed already a tradition of novels about, or partly about, student life – a tradition associated with Oxford dandyism and including Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson*(1911), Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street* (1913-14), Beverley Nichols's *Patchwork* (1920), and Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945)." (132)

When English professors write novels, they tend to write about what they know best: other people's books. Even in some of the most celebrated and familiar academic satires, rewriting literary conventions is as important as mocking campus attitudes. Many of the best and most successful academic novels of the past 50 years have been rewritings of Victorian novels. For instance, Gail Godwin based her academic novel *The Odd Woman* on Gissing's masterpiece about Victorian feminism, *The Odd Women*. Similarly, *In Nice Work*; David Lodge rewrote the genre of the English industrial novel, particularly Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, to describe the tensions between the modern university and the world of business. Novels about professors are set in academic time, which is organised and



compartmentalised according to various grids and calendars, vacations and rituals. Some of the characters have names that allude to that system, such as Annie Calendar in Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man*. (Showalter 9)

Thus we have seen that several writers have contributed to the realm of campus fiction, for instance, Mary McCarthy, Kingsley Amis, Randall Jarrell, Vladimir Nabokov, Malcolm Bradbury, and others. The contribution of David Lodge to this sub-genre is outstanding as he has established it as a distinct genre by writing four novels. The four novels set the standards of the genre and reflect his critical theory about the form. As Nick Rennison comments:

In the early 1980s the English campus novel, a seemingly moribund form, was given new life by two writers. One was David Lodge, whose novels of transatlantic academics, enmeshed in misunderstandings and misalliances, reworked themes aired in earlier books by himself, Malcolm Bradbury and others. The other was Howard Jacobson.... (94)

Lodge's first Campus novel was *Changing Places* (1975) which "cemented Lodge's reputation as a popular novelist in England" (Metzger 229) and "solidified Lodge's reputation as a leading writer of 'campus novels'." (Marowski 266) Inspired by his experience of teaching in California, the novel centres on two academicians: an Englishman, Phillip Swallow, from the University of Rummidge in the West Midlands and Morris Zapp, an American, from the State University of Euphoria (California). The two professors are shown participating in "an exchange programme" when they swap politics, lifestyles and even their wives. Zapp successfully brings his experience with student unrest to bear on problems at Rummidge, while Swallow successfully becomes a part of the unrest at Euphoric state. Throughout the novel Lodge displays "an academic self-consciousness about writing a novel, including the book's last lines, 'PHILIP shrugs. The camera stops, freezing him in mid-gesture'." (Stade 235)

*Small World: An Academic Romance* (1984), Lodge's second campus novel, develops Zapp and Swallow's story of *Changing Places*. They are only two of the many characters who jet around the globe from one academic conference to another in search of glory, romantic trysts, and the UNESCO chair of literary criticism – a job with virtually no responsibilities and a \$100,000 tax free salary. In this novel, a new character – lovely and chaste Angelica is included who, true to Lodge's sense of symmetry, has a twin sister who is a stripper. Lodge fills the novel with references to other works of literature, particularly those of the romance tradition. Angelica is writing a thesis on the history of the romance, and the plot of the novel is an updating of the Arthurian quest romance. The young hero Persse (i.e., Percival) seeks the chaste Angelica, and as Percival is in Arthurian legend a "wise fool", so is the unsophisticated and relatively unlettered Persse when he confounds all the learned scholars who are supposedly his intellectual superiors when he asks, "What do you do if everybody agrees with you?" (Lodge 557) He doesn't win Angelica but instead embarks on a new quest as the novel ends, this time pursuing a naïve airline attendant, Cheryl Summerbee. As Michael Rosenthal writes in *The New York Times Book Review*:

[This] exuberant, marvelously funny novel demonstrates [that] no one is better able to treat the peripatetic quality of current academic life than the British writer David Lodge.... Despite the novel's breathless pace, profusion of incident and geographic scope, Mr Lodge never loses control of his material. His deliberately outrageous manipulation of character and event is entirely successful. (Rosenthal 7)

Lodge's next and third campus novel, *Nice work* (1988), deals with the story of industrialist Vic Wilcox and his unlikely relationship with the Marxist, Feminist and Post-Structuralist academician Dr Robyn Penrose. The novel is set in the industrial heartland of Thatcherite Britain in the early 1980s. The Managing Director of an engineering company (Vic Wilcox) and a university lecturer (Dr Robyn Penrose) are brought together against their will. The Industry Year "Shadow Scheme" is a government scheme to help thinkers from the

academic world to comprehend the practical side of the industrial world. Accordingly, Vic Wilcox is assigned Robyn Penrose from the University of Rummidge for a semester and initially they do not like each other, particularly because Vic was expecting a man (“Robin”). She (Robyn Penrose) starts pestering Vic, specifically when she interferes with a human resourcing problem, which results in industrial action. Gradually they begin to like each other, at least in their point of view and it becomes a case of unlike poles attract. Till now, Vic has never come across anyone in his life like Robyn and he becomes obsessed with her, particularly after an official visit to Frankfurt, where her linguistic skills facilitate him to fetch an important business contract. They both require to organize their complex lives and the consequences of the ‘Shadow Scheme’ help them to perceive things from a different approach and make significant decisions about their coming life.

Lodge’s fourth and so far the last campus novel, *Thinks...* (2001), centres on Ralph Messenger, the Director of the prestigious Holt Belling Centre for Cognitive Science at the fictional University of Gloucester and Helen Reed, a novelist who has come to work at the university. Ralph is a scientist and he is researching to explain one of the most typical features about human consciousness: its bewildering combination of spontaneity and order, the quick-silvery way our thoughts appear to split up and flow back together. Helen Reed, a recently widowed novelist who has been appointed by the university to teach a course in creative writing, ends up fascinated by consciousness studies – and is taken aback by how callously it rejects familiar notions about the personal lives of human beings. She gradually develops ambivalent, though passionate, attachment to Messenger himself. Using stream-of-consciousness technique, third person omniscient point of view in narration and e-mails, the novel swings between the two characters bringing out their contrasting attitudes towards sexual morality, mortality, and human consciousness itself (subject of the academic conference that concludes the book). The book functions in effect as a very amusing seminar, both on the current state of consciousness studies and the process of writing. As ever, Lodge manipulates his cost of staff, students, the art of writing, morality etc., but all in a good-humoured way.

Thus, in all his campus novels, David Lodge scoffs at his own world of university, poking fun at the university teachers who wrap themselves in theories of the outside world while never actually experiencing it. All these novels are filled with characters whose speech and behaviour are sometimes silly and absurd, as are the situations in which they find themselves. As a Chicago Tribune reviewer said, “David Lodge seems to have the heritage of the British intellectuals and the Keystone Kops”, (Stade 235) but there is none of the malice in his work that one finds in Evelyn Waugh, with whom he is frequently compared. Critics find him gentle in his humour; as a reviewer for the Christian Science Monitor said, “Whether he is speaking of city types pushing paper for fun, the academics indulging in psychobabble, or the measurement of corporate success, he mocks these absurdities without resorting to cynicism.” (Stade 235)

Lodge’s art of making his novels lively and readable in spite of the technicalities is because of his art of humour. David Lodge is popular not only in the general reading public but also among the literary connoisseurs who rate him as one of the foremost novelists and critics of today. Linda R. Williams wrote about his two Campus novels, *Changing Places* and *Small World*: “...inventive, humorous tales of academic life, full of jokes, puns, allusions, parodies, and reflexive comments on the nature of narrative which reflect his interest in critical theory. (224)

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