



CATHOLIC QUESTIONS IN DAVID LODGE'S NOVELS

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There is a distinguished roll-call of English writers who have been Roman Catholics: Newman, Hopkins, Chesterton, Waugh, Greene, David Jones, and Muriel Spark. But nearly all of them were converts to Catholicism. This fact separates them from the majority of their co-religionists, the 'cradle-Catholics' whose religion was passed on from their families, and, who, apart from a small number of upper-class 'Old Catholics', were working or lower middle class, with a strong admixture of Irish immigrants. Their educational attainments and ambitions tended to be limited, and did not often turn them towards literature.

Young people from such a background who took advantage of new educational opportunities and became socially mobile often abandoned Catholicism in the process. This has long been the case with Irish writers, most famously Joyce, though his work remained profoundly marked by the religion which he had abandoned. A number of recent English writers have been lapsed Catholics, who look back on Catholicism with affection or hostility, or elements of both. Examples include John Braine and Anthony Burgess, both of Northern English Catholic religion, and a succession of women authors seeking revenge for their convent education (Bergonzi B., *The Decline and Fall of the Catholic Novel*, 1986).

David Lodge is unusual in being a cradle-Catholic from a lower-middle-class family in South London who is a successful writer and who continues to regard himself as a Catholic, though his ideas about religion have greatly changed over the years. In *Memories of a Catholic Childhood* he described his origins, which were not altogether typical of a cradle-Catholic culture, since he was an only child and his father was not a Catholic:

My mother was a dutiful but undemonstrative daughter of the Church. I was given a Catholic schooling, but the atmosphere at home was not distinctly Catholic. There was no great profusion of holy pictures and statues in the house, religion was a topic rarely touched on in conversation, and there was little of the regular and complex social interaction with parish clergy and laity that is a feature of the typical large devout Catholic family. I had no brothers or sisters to reinforce the Catholic cultural code, and my friends in the same street happened not to be Catholic. The result was that as a child I always felt something of an outsider in the Church, anxious to belong, to be accepted, yet hanging back on the periphery through shyness, absence of familial pressure and inadequate grasp of the relevant codes. (Write On, 1986: 28-32)

The sense of being in the Church and at the same time something of an outsider can be traced in Lodge's novels, which combine detailed knowledge of the institution with cool observation. At school he acquainted the idea of the theological foundations of Catholic belief and developed 'a respect for and fascination with its subtleties and complexities'.

Reading Joyce and other modern authors extended his intellectual horizons: '*I became more critic of the Catholic "ghetto" culture that I encountered in the parish and at school, especially its suspicious hostility towards the arts. When I discovered **A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man** I identified immediately with Stephen Daedalus, though I had neither the courage nor the urge to rebel on so spectacular a scale.*' (Bergonzi B., *David Lodge Interviewed*, 1970: 45)

Graham Greene, Francois Mauriac and other authors offered new possibilities within a Catholic world-view, '*presenting authentic religious belief as something equally opposed to the materialism of the secular world and to the superficial pieties of parochial Catholicism.*' (Bradbury, M. and D. Palmer, **The Contemporary English Novel**, 1979: 65)

They drew the sinner as a representative Christian in a way that was exciting to an adolescent with literary ambitions: '*being a Catholic need not entail a life of dull, petty-bourgeois respectability. The extreme situations and exotic settings on which these writers thrived were, however, very remote from my experience; and when I came to try and write fiction for myself I domesticated their themes to the humdrum suburban parochial milieu that I knew best.*' (Lodge D., 1966:89)

Lodge's first four novels all contain Catholic characters, but he does not put them through high spiritual dramas. He is much more interested in the subculture of English (or Hiberno-English) Catholics and their dealings with the rest of society. The problems that arise from following their beliefs are more likely to be treated comically than melodramatically. In **The Picturegoers** he presented the *typical* large devout Catholic family, with an Irish mother and an English convert father basing it on his wife's family rather than his own. Kingsley Amis in a favorable review of **The Picturegoers** described it as a '*Catholic novel, but written without the nose-to-the-grindstone glumness, all sin and significance, that the phrase often implies*' (Lodge, D., **About Catholic Authors**, 1958:34).

Amis rightly praised Lodge's *social eye*: here and in his other early novels the frame of reference is sociological rather than theological, with much close observation of the minutiae of lower-middle-class Catholic life.

When Mark Underwood first enters the Mallory household, he soon encounters the signs of Catholic devotion: '*the plastic holy water stoup askew on the wall, the withered holy Palm, stuck behind a picture of the Sacred Heart which resembled an illustration in a medical text-book, and the statue of St. Patrick enthroned upon the dresser*' (**The Picturegoers**, 1933:44). This milieu has rarely been caught in English fiction, for the convert Catholic writers had little knowledge of it, and the closest parallels are in Joyce's domestic interiors.

Though the implied attitudes in **The Picturegoers** are entirely orthodox, in ways that seemed remote to Lodge when he wrote his preface to the 1993 reissue, there are elements of distancing irony directed at some of the more extreme manifestations of Catholic fervor. There is the odious Damien O'Brien, an Irish ex-seminarian who lives next door to the Mallorys and lusts after Clare. He is permeated with pharisaical piety, and Lodge gives him the malign vitality of a Dickensian caricature; he is described, in a Greene-ish simile as '*carrying his failure before him like a monstrosity*' (1933:54).

And there is Father Kipling, the parish priest of Brickley, who starts a campaign against the sinfulness of the cinema. E is an amiably ridiculous figure, whose portrayal suggests the mild anti-clericalism sometimes found in cradle-Catholics (more precisely, cradle-Catholic men).

In **Ginger, You're Barmy** the principal Catholic character is the Irish rebel, Mike Brady, to whom we never become very close, as we know him only through the narrative

of his agnostic and ultimately disloyal friend, Jonathan Browne, who is dismissive of Mike's religion. He does, though, recall a poem Mike has written attacking contraception; an ironical touch, in the light of Lodge's next novel, **The British Museum is Falling Down**. That book broke entirely new ground for a Catholic novel, and despite its comic elements dealt with a serious subject: the ban on contraception and the restiveness that was beginning to be felt about it by married Catholics in the 1960s. Adam Appleby embodies the hopes that were in the air as the Second Vatican Council opened in 1962. Early in the story he gives a lift on his motor-scooter to Father Finbar, an *echt* Irish curate from his parish church, and tries to raise the possibility of a change in the teaching on birth control. Father Finbar will consider no such possibility; as far as he is concerned, the Church's teaching never changes on any subject whatsoever, and the true purpose of marriage is to procreate children and bring them up in the fear and love of God. Adam is hardly surprised, for he and his wife already regard him as the Priest Most Likely to Prevent the Conversion of England. Later in the day he meets a priest of a very different kind, the radical Dominican, Father Bill Wildfire, who wears workmen's clothes and occupies dangerously advanced theological territory: *'I was preaching at a men's retreat the other day, and told them, better sleep with a prostitute with some kind of love than with your wife out of habit. Seems some of them took me at my word, and the bishop is rather cross.'* (**The British Museum is Falling Down**, 1981: 70)

Father Wildfire is sympathetic to Adam's difficulties, but the priest's real concern is in larger spiritual dramas: *'In contrast, Adam's moral problem seemed trivial and suburban, and to seek Father Wildfire's advice would be like engaging the services of a big-game hunter to catch a mouse.'* (1981: 72)

Father Finbar and Father Wildfire, contrasting caricatures as they are, reflect the divisions that were appearing in English Catholicism and which would deepen over the years finding no satisfaction, Adam retreats into his Corvine fantasy of becoming pope and decreeing all methods of birth control acceptable, with the result that *'so many lapsed Catholics are returning to the practice of their Faith that the Churches cannot accommodate them.'* (80) But in practice only the rhythm method, or safe period, was permitted to practicing Catholics. Adam has already engaged into a fantasy about that, an imaginary article on 'Roman Catholicism' for a Martian encyclopedia compiled after life on earth had been extinguished by nuclear war:

'Intercourse between married partners was restricted to certain limited periods determined by the calendar and the body-temperature of the female. Martian archaeologists have learned to identify the domiciles of Roman Catholics by the presence of large numbers of complicated graphs, calendars, small booklets full of figures, and quantities of broken thermometers, evidence of the great importance attached to this code. Some scholars have argued that it was merely a method of limiting the number of offspring; but as it had been conclusively proved that the Roman Catholics produced more children on average than any other section of the community, this seems untenable. Other doctrines of the Roman Catholics included a belief in a Divine Redeemer and in life after death.' (16).

At the end of the novel, Adam's wife proves not to be pregnant after all, which brings immediate short term relief, but the large issues remain unresolved. Lodge himself wrote in his **Introduction** to the new edition of 1981: *'Like the most traditional comedy, The British Museum is Falling Down is essentially conservative in its final import, the conflicts and misunderstandings it deals with being resolved without fundamentally disturbing the system which provoked them. (That more fundamental disturbance is the subject of How Far Can You Go?)'* (3)

The British Museum is Falling Down was published in 1965, the year in which the Second Vatican Council completed its sessions. That great assembly of bishops from all over the world, called by Pope John XXIII to update in effect the Catholic Church, brought about many changes. Latin was replaced by the vernacular in much of the liturgy, theologians and scriptural scholars found new freedom, and morality was seen less as adherence to rules laid down by an authoritarian system and more a matter of informed and responsible decision-making. The traditional modes of belief and practice described in **The Picturegoers** remained in place, but suffered noticeable and sometimes disturbing notification.

Many conservative believers, of whom Evelyn Waugh was one of the most prominent, were distressed or angered by the changes. The Vatican Council did not, however, pronounce on contraception. That subject was removed from its deliberations by the pope and entrusted to a special commission made up of theologians, scientists and other experts. In time it voted by a large majority for a change in the traditional teaching, and such a change was widely expected. Nevertheless, in 1968 John's successor as pope, Paul VI, confuted expectations and reaffirmed the ban in his encyclical, **Humanae Vitae**. Instead of the resigned obedience which such a pronouncement might have prompted before the liberal climate initiated by Vatican II, there was a storm of protest. Married Catholics, at least in the western world, decided that if there was not to be a change in the law about contraception then they would ignore it. **Humanae Vitae** provoked crisis not only about sexuality but about authority in the Church that is still unresolved.

How Far Can You Go? (1980) is a much more serious novel than **The British Museum is Falling Down**, in the senses of being both more intellectually and artistically ambitious and less funny, though it has its comic moments; Moseley says of it, '*this is the first novel ... in which he has actually made being a Catholic a serious, world-historical kind of situation*' (1991: 77). Lodge describes the enormous changes in the Church brought first by Vatican II and then by **Humanae Vitae** and the reaction to it, as they affect a group of middle-class English Catholics from the early 1950s, when they are students, to the late seventies, when some of them are no longer Catholics. Lodge said of the book in 1984:

'It was a subject nobody else seemed to have dealt with, what had happened to the Catholic Church over the last twenty-five years. Even the people in the Church haven't realized how it's changed out of all recognition, because it was a gradual change, and I needed a large number of characters in order to illustrate all the varieties of change – priests dropping out, for example, and nuns having to throw off their habits and adjust to the modern world; sexual problems in marriage, mixed marriages, changes in the liturgy – I would immediately think of a whole sets of incidents and situations that I wanted to incorporate. It would have been a huge saga novel if I had treated it in a realistic mode. I also knew I had to find some way of communicating to a non-Catholic audience a lot of theological and ecclesiastical information. So thinking in terms of a short novel with a rather rapid pace, with a lot of characters and a lot of information to communicate, I was led inexorably to use a dominant, intrusive authorial voice which would communicate that information in a way I hoped was itself amusing. It meant cutting down the characterization to a fairly summary form, and having many characters of more or less equal importance' (J. Haffenden, 1984:154-5).

In **How Far Can You Go?** Lodge departs from the realistic mode only in the limited sense that the novel rejects the Jamesian prescription that the author should always dramatize the story and go in for 'showing' rather than 'telling'. But the knowing storyteller, the dominant, intrusive, omniscient narrator, has been central in a line that runs from

Cervantes to Fielding to the major Victorians; Thackeray, for instance, writes at the end of *Vanity Fair*, 'let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out'. This is every bit as alienated and distancing as the tone adopted by Lodge's narrator.

The opening of the novel is precisely located in history and geography. The year is 1952, it is 8 o'clock in the morning of a dismal February day – St. Valentine's Day – in a sooty Catholic church in central London, where a group of London University students are attending Mass. These are young Catholics whose fortunes we are to follow through the novel. There is Angela, pretty, blonde, and very devout, reading French. Dennis is a burly youth, reading chemistry, and not very devout; indeed, he is only at the Mass because he is in love with Angela. (They will marry, after a protracted, nationally chaste engagement lasting several years). Polly is a dark, pretty girl, something of a rebel and destined to lose her virginity and her faith before long. She is reading English, and so is Michael, who is clever, sex-obsessed and still a virgin, as are all of them at this point. He has a white face and dark greasy hair, and wears what the author piquantly describes as a 'wanker's overcoat'. After graduating Michael writes a thesis on Graham Greene, and references to Graham Greene's new novels as they come out provide a subtext relating Lodge's work to an admired master of the English Catholic novel. Michael will marry Miriam, a convert to Catholicism, and have a happy marriage, though preserving a lively erotic imagination. Although Lodge has said that the characters are intended to be of roughly equal importance, in fact it is the married couples who are at the moral and imaginative centre of the novel: Angela and Dennis; Michael and Miriam; and to a lesser extent, Edward, a somewhat lugubrious medical student who is acting as Mass server when we first see him, and Tessa, a nurse whom he marries after he qualifies as a doctor, and who willingly becomes a Catholic.

The other characters are more marginal. There is Adrian, a student of economics, who never really comes alive; theologically, he is a dogmatic conservative at the beginning of the book and a dogmatic liberal at the end of it. Ruth is a plain girl with a strong personality, reading botany; she is to become a nun and have an unexpectedly interesting life in the wake of changes brought by Vatican II. Miles, a recent convert, is the only member of the group to have been at a public school; he becomes an academic historian and struggles with his homosexuality. Violet, reading classics, is a pretty but neurotic girl, who is to be seduced by a young lecturer and then marry him; her spiritual path takes her away from Catholicism, first to Jehovah's Witnesses, and then to Sufism. The person who travels the furthest is the young priest saying Mass. Initially, Father Austin Brierley is narrow-minded and priggish, but he will change enormously during the sixties and seventies. He is one of the priestly rebels against *Humanae Vitae*, but is handled gently by his bishop, who treats him as a managerial rather than a spiritual problem. Father Brierley is removed from parish work and sent on courses of study to keep him out of the way. He becomes more and more radical, discovering new modes of theology and biblical exegesis and moving into the secular discipline of sociology. By the end of the novel he has left the priesthood and married, though still considering himself 'a kind of Catholic'.

Throughout the novel Lodge keeps the focus on the group as a whole, cutting rapidly from one individual or couple to another, and freely using authorial omniscience to look ahead as well as back. Since there are a lot of characters, and *How Far Can You Go?* is not a long novel, their psychological and moral development over the years cannot be shown in any depth and one has to rely on the narrative to inform us about it (a matter of 'telling' rather than 'showing'). Indeed, they are not always sharply differentiated, a point which Lodge has accepted: 'One of the possible weaknesses of the book, which is an almost inevitable result of dealing with a homogenous social group, is that the characters are likely to be confused with each other in the reader's mind' (Haffenden, 154). He has

also acknowledged that the women characters tend to be more complex and interesting than the men; this is *'partly a reflection of the fact that in the period dealt with women have changed a lot more than men'*. (155)

One of the most important characters is the narrator, whose voice is frequently heard. In time it becomes evident that he is a version of David Lodge himself; he cross-refers to his other novels, and at the end of the book, when there is a round-up of what all the characters are doing, he says: *'I teach English literature at a redbrick university and write novels in my spare time, slowly, and hustled by history'* (**How Far Can You Go?**, 243). Such a device seems to undermine the distinction between 'fiction' and 'reality', but in fact the author-as-character is still an invented figure, and not identical with the historical individual whose name appears on the title-page.

Wayne C. Booth provides a classic account of this question in the **Rhetoric of Fiction** (1983); more recently, Lodge himself has written, *'the more nakedly the author appears to reveal himself in such texts, the more inescapable it becomes, paradoxically, that the author as a voice is only a function of his own fiction, a rhetorical construct, not a privileged authority but an object of interpretation'* (**After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism**, 1990: 43).

Although **How Far Can You Go?** is to a degree a formally innovative novel, its intervening commenting narrator, who is ready to break off the story to insert little essays on religion or the nature of narrative, is reminiscent of Fielding's narrator in **Tom Jones**; he, too, has a pseudo-identification with the historical author.

The narrator's active role in **How Far Can You Go?** means that the book contains a good deal of direct discussion of the transformations in Catholicism as well as showing them in the attitudes and behavior of the characters. The title is first presented in a reminiscence of Michael's schooldays: *'a favorite device of the bolder spirits in the sixth form to enliven Religious Instruction was to tease the priest who took them for this lesson with casuistical questions on sexual morality, especially the question of How Far You Could Go with the opposite sex.'* Please, Father, how far can you go with a girl, Father?"'(4).

By the end of the novel the question has a wider and less literal application; it asks how far can Catholics, or the Church, change and still retain anything identifiable as Catholic identity. Early on the narrator describes the world-picture that his young Catholics would have grown up with. It took the form of a great snakes-and-ladders board with Salvation as the name of the game; at the top was Heaven and at the bottom was Hell; prayers and good deeds sent you scuttling up a ladder; sins sent you slithering down snake. The rules were complicated, but anything you very much liked doing was almost certainly bad, or at least a moral danger. This account would have been regarded by thoughtful Catholics, well before Vatican II, as a caricature, since it excludes any idea of a loving Creator or an autonomous spiritual life.

Nevertheless, there is no denying that something like this caricature was what cradle-Catholics often grew up with. In the novel, Lodge's characters gradually come to abandon it, not by conscious rethinking of doctrine, but by a steady change in their sense of what seemed credible. *'At some point in the 1960s'*, remarks the narrator, *'Hell disappeared. No one could say for certain when this happened. First it was there, and then it wasn't.'* (6) By the end of the decade, the married couples had all taken to using contraception, in defiance of **Humanae Vitae**.

The narrator subjects the Catholic position on contraception to a chilly analysis; it was more logical, he suggests, when the Church believed, like Father Finbar in **The British Museum is Falling Down**, that the purpose of marriage was simply the procreation and education of children. But then the emphasis changed; marital sexual

pleasure was regarded as acceptable, even proper (in defiance of ancient traditions), and the use of the safe period, which had been reluctantly tolerated as a means of birth control, was actively encouraged. All of which meant that the ban on contraceptive methods based on abstruse metaphysical arguments, came to seem less and less cogent. Furthermore, the starry-eyed praise of sexual happiness – in marriage, naturally – by the new theologians meant that the young Catholics were disinclined to wait patiently for marriage before enjoying it, as the characters in **How Far Can You Go?** had done. In this novel Lodge opens up an entirely new subject, and describes, with somber wit and painfully sharp observation, a subculture on the point of meltdown.

The last chapter of the novel contains the script of a television programme, presenting Paschal Festival put on Easter 1975 by Catholics for an Open Church, a reformist group which includes the characters of the novel who are still practicing believers. At intervals in the programme, a 'voice over' comments on the symbolic and liturgical action and its implications and Lodge has associated this narratorial voice with his own view on the issues raised it announces '*the fading away of the traditional Catholic metaphysic - that marvelously complex and ingenious synthesis of theology and cosmology and casuistry, which situated individual souls on a kind of spiritual Snakes and Ladders board, motivated them with equal doses of hope and fear, and promised them, if they persevered in the game, an eternal reward.*' (239) Within another generation or two, the speaker believes, '*it will have disappeared, superseded by something less vivid but more tolerant. Christian unity is now a feasible objective for the first time since the Reformation.*' (242) He goes on to propose a future for religion in terms which Lodge has developed elsewhere: belief involve necessary but provisional narratives with which we try to make sense of existence, and which have analogies with literary narratives:

'Just as when reading a novel, or writing one for that matter, we maintain a double consciousness of the characters as both, as it were, real and fictitious, free and determined, and know that however absorbing and convincing we may find it, it is not the only story we shall want to read (or, as the case may be, write) but part of an endless sequence of stories by which man has sought and will always seek to make sense of life. And death.' (240)

But this speculation is not quite the end of the story. The author moves on a few more pages, and years, and in the final paragraph announces the election in 1978 of a new pope, a Pole and the first non-Italian for 400 years, adding '*all bets are void, the future is uncertain*'. It was a prudent intervention, for John Paul II proved to be a pontiff of charismatic, conservative and authoritarian temperament, with little sympathy for modernizing liberal Catholics; he made great efforts to deflect if not reverse the thrust of Vatican II, and to undo many of the changes that stemmed from it. Right-wing and traditionalist groups in the Church revived, and the '*traditional Catholic metaphysic*' did not fade away in the manner predicted in **How Far Can You Go?**. The divisions between liberals and conservatives remained in place, and argument continued. The ban on contraception was reaffirmed, but was widely disregarded.

In 1991 Lodge returned to the Catholic questions in **Paradise News**. It had a more mixed reception than his last few novels, and it is true that it is milder and gentler, without the inventiveness and displays of wit readers had come to expect. It has a retrospective quality, as he takes the opportunity, after more than thirty years of writing, to revisit the places and themes of his earlier work. The novel is partly set in Rummidge, not in its university but in a rather run-down theological college; one chapter takes us to Brickley, the South London suburb which provided the setting for **The Picturegoers**; and most of the action occurs in Hawaii, where Persse McGarrigle had briefly touched down in **Small World**.

Lodge's last *Catholic* novel raised and tried to answer the question, 'How Far Can You Go?'. In **Paradise News** the answer is, 'Further still'. In the earlier novel, Father Austin Brierley has passed through many vicissitudes after his conventional beginning, has left the priesthood and married, but remains 'a kind of Catholic'. Bernard Walsh, the central figure of **Paradise News**, has gone further, for he has abandoned not only the priesthood but Catholic belief itself. He is the son of a London Irish family in Brickley, which is reminiscent of the Mallorys, but is shown in a harsher light.

At the end of **The Picturegoers** Mark Underwood goes off to become a priest, to the general approbation of the Catholic characters, and, one imagines, the author. One of the Mallory sons, James, is already a priest, and another, Patrick, is expected to become one, though it is not clear how far he shares this expectation. Bernard, like the Mallorys a parishioner of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Brickley enters the priesthood, not out of deep dedication and spiritual zeal, but because his family hope he will become a priest, and he is drawn to the privileges and status of the priestly life, and scared of the demands of the larger world. The Mallory family had been depicted as admirable people, but the Walsh family is permeated by self-deception and bad faith. Bernard suggests what might have happened to James or Patrick in the uncertain future that followed Vatican II.

He serves as a priest to the best of his abilities, and becomes a lecturer in theology at a seminary. But his faith, never robust, is steady dwindling, and Lodge effectively traces the intellectual and psychological process of the decline. The final break is prompted by sex, when Bernard, a 40-year-old celibate and virgin, falls or is led, into an affair with a woman whom he is supposedly instructing on Catholicism. It ends disastrously for both of them. After he has left the priesthood, Bernard scrapes a modest living as an unbelieving part-time lecturer in theology at a college in Rummidge. Now in his mid-40s, he is a lonely and depressed figure, with few friends, and more or less alienated from his family, who have found it difficult to forgive his abandonment of the priesthood.

The plot transports Bernard from Rummidge to Hawaii. His Aunt Ursula had long ago moved to the United States, like Kate in **Out of the Shelter**, and has retired to Hawaii. She telephones Bernard, whom she has not seen for so many years, to tell him that she is suffering from inoperable cancer and may not live much longer. Before she dies she wants to meet again and make her peace with her brother Jack, Bernard's father, from whom she has long been estranged. She urges Bernard to bring Jack to Hawaii, and will pay their fares. Bernard is more than ready to make the trip, but his father, a cantankerous Irish widower who lives alone in Brickley, needs a great deal of persuasion. Eventually he agrees, spurred by the hope of getting something in his sister's will. Bernard finds that a package holiday in Hawaii is much cheaper than two ordinary return air tickets, so they make the long flight as tourists. Lodge moves easily into a comic mode in his description of their fellow travelers – who include Brian Everthorpe, previously encountered in **Nice Work** – and in satirical reflections on the phenomenon of global tourism; he carefully registers the exotic appearance and *mores* of Hawaii, an American state which is in every sense halfway to the Far East. But the comic dimension of the novel is a little perfunctory. The real interest is in the story of Bernard and what happens to him in Hawaii, a gentle, painful and moving story.

Bernard does what he can to make his aunt more comfortable, and her situation makes him think steadily about death. The prayers and liturgy which he used to conduct as a priest are full of references to the world to come, where those who have lived a good life on earth can expect an eternity and happiness with God. According to the Catechism, the Christian is to love and serve God in his life, and be happy with him for ever in the next (Bernard notes sardonically that there is nothing about happiness in *this* life). Hope in heaven is still an essential part of the faith of most Christians, especially those who have

found little reward in their earthly existence. But the advanced theologians whom Bernard studies and teaches are silent about an afterlife. Hell quietly disappeared for the liberal Catholics in **How Far Can You Go?**, and it seems that heaven may have gone the same way. If so, a traditional hope for humanity has been snatched away. Ordinary believers, though, may be unaware and unaffected by this shift, since theologians write not for them but for each other; there is an analogy, which Lodge has pursued elsewhere, with the way in which academic literary criticism and theory are now incomprehensible to unprofessional readers of literature.

Bernard dwells on these questions in the intervals of looking after his aunt, and his father, who is injured in a traffic accident on their first day in Hawaii. The woman driving the car which runs into Jack is very concerned about him, though entirely blameless (Jack, not used to traffic coming from the right, was looking the wrong way). She is Yolande, an attractive woman of 40, who came to Hawaii from the continental USA some years before because of her husband's academic job; now they have split up and she is seeing a divorce. After some hesitation on his part, Bernard and Yolande embark on an affair, which is both passionate and tender. He finds unfamiliar happiness and a tentative hope for the future, since their love is shared and the relationship may continue. Yolande is keen to leave Hawaii, having had more than enough on the island paradise and its supposedly perfect climate, and is intrigued by the idea of the English Midlands, despite the weather. It is a thoroughly romantic episode, but Lodge presents it very persuasively.

When he arrives at the airport in Hawaii Bernard picks up a tourist brochure called **Paradise News**, and he soon discovers that practically everything in the islands connects itself to Paradise: '*Paradise Finance Inc., Paradise Sportswear, Paradise Supply Inc., Paradise Beauty and Barber Suppliers, Paradise Beverages, Paradise Puppets, Paradise Snorkel Adventures, Paradise Tinting, Paradise Cleaning and Maintenance Service, Paradise Parking.*' (Lodge D., **Paradise News**, 1991: 34)

The insistent and ultimately meaningless repetition of the word is counter pointed with Bernard's mingled doubts and hopes about the spiritual paradise of Christian tradition. He finds romance in Hawaii, but he is also in a Romance, of the kind that Lodge is very interested in. The image of Hawaii as an earthly paradise is a commercialized vulgarity, but he attempts to redeem the term and revive its ancient associations; in the novel, Hawaii has affinities with the magic island of **The Tempest**, which is quoted more than once, and with the Fortunate Isles of European mythology.

Back in Rummidge, Bernard receives a letter from Yolande, saying that she may marry him in time, and meanwhile wants to come to England to spend Christmas with him. A colleague asks Bernard if he has good news, and he replies, in the final words of the novel, '*Very good news*'. It is indeed, for Bernard at that point in his life; but the phrase '*good news*' also referred to the Gospel and the Christian hope for the future. Bernard's experiences in Hawaii may not have restored his faith, but they have given him hope, which is a theological virtue as well as a human quality. The tentatively happy ending of **Paradise News** emphasizes its affinities with the Romance mode rather than with the despairing realism of much modern fiction. Lodge's use of the semi-magic plot devices of the Victorian novel is continued from **Nice Work**; there an unexpected legacy arrives from Australia, and in **Paradise News** an overlooked share certificate among Ursula's modest assets proves to have become immensely valuable, enabling her to spend her final weeks in dignity and comfort; and, after her death, to benefit Bernard's sister, who is coping with a brain-damaged child. (He refuses any share in the money).

In **How Far Can You Go?** and **Paradise News** Lodge considers Catholicism in England during the long aftermath of the Vatican Council. Both novels show his keen if skeptical interest in religious questions and his reading in modern theology. His personal

attitude is not altogether apparent, though it is evident that he has come a long way from the kind of traditional Catholicism which underlay **The Picturegoers**; he has said of **How Far Can You Go?**: *'it brought me in a way to 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...'* (C. Walsh, 1984: 5).

In 1992 Lodge attempted to define his position further. Graham Greene, one of his early models, described himself, after he had moved on from the tormented orthodoxy of his Catholic novels, as a *'Catholic agnostic'*; Lodge prefers to reverse the term and call himself an *'agnostic Catholic'*. He remains a practicing member of the Church, though he is agnostic about the ultimate reality behind the symbolic and metaphorical languages of liturgy and scripture. Although he has abandoned much of what he has called the *'Catholic metaphysic'*, he insists that religious language is meaningful, as the perennial symbolic and speculative mode in which we articulate the contradictions and anxieties and hopes which are central to the human condition.

Lodge acknowledges that by traditional standards, including those that he professed as a young man, he is probably a heretic; but he believes that many theologians, including Catholic ones, would now hold similar views. His position has affinities with that of the Catholic Modernists of the early twentieth century; and, less certainly, with recent radical Protestant theology. That approach, though, regards divinity as entirely immanent, whereas Lodge finds the idea of transcendence necessary to make sense of existence. Responding to the theme explored in **Paradise News**, he thinks that without some idea of life beyond death there is no point in religion, though the problem is to find an adequate language for the idea.

It is for theological experts to decide how far Lodge has in fact gone in moving away from the Catholic mind-set. There is, however, one important respect in which his fiction continues to reflect it, though perhaps for temperamental as much as doctrinal reasons. This has been described by Peter Widdowson:

*Lodge's Catholicism – explored historically in **How Far Can You Go?** – underpins his acceptance of bourgeois marriage as the domain in which people, whatever their frustrations and aspirations need finally to secure themselves: the family is still point in a world turning ever faster, and the wife (usually) the one woman he has to stand in for ... all the other women theoretically available in the world of sexual permissiveness. In Lodge's novels, there is always a crucial return (or *nostos*) for the main characters from the wide-open spaces, the fleshpots, the global campus, to a marriage which has to be remade.* (1984: 22)

Widdowson's phrase *'bourgeois marriage'* indicates his own ideological agenda, but his point is valid. The marriage of Philip and Hilary Swallow has dwindled into a rather empty relationship; but they come together after the infidelities in **Changing Places**, and again in **Small World** after Philip's affair with Joy, an attractive widow with whom he had spent a night some years before, and, unknown to him, conceived a child. The revived relationship between Philip and Joy has a lot going for it, and is described in very lyrical language. Indeed, Philip wishes to marry Joy, and is on the point of asking Hilary for a divorce when she disconcerts him by telling him that she has got a job as a marriage counselor, and he cannot bring himself to say anything. The affair comes to an end when Philip is attending a conference in Israel, with Joy in tow. He falls ill with what is at first wrongly diagnosed as Legionnaires' disease. Panic-stricken, he asks Joy to phone Hilary, who flies out to take him home, like a mother rescuing a naughty boy in trouble. Later, Philip says of himself, *'Basically I failed in the role of romantic hero. I thought I wasn't too old for it, but I was'* (**Small World**, 1984: 336). Meanwhile, Joy is to marry someone else. There is a hint of

authorial intervention about this episode, a suggestion of a moral story in favor of the indissolubility of marriage. The Swallow marriage, according to hints in **Nice Work**, does not get any happier, but it endures after a fashion. Hilary, in her new professional role, restores the broken marriage of Swallow's former colleague, Dempsey. Admittedly, the end of **Small World** is something of a Shakespearean tableau, where broken marriages are restored and new ones are made.

Already, though, in the generally graver and more realistic **How Far Can You Go?** there can be seen a similar pattern. Dennis has a brief headlong affair with a much younger woman, Lynn, who thinks she is in love with him; he leaves his family and moves in with her, but after a few weeks of discomfort and sexual exhaustion he goes back to them. Eventually she marries the ex-priest, Austin Brierley.

Again, in **Nice Work**, Vic Wilcox, after his infatuation with Robyn, settles back into what has been established as a pretty unsatisfactory marriage. It is true that he would never have got anywhere with Robyn, but he need not have gone back to the dim and lymphatic Marjorie, though it is suggested that her character might improve once she has a part-time job as a secretary. The underlying assumption seems to be, adapting a remark by Samuel Johnson, that though marriage has many pains, infidelity brings no pleasure.

In his latest novel, **Therapy**, Lodge gives a significant twist to this belief. The main character, Tubby Passmore, a successful television scriptwriter, has been married, happily as he thinks, for thirty years, and he and his wife have been faithful to each other all that time (though he has a girlfriend with whom his relations are quasi-platonic and strictly non-penetrative). He takes great satisfaction at the success of his marriage, when other all around are coming apart, so he is shattered when his wife tells him that she is leaving him; not for someone else, but because she cannot stand him anymore. The apparent success of his marriage was based, he discovers (as do the readers), on solipsistic complacency. In his late 50s he starts making desperate and comically unsuccessful efforts to catch up on the sexual opportunities he has long denied himself. In time he discovers Maureen, his first love from forty years before; she is the same age as Tubby, long married, has suffered from cancer and lost a son, and no longer has sex with her husband. Tubby falls in love with her again and begs her to marry him after they have divorced their spouses, but she is a Catholic, as she was when Tubby first knew her – when they meet up again she is making a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James at Santiago in Spain – and so is her husband. Their marriage may be sexless, she tells Tubby, but it is not loveless, and as a Catholic she will not consider divorce. Nevertheless, her conscience is accommodating enough to let her sleep with Tubby from time to time. He and Maureen and her husband, we are told on the last page, are all very great friends; it reads like another version of a fairy-tale ending.

Lodge's treatment of traditional Catholic practices is more sympathetic than in **How Far Can You Go?** or **Paradise News**, particularly in the presentation of Maureen's devotion to St. James of Compostella; she knows that there is far more myth than history in his cult, but she still finds spiritual value in it. Notwithstanding his generally skeptical state of mind, Lodge responds warmly to ritual and ceremony, as ways of bringing people together for a higher end, transcending their individuality for a time. This is evident in his account of the devotions in the great Cathedral of Santiago at the end of the pilgrimage earlier instances include the Paschal Festival in **How Far Can You Go?**, and the Hawaiian Folk Mass in **Paradise News**, which is celebrated on the beach for Ursula after her death, and which impresses the unbelieving Yolande.

Widdowson claims that Lodge's emphasis on marriage and stability, even a dull stability, '*runs counter on the openness and freedom of the novels' Romance rhetoric.*' (1984:23) This is a fair comment, and the tension between romance and realism does give Lodge's more recent fiction its particular flavor. Widdowson suggests that he unfairly

favors *realism*, such as carrying on with a humdrum marriage, against *romance*, which is getting a divorce and making a fresh start. But the more common mode of Romance in the novels is not the Ariostan, which is open-ended, indeed, never-ending, and involves constant fresh adventures. There is also the Shakespearean, which ends firmly, with marriages and ceremony. It first prompted Lodge's interest in Romance when, as an undergraduate, he made a special study of the late plays, with their patterns of reconciliation and transcendence. It is worth noting, too that he wanted to end his television adaptation of Dickens's **Martin Chuzzlewit** with multiple marriages but was overruled by the director.

Unlike many modern novelists who like to humiliate and torment their characters, Lodge treats his creation with respect and affection, even at the risk of being sentimental. He is much concerned with what he calls 'providential plotting', and the happy endings of his recent novels, so against the grain of the age, emphasize the centrality of hope as a virtue, which was made explicit in **Paradise News**. Traditionally, religious literature implied a work with a happy ending, a *commedia*. Despite his agnosticism about doctrinal definitions, it makes sense to regard Lodge as a kind of religious writer.

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Rezumat

Lucrarea explorează sentimentele create de educația catolică și încercate de David Lodge așa cum sunt descrise acestea în primele sale patru romane.

Résumé

Le papier presente les sentiments catholiques décrits par David Lodge dans ses premiers quatre romans.

Abstract

The paper explores David Lodge's catholic feelings as described in his first four novels.