The Comic Hero and Heroine in David Lodge's Later Fiction

Gayle Grimmell Whitaker

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THE COMIC HERO AND HEROINE IN DAVID LODGE'S LATER FICTION

Gayle Grimmell Whitaker
THE COMIC HERO AND HEROINE IN DAVID LODGE'S
LATER FICTION

A Thesis
Presented to
The College of Graduate Studies of
Georgia Southern University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master's of Art
In the Department of
Literature and Philosophy

by
Gayle Grimmell Whitaker

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To the Graduate School:

This thesis, entitled “The Comic Hero and Heroine in David Lodge’s Later Fiction,” and written by Gayle Grimmell Whitaker is presented to the College of Graduate Studies of Georgia Southern University. I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master’s degree in Literature.

We have reviewed this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Frederick K. Sanders, Committee Member
Candy B. K. Schille, Committee Member

Accepted for the College of Graduate Studies

G. Lane Van Tassell
Dean, College of Graduate Studies
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VITA

GAYLE GRIMMELL WHITAKER

EDUCATION

1972 University of West Florida, Pensacola, Florida
B. A., Special Education and Elementary Education

1992 Armstrong Atlantic State University, Savannah, Georgia
B. A., English
Editor of Calliope, literary magazine of AASU

2000 Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia
M. A., English

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

1972-73 Special education teacher for educable mentally retarded children
Warrington Middle School, Pensacola, Florida

1981-88 Special education teacher for learning disabilities class
Creekwood Middle School, Humble, Texas
Special education teacher for self-contained class
Timbers Elementary School, Humble, Texas

1992-95 Upper School English teacher, 9th and 11th grades
St. Andrew's School, Savannah, Georgia

1998-99 Teacher for residential adolescent school
Charter Behavioral Hospital, Savannah, Georgia
Introduction

In reading any or all of David Lodge's work, one no doubt enjoys a good laugh. Sharp one-liners, energetic dialogue, and an unerring comic timing all contribute to a witty fiction that is experiencing a rebirth in England and a new popularity with American readers. Comedy is a strength that Lodge has aptly demonstrated at least during the second half of his writing career in both his novels and now plays, screenplays, and television serials.

Penning characters who seem more like members of one's family or the neighbor down the street is what Lodge does best. Lodge's hero is Everyman struggling to make his life meaningful. In battling all the modern day annoyances—job dissatisfaction, marital monotony, keeping up appearances in an ever-intrusive world—he seems to lose ground daily, and by the time we meet him as readers, he is floundering in self-doubt. Enter the heroine: self-possessed, grounded in reality, and ready to be of service to the hero. She is the yang to his yin, and within just a few chapters, she begins to turn his life around and head him towards happiness again.

Although Lodge's novels are thematically different from one another, this particular relationship occurs somewhere in each of them. In the case of his last three novels, Nice Work, Paradise News, and Therapy, the plot could not work without this pairing. We will look at these three novels as well as Home Truths, Lodge's newest work, a novella based on a play he wrote earlier, which again works on the same principal of comic hero(es) helped by comic heroine, to examine how this pairing works.

Only The Writing Game, A Comedy, a play written in 1991, seems to run counter to the pattern. In this dark comedy, both the hero and the heroine are self-centered,
cynical writers who exploit their fellow writers for selfish, wanton reasons. In many ways it is so unlike anything Lodge has ever written that it bears to be examined for its differences. Lodge shares many of the problems he encountered in trying to get the play produced in an essay from *The Practice of Writing*, a collection of his thoughts published in 1996. Although he has labeled it a comedy, we do not feel uplifted at its end, as comedies should do.

We are focusing on the comic hero and heroine in Lodge’s fiction because until now no critic has dealt with this subject, and it remains misunderstood as a characteristic of his comedic writing. Lodge’s writing has attributes of Catholic writing, a genre of literature that has all but disappeared, but more predominantly in his later novels he follows the precepts of the timeless comedy. This combination of styles makes for an interesting post-modern hero who reflects contemporary issues yet who still remains apart from the soulless, hopeless man who feels alone and alienated from the world. Lodge’s hero remains hopeful in spite of the disquietude he suffers.

Lodge admits to a love of Shakespearean comedies, stating, “My novels are comic, not only in the sense of being funny, but also in structure. The patterns of comedy, and romantic comedy in older literature, always attracted me and fascinated me... Although I can read and enjoy very different kinds of writing—total negativity and despair, as in Beckett—I could not possibly write like that” (Kostrzewa 10). Lodge’s fascination with the structure of comedy provides the reason for his heroes and heroines to act the way they do—to complement each other. Comic heroes need help from comic heroines; nearly all traditional comedies follow this pattern.

Paul H.Grawe asserts that “Romantic comedy often matches a true heroine with a much less admirable male figure... virtually all of these male leads could best be identified as comedic fools, rescued from their foolishness by the superior women with whom they are matched” (136). Edward L. Galligan also says the same about the heroine “who is both witty and tender and who has the courage... to go her own way” (116).
Lodge keeps his female heroes less witty than wise. He allows them to be more than human but less than goddess. Although they are placed in the story to make things happen for the hero, the reader does not mind the manipulation because Lodge's humor overshadows everything. Moreover, we should note that Lodge uses romance to tackle other more important issues. Grawe states:

Comedic writers routinely try to insert a romantic interest in their work, even when they know that their own interests and the main direction of the comedies they are creating have little or nothing to do with sex or romance. Sometimes, love and romance are used in comedy as devices of education. The true test is whether characters learn the real nature of things, rather than the successful or unsuccessful romance itself (135).

In Nice Work, Lodge uses Victor as a mouthpiece for a discussion of the conditions of the workplace in England during Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's reign of conservatism. Lodge, in his aim to expose the difficulties that arise when an economy is stretched to its limits, uses Victor as the voice of practicality. Robyn, the heroine, acts as the voice of liberalism, antagonizing Victor with her "ivory tower" views. A romance of sorts brings about a mutual understanding between them and sends them forward to tackle the problems together.

Both Paradise News and Therapy involve the issue of faith in oneself. Bernard must resolve his ambiguous feelings of guilt about displeasing his family, and Tubby must learn to have faith in himself as opposed to the multitudinous therapies he has chosen as replacement. The heroines in these stories act as catalysts for the necessary changes to take place.

The term comic hero sounds a bit like an oxymoron, but Robert Torrance explains it this way: "The Comic hero is a contradiction in terms. He is comic because he differs from others and heroic because he is always himself" (1). Probably the outstanding
characteristic of Lodge's characters is that they are always themselves. In *Nice Work*, Victor Wilcox feels like a dinosaur in a modern age. Battling budget cuts as managing director of his engineering firm, he hates the way the economy has soured his feelings for a job he worked long and hard to attain. Living in a luxurious “five-bedroomed, four-lavatoried neo-Georgian house on Avondale Road” (110), he fights a growing disdain for his wife and children, who seem like parasites lately in their behavior toward him. As one who buys only British products, he is impatient with others who seem to slow the economy down even further with "industrial inaction," as he puts it, striking for better pay when he thinks “they're just sitting around in their warm staff rooms, chewing the fat . . .” (8). Frustrated, stymied, impotent . . . these are all the feelings Victor has when the novel opens.

Bernard Walsh, as hero in *Paradise News*, also battles demons, although his are more internal than Victor's. Bernard, an ex-priest, suffers quietly the intense disappointment felt by his father and sister over his departure from the Catholic Church. He also is excruciatingly aware of his sexual inexperience in a world that places a high value on sexual performance. Unable to rectify either of these situations in a suitable manner, Bernard initially appears stagnant, dormant, but on the cusp of transformation, feeling “a kind of excitement, even exhilaration, stirring the normally sluggish stream of his consciousness. To fly halfway round the world [to Hawaii] at a few days' notice was an adventure . . . it would be 'a change', as people said” (24-25).

Lodge's *Therapy* best fits the stereotypical model of a comedic novel. His hero, Tubby Passmore, fills pages with diary entries—intensely humorous revelations of himself, all deprecatory and intimate but engagingly human: “Alexandra is my shrink, my current shrink. Dr. Alexandra Marbles. No, her real name is Marples. I call her Marbles for a joke. If she ever moves or retires, I'll be able to say I've lost my Marbles” (14). Although he is a successful television sitcom writer, Tubby is about to undergo a humiliating blow to his ego when his wife leaves him. He is in the pre-disaster stage
when the novel opens, booking his days with an assortment of therapy sessions in a futile attempt to alleviate a phantom pain in his knee.

All three of Lodge’s heroes, although managing their lives in a normal fashion, are dissatisfied with themselves, with others, and with the way their lives are headed. Furthermore, although it appears that they are attempting to change things, i.e. Bernard’s trip to Hawaii and Tubby’s various therapies, in reality nothing much will come of these ineffective attempts. They are more at ease with the idea that something will turn up on its own to change their lives. Galligan explores the complicated makeup of comic heroes and heroines, finding that unlike the tragic hero in literature, the comic hero demonstrates his valor and purpose through passivity and a trust in luck: “What comedy affirms, at least in its heroes, is an odd sort of passivity that combines a flexible yet stubborn resistance to being pushed with a general reluctance to pull” (84). We can see this clearly in these three heroes in different ways. Victor seems always to be grousing about how things used to be different, oftentimes ending thoughts with “There ought to be a law” (15). Bernard is passive to the point of fatigue when faced with lists of unpleasant things to do, while Tubby thinks activity (therapy) indicates an ability to control matters already out of control.

Lodge’s latest work, *Home Truths*, also follows the hero/heroine scheme, but we have two heroes who love the same heroine. Both Adrian and Sam are middle-aged writers who, though successful in different ways, still maintain a rivalry between them that extends to the heroine. She at one time loved them both, but made her choice years earlier to marry Adrian. Her role in the play is to showcase their foolishness and vanity and ultimately bring about resolution between them.

Historically, as Robert M. Torrance attests, the comic hero has not been well-received or thought to be much more than a buffoon or idiot, his “lineage extending back to an earlier day than Aristotle’s . . . Greek comedy grew out of primitive rituals celebrating rebirth and fertility; and the hero of Aristophanic Old Comedy . . . normally
transcended all obstacles in his path and came out king of the mountain" (10). The traditional comic hero, descending from Aristophanes, follows his own heart, usually at the cost of ridicule from his friends. Lodge's heroes are sophisticated in the ways of their world—they could not be considered buffoons. Yet, their vulnerability is humorous and makes them laughable.

Unlike the tragic hero who elicits sympathy and pity, the comic hero elicits laughter. Alice Rayner explains the importance of laughter, suggesting that “laughter integrates the human community and that laughter itself has a unifying or healing capacity” (22). Laughter releases tension and unifies contradictory elements into one meaning and emotion. In Lodge's books it energizes the plot and allows the hero to be accepted and not ridiculed although he acts foolishly. In a turnabout way, comedy glamorizes the hero, making him larger than life, truly enabling him to be a hero. Bernard Bergonzi suggests that Lodge “is constantly fascinated by the absurdity and untidiness of the human lot . . . in ideas about how civilization is maintained; in his novels comedy is interwoven with serious reflections on religion and society, literature and education” (60). Because of this serious reflection, some critics have had a hard time agreeing that his work is comic in nature. Along with this difficulty, as A. Michael Matin contends, they find fault with his upbeat endings, his sentimentality, his “buoyant optimism” (386). Lodge refuses to offer much help, stating that to do so would be counter-productive to the process of interpretive freedom for the reader. He does concede that:

Comedy is perhaps the genre that offers most resistance to post-structuralist aesthetics. Things that make us laugh in books rarely happen by accident . . . [However] I would not claim that, because I could explicate my own novel line by line, that is all it could mean; and I am well aware of the danger of inhibiting the interpretive freedom of the
reader by a premature display of my own . . . “authorized” interpretation.

(Write On 74).

Despite Lodge’s reluctance to interpret his own work, if we recall, we have Lodge’s own admission that his work is comic in structure. Ashley H. Thorndike reveals that from the time of Dante’s Divine Comedy, the happy ending has been associated with comedy. He relates that comedy can “yoke itself in service with morality and sentiment, or it can disport with folly and fancy” (7). If we follow that premise, then Lodge’s comic heroes and heroines, as well as the happy endings, the sentimentality and optimism, fall right in line with the comic tradition. What is confusing about Lodge’s fiction is that it is more than just comedy. Comedy is the structure of his work, but inside that structure we find each novel and play deals with a serious topic. In Lodge’s beginning novels he concentrated on Catholic issues; in his middle years, he wrote of academic life; with his latest works, he has explored social problems.

Edward L. Galligan identifies what he calls five major recurring images in comic literature: intellect, will, wishfulness, time and change, and play (30). He relies heavily on William Lynch’s theory of tragedy and comedy from his book Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination, to which we will also refer. We will also refer to Lynch’s theory of hopefulness from his book Images of Hope, which also explains in understandable terms the idea of wishfulness. These images will be fully explored as they apply to Lodge’s three novels and novella. For now, brief explanations will do to aid in our understanding: Comedy makes fun of the intellectual because he generally is lacking in wisdom or common sense. Willfulness, or trying to control one’s destiny also appears as somewhat foolish in a comedy: “Deep in the comic scheme of things is a preference for those who float through life over those who march through life” (33). Wishfulness, a negative trait of denying the real nature of things, is often confused with wishing, a positive and natural aspect of human nature—we all must have wishes if we are to be happy. Time in comedy is cyclical and not lineal, repetitive and not progressive.
Comedy enjoys upheaval and mayhem. Finally, comedy needs to be funny, or have an image of play (Galligan 30).

Comedy’s heroines, although their parts are minor in comparison to the hero’s, have a vital function to perform. In the second part of this paper, we will focus on the role of heroine and how Lodge’s females measure up to the tradition they have inherited. The last part of the paper will explore Lodge’s recent play, *The Writing Game: A Comedy*, and how it veers dramatically away from any of his former fiction. In defining comedy, Thorndike divides English comedy into two tendencies—"the one toward satire and realism, the other toward sentiment and fancy" (592). Perhaps after examination, we will find that satire is the appropriate category to place *The Writing Game: A Comedy*.

David Lodge’s fiction has evolved from his early days of Catholic writing to today’s biting and realistic comedy. From then to now, however, he has maintained a hero/heroine relationship throughout each of them. This paper will explore that relationship, as well other traits that have traditional comic roots, in order to show that this particular pairing is a characteristic of Lodge’s comic writing.
Chapter I

The Comic Hero in Lodge's Later Fiction

In Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination, William F. Lynch states, “Comedy is perpetually reminding the uprooted great man that in some important sense he was once, and still is, a bit of a monkey” (97). David Lodge’s fiction, in particular Nice Work, Paradise News, Therapy, and Home Truths, lives up to this reminder very well. All of Lodge’s heroes are great men, successful in their particular fields, yet undeniably silly and laughable to us, the reader, because we are privy to their innermost thoughts and fears. Lodge’s humor is at its finest when he exposes his heroes’ fears for our amusement. We laugh in commiseration, in recognition that life is fearful and uncertain, and at the same time, ironic and funny.

Lodge’s heroes follow a pattern of comedy that is as old as time. Deriving its history from primitive rituals, comedy serves to celebrate man’s “vital impulse over social constraint” (Torrance 10). The comic hero serves to show man that although life is challenging, he will prevail despite repeated failures, even if he appears ridiculous in his fellow man’s eyes. Lodge’s particular hero finds his way through difficulty with the aid of a heroine, also typical of comedy. Even in Lodge’s serious fiction, in particular his first novels, the heroine is a stronger, better, sharper human being. In his comedies, the hero and heroine are complements of each other—what one lacks the other provides.

Criticism of Lodge’s fiction centers on his “buoyant optimism” (Matin 386), “his wit [that] froths around and out of characters whose behaviour seems as sweetly absurd as the antics of playful puppies” (Waugh, CLC 36, 277), and a sentimental desire to manipulate endings to “emphasize the centrality of hope” (Bergonzi 47). Each quibbles over what are essentially characteristics of comedy. Edward L. Galligan believes comedy
incorporates five major images, a theory he borrows from William Lynch’s *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination*: intellect, will, wishfulness, time and change, and play (30). Acting as an umbrella over these is the essence of hope. Lynch believes that wishing and hope go hand in hand, that to not have wishes is to feel hopelessness, that “the best and the most human part of man is the ability to wish, to say ‘I wish’” (*Images of Hope* 157). This chapter will focus on these five images in relation to *Nice Work, Paradise News, Therapy*, and *Home Truths*, to show that this fiction is based on traditional comic structures. We will see that Lodge’s heroes are truly comic in their makeup and that their behavior is entirely appropriate for this genre.

The study of the makeup of comedy proves to be more complex than one would imagine, considering that it notoriously deals with light, frothy subjects. Besides, what more is there to know than if something makes us laugh, then it must be comic? Galligan’s five images help us to dissect the nebulous idea of comedy, pinning it down to examine its physical characteristics. The first image deals with the intellect. Comedy abhors the “neat, mechanical, perfectly balanced order generated by logic” (Galligan 31). It prefers the messiness of life, the unpredictability of living with others, the untidiness of emotions. In *Nice Work*, the heroine Robyn Penrose, avowed feminist and university lecturer, approaches all situations in “a rational, orderly manner” (22). A brilliant graduate student, she is well on her way to an enviable career as an academic when the economy goes sour and she must scramble for any position that is open. Forced to accept an assignment to work with Victor Wilcox, her antithesis in the Industry Year Shadow Scheme. Working with him, or, rather against him in the beginning, she is forced to see that real life does not conform to textbook formulas. Victor, a self-made man, who easily dismantles Robyn’s logical but unworkable theories about the workplace, is intent on making her look foolish, which he does quite handily. After viewing the factory on her first day, she is appalled by the conditions:
“The noise. The dirt. The mindless, repetitive work. The . . . everything. That men should have to put up with such brutalising conditions—“

“Now just a minute—“

“Women, too. I did see women, didn’t I?”

“We have a few. I thought you were all for equality?”

“Not equality of oppression.”

“Oppression? . . . We don’t force people to work here, you know. For every unskilled job we advertise, we get a hundred applicants—more than a hundred. Those women are glad to work here—go and ask ’em if you don’t believe me.”

Robyn was silent. She felt confused, battered, exhausted by the sense-impressions of the last hour. For once in her life, she was lost for words, and uncertain of her argumentative ground . . . “But the noise . . . The dirt!”

“Foundries are dirty places. Metal is noisy stuff to work with. What did you expect?” (81)

Robyn’s solid background of academics has little prepared her for real life. Instead of using common sense in forming her opinions of the world, she has relied on theoreticians who, truth be known, go outside their professions very little. Her sense of logic is skewed by theories that have no real bearing on the ordinary work world. Victor, though less-educated in theory, relies on practical knowledge to keep him ahead of the game.

Bernard Walsh, the hero in Paradise News, takes some pratfalls in trying to avoid uncomfortable emotions. A former priest in the Catholic Church, he now realizes he entered the priesthood for all the wrong reasons, as he thinks back to an adolescent decision that he thought “would solve all my problems at a stroke: sex, education, career,
and eternal salvation" (146). Though self-realization comes for Bernard, it is slow, and as a middle-aged man, he knows very little about sexual relationships, except to avoid them out of embarrassment. He meets his salvation in Yolande Miller, someone who quite literally bumps into his life when in Honolulu her car hits his father who is crossing the street. She offers her services (conveniently, she is a trained sexual therapist) after they form a mutual attraction and she discovers his naivete. Through some of the most humorous scenes of the novel, he discovers the pleasures he has avoided for so long. Yolande takes charge as instructor:

"Of course, it's easy to see what pleases a man, but with women it's different, it's all hidden inside and you've got to know your way around, so lick your finger, and I'll give you the tour."

He was shocked, bemused, almost physically winded by this sudden acceleration into a tabooless candour of word and gesture. But he was elated too. He hung on for dear life. "Are we going to make love today?" he pleaded.

"This is making love, Bernard . . . I'm having a wonderful time, aren't you?"

"Yes, but you know what I mean." (218)

Physical intimacy frees Bernard of his terrible embarrassment and gives him the courage to take charge of his life. His former way of dealing with any sort of feelings—denial, immersion of himself in his academic world, the pretense that he is not meant for such things—is over. Through humor and Yolande, he is able to feel like a whole man. 

*Therapy's* hero, Tubby (Laurence) Passmore, demonstrates even better the pitfalls of thinking things through too logically. He is a compulsive “looker-upper” (116) who continually consults the dictionary for the correct spellings and meanings of words he uses daily. Expanding that trait to include researching the cause for his worsening painful knee and unhappiness with life in general, he records all his findings in a
personal log that he methodically fills in daily. He engages in multi-therapies (cognitive behavior therapy, aromatherapy, acupuncture, and physiotherapy) to alleviate his suffering, all without success. Sinking in his self-induced torpor, he turns to the philosopher Kierkegaard’s books because of their titles: “I can’t describe how I felt as I read the titles. If the hairs on the back of my neck were shorter, they would have lifted. *Fear and Trembling, The Sickness Unto Death, The Concept of Dread*—they didn’t sound like the titles of philosophy books, they seemed to name my condition like arrows thudding into a target” (64-65). Tubby’s “condition,” brought on by too much logical thinking, jeopardizes his career and reputation when his fellow workers, as well as his close friends, begin to see cracks appear in his normally unflappable demeanor. Because Tubby “writes” *Therapy*, all in first person narrative, we have only his perceptions of others’ thoughts and opinions of his behavior, but those graphic scenes of humiliation are entertaining enough. As an example, when Tubby suspects that his wife is having an affair with her tennis coach, a good-looking guy, “good at other things too” (27), he surreptitiously tracks the coach’s movements, even phoning the coach’s home at odd hours and asking for Sally in a falsetto voice. Driven mad with jealousy, he foolishly breaks into the house at night in order to discover them in the act. He finds them naked in bed, but “them” is the coach with his gay lover, Nigel:

That night—it was about three o’clock—I was woken by Nigel squeezing my arm and whispering in my ear, “I think there’s someone in the room.” He was shaking with fear. I turned on the bedside lamp, and there was Mr. Passmore standing on the rug on my side of the bed, with a torch in one hand and a large pair of scissors in the other. I didn’t like the look of the scissors—they were big, dangerous looking things, like drapers’ shears. As I said, I always sleep naked, and so does Nigel, and there was nothing within reach I could have used to defend us with. I tried to keep calm. I asked Mr. Passmore what he thought he was doing.
He didn’t answer. He was staring at Nigel, completely gobsmacked.

Nigel, who was nearest the door, jumped out of bed and ran downstairs to phone 999. Mr. Passmore looked round the room in a dazed sort of way and said, “I seem to have made a mistake.” I said, “I think you have.” He said, “I was looking for my wife.” I said, “Well, she’s not here. She’s never been here.” Suddenly it all fell into place, and I realized what had been going on, in his head I mean. I couldn’t help laughing, partly in relief, partly because he looked such a fool standing there with scissors in his hand. I said, “What were you going to do with those, castrate me?” He said, “I was going to cut your ponytail off.” (136)

Tubby's wrongheadedness is finally stopped with this embarrassing incident, and luckily for him, nobody is anxious for this discovery to become public news.

In *Home Truths*, hero Adrian Ludlow sets about trying to trap a young woman journalist who has written an unflattering interview of his best friend. Adrian, logical and contemptuous of her style of journalism, nevertheless sets up an interview with her to trick her into revealing something private about herself. He does not confide this plan entirely to his wife, and she inadvertently breaks in on them while both are in robes, and as Adrian is closely examining the journalist's shoulder for a tattoo:

It was the first time he had touched her, apart from the formal handshake at the front door, and it was an intimate touch, on the threshold of the erotic... Adrian left his fingertip lightly pressing Fanny's skin, as he studied the butterfly like a curious lepidopterist...

"Am I interrupting something?"

Adrian whirled around, and leaped away from the chaise lounge. Fanny pulled the bathrobe back over her shoulder and stood up.

"Ellie! You’re back early. I didn’t hear the car." (67)
Adrian's well-planned attack goes from bad to worse. After Adrian leaves the room to get dressed, Ellie, in a rage to get even, reveals secrets about him to the journalist. Although from here on the plot becomes predictable—they argue, he pouts, she threatens to leave, they reconcile—Lodge's humor takes over the plot and keeps readers amused at the mayhem caused by characters too smart for their own good.

The second image of comedy concerns willfulness: "Comedy consistently mocks willfulness, pride of purpose, and self-centered design, especially... when they involve a claim to godlike dignity or power" (Galligan 32). Lodge's heroes are all essentially good people, not malicious or arrogant, and so their comeuppance is never world-shattering or tragic. Yet, they do experience mortification and embarrassment from ill-conceived self-centered plots. Vic, in Nice Work, begins to find ways to be with Robyn, having fallen in love with her. She, on the other hand, does not believe in love. On a business trip, and after cementing an important deal with a German company, they end up in her room, both in different states of mind: Robyn's mood is blithe. She feels mildly wanton, but not wicked... For Vic the event is infinitely more momentous... the secret dream of weeks come true" (207). In the morning she is sober and has "no wish to be reminded" while he, at breakfast, looks at her with "worried, doggy devotion" (213). By mid-morning Robyn has booked a flight home, unable to face a "sentimental inquest over lunch about the night before" (213). Vic becomes the clown, the besotted lover, the poet who, when rejected by his beloved, can only reply: "When angry... you look like a goddess" (216).

If Vic becomes a ridiculous lover, Tubby, in Therapy, plays the fool by micromanaging his life with assorted therapies. In a first person narration that is slangy and informal, he shares with us the saga of his life, beginning with an unsuccessful surgery to fix a "mysterious pain in the knee" (5). As he tries valiantly to stem the mild depression that is threatening to sink him, his confessions are hilarious but pathetic. After his wife informs him of her decision to jettison the relationship, Tubby's life spirals into a slow dive as he tries to mend his hurt ego by attempting to "bed" the various
women with whom he has had daily or periodic contact. Scheming, or willfulness, backfires each time. As Amy, former platonic friend and now potential lover, puts it:

Well, it was lucky I was half-pissed, otherwise it could have been just too embarrassing for words. I mean, one either had to laugh or cry, and having a few drinks inside me, I laughed. I got the giggles as soon as I saw Laurence putting on his knee-support when we were preparing for our siesta. It’s made of some spongy stretch fabric, like they use to make wet-suits, and it’s bright red, with a hole in it for his kneecap to poke through. It looked particularly funny when he had nothing else on . . . When he put on an elasticated elbow bandage as well I nearly had hysterics . . . I wondered if he was going to put on anything else, a pair of shin-pads perhaps, or a cycling helmet (159-60).

Tubby’s problems all stem from an overactive need to manage his life. Instead of letting the dust settle after his wife leaves him, he goes into overdrive in his attempt to assuage his hurt ego. He wrecks the good relationships he has had with the women in his life. Galligan observes that inherent in the idea of comedy is the “preference for those who float through life over those who march through life, for those who do what ‘it’ wants them to do and go where ‘it’ wants them to go over those who do and go according to resolute purposes of their own” (33). Tubby has yet to learn to let life take its own course. He will eventually get to that realization, but he seems destined to play the fool many times before that happens.

*Home Truths*, above all the others, shows what can happen in a comedy when one tries too hard to manipulate situations. Adrian, in his attempt to embarrass the young woman journalist who is “notorious . . . for being rude about people” (12), has his scheme explode in his face, when she becomes a confidant to his wife, who unthinkingly exposes all his fears and hangups about being a writer. As Eleanor expresses her frustration with being a writer’s wife (“I’ve spent too many hours trying to prop up his self-esteem.
It's the worst thing about being married to one, too... If you don't enthuse about their work they sulk, and if you do they think it doesn't really count" (74), she is unaware that the conversation is being recorded. Predictably, the journalist includes all of Eleanor's admissions in a scathing review she writes about Adrian. Adrian's well-planned attack is ambushed by his own wife.

The third image of comedy, wishing, is a positive trait that all humans need to nurture. However, according to Galligan, "No one is more consistently and more harshly mocked in comedy than the person who wishfully denies the real nature of things" (33). Tubby denies the real nature of things when he partakes in multi-therapies to assuage his "terminally depressed" (13) state of being. He wishes that one of them would be effective, would work to alleviate his depression, but because he is a smart guy, he subconsciously knows that he is wasting both his time and money. We enjoy his anguish because he is so funny in dealing with it. But, again, we laugh because he reminds us of ourselves. We already know that Tubby needs a heroine to help solve his problems, but for now, he is in denial of the real nature of things.

Bernard wishes that his life were different: that he could be in the good graces of his family, that he could know where his life was heading, that he could have someone with whom to share his life. He wishes for these things, but as good as these wishes are, he is unable to act on them. As he admits to his Aunt Ursula on the telephone, "I'm not very good at enjoying myself" (24). He is forty-four, living in a dormitory for students of theological studies, has no life-savings, not even his own telephone to use. As his sister caustically reminds him: "What a mess you've made of your life" (32). Until he goes to Hawaii and meets the women (his aunt and Yolande) who force him to be assertive and take charge of his life, he remains immobile and unable to facilitate these wishes. He is in denial of the real nature of things.

Victor lives surreptitiously through his music and his car—a "gleaming dark blue Jaguar V12, Registration Number VIC 100" (13)—immersing himself in music that
“favours female vocalists, slow tempos, lush arrangements of tuneful melodies in the jazz-soul idiom” (14). He is frustrated by a stagnant marriage and a job that increasingly grows harder to perform in an economy that is as stagnant as his marriage. He imagines himself the lonely captain of a ship “steering his oblivious crew through dangerous seas” (4). He wishfully imagines a life that is worry-free, pro-British, and more exciting than what it is now. The problem Victor is having is universal. It is called mid-life crisis and it hits men particularly hard if they feel unsuccessful in their work and family relationships. Although he is a director of a firm, he is relatively new to the position and feels he must justify his actions to those who have been at the firm longer. He hates being “Mr. New Broom” (18), dislikes the informal working relationship his secretary uses with him, one she apparently used with the boss before Vic, and he detests his marketing director for just about everything. Until he meets Robyn, who brings about the needed rejuvenation that Victor needs, he is in denial of the real nature of things.

In Home Truths, Adrian is painfully aware that he is a writer who has gradually been dropped from the writing scene. He does not like it, but he imagines still that he can regain the recognition he once had. He thinks that by engaging the young journalist in an interview, it will revive his sagging writing career. Envious of his best friend’s success, he thinks that by correcting a glaringly personal interview of his friend, he will gain notoriety himself. He hopes that he will become famous again. His wishful thinking results in painful revelations. He does not become popular again as a writer. The interview was meant only as a human interest story, a “where is he now” type piece, or as the journalist describes it: “The writer who had to get out of the kitchen because he couldn’t stand the heat, but pretended he’d lost interest in cooking” (99). As Galligan states, “Comedy is a mode for realistic, wishing but not wishful, imaginations” (34). Adrian is in denial of the real nature of things.
The fourth image of comedy pertains to time and its cyclical nature. In comedy, time revolves instead of going forward. As Galligan states: "Progressions—of seasons and of generations—matter in comedy; progress does not. . . . The comic imagination is undisturbed by mutability and at ease with flux" (34). We see this most clearly in *Therapy* when Tubby focuses on his long-ago teenage girlfriend, Maureen, who idolized him and loved him unconditionally. He turns his thoughts to her, now as a middle-aged man who has seen his life turn on him. He begins to think of her as his salvation from his physical as well as emotional pain. This return to youthful love is an example of cyclical time—Tubby does not progress linearly but cyclically toward happiness. He goes backward to go forward. It works. He finds his childhood love; they reconnect; they reaffirm their love for each other. Although she has a husband already, because this is a comedy, Tubby re-enters her life and they become a threesome—awkward in real life, but totally believable in a comedy.

*Home Truths* also progresses this way. Sam, Adrian, and Eleanor meet and become fast friends during their college years. Both Sam and Adrian love Eleanor, and eventually she chooses Adrian to marry. Throughout the years, however, an unspoken undercurrent of jealousy remains among them. When Adrian's escapade with the journalist backfires, it brings all of the unspoken feelings out in the open. Sam takes the initiative to try to win Eleanor for himself, offering her refuge from an angry Adrian: "Get dressed, pack a bag, come with me now . . . Just do it . . . No strings attached. Unless you want them, of course" (86). Eleanor refuses, but in speaking out about it, the three of them experience relief and become closer as friends. The circular pattern of their friendship begins again refreshed and renewed.

Victor's unhappiness with his family life, in particular with Marjorie, his wife, stems from his frustration with their apparent lack of motivation. He and Marjorie have three grown children who still live at home, with one who openly sneers at his father's success: "Vic feels his blood pressure rising at the thought of his oldest son, who dropped
out of university four months ago and has not been usefully occupied since, now
swaddled in a duvet upstairs, naked except for a single gold earring, sleeping off last
night’s booze” (7). Victor senses that Marjorie humors the children, encouraging their
indolent behavior. He also is feeling a growing embarrassment about Marjorie, once the
pretty secretary who caught his eye, but now plump, aging, and disinterested in anything
but shopping. When Robyn enters his life, he awakens to possibilities that he only
dreams about when listening to singer Jennifer Rush on his car stereo. Victor has no
ulterior motives; he is too conservative for that. Yet, he is attracted to another woman
besides Marjorie now, and he feels alive again. Through Robyn’s intervention, Victor
eventually returns renewed to his family, seeing them in a different light. Marjorie and
the children, in the meantime, noticing changes in Victor, re-evaluate their roles in the
family and begin to take responsibility for more around the house. In this cyclical
movement, Victor is again young and ready to tackle a new career opportunity that is
waiting.

Bernard also goes backward in time to find his place in the world. His Aunt
Ursula is dying of cancer in Hawaii. She wants to reconcile herself with her brother,
Bernard’s father, before she dies. Bernard agrees to fly with his father, a cantankerous
old man, to Ursula in Hawaii. In doing so, Bernard must endure his father and sister’s
animosity, an uncomfortable situation that arose when he dropped out of the priesthood.
Mild-mannered to the point of meek, Bernard learns to speak up for himself and to his
father. He gains a new respect for himself, through Ursula’s encouragement and
Yolande’s attraction to him. In resolving his personal issues, he is able to foster
reconciliation for Bernard and Ursula. He finds his voice by a circuitous route, but one
that is necessary for resolution of the plot.

The last image of comedy is a fundamental one, the sense of play. As simple as it
sounds, it is the hardest one to understand. Comedy must be funny, according to Lynch:
"For things are funny and a final theory of comedy must be as simple as that" (110).

Galligan elaborates:

The image is the source of that spirit of gaiety which permeates all comedy and which is the one thing that all of us are sure to carry away from any comedy we respond to: and it is grounded on the conviction that the unknown will turn out to be at least as good as the known, that we will, somehow, land right side up. (36-37)

Lodge’s characters always end up winning—landing right side up. Critics fault him on this aspect of his writing, citing contrived, fairy-tale endings. He does not dispute them, saying only that he has a difficult time in his god-like role, “creating people who weren’t there before, putting them in motion, deciding how their various interweaving fortunes are going to turn out” (Walsh 8). Ashley Thorndike remarks that from the time of Dante’s Divine Comedy, “the happy ending has been associated with comedy” (6). Lodge’s comic novels end with his heroes looking forward: Victor begins a new design company that he will own; Bernard gets word from Yolande that she wants to visit him at Christmas, implying that their relationship will go further; Tubby, in renewing his friendship with Maureen finds his “bum” knee has stopped hurting and that he is happy once again; Adrian and Eleanor forget their petty problems when they get caught up in the tragedy of Princess Diana’s death.

Lodge’s novels are witty. Bruce Martin notes that Lodge’s reputation has resulted from the “supreme wit evident in the hilarious situations of his novels . . . as well as in exchanges between characters” (165). Perhaps the funniest parts are the sex scenes that invariably occur in each of them. Sexual encounters are frank, startling, and borderline lascivious in the four novels we are studying. Even squeamish readers, however, will find these passages humorous because Lodge is careful to go only so far before he draws back and leaves the rest to our imaginations:

Robyn holds out two glasses. Vic fills only one. “Not for me,” he says.
Robyn looks at him over the rim of her glass. “You’re not worried about being impotent, are you?”

“No,” he says hoarsely. He is, of course.

“If it happens, it doesn’t matter, OK?”

“I don’t think it will be a problem,” he says.

“You could just give me a massage, if you like.”

“I want to make love,” he says.

“Massage is a way of making love. It’s gentle, tender, non-phallic.”

“I’m a phallic sort of bloke,” he says apologetically.

“Well, it’s also a nice kind of foreplay,” says Robyn.

The word “foreplay” gives him a tremendous hard-on. (208)

Lodge leaves us with pictures. His skill in witty dialogue and quick retorts allows him to skip the parts that would qualify his writing for some readers as pornography. He answers critics who have thought he comes close to stepping over the line: “My novels are sometimes regarded as rather shocking and explicit, but only pornographic novels will move from one ecstatic sex scene to another: that’s precisely the difference between a pornographic erotic novel and a literary novel about sexuality” (Haffenden 159). Lodge’s novels are explicitly sexual, but more than that, they are comic romances.

Romance plays an important part in conveying the message the author wants to deliver. Lodge’s romances have a direct bearing on the resolution of the plot. They facilitate interaction and understanding between characters, but they are not permanent most of the time. When one of Lodge’s heroes falls in love it is for the purpose of salvation: either the hero is in the throes of self-doubt or he needs a heroine who can teach him a skill. Paul H. Grawe finds that romances are sometimes used as “devices of education . . . the true test . . . is whether the characters learn the real nature of things” (135). The heroes in Lodge’s fiction find romance but more than likely they are being
taught something valuable as well. Victor's romance with Robyn is what enables him to handle the upheaval that is coming his way. Bernard finds himself after spending a lifetime listening to what others think he should do. Tubby lets go of all his therapies when he finds the true thing in a childhood sweetheart. Adrian receives a wake-up call, administered by his wife, when he gets carried away with fame. All of these heroes gain knowledge from love and romance, in a humorous fashion. Within each of these romances is a strong sense of play.

The principal way Lodge imparts a sense of play is through dialogue. Both hero and heroine are given witty lines, but the hero's voice is what we hear the most. Therapy uses a style of first person narration according to Bergonzi, called skaz, "a spoken utterance, colloquial, slangy, sometimes obscene, registering every shift of mood from exasperation to exaltation" (59). This technique enables Lodge to invent a character who is memorable solely through his "voice" that we hear throughout the novel. Therapy's effectiveness comes from the engaging informality that Tubby exudes through diary entries. Like a gregarious friend who feels the need to tell you everything, he rattles on about life's pleasures and pains, and its mysteries:

It's a funny business, casting. It's a gift, like fortune-telling or water-divining, but you also need a trained memory. Amy has a mind like a Rolodex: when you ask her advice about casting a part she goes into a kind of trance, her eyes turn up to the ceiling, and you can almost hear the flick-flick-flick inside her head as she spools through that mental card-index where the essence of every actor and actress she has ever seen is inscribed. (29)

Tubby's outlook on life is full of a sense of play, his vision of things a little off kilter. Bernard also exhibits a sense of play when he goes about describing what he observes on his trip to Hawaii. Bernard has spent the majority of his life indoors and closeted away in classrooms, so it is no wonder he is taken aback by ordinary activities:
“As I was standing in the tepid shallows... a swimmer suddenly surfaced a few yards away like a submarine, and reared out of the water. He wore a glazed rubber mask and a plastic tube protruded from his mouth... then he removed his mask... He staggered towards me, impeded by enormous webbed rubber flippers on his feet, a very land-fish” (131). Bernard’s backwardness is amusing and because he is not embarrassed by his gullibility, there is a sense of play about his discoveries.

Grawe states that comedy makes three important points: it is about life, not just action; it is about faith, not facts; and, it is based upon patterns (17-18). What does he mean? First, comedies end with our expectation that there is a happy future beyond the last page. In *Nice Work*, although the facts do not state that Victor starts up his own factory, with the help and love of his family, we are led to believe that it will happen. We accept this premise because we have faith in the story, and because the author has set up a regular set of patterns that tell us so. As Grawe explains, “A pattern is any conscious repetition of material in juxtaposition with intervening, contrastive material... It is the artist’s problem to give us enough evidence of a pattern for us to believe in it” (18-19).

Returning to *Nice Work* as an example, we see patterns of Victor’s work ethic throughout the story: the beginning chapter that introduces us to him as a serious, imposed-upon family man, who feels the weight of responsibility heavily on his shoulders; his irritation with having to participate in the Industry Year Shadow Scheme, his impatience with strikers, slackers, and feminists who cry unfair to business practices that he favors. Lodge gives us enough repetition to understand that Victor works hard and deserves to be rewarded for it at the end.

We also have examples of how Victor misses having his family’s attention, turning his disappointment into cynicism, as he feels increasingly unappreciated. When his family eventually notices that Victor is acting strangely, they examine their own behavior and resolve to be better family members. We know enough about life to understand that most families tend to act like Victor’s family, that children, even grown
ones, can be oblivious of their parents' expectations. Because of the patterns established throughout the story, we accept the premise that the Wilcox family intends to be closer, contributing members, although the story ends before that happens.

The same patterning is observable in the other three novels, especially in *Therapy*, the most comic novel of the four. When the story ends, with Tubby continuing as Maureen's lover despite her refusal to leave her husband, and with his remark that "my own conscience is quite clear. The three of us are the best of friends" (321), we can reasonably believe it. Throughout the second half of the novel, Tubby spends much time explaining how his conscience has bothered him over the way he manhandled Maureen as a young teenager, forcing her to perform sexual favors that as a Catholic she felt were wrong. In recent years, he cringes at how crude and uncaring he was toward her, and finally, searching her out, is a little hurt to find that she spent little time brooding over him. She is a mature woman with more important issues on her mind—namely the loss of her son in a bizarre shooting and a mastectomy that has resulted in physical estrangement from her husband. She accepts Tubby's attention as pleasant and distracting, but he must prove himself worthy with deeper actions than just being around. Tubby comes through nobly, accepting her on her terms, convincing her that she is still as desirable as she once was. She laughs when he asks her to marry him:

"I couldn't leave poor old Bede [her husband] What would he do without me? He'd crack up completely."

"But you have a right to happiness . . . not to mention me."

"You'll be alright, Tubby."

"I like your confidence. I'm a notorious neurotic."

"You seem very sane to me."

"That's because of being with you again." (315-16)

Tubby is not exaggerating when he states that he is a recovering neurotic. We know he is from the patterning Lodge has set up for us. However, we can also believe that he is
on the road to sanity with Maureen. That is why we can believe his conscience is clear in his relationship with her.

The last two points that need to be made about comedy and its heroes are these: Comedy not only delights but also instructs (Grawe 20), and comedy should leave its audience uplifted with hope (Lynch, Christ and Apollo 79). David Lodge, unlike most comic writers, comes from a background of Catholic writing. His first novels dealt primarily with the precepts of the Catholic Church and their implications for the laity of the Church. In his novels today, we can see that same moral framework. His heroes are morally uplifting, which is not to say they are morally perfect. He forms heroes out of ordinary men who attempt to live life as best as they can. None of them are outwardly religious, even Bernard, who is more comfortable with no belief at all. Victor strays from his marriage vows but he returns to Marjorie a better person, we like to think. Bernard, a good man tormented by the knowledge he no longer believes in the Catholic faith, has to learn to like himself again. Adrian wants to damage a journalist's reputation but is not perceptive enough to do it properly. Tubby's sexual escapades only reinforce his feelings of inadequacy, forcing him to dig deeper for meaning to his life. Lodge's comedies make us voyeurs of British life as we eavesdrop on families who have the same behaviors as we do. We can learn a great deal from laughter; if nothing else, that it relieves tension.

Hope has to be an integral part of comedy or it is not true comedy. Lynch states that there are three evils of hope and wishing: "either we do not wish at all, or we have wishes and do not even know what they are, or we let others do the wishing and hoping for us" (Christ and Apollo 130). Bernard allows others to wish for him until he can no longer live a lie as a priest. He has hope that he can find his own beliefs on his own terms. Tubby tries out different therapies because he does not know what he is wishing for. His therapies end when he figures out what is missing in his life. Victor is so overwhelmed with defeating feelings that he dares not wish for much. He wishes life to
be easier, but he is skeptical that wishing will get him anywhere. Adrian wishes that his writing career had lasted longer and that he could live up to the rigors of being a writer. He has unrealistic wishes and does not know how to wish for what is best for him.

Lodge sets up these heroes, each with his own set of problems, to be guided through lessons taught by the heroines. The next chapter, we will consider the relationship between hero and heroine, how her role, though small, is vital in Lodge’s comedies. We will see that Lodge’s heroine is the traditional comic figure whose mission it is to help the hero. She is a superior being to the hero, well grounded in life and able to take on somebody else’s problems. Still, although she is sharper than the hero is, she also has problems of her own. When she meets up with the hero, she solves his problems and he solves hers. They form a complementary relationship that functions only when both help each other.

The hero in David Lodge’s comic fiction fits the traditional comic role: He is an ordinary man who goes against the tide most of the time. He needs a heroine to help him achieve his goals. Above all, he is a man who believes in the goodness of life and can give a witty interpretation of it. In Lodge’s hero we see Lodge himself, who “is constantly fascinated by the absurdity and untidiness of the human lot . . . , in ideas about how civilization is maintained” (Bergonzi 60).
Chapter II

The Comic Heroine in Lodge’s Later Fiction

David Lodge, in an essay titled “Mailer and Female (1971)” from Write On, discusses the then hot issue of “women’s liberation.” He sympathizes with Mailer’s concern that women’s lib has unfairly attacked some of the greatest writers for being male chauvinists, Mailer being one of them. However, Lodge makes the point that he finds the women’s movement not all that bad. He confesses that women “touched by the breath of Lib became more interesting. . . . Some, indeed, became visible to him for the first time” (89). Lodge could be speaking about his comic heroines.

Actually, without one’s knowing anything personal about Lodge, it is clearly evident that he admires what it is that females do for males, and we are not speaking just of the sexual act. His women are strong figures who are able to handle problems— their own as well as others. They seem “settled” and unflappable. Even if they encounter rough patches in their lives, they know somehow that they will not be derailed by them. They use the common sense they were born with to figure out how life works, unlike the males around them who fret and waste time trying to figure out what is wrong with themselves. Lodge uses his heroines to resolve the action after allowing his heroes to dominate it with their hilarious antics. It makes for good reading, and although the scenario is repeated in each of his comic novels, it is not tiresome. There are two reasons for this: First, Lodge is a witty writer who never fails to engage his readers with fast dialogue and keen insights into human behavior. Second, Lodge follows the traditional comic format that, as Grawe says, “matches a true heroine with a much less admirable male figure” (136).
Grawe rejects the assumption that all comedies are basically romantic, instead believing that “romance is often present in comedy” (134). As a secondary device, romance works to strengthen a more important idea or theme. Lodge’s novels do this very well; the romance is not the whole story. Bruce K. Martin, in his conclusion in *David Lodge*, remarks that Lodge’s writing is successful due to “[H]is ability not only to write serious fiction but to make serious use of the amusing and absurd materials he develops in his comic novels, to shift at appropriate points in his narratives to a serious, even moral tone” (165). Serious topics do hold more importance than the romantic pairings in his books. We witness the results of a Thatcherite England in *Nice Work*, examine the growing use of therapies in a me-obsessed culture in *Therapy*, question the importance of faith in one’s life in *Paradise News*, and feel the ramifications of a media-obsessed culture in *Home Truths*. These are the issues Lodge wants his readers to remember. How he accomplishes these is where the romance enters.

An important twist to the romantic comedy that has appeared in modern drama, and one that Lodge incorporates, is the idea that in addition to the hero having flaws, the heroine also suffers from problems that they mutually solve through a romance. We see this in *Nice Work*, where Robyn must open her eyes to real life outside the university before she can consider her education complete. Robyn, in touring the plant with Victor, is dismayed to see the workers performing the same operation repeatedly. She feels sorry for the men, thinking they must be bored:

“Couldn’t you move him to another job occasionally? . . . Move them all about, every few hours, just to give a change?”

“Like musical chairs?” Wilcox produced a crooked smile

“It seems so awful to be standing there, hour after hour, doing the same thing, day after day.”

“That’s factory work. The operatives like it that way.”

“I find that hard to believe.”
"They don't like being shunted about. You start moving men about from one job to another, and they start complaining, or demanding to be put on a higher grade. Not to mention the time lost changing over."

"So it comes back to money again."

"Everything does, in my experience." (83)

Initially Victor appears the villain in Robyn's eyes as she is horrified by the harsh working conditions in the factory. In her line of work as a university lecturer, she has spent little time worrying about budgets, and although of late she is experiencing the short end of a tight job market, she neglects to make the connection between them. Robyn's sheltered environment and theoretical underpinnings fail her in her encounter with a real factory situation. Ironically, she teaches a course on the Industrial Novel, which makes her appear even more ridiculous in Victor's eyes: "Jesus wept! Not just a lecturer in English literature, not just a woman lecturer in English literature, but a trendy lefty feminist lecturer in English literature!" (77).

In Paradise News, Yolande needs to negotiate a painful divorce that without Bernard's calming influence she is unable to do. As she explains to Bernard at their first dinner:

"He would like me to move away... to give him a divorce as quickly as possible, take my share of the value of the house and move back to the mainland. But I'm not going to give him an easy out... I want to hurt him... I was hurt. I felt betrayed. I knew the girl... She was one of Lewis's graduate students. (137)

Although Yolande is a trained marriage therapist, she is unable to apply the skills she uses on others to help herself. Bernard's calm demeanor and ability to placate serve as a model for Yolande in her trial to rid herself of enough anger to finish the divorce proceedings and get on with her life. We see that what are strikes against Bernard—his quiet approach and distancing—are precisely the attributes needed for Yolande's
situation. She finds Bernard “an honest man” (139), and at the end chooses him over Lewis, her husband, who wants to return to her.

Lodge introduces several women who are potential heroines in *Therapy*, but settles on Maureen to be Tubby’s savior. In this novel, more than the others, the conclusion seems the most stilted and contrived. Critics find “the Maureen plot . . . weak” (Matin 384), but, because this is a comedy and not realism, the complaint is invalid. Lodge’s purposes fit the comedy mode, chapter one establishes, with this section fitting the image of comedy that says time and change is “cyclical and unthreatening” (Galligan 34). Additionally, Lodge labels the section a memoir, signaling to us a circular return to the beginning for Tubby.

In *Therapy*, Maureen observes in Tubby a zest for life that has become dormant in her of late. Two horrible occurrences—the murder of their twenty-five year old son in Angola while doing missionary work and a mastectomy—have robbed her of her feelings. When her marriage becomes too uncomfortable for her to handle, she embarks on a religious pilgrimage to get away—“Something quite challenging, and clearly defined, something that would occupy [my] whole self, body, and soul, for two or three months” (302-03). Maureen’s strength comes from within her, from her deep faith in God, and from helping others. However, her reasons are selfish for being on the pilgrimage; she needs to find herself. In explaining the attraction of the pilgrimage to Tubby, she confides: “Surviving. At first you think you’ll go mad with loneliness and fatigue, but after a while you resent the presence of other people” (301). We observe in Maureen behavior completely opposite of Tubby’s, whose solution to his angst is frantically to include more therapies into his life.

In *Home Truths*, Eleanor learns that she really does want her marriage with Adrian to survive after a tumultuous period. Throughout their marriage of thirty years, she has been the one to keep Adrian, a novelist of faded glory, happy and feeling successful. Enduring years of his cyclic depression that chased even their sons away, she
has hidden his mood swings from the public. However, when she learns that Adrian has revealed intimate details of her triangle love relationship with Sam and him, she angrily spills out the truthful but private revelations of Adrian’s insecure behavior to the prying Fanny Tarrant, a journalist “notorious . . . for being rude about people” (12). Penitent, she confesses to Adrian, who quits speaking to her. After two weeks, when confiding the episode to their good friend Sam, she states that divorce is out of the question: “I’ve seen what it does to people . . . I don’t want to go through all that, not at my time of life” (86). Eleanor’s steadiness directly contrasts with Adrian’s artistic personality, and although she is fed up with nursing him through his moods, she is smart enough to know there are things worse. She needs Adrian to open up to her and welcome her back into his life.

In these comedies Lodge gives most of his attention to the heroes, imbuing them with memorable personalities and hilarious repartee, which is par for comedy. Grawe comments, “At least as often, comedy refuses to allow both the hero and the heroine equal stage time” (137). Heroines in Lodge’s comedies do not receive the funny lines. They play the “straight women” to their starring heroes. Robyn comes the closest to sharing equal billing, frequently appearing as humorous and witty as Victor in biting scenes that argue the merits of her thinking versus his. One memorable scene involves Victor’s marketing director, Brian Everthorpe, who suggests a pinup calendar to market their factory machines. Although Victor has already dismissed the thought as ludicrous, Robyn, who is sitting in on the conversation, is unable to remain quiet:

“Do I understand that you’re proposing to advertise your products with a calendar that degrades women?”

“It won’t degrade them, my dear, it will . . . “ Everthorpe groped for a word.

“Celebrate them?” Robyn helped him out.

“Exactly.”
“Yes, I’ve heard that one before. But you are proposing to use pictures of naked women, or one naked woman—like the pin ups that are plastered all over the factory?”

“Well, yes, but classier. Good taste, you know. None of your Penthouse-style crotch shots. Just tit and bum.”

“What about a bit of prick and bum, too?” said Robyn.

Everthope looked satisfyingly taken aback. “Eh?” he said.

“Well, statistically, at least ten percent of your customers must be gay. Aren’t they entitled to a little porn too?”

“Ha, ha,” Everthorpe laughed uneasily. “Not many queers in our line of business, are there, Vic?”

“Or what about the women who work in the offices where these calendars are stuck up?” Robyn continued. “Why should they have to look at naked women all the time? Couldn’t you dedicate a few months of the year to naked men? Perhaps you’d like to pose yourself, along with Tracey?”

“I’m afraid you’ve got it wrong, darling,” said Everthorpe, struggling to retain his poise. “Women aren’t like that. They’re not interested in pictures of naked men.”

“I am,” said Robyn. “I like them with hairy chests and ten-inch pricks.” Everthorpe gaped at her. “You’re shocked, aren’t you? But you think it’s perfectly all right to talk about women’s tits and bums and stick pictures of them up all over the place. Well, it isn’t all right. It degrades the women who pose for them, it degrades the men who look at them, it degrades sex.” (94-95)

Robyn’s aggressive attack of Everthorpe’s idea is witty and shocking. She is entertaining because she can hold her own against “the big boys” and does not back down or admit
defeat easily. Galligan describes the universal qualities of a heroine, the qualities of
Robyn, as these: “She knows that she is both intelligent and ardent, and she insists on
being both at once...[S]he knows that she is both a woman... and an individual, both
a social being who is incomplete without others, and a self whose private imperative
must be respected” (113-14). Robyn’s behavior is impetuous at times, as when she
foolishly tips off a factory worker that he is to be laid off, who then spreads the word to
his fellow workers who all walk off in protest. Victor’s wrath has little effect on her; on
the contrary, she wins by getting him to concede his role in the layoff and to apologize to
the group. She must apologize too, however, and lie that she misunderstood the
directive. Critics dislike this scene, claiming that it weakens Robyn’s moral stance, but it
can be logically explained that she is learning compromise in the business world.

Surfacing from these tense encounters is a grudging respect on both their parts: Vic has
never met the equal of Robyn: “If her ideas were barmy, at least they were ideas,
whereas Marjorie’s idea of an idea was something she had about wallpaper” (114). Robyn
meanwhile admits to herself that the shadow scheme allows her to be “a more interesting
and complex person” (151). Robyn is the most complete of the four heroines in this study.
Sadly, the other women have fewer lines, show less wit, and fade to the background for
most of the novels.

Yolande, in Paradise News, shows spunk and verve in her dealings with people,
as when she confronts an ambitious lawyer who attempts to give Bernard his card at the
scene of the accident with his father. Yolande, already angry and worried about the
situation, inserts herself between the lawyer and Bernard: “Keep your nose out of this,
mister... snatching the card and tearing it in half. “You people make me sick, you’re
like vultures” (82). Yolande’s aggressiveness is off-putting to Bernard, but he also is
envious of her “anger and her expletives” (82). Bernard, well-meaning but highly
introverted, feels inadequate in most situations, “oppressed with guilt and dread” (105),
and “insulated from the realities and concerns of modern secular society” (146). A
disastrous love affair that was instrumental in his leaving the priesthood has scarred him and taught him that celibacy is the safer route.

In Yolande, he meets his counterpart, but like Victor, compatibility does not come quickly. Her casual use of salty language, her self-revelatory talk at dinners, and her open fondness for him are exciting, but he is so fearful of becoming physically close that he ends each of their encounters abruptly. Finally, she blows up at him: “Do you think I’m trying to seduce you, or something? . . . You think I’m a sex-starved deserted wife whose tongue is hanging out for a screw? Is that it?” (187). Yolande’s harsh confrontation forces him to face what he has tried to block out. He decides to leave in her mailbox a journal that he has been writing, an intimate expose of his life and, in it, the explanation for his strange behavior.

The journal becomes the key to opening up meaningful dialogue between Yolande and Bernard. With his past now revealed, he is free to accept Yolande’s help, and the relief is so great that “he [feels] momentarily dizzy” (215). Bernard’s sexual therapy classes with Yolande are tender, witty, poetic (thanks to Bernard’s habitual need to equate various actions with a verse or two of poetry), and erotic. Lodge uses his humor to its best advantage here, in portraying Bernard with a dry sense of humor in counterpoint to Yolande’s earthy and erotic directions. After agreeing to let Yolande “teach” him the steps to physical intimacy, they meet in his hotel room. Upon entering, Yolande briskly informs him:

“I hope you don’t think we’re going to have sex this afternoon?” . . . and she laughed at the expression on his face, halfway, she said, between disappointment and relief. . . .

“If we don’t,” he said, “I’m not sure that we ever shall. The awful daring of a moment’s surrender is not something you can turn on at will.”

The awful what?”

“It’s a line from a poem.”
“Forget poetry for a while, Bernard. Poets are romantics. Let’s be practical. The reason you and Daphne didn’t make it together, well, one reason anyway, is that you rushed at it. You tried to go from total chastity to hands-on fucking in one move. Sorry, does the word bother you?”

“It does a bit.” (215-216)

Bernard’s squeamishness, in direct contrast to Yolande’s sexual earthiness, demonstrates a reversal of the traditional roles played out in a typical romance. Both Paradise News and Nice Work, to a lesser degree, follow these formats. Both heroes find themselves in romances where the heroine is far more comfortable with the sex act than her partner.

Lodge invents such interesting heroes that he does his heroines a disservice by not giving them the same consideration. Yolande has the potential to be more than just a good sex therapist who happens to enter Bernard’s life at an opportune moment, but essentially her role is reduced to that. She is the epitome of the modern sexual woman who understands the meaning of sexuality without having all the hangups. She is young, tanned, fit, and interested in Bernard, a shy, socially-awkward, gangly man who pushes her away. We find the relationship difficult to understand especially when Yolande can name only one quality that attracts her to Bernard—his honesty. Even Bernard’s sister has a difficult time understanding how it has all come to be, revealing her mystification over the relationship, “[W]hat she sees in you, Bernard, I can’t imagine.” (238). In comedies, it is not unusual for seemingly mismatched pairings to work. Grawe says it this way: “Virtually all of these male leads could best be identified as comedic fools, rescued from their foolishness by the superior women with whom they are matched” (136).

Maureen, from Therapy, is quite different from Robyn and Yolande in that she is not overly assertive or demanding. Her quiet manner is in direct contrast to Robyn’s strident feminist ways and Yolande’s street-wise behavior. Trained professionally as a
nurse, she also has spent years doing charity work and counseling. Unlike the other two heroines, she is married, although the marriage is faltering badly. Maureen resembles Lodge's heroine Clare, from his first novel, a serious Catholic girl who falls for a man who can think only of ways to seduce her. Maureen is Clare years later, still a devout and practicing Catholic, but much wiser now about life. She endures a flawed marriage because she will not break her marriage vows. As she puts it: "Sexless, perhaps, but not loveless... And I did marry him, after all, for better or for worse" (316). Maureen's seriousness runs counter to Tubby's silliness and impulsiveness. She plans her moves carefully, even down to timing perfectly her arrival into Santiago at the end of her pilgrimage, gaining Tubby's admiration: "How could you be sure you would get here, at exactly the right time?"... 'I had faith,' she said simply" (312). Faith dictates how Maureen will live her life. Faith is what Tubby has so little of that he must indulge in every quack therapy that comes along.

We "hear" about Maureen long before we meet her. In fact, she fills only twenty-seven of three hundred and twenty-one pages in the novel. The rest of what we know is from recollections by Tubby. She is the only heroine we get to know as a schoolgirl, thereby allowing us to contrast her youth to her middle age. We find that although her looks have been lost along the way, she still maintains a sweet demeanor that keeps Tubby enthralled—sweet, but not exploitable, like Clare in The Picturegoers, who allows Mark to change her feelings and beliefs. Maureen, even as a schoolgirl, keeps a firm hold on her beliefs and though Tubby tried very hard in the past to veer her away from those beliefs, she remained true to herself then as well as now. Only when she chooses to break a rule does she do it. She reveals to Tubby that she was not a virgin when she married Bede, who was second choice, sleeping first with a man she loved and hoped would marry her. Maureen, underneath that sweet demeanor, is her own person and will bend the rules from time to time only when she feels the need. Tubby may be just a pleasant diversion for her; we never really know. She does remark to him at the end of
the pilgrimage: “It’s been wonderful. . . . But it’s like the whole pilgrimage, a kind of kink in time, when the ordinary rules of life don’t apply” (316). This revelation allows us to partly understand the final pages of the novel, when Tubby states that “every now and then Maureen and I have a siesta” (321) although she remains married to Bede. Maureen lives outside the boundaries at times for the sake of her happiness as well as Tubby’s.

Maureen does for Tubby what all the therapies he engaged in before could not do—make him happy. Tubby’s happy-go-lucky optimism is restored. His job, that he was once in jeopardy of losing, has been made even grander. He is not even bothered that much that Sally, his wife, really wants to go through with the divorce, since finding somebody new. His flat in the West End has been “stripped bare” (319) by Grahame, a homeless youngster that he had befriended. Even that does not bother him—he never liked the furniture much, as Sally chose it. He is now looking for “a nice little house up the hill from the All England Club” (320), to be closer to Maureen and Bede. Typical of all comedies, we can almost hear the words “And they lived happily ever after.”

Lodge’s interest in writing Therapy was to show that the era of the ‘nineties was about therapy (Martin 156). His reason for writing Home Truths hits closer to his home—the deleterious effect the media has on celebrities, both well known and obscure. He begins and ends the novella with Princess Diana as the topic, a clever tactic since Diana surely is the most popular heroine of this century. The heroine of Home Truths is Eleanor, a middle aged “good-looking woman, pleasant to behold . . . [who] had kept her teeth and her figure” (8-9). She has been married to Adrian Ludlow for almost thirty years, a relationship with its typical difficulties. They live in a small comfortable cottage that formerly was their summer home. Adrian, once a popular novelist, has withdrawn from the writing scene for private reasons: he can no longer take the pressure of critics’ reviews and suffers writer’s block because of it. Eleanor has lived with this situation, playing protector but also victim, feeling she is the one who gave up the most: “It’s not as if I wanted to come and live down here . . . give up my job at the V and A . . .
lose touch with my friends . . . give up going to the theatre and galleries and shopping whenever I felt like it. I did it for your sake” (96). Eleanor has played heroine to the point that she no longer enjoys the role. Adrian, as hero, must come to her rescue this time, and convince her that her sacrifices have all been worthwhile.

Adrian is not as funny as Tubby, as witty as Victor, or as droll as Bernard. His humor borders on pungent, as we observe when he is laying the trap for Fanny, the ruthless journalist:

“Miss Tarrant?”

“Yes”

“Please come in.”

“Was that your wife who drove out of the gate as my taxi was trying to get in?”

“Yes. She’s gone to visit her niece in East Grinstead.”

“Pity. I was hoping to meet her.”

“That was what she wanted to avoid.”

Oh, why’s that?”

“She reads your articles . . . Won’t you sit down?” (35)

Adrian, the sly one, wants to trick Fanny into revealing something dark about herself, but she is smarter and ends up tricking him. Adrian fails as the hero from this point. He cuts off communication with Eleanor after finding out she has revealed his personal problems. He does not apologize for the suspect scene upon which she intruded. He thinks only of himself. As Galligan states. “[T]he qualities comedy derides are essentially the same whether the butts are men or women—arrogance, vanity, stupidity, inflexibility, and all the other faults associated with willfullness” (84). Adrian freezes out Eleanor, and in doing so, encourages her to begin thinking seriously about the state of their marriage. She does, but like a true heroine, decides that there is a bigger picture to look at: Life with Adrian has improved since he “gave up writing novels” (87). Unlike
Adrian, she thinks for the two of them and concludes that their life together is worthwhile. It only takes a word or two from her to indicate the seriousness of her resolve to convince him he needs to make the next move:

“Adrian, if you go on in that plummy mine host manner a minute longer, I swear to God I’ll throw this coffee pot at you”

“I don’t know what you mean, my dear”...

“Either you start speaking to me like a normal human being, or I’m going to leave now, instantly, this minute.”

“All right.”

“Did you say something?”

“I said ‘all right’”

All right what?”

“All right, I’ll speak to you like a normal human being. I’ve spoken.” (95)

Eleanor and Adrian reconcile because they know they work well together. They have toughed out worse times and recognize that this is not one of them. Together they will face Fanny’s scathing interview on Adrian, knowing that they will survive it, too. As it turns out, Fanny’s interview is barely noticed by anybody because the top news story for that Sunday and for weeks to come is Princess Diana’s horrible death in a Paris tunnel. The novel ends with Eleanor, Adrian, and Sam huddled around the television, having already forgotten their own difficulties.

Comedy builds up anticipation throughout the story that all will end hopefully. We know as well as Eleanor and Adrian that they will remain together. We know this because the author has used a technique that Grawe calls “patterning”: “A comedy is totally patterned to assert a faith in survival and may additionally assert the conditions or qualifications under which such survival is possible” (141). In other words, the author inserts statements that reinforce character traits, plot turns, information about what to
expect. For example, Lodge begins *Home Truths* describing how comfortable Adrian and Eleanor are with each other on a typical Sunday morning while reading the paper. In the next scene we see an unspoken agreement between Eleanor and Adrian to work together to keep Sam from figuring out they know the worst about the disastrous article about him. Even when Adrian shares his lame-brained scheme to trap Fanny, Eleanor supports him although she tells him of her doubts. When Eleanor realizes the seriousness of her betrayal of Adrian, she is beside herself with worry. In speaking with Sam about the mess, she refuses to give up the relationship. All of these vignettes pattern our thinking to believe that, no matter what, Eleanor and Adrian will always have a future together.

In *Therapy*, Tubby’s intense interest in Kierkegaard seems implausible. Kierkegaard, a philosopher whose books demand a disciplined mind to understand, would hold little interest for Tubby, a British sitcom writer. Yet, through Lodge’s patterning we are conditioned to believe it. Beginning with the first word, we see Tubby look up—“Should that be ‘gingerly’? No, I’ve just looked it up, adjective and adverb both have the same form” (4)—to his informal lecture on the Milky Way to Maureen in Santiago, near the end of the book, we observe Tubby’s fanatical need to consult the reference books. Tubby discovers Kierkegaard because an acquaintance asks about his angst. Not entirely sure of what angst means, he looks it up and finds the philosopher Kierkegaard connected to the word. Further research reveals the titles of Kierkegaard’s books, titles too intriguing not to pursue. Ultimately, Tubby becomes an avid reader of the philosopher who has also suffered from a sad love life. Tubby begins to make a connection between Kierkegaard and himself, which then leads to Maureen and his Quixotic quest to track her down. We know, after reading this far, that Tubby will find Maureen and they will reconnect. Patterning is the reason for it.

In *Nice Work*, we do not expect Victor to leave his wife, Marjorie, for Robyn. Lodge steers us away from that expectation from the very beginning, when he devotes an
entire chapter to Victor’s family life. We also observe that Victor believes in stability and conservatism, expressing his outrage at strikes, his idle children, and “silly bitches” (113). Robyn, the “silly bitch,” is far too different for a permanent relationship with Victor: she is a feminist; she is highly educated; and she does not believe in love. When their short-lived affair finally gets off the ground, it is terribly lopsided, with Victor experiencing only a bad case of puppy love—no surprises here. Finally, we have Victor’s own words at the end of the novel as verification of Lodge’s patterning: “I must have been out of my mind, imagining you would see anything in a middle-aged dwarf engineer” (274). Robyn and Victor part as good friends.

Paul Grawe devotes an entire chapter in his book to romance in comedy, in particular those of George Bernard Shaw. In his play *Pygmalion*, Shaw patterns it to have us believe that Eliza and Henry Higgins will wed. However, the play ends on an open note, with Henry giving Eliza the opportunity to marry Freddy if she wishes. We expect to see Henry and Eliza unite, and when they do not we are disappointed. Lodge resorts to this same trick in *Therapy*. We are led to believe that Maureen and Tubby will wed, but the ending veers away from that scenario, with Tubby stating that Maureen, Bede, and he are “the best of friends” (321), not a couple but a trio. The ending jars us because we have been patterned to expect a different ending. Grawe states, “We look to the future to assure ourselves that we have properly read the implied message of the work... The presence of a fairly definite virtual future proves the presence of a meaningful pattern in the work (31-32). In other words, we expect the ending to match our interpretation of the story. If the ending does not match our expectations, then we are forced to question our interpretation. If the patterning has been reliable throughout the story, but the ending does not match the patterning, the author has failed to do his job correctly. Why Lodge ends *Therapy* the way he does remains mysterious, but, like Shaw, he fails to convince us of this contrived ending.
Shaw was an avid believer of the superiority of women over men, "female chauvinism" as Grawe describes it. Lodge also subscribes to this belief, if we judge him by his heroines. Robyn, the most remarkable of the four studied, truly exemplifies a liberated woman who is still willing to learn from her mistakes, the few she makes. She has a giving heart, as we learn when she invests in Victor's new company, lending him "six figures" (274). She is self-reliant, not needing "a man to complete [her]" (274), but willing to keep her eyes open to possibilities. She has a social conscience to the very end—giving up a lucrative position in the United States to stay on in Rummidge in a position that may not stay funded, all because of a dream of hers to see equality on the campus, a place "swarming with local people... using the Library, using the laboratories, going to lectures, going to concerts... everything" (170).

Yolande, Maureen, and Eleanor also rate the title of heroine for their actions toward their heroes. Yolande "jumpstarts" Bernard into the twentieth century after a lifetime of solitary living without any vision. Maureen enables Tubby to go "cold turkey" on all of his addicting therapies, showing him that his depression can be controlled without them. Eleanor displays the common sense and stability for which comic heroines are most noted, demonstrating to Adrian that she wishes to keep their relationship intact. Lodge's patterning in these four comic novels leads us to believe in hope. As Alice Rayner states, "The comic form repeats the irrepressible force of life over death, the comic marriage symbolically duplicates the mystery of renewal, and that the world as we know it can be born again, renewed and refreshed" (10). Lodge employs the comic format because he excels at it. His humor has no bite, no maliciousness. His characters do seem renewed and refreshed at the end of their sagas. Most marriages remain intact. New relationships, if they are genuine, continue into marriage. Lodge, in his godlike capacity, creates happy worlds. Usually...

In *The Writing Game, A Comedy*, Lodge goes against the traditional comic format and presents us with characters that are not easy to like. They are self-absorbed and
manipulative, unconcerned and uncaring of others. The ending is not uplifting, unless we believe that the two schemers seem to be seeing eye to eye for the first time, a truce of sorts. Lynch, in *Images of Hope*, would say these characters have fixated wishes: “The fixated wishes which plague the sick have the tones of situations in which human beings are trapped or stuck . . . in some past situation . . . They are trying to work something out in the past but never quite succeed” (142). Both hero and heroine in this play bring with them problems from the past that they must get past in order to progress toward happiness. What is mystifying is that Lodge never allows his hero and heroine to get past their problems.

Leo, the hero, is an American writer who freely shares his opinions with anybody, whether they like it or not. He has a monstrous ego he feeds by pretending his books are “literature” (25) as opposed to the others that sell in vast quantities in airport bookstalls. Divorced twice, arrogant, and chauvinistic, he strikes out at the world with caustic sarcasm. Maude, an attractive woman in her forties, also is a writer—one whose books do sell in vast quantities in airport bookstalls. She is well spoken and quite able to take care of herself in any kind of situation. Leo does not daunt her; she revels in mastering him in his mean-spirited banter. She, like Leo, has pent-up anger that she vents in immoral ways. They make quite a pair of unlikely heroes.

Lodge describes his play as one of “relationships of sexual and professional power, possession and rivalry” (*The Practice of Writing* 216). We will explore these relationships, using Lodge’s words as our guide. We will attempt to identify the comic elements, the five images of comedy, and determine if the work incorporates hope in its theme. Lodge undoubtedly is proud of this play—we will attempt to see why.
Chapter III

The Unlikely Heroes of The Writing Game: A Comedy

Charles Child Walcutt, in Man's Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction, states that Aristotle's theories of tragedy and comedy remain unchallenged even today. In deciding what determines character, there are two major elements: "moral bent and intellect." He defines moral bent as "the way the person reacts to a situation and translates his reaction into action," and intellect as "the way he thinks about himself and his situation" (17). These reactions must be judged in relation to the "central values, customs, and manners of a society" (18). Little actions accumulate and form the character who discovers his identity from the big acts that come in crucial places in the plot. Intellect is derived from the character thinking of his actions while he is performing them. When a character thinks too much about his actions, we will usually observe a conflict in the plot, leading to change.

In Lodge's comedy The Writing Game, we encounter a circumstance quite unlike any of the others we have observed in chapters one and two: namely, two despicable characters who serve as hero and heroine. In contrast to Tubby from Therapy, who is upbeat despite fighting a growing depression, Leo, our hero in this story, appears pessimistic, unkind, and suspicious of those who are kind. Maude, the heroine, appears sophisticated, accustomed to the finer things in life, and tolerant of those less fortunate. Our judgment of Leo is accurate, whereas our judgment of Maude is generous. She is as flawed as Leo. Both are ruthless, self-serving people who are consumed with maintaining an identity in the writing world.
If we judge our heroes on their moral bent and intellect, they fail. When the play first opens, Leo is being shown the converted seventeenth-century barn that is used to hold short seminars in writing. He has been recruited after a more popular writer has backed out. Leo finds it irritating that some of the enrolled have cancelled upon hearing the news. He dismisses the popular writer's ability with the offhand remark that he “tried one of his books. Never finished it” (4). Immediately we detect that Leo is intimidated by others’ successes and must be dismissive of their work to assuage his own feelings.

In choosing his room in the barn, he picks the one without the “birds in the eaves” (2), a deliberate lie told by Jeremy, the caretaker, who has already figured out the type of character Leo is. Leo, in his haste to grab the better room, will discover shortly, when Maude arrives, that he has chosen incorrectly:

Maude

Where am I sleeping?

Leo (quickly)

I took the downstairs bedroom.

Maude

Oh, how kind of you.

Leo (disconcerted)

Kind?

Maude

Yes, it's rather damp, haven't you noticed? And you get a lot of beetles in there. (12-13)

Leo is learning quickly he has volunteered for more than just a bad room. When Jeremy refers to the workshop as a “pressure cooker” (9), Leo picks up his bags and declares he is leaving. Our hero, anxious about being overworked, has little concern about leaving Maude in the lurch. It takes both Maude and Jeremy to get him to change his mind.
Maude, at this stage in the play, comes across as a caring, insightful woman. She appears not to notice Leo's rough edges, soothing him as a mother would. She cajoles him into staying by offering him a compromise: "Give it a trial, at least. One day" (12). She also appears not to know much about Leo, which he finds irritating as he brags about his "novel about the end of World War Two" he is in the middle of writing. Her remarks of "Congratulations (with a hint of mockery)" and "Ambitious" (14) are signs that she finds his inflated ego insufferable, but she is too much the lady to openly show it. We like Maude; we empathize with her and feel sorry that she must endure such a callous, self-centered jerk for the week.

As Leo continues to share his tactless remarks with Maude and Jeremy about the workshop, we begin to wonder when Maude will finally have her fill and tell him off. We do not have to wait long. When Leo discovers that the third writer contracted for the workshop is a reviewer who, as he puts it, "Interviewed me once . . ., [f]lattered the hell out of me, then went away and wrote a lot of sneers and smears" (17), Maude loses patience with him and tells him to leave, that she would rather teach by herself than hear him "moaning and whingeing for the next four days" (18). Leo backs down and leaves the room in huff. Our mental score for the showdown: Maude, 1; Leo, 0.

Leo is an easy hero to despise. Lodge makes him as unlikeable as one can. However, we sense that there is more to him than what we have observed. It is what entices us to continue with the play instead of putting it down. Maude, too, is intriguing in that she seems too accommodating. We wonder what is in it for her. Her inquiries to Jeremy after Leo leaves the room about the third writer, Simon, a man she obviously likes, tip us off that she is disappointed that it is not Simon instead of Leo who is the second writer.

Throughout the play, as sort of a running gag, we hear the loud voice of Maude's husband, on an answering machine in the room. He is an elderly professor-type, who seems to be quite lost without his wife's guidance, a phantom voice calling with the
typical mundane questions husbands ask wives when they are not there to run things. Although it is meant to be funny, it is mostly not. But, we are able to judge Maude more accurately by her reaction to each interruption. She never picks up on the machine, maintaining a distance from him that speaks volumes about their relationship.

In Act One, Scene Two we see a more relaxed Leo. Dinner is over; they have met the students, and are back in the barn, re-acquainting themselves with each other. Maude, making small talk, tries to flatter Leo by stating she has admired his work “for ages” (23). He catches her on this when he reminds her that she reviewed his first book, remembering perfectly her statement, “Mr. Rafkin polishes his style, the better to see in it the reflection of his own ego” (24). We see now that Maude knows more than she is letting on. As Leo warms up to her, flattering himself with how his books “win prizes . . . attract grants . . . justify [his] salary as a college teacher” (25), she decides to call it a night.

So far, we have little evidence that Maude hides a dark personality. She defends the students’ right to write when he finds them “a bunch of amateurs . . . , the literary equivalent of Sunday painters” (35). Her view that teachers should encourage talent runs counter to his belief that teachers should be honest. In a convincing argument that Leo wins, he comically describes one of the students who has written twelve rejected novels, “approximately one million words” (36) and has received two hundred and thirty-nine rejection slips. She questions his motives for writing when he states that “writing is grim business” (38). Leo understands writing to be a supreme sacrifice that will take years of hard work and rejection. She, in contrast, delights in the joys of writing, when everything flows and the “pages mount up” (38).

Throughout the play so far, Leo has openly tried to seduce Maude, even sharing with her that he only volunteered for the workshop to get to know her better. She handles his advances with her usual grace and charm, putting him off with light barbs and pointed sarcasm. On his selected night for reading aloud from his manuscript, he
describes in gory detail the sodomizing of a prostitute with a bar of soap. Several people walk out of the reading. Later, after Leo himself walks out in a snit, Maude pins him down on his feelings about sex. He admits that he looks upon it as a "power struggle, a struggle for dominance, with violence at the heart of it, violence and tenderness strangely intertwined" (57). Leo finds sex analogous to writing style: when sex is controlled and cooled it has a powerful energy, much the same way style infuses energy into writing.

Leo egotistically thinks the plot of his novel is brilliant, a stunning combination of "repetition and difference compacted together" (46), and so is devastated when Maude deduces the plot using the few known facts he has divulged. As Leo quickly begins to make alterations to his manuscript, distracted by this new predicament, Maude, who has been drinking wine all evening, shares with him the plot from one of her novels: two adults whose mates are having an affair, meet, get soaked in a rainstorm, and ultimately end up in a hot bath together, and afterwards, rub each other down with hot towels. It is erotic but there is no sexual intercourse. Leo remarks, "Your scene is phoney. You wrote it with your eyes shut" (60). Maude defends her plot, explaining that women writers write sex scenes that are sensual, whereas men write clinical explanations of private parts. Leo, still preoccupied with his manuscript, pays only enough attention to interject a remark now and then. Maude goes off to get ready for bed. She enters the bath, turns on the shower, all the while leaving the door cracked. Soon steam escapes, drawing Leo's attention away from his work. He catches the hint and enters the bath.

We are now beginning to see another side of Maude. Is our heroine coming to the aid of the hero, who has openly pined for her? Is she trying to act out her steamy novels? The next day she is back to her usual "tight-assed English rose" (78) ways, to quote Leo. Simon has arrived, a trendy upscale reviewer who writes nasty reviews. He engages Maude in bubbly conversation, bringing Leo in when he wants to insult him. He has
already sneaked and read Leo's manuscript and now delights in Leo's anger when it is revealed:

Simon

I daresay it's only a matter of time before writing is fully automated in the States. (To Leo) Or can you already buy software that actually writes the stuff for you? Like a programme for writing the Great American Novel. What would it be called . . .? 'MEGAWRITER,' perhaps.

Leo

Very witty.

Simon

‘WANKSTAR’ for Penthouse stories.

Maude

Shut up, Simon.

Simon

And, of course for the ever-popular story of Jewish hangups about sex and the Holocaust—‘SOFTSOAP’.

Leo

You asshole! Have you been reading my manuscript . . .?

Leo moves threateningly towards Simon, who retreats, raising his hand in a mock gesture of surrender. Leo picks up his yellow ringbinder from the table.

Simon

Sorry! Is it not intended for publication? (70)

For the first time, we begin to feel sorry for Leo, for although he is obnoxious, he seems tame in comparison to Simon, who is evil and corrupt. We also have to wonder by now, why Lodge brought to life such vile people in a play about writing—supposedly a profession that has brought him happiness and success.
Simon’s night to read his manuscript reveals the depths an “artist” will go to appall his audience. Titled Instead of a Novel, it is a sardonical description of the physical parts of a novel—the book—the jacket, the blurbs, the photos, the biographical note, the reviews, the title page, the dedication, the acknowledgements, and the epigraph. It is “horseshit” (86), to quote Leo, parading as art, with Simon as its coy and pretentious artist. The acknowledgements section is especially written for its shock value, as he cynically thanks the people who enabled him to become the raging success he is today. What we really observe is proof that even when a man acts so lowly that he slithers along the ground, he can still maintain enough stiff-necked pride to blame others for it. Leo, when asked his opinion of the reading, succinctly snarls, “He luxuriates in his own obnoxiousness. He has orgasms of self-loathing...That piece is nothing but bad faith jerking itself off” (87). Put it there, Leo!

When Leo finally punches Simon for one remark too many, we finally see the real Maude. Up to now she has been obscure, behaving more like a referee than anything else. When she disappears into the bathroom with Simon, in a pretense of helping him with his bloodied nose, we recognize the pattern. Leo does too, much to his chagrin. They openly solicit him for his bedroom (actually, just his mattress), and as Simon and Leo trade barbs over “ownership” of Maude’s body, we cringe to think that Maude is one of Lodge’s heroines.

We see that Maude is a modern sexual woman, just as Robyn is described as being in chapter two. However, that is where the similarities end. Maude takes lovers to get even with her husband who has been “tutoring” his special students for years—before he met Maude and since. She married her husband as a “repressed, unfulfilled young woman” (106), much like the heroines she writes about in her books. It took her years to figure out what her husband was up to, and it was then, at age thirty-five that she strayed outside the marriage. She tells all this to Leo straightforwardly, not bragging but also not apologizing
Lodge inserts into his play one shining light—Penny, one of the students. She is a pre-school teacher, married, somewhat wide-eyed. When she first presents her manuscript to Leo, he is harsh in his criticism, suggesting she throw it away and give up the idea of writing. She takes it as a challenge and writes a much better piece. He is impressed enough to encourage her to keep at it, although she will probably experience years of rejection: "It's a hard, lonely road.... You sure you want to go down it?" (110). She hesitates a brief second and answers no. Coming to the course has "cured [her] of wanting to be a writer" (111). She gives other reasons: the writers are insecure, as if they "begrudged each other the tiniest success;" they "live to write," always having to "keep devouring experience, turning it into writing, or they would cease to be recognized, praised, respected—and that would be death for them" (112). Leo seems to take her comments to heart, whereas Maude, who has been eavesdropping on the conversation only remarks, "Mrs. Sewell has hidden depths. Somewhat sanctimonious ones, I'm bound to say" (113). The play ends with Maude and Leo on friendly terms again, with Leo joking that he is going to give up on his epic because he has just had a great idea for a play.

So, where are we in terms of moral bent and intellect? As we said earlier, both characters fail to serve as admirable heroes. Leo, as it turns out, fares better than Maude, because he is exactly as he appears: gruff, chauvinistic, insensitive. He has a heart; it just is not used very often. His little actions throughout the play characterize him as selfish and unfeeling but, as we see in his interaction with Penny, he is totally consumed in helping a good writer write better. He has a conscience that he has kept under wraps that Penny has been able to prod to life. He is a worthwhile individual whose intellect tells him he needs to make changes in his life.

Maude, however, is duplicitous. Moreover, her excuse for her extramarital affairs is inexcusable—to live a sham marriage is immoral and unnecessary for her. She is financially well off and quite capable of taking care of herself, as we have observed.
Although she gives no reason for remaining in the marriage, we sense she finds it a convenient “cover,” allowing her to keep her pristine reputation as a romance writer. Lodge verifies this supposition through his essay “Playback,” in The Practice of Writing, relating that the actress chosen to play the role questioned how “Maude could be so cool and calculating about her sexual life, and whether there mustn’t be some kind of hurt underneath it all” (303). Originally, Maude was to have an “open” marriage, but Lodge later adjusted it, reasoning that it seemed improbable a man like her husband would go for something that permissive. Maude’s original line was “It’s a perfectly amicable arrangement, so much more civilized than divorce and much less expensive” (304). So, there we are.

Nathan A. Scott states “that the art of comedy is not an art that is dedicated to the ludicrous . . . , rather an art that is dedicated to the telling of the Whole Truth” (93). Of all the comedies Lodge has written, this one hits closest to telling the Whole Truth. It shows man as a pathetic, grabby creature, who is out for all he can get in this life. It is not a pretty picture. But, perhaps Lodge’s point is exactly that—comedy shows the man without the pathos of a tragedy. Tragedy glosses over a weak man’s traits because it takes a panoramic view. We are swept up in the grandeur of the tragedy. Comedy, however, looks microscopically at that same man and suddenly we see every flaw and weakness. Incongruous as it sounds, comedy would be hard to like if it did not take the edge off with humor.

We find humor in The Writing Game but it is deprecating, not elevating. Although Leo is coarse in his expressions, we have grown used to that style of profanity in Lodge’s other comedies. Quite honestly, the funniest scenes in all of his comedies involve this language. Lodge is adept at making profanity acceptable to even the most modest of his readers. However, the exchanges between Simon and Leo are so mean-spirited they become shrill in our ears. We want them just to leave the room and settle their differences outside. What seems missing in the humor of this comedy is its sense of
play. We do not see anybody having any fun. Penny, the most likeable of all the characters, observes this same thing to Leo when she states, “You don’t seem to be very happy” (111). Leo is not happy, he is driven. He is suffering from writer’s block that, like a physical constipation, is making him irritable and out of sorts. We presume that if he is serious about his last statement to Maude about writing a play, his temperament will improve. Scott reminds us that “the joy of comedy is a great joy, but it is a joy that can sometimes come after great humiliation” (103). Leo has suffered humiliation at the hands of Maude and Simon, both expert at inflicting verbal barbs where they hurt Leo the most—his ego. But he binds up his wounded pride with the cautionary words Penny uses for herself: “I see how easily I could get addicted to that kind of praise” (113). Leo seems ready to heed Penny’s warning, seeing in himself the addiction that she fears. Why else would he ask Maude if they were “really such assholes?” (114).

Maude, in contrast, exudes charm and warmth, yet we sense no real happiness in her world either. She uses her sophistication as armor, deflecting any emotion that comes her way. She is cold underneath that veneer of warmth, and she calculates with alarming precision her future bedmates, as she might pencil in future lunch dates. Her husband must take some of the blame for the damage we see in her, but she should accept that she is the one who chose to get even by cheating. Of Lodge’s heroines, we observe they are superior to their heroes, endowed with a common sense about life that their counterparts lack. Perhaps it is merely a heightened intuition that females cultivate. Whatever we call it, Maude seems to lack it. She does not see the devastation in herself brought about by her vindictiveness. Her lack of awareness is startling when we compare her to Robyn, Yolande, Eleanor, and Maureen, who seek happiness in positive ways. While we have a little hope that Leo will work on improving his life from here on out, we hold no such expectations for Maude. As we have all heard our mothers preach, “She has made her bed; now she must lie in it.”
Lodge shares his reasons for writing this play in *The Practice of Writing*, saying that he hit upon the idea for a writing seminar from his experience with them, "teaching such a course myself—not because its plot bears any resemblance to what happened on that course... I invented the plot... to fulfill the dramatic possibilities inherent in the situation" (216). Our question should be, then, why is the play so dark with writers whose egos are out of control? Is Lodge trying to show through this play typical behaviors of writers? We hope not. Some of the intense discussions that Leo and Maude have are Lodge's way of shedding light on the writing process, something he has spent his academic career studying. They are easily understood yet informative to the lay person. We enjoy the give and take of these conversations, seeing the relationship build between Maude and Leo. What is startling to us, after seeing other relationships go through the same "testing," is that these characters seem to have no redeeming qualities to offer each other. Unlike Victor who can teach Robyn about life outside the walls of her university, Leo can offer Maude nothing but his pessimistic sarcasm and a quick roll in the hay. Unlike Yolande, who tenderly guides Bernard through the *Joy of Sex* in five easy lessons, Maude plays games with Leo, sleeping with him but never explaining why.

Where did Lodge's moral compass point when he invented these people? Leo grumbles his way through the first scene just as Victor grumbles through the first chapter of *Nice Work*, but Leo's comes off as whining whereas Victor's seems plaintive. Leo plots to have the best things for himself (the bedroom without the birds in the eaves); Victor worries that his family takes advantage of his work ethic and are unconcerned that he is shouldering the entire burden. Victor has a brief affair with Robyn but returns to his wife, Leo and Simon fight over who will have Maude in his bed. Victor is a team member; Leo is a loner.

Maude floats into a room, much like one of her heroines from her books, just as mysterious and just as phony as the plots she devises. Robyn enters Victor's world and bares her social conscience for the men in the factory. Maude keeps secrets; Robyn is
admonished to quit letting out secrets to the workers. Maude does not believe in love because she was hurt by it; Robyn does not believe in love because of something she learned in a course. Maude is dangerous; Robyn is safe.

What are we supposed to think about Simon? In the stage directions he is described as “good-looking in a slightly Mephistophelian way” (64). It does not take long to see that he lives up to his looks; He is evil beyond any character Lodge has ever invented. Simon takes pleasure in hurting people. He excels in verbally demolishing his opponent, as we witness in his dealings with Leo. He cannot be riled in an argument: Instead of taking offense at Leo’s diatribe on the English writer, who “has his hand in someone else’s pocket and his nose in someone else’s asshole,” Simon halts him in mid-sentence, facetiously wondering, “Let me think if that is anatomically possible” (87). Simon wins every time in his verbal jousts, whereas Leo can only think to defend himself by using his fists. Simon, a slender type who “bleed[s] rather easily” (96), avoids physical confrontations whenever possible. The only way Leo can halt Simon’s verbal barrage is to move “threateningly” (70) toward him.

Like Maude, Simon presents different sides of himself on different occasions. In his interactions with Maude, he is chatty like a schoolgirl, eager to know the latest gossip. With the students he is temperamentally, disinterested, more than willing to have them get “pissed” at the local pub—“the only way to get any peace” (73). With Jeremy, the caretaker, he is dismissive, failing even to inform him of a change in arrival plans, thus causing Jeremy a long trip to the train station for nothing. As a pampered Cambridge student who moved easily into the London writers’ scene, “without stubbing [his] toe on reality” (87), to quote Leo, Simon has enjoyed success at a quicker pace than he deserves.

We believe this when he reads from carefully numbered index cards his novel of experimental fiction. Simon is a gifted, perhaps brilliant man who has allowed the literary world to convince him that anything he writes will be acclaimed for its genius. What he has produced is not brilliant—it is Simon’s way of thumping his nose at the
group, the literary scene in London, and most particularly, himself. He hates himself for his cowardly handling of his girlfriend’s pregnancy and abortion, for the way he treated his best friend, Julian, who was always there to clean up Simon’s messes. He hates the way Julian confessed to him one night, “high as a kite on cocaine,” that he loved him, and that Simon, “quivering with righteous indignation like an outraged Victorian maiden,” threw him out. He hates that Julian died two years later, a heroin addict (82). He hates that he might be gay. Of course, we can also believe that Simon’s experimental novel has no autobiographical basis.

As noted in the introduction, comedy can be divided into two classes: sentiment/fancy and satire/realism. Satire can be defined as “something aroused by the inferior and ugly.” It is the duty of comedy to expose folly to ridicule to make us all feel better. Fancy and sentiment in comedy are based on a “sympathetic or playful response for almost everything in life” (Thorndike 593). Perhaps this is too simplistic to say of Lodge, but it appears that his comic novels are based on fancy and sentiment whereas his play is satiric and realistic. W. O. S. Sutherland, Jr. states that satire has three characteristics. The first involves “a contrast in values . . . , one set . . . to act as a criterion; the other . . . the subject of satire” (10). Lodge gives us the writers’ values as the subject of satire: Leo’s selfishness and lust for Maude, Maude’s fancy for “younger men” (102), and Simon’s corrupted and evil manipulation of the writing world. He holds these people up for us to judge and ultimately reject.

Penny, representative of the students (and us), forms the criterion. Her world of pre-school children, fidelity in marriage, and a sensibility about what is right becomes a model for comparison to the writers. She is described as having “big eyes and fair hair” (22), a metonymic reference to innocence. She is not innocent, but she is pure. It is interesting to watch Maude’s attitude toward Penny change from thinking “she was very nice” (23) to suspiciousness and a complete dismissal of her “sanctimonious” depths (113), because she feels threatened by her.
The second characteristic involves the author. He must “indicate an unfavorable attitude toward the values which are the subject of the satire and a favorable attitude toward the values which act as the criterion” (11). Lodge demonstrates this by having Penny become the conscience of the play. She is the one who learns more than just writing skills. She observes that a big ego, adulation, and fame can corrupt a writer. Recognizing these traits in the writers before her, she turns down Leo’s offer to enter their privileged circle. She would rather live where the compliments are sincere (112).

The third characteristic is that “the reader is not really deceived, though he must never reveal that he is not” (12). Are we deceived by Lodge’s story of the writing world? Are we confusing these heroes with the others in his novels, forgetting that The Writing Game is more satire than comedy? If we believe the purpose of this play is to show the pitfalls successful writers face, are we to find the characters despicable or merely stereotypes? The question comes down to this: Is Lodge’s play a comedy or a satire? If it is the latter, it fulfills all the requirements. We can quit hating these characters because they are merely symbols of their greediness. They teach by being. They do not need to change and improve their behavior by the end of the play. Gilbert Highet, in The Anatomy of Satire, explains that when an optimist (which we believe Lodge to be) writes a satire he believes that “folly and evil are not innate in humanity, or, if they are, they are eradicable . . . , [that we should] make warning examples of them . . . in order to help all the others . . . The optimist writes in order to heal” (236-37). We learn from satire how not to be like the characters who demonstrate poor moral bent and intellect.

However, if it is a comedy, as the title affirms it is, does it support the five images of comedy? To begin with, we observe very little hope in this drama. None of the characters seems capable of change. Leo comes the farthest in his actions, but we are left with an ambiguous ending: we observe an exuberance because he is onto a new topic to write about—a play. Does this exuberance indicate that he is ready to change his ways.
too? Who knows? Maude has no remorse for her actions, and she probably never will. Nothing seems to penetrate her armor.

Image One: Comedy makes fun of the one who thinks too much. Leo thinks too much and we see he is the butt of jokes for both Maude and Simon. However, Simon wears his intellectual superiority like a piece of clothing. He is not made to appear foolish, but he is rather pathetic. Maude is too self-contained for us to judge.

Image Two: Willfulness, or having one's own way backfires in a comedy. Leo, again, is made the fool for trying to sleep with Maude. When she calls the shots, he scores. Simon wins ownership of Maude's bed, too, but it is not through willfulness. Maude succeeds in her willfulness, as sad as that is.

Image Three: Wishfulness, or wishing for things that are foolish (denying the real nature of things). Leo wishes that he would finish a novel that is going nowhere. Maude does not wish; she plots with deadly accuracy. Simon wishes he were dead, if we judge him by his cynical Instead of a Novel.

Image Four: Time is cyclical. Times seems linear in this play; however, both Maude and Simon are on repeat visits. Also, if we think of the course as a perpetual occurrence, time is cyclical.

Image Five: Comedy enjoys upheaval and mayhem. We have no doubt Lodge's play fulfills this image. Even Jeremy notes, "I was beginning to fear this evening would be another fiasco" (71). It is a play of musical beds, upset writers, and a mutiny of one student.

Now, although we have been having fun with the images of comedy, it is obvious that Lodge's play can be considered both comedy and satire. It fits the classification of satire better, as it has a bite that is remarkably absent from his comic novels. Whatever we call it, it seems a step down from the quality of writing for which Lodge is known. Perhaps we should give him some leeway—It is his first play.
Lodge finds the theatre the most exciting place to be right now. He is in awe over how the process works: “wooing, manipulating, controlling, and delighting audiences” (327). He confides, “One of the satisfactions of artistic creation, if it is successful, is that it is a benevolent exercise of power. power, because you are controlling other people’s behaviour, benevolent because you are giving them pleasure” (327). It is in the “pleasure” part that we find objection. Is there any pleasure in The Writing Game? Do we finish reading it and feel better? That is what comedy is supposed to do. Will we remember Leo with the same fondness as Victor or Tubby? Will Maude’s cool sophistication measure up to Robyn’s ardor or Maureen’s steely determination? Will there be any parts that we will re-read for their wit and humor as we are bound to do with Therapy? Lodge, who has established his reputation in writing comic fiction, is known primarily for his “beneficence” (Matin 386). Where is the beneficence in The Writing Game?
Conclusion

David Lodge’s comic heroes are remarkable for their ability to be like us, only funnier. They live funnier lives, have funnier problems, think funnier thoughts. When we read a story about one of these heroes, we feel better about ourselves. That is the purpose of comedy—to feel uplifted. Lodge has incorporated in each of his comic novels a scheme that works very well. He brings in a heroine to give the hero a “mind-lift.” She becomes his teacher, showing him solutions for the problems he has. This scheme is not original. It has been a part of the tradition of comedy since its evolution. As discussed in chapter one, Galligan’s identification of five images inherent in comedy allows us to actually break apart each of Lodge’s novels to see how it conforms to these guidelines.

Lodge’s heroines are superior to the heroes. They are not superwomen; they are as normal as the heroes. They are superior in the skills needed to help the hero. Robyn knows nothing about factories, but she does know how people should be treated. She teaches Victor to be a better boss to his workers. Yolande sometimes loses her cool when she should remain calm, but those emotions come in handy as a therapist when she needs to feel empathy for others. Her counseling skills rescue Bernard from an emotionless life. Maureen has lived a quiet existence with Bede for years, but in that time, she has become even more self-determined, a trait that Tubby needs to emulate. Eleanor has let Adrian’s career dictate their decisions, but it has made her flexible. Adrian needs to learn how to be flexible, himself.

Heroines are placed in comedies to help the hero resolve issues. Lodge follows this format, but adds to it: the hero and the heroine form a complementary unit together. What he lacks, she supplies, what she lacks, he supplies. This characteristic pairing can be found in all of Lodge’s fiction, even in his Catholic novels. Sometimes it may be just a
minor part of the story, but it is there in every novel. Lodge’s later fiction relies heavily on a romantic pairing for plot resolution. The exception to this is *The Writing Game*, which features a hero and heroine too self-absorbed to be of use to each other.

Lodge’s handling of romance usually borders on the humorous. He gives his reason for that: “Possibly I overdo the disappointed and absurd side of sexuality out of a wish to avoid falling into a false and lyrical sentimentality about sexual love” (Haffenden 159). We have little fear that we will encounter sentimental love scenes in any of Lodge’s comedies. Most of his sex scenes border on pornographic, but they are indeed the funniest parts of the book. Scenes such as those we detailed in chapters one and two are typical of Lodge’s idea of romance: graphic with an abundance of embarrassment on the hero’s part, usually. In these novels, all four of our heroes have relationship problems, sex being part of it. The heroines in these four novels are more skillful in the love department than the heroes. Again, we go back to the issue of the superior heroine.

Critics fault Lodge for his happy, contrived endings. They also have a difficult time deciding if his fiction is realism or comedy. One hopes this paper has resolved both issues. Lodge incorporates serious issues into his comedies, giving them more weight than the comedic parts in some instances. *Nice Work* gives us a picture of the downside of a tight economy in England. *Paradise News* contemplates faith and its place in society. *Therapy* lampoons the ‘nineties, a decade dedicated to self-absorption. *Home Truths* demonstrates the growing menace of the press in private lives. These serious issues dominate the novels, with the humor added to make it all go down easier.

In Lodge’s play, *The Writing Game, A Comedy*, the heroes are not likeable, although they are humorous. They spend their time trying to get ahead and get even. Dialogue is witty but mean-spirited. At the end, the characters call a truce to their fighting, but it is unsatisfying because we see no growth, no change to speak of, in them. Unlike Lodge’s other comedies, which could be termed romances, this play is truly satiric
in its form, thereby forcing us to look at the characters as merely examples of how not to be. One wonders why Lodge chose to write so darkly about his own world, unless he means truly to warn us away from it.

Lodge has turned his attention to television and stage productions. He finds the experience exhilarating, stating: “In no other medium can the writer observe and measure the reception of his work so closely and intimately . . . Sitting in an audience in the theatre, you can experience the exercise of [benevolent power], when the play works—and, by the same token, experience mortification and frustration when it doesn’t” (Practice of Writing 327). We have to feel sadness about this move because it means that no more novels will be forthcoming. No more Tubbys, no more Robyns. No more of Lodge’s sex scenes that make us blush, from either embarrassment or laughing too hard. No more books that we can pile together in a row, in their orange and white Penguin Series covers. Tubby confesses in his diary that television is all lines, “whereas if you’re writing a book, you’ve got nothing but words for everything: behaviour, looks, thoughts, feelings, the whole boiling. I take my hat off to book writers, I do honestly” (18). We join Tubby in his sentiments. We take our hat off to David Lodge, we do honestly.
Works Cited


