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Industrial Novel in his Campus Novel
Nice Work (1988) .**

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In the opening essay to his collection entitled, *The Practice of Writing* (1997), David Lodge, commenting on contemporary fiction at the end of the 1980s says,

The aesthetic pluralism ... seems to me to be now a generally accepted fact of literary life. It is sometimes described as a post-modern condition ... the astonishing variety of styles on offer today, as if in an aesthetic supermarket, includes traditional as well as innovative styles, minimalism as well as excess, nostalgia as well as prophecy. (11)

Lodge argues that in the absence of a dominant literary mode or any consensus about aesthetic value as there was in the 1930s or 1950s, materialist notions of success has filled the vacuum. Lodge, therefore, remarks,

It is a commonplace that the literary novel acquired a new commercial

significance in the 1980s, and of course it is no coincidence that it was a decade dedicated to Enterprise culture and the deregulation and internationalization of high finance ... Prestigious literary writers became valuable assets, like brand names in the commodity market, worth far more than the income they actually generated ... The literary bestseller was born, a concept that would have seemed a contradiction in terms to F.R. and Queenie Leavis: (12)

Deprived of earlier consensus, the term ‘aesthetic’ ‘has tended to crop up in postmodern theoretical discussion mainly as a corrective to reductionist views of literature than as a prelude to detailed discussion of the specificity of art or literature’. (Hawthorn 5) On the other hand, the word ‘supermarket’ associates with the commercialism/cultural materialism of the 1980s which Lodge expounded on in the above quotation. Choosing traditional realism from the ‘aesthetic supermarket’ as a vehicle for his novel, Lodge records his political and social observations of Margaret Thatcher’s England in an innovative style that not only recycles the Victorian Industrial novel but also its writer’s

earlier texts as well. The novel is therefore dated, a fact which made it both "regional and topical". This enhanced its prompt adaptation for a four-part TV serial for the BBC, broadcasted 1989. The circumstances relating to the novel's TV serialization are recalled by Lodge as follows:

I finished writing my novel *Nice Work* early in 1988. not long before, I had made the acquaintance of Chris Parr, a TV drama producer based at the BBC's Birmingham Centre, Pebble Mill, working under Michael Wearing ... They expressed an interest in my writing something "regional and topical" for production at Pebble Mill. I told them I had the very thing, and gave them the typescript of *Nice Work*. They liked it ... But there was a pragmatic reason for proceeding as quickly as possible: we all recognized that it was important to broadcast the TV version of the novel while its picture of Thatcher's Britain was still recognizable. (*Practice* 218)

Focusing on Thatcher's Britain David Lodge's *Nice Work* combines the familiar campus novel with the Victorian

industrial novel genre not without showing a clear interest in critical theories. After the TV adaptation and broadcasting above mentioned, the novel won the Royal Television Society Award (Best Drama Serial) and its author was awarded a Silver Nymph for his screenplay at the International Television Festival in Monte Carlo in 1990.

Nice Work (1988) is the final novel of David Lodge’s trilogy of campus novels. *Changing Places* (1975) was the opening number in the trio. The second was *Small World* published in 1984. As one reviewer, Joel Conarroe, has noted, Lodge used literary influences/ models in each of the three novels. In *Changing Places* he used Jane Austen, the speciality of the American Professor Morris Zapp who in the late 1960s swaps jobs (and wives) with the British Professor Philip Swallow of Rummidge University. In *Small World*, Lodge mimics certain characteristics of the romance genre whereas in *Nice Work*, the literary model becomes the Victorian industrial novel. (Online)

David Lodge is certainly among the ‘brand names’ in contemporary England. He wrote more than twelve novels and published more than nine volumes of criticism, reviews, and essays over the past four decades. He is Emeritus Professor of English Literature at the University of Birmingham, where he taught from 1960 until 1987, when he retired to become a full-time writer. As a successful

playwriter and screenwriter, he has also adapted his own work as well as other writers' novels for television. David Lodge obtained numerous prizes and awards. *Changing Places* won the Hawthornden Prize in 1975 whereas both *Small World* and *Nice Work* were shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1984 and 1989 respectively. *Nice Work* won the Sunday Express Book of the Year in 1989.

Lodge's dual status or double life in which he performed as both a leading comic novelist and an academic professor or as a novelist and a renowned literary critic must have had its particular impact on the man. In an interview with Amanda Smith Lodge explains: "The academic life has given me a lot of material to write about, but that's where the problem of role comes in, particularly where the position of professor carries a certain dignity and mystique". And he goes on to add, "It becomes increasingly paradoxical to combine the professional roles of responsibility and dignity with imaginative freedom." (Online)

This duality in the writer's life perhaps explains the author's fondness and habitual use of what narrative theorists term "binary structures". In the following quotation Lodge discloses his literary preferences in tackling the comic novel and his fascination by the political power inherent in the narrative:

I seem to have a fondness for binary structures, which predated my interest ... in structuralism. I use comedy to explore serious subjects, and find Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea that the novel is an inherently carnivalesque form, subverting monologic ideologies by laughter and a polyphony of discourses, immensely appealing. I am fascinated by the power of the narrative ... to keep the reader turn the pages, but I also aim to write novels that will stand up to being read more than once. (‘Author statement’ Online)

Binary structures, serious subjects, and a polyphony of discourses constitute one part of Lodge’s technique which is also characterized by its heavy use of intertextuality, quotations, allusions, and citations. Apart from the lively and amusing dialogues, even a part of Jennifer Rush’s Song, ‘The Power of Love’ becomes part of the text of *Nice Work* (783-784). In a postmodernist fashion, pastiches, parodies, and puns also become part of the texture of his novel. Hence, ‘recycling’, a term derived from environmentalist practice and used to describe ‘the reuse of traditions, motifs, and

ways of seeing and doing by contemporary artists and designers' ('A Discourse History of Pasticcio and Pastiche' Online) seem apt here: Thatcher's England, particularly the decline of the British industries in the 1980s, the industrial novel, and the satirical campus novel are recycled into a 'nice work' by David Lodge, a work which also conveys its author's sense of fun and delight.

Following the 1979 general elections in Britain, the Conservative Party gained power and Margaret Thatcher became Britain's first women Prime Minister. Her style of leadership and the policies she promoted during her period of office, which lasted until 1990, came to be known as Thatcherism. According to *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*,

Thatcherism is characterized by free market economy ... associated with Victorian Liberalism ... monetarist economy policy, privatization of state-owned industries, low taxation, opposition to trade unions, nationalism, centralism, as well as checks on the size of the Welfare State and local government. (Online)

Hence, Thatcher's policies mainly rested on strengthening the powers of central government, curbing the powers of trade unions, and promoting individualism and

private enterprise. This resulted in a drastic reshaping of the British working class. According to Ian Haywood, 'the British working class was to be returned to a condition in which there was no right to job security, no right to organized self-protection, and in which the discourse of social relations was ruthlessly commodified..' Haywood further remarks how 'Thatcherism ... based its appeal on the mentality of the entrepreneur'. (Haywood 139) Lodge's character Vic Wilcox of *Nice Work* represents this entrepreneur mentality.

Lodge's *Nice Work* is set in the industrial heartland of Thatcher's Britain in the early 1980s. Most of the plot takes place in Rummidge (that stands for Birmingham) and which the author describes as 'an imaginary city, with imaginary universities and imaginary factories, inhabited by imaginary people'.

The novel is mainly focused on two characters: Victor Wilcox and Robyn Penrose who are thrown together against their will through an Industry Year Shadow Scheme. Vic is the Managing Director of J. Pringle and Sons Casting and General Engineering while Robyn is a temporary Lecturer in English Literature at Rummidge University. Obviously as already stated, Vic represents the 'the mentality of the entrepreneur' and is connected with the world of industry and business. On the other hand, Robyn, who is specialized

in the Victorian industrial novel, belongs to the intellectual world of British academia wherein Thatcher has imposed severe cuts on the university system and gloom prevails. Lodge's fondness for binary structures is revealed in his handling and representation of the plot of the novel where Vic and Robyn start as opposite characters who resent each other but later dissolve their differences, attract each other, go to bed together, to be later separately rewarded with good luck by the end of the novel.

The novel is divided into six parts prefaced by quotations from works by George Eliot, Benjamin Disraeli, Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Charles Dickens. The first four parts are neatly divided into three sections, the fifth into four, while the final part six into just two sections.

David Lodge places the following two extracts from Victorian novels at the outset of everything else in order perhaps to provide the reader with clues:

Upon the midlands now the industrious
muse doth fall, The shires which we the
heart of England well may call.

Drayton: *Poly-Olbion*

(Epigraph to *Felix Holt the
Radical*, by George Eliot)

'Two nations; between whom there is no
intercourse and no sympathy; who are as

ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, and fed by different food, and ordered by different manners...’

‘You speak of-’ said Egremont hesitatingly.

Benjamin Disraeli:

Sybil; or the Two Nations

The above quotations perhaps refer to the ironical relevance of the past to the present. Lodge’s novel, not unlike Eliot’s *Felix Holt* is also set in the English midlands; but, like Disraeli’s *Sybil*, points to a clash of ideologies and lifestyles. This time the clash is between the working class and the academics. The world of industry and business and the intellectual world of British academia, it is implied, are totally ignorant of each other. An outsider to the world of industry and business himself, David Lodge had to do some fieldwork and research for his novel. As his interviewer Amanda Smith reports,

For *Nice Work*, Lodge did his research firsthand, in the midst of a Birmingham deep in recession, with a third of the city’s engineering

companies failing as a result of Thatcher's economic policies, Lodge claims, and subsequent unemployment a huge problem. 'A friend of mine who is an executive in engineering was willing to let me follow him about, observe his work. To explain my presence, we concocted this story that I was shadowing him as part of an industry initiative.' This same "shadow" scheme became the device by which Lodge brings together his anti-hero and -heroine in *Nice Work*.

Having done his fieldwork research homework, Professor Lodge warns his reader against expecting a romance or emotional and passionate staff. Instead, a real and solid story focused on social everyday 'realities' of Thatcher's England of the 1980s is about to unfold. The warning comes in the form of a quotation from Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* which Lodges uses as an epigraph to Part One of the novel. The quotation reads as follows:

If you think ... that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you were never more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, and poetry, and

reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations, reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool and solid lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning, when all who have work wake with the consciousness that they must rise and betake themselves thereto.

Charlotte Bronte: Prelude to *Shirley*

In *Nice Work* Victor Wilcox has to betake himself to work precisely, as the first sentence of Part One reads on 'Monday, January 13th, 1986'. (587) He is represented as a middle aged family man from a distinctly working class background who has worked his way up to become, as mentioned earlier, Managing Director of Pringle and Sons Casting and General Engineering. Pringle is a division of a larger corporation which provides Vic with the necessary income and lifestyle of the upper middle class, or at least the almost upper middle class. His unsatisfactory wife and lazy three children have adjusted to the suburban life in an attractive home near Rummidge. Vic is proud of his achievements and firmly believes in British industry despite competition from other countries. However, he confines his attention to the profits and losses at his work. A full resumé

of Vic's is hastily provided by the author for the convenience of the reader on the fourth page of the novel's text. The addition alludes to the postmodernist taste for listing. Physically, Vic is described to be of a short stature which, some say, accounts for his 'aggressive manner'. (590) While Vic is presented as a mature responsible family man who courageously resists identity crises on seeing his own reflection, still he shares one major problem with contemporary men: 'Worries streak towards him like enemy spaceships in one of Gary's video games'. (589)

The imagery in the above quotation denotes a clear interest in technology that does not cease to fascinate, it seems, both author and characters. In another instance Vic's bed alarm is compared to a mechanical bird, 'the alarm wakes him [Vic] again, cheeping insistently like a mechanical bird'. (588) On the other hand, the house alarm is another story. Though proud of having such house alarm, its complicated electronic system baffles its new owner:

All the houses in the neighbourhood have these alarms, and Vic admits that they are necessary ... but the system they inherited from the previous owners of the house, with its magnetic contacts, infra-red scanners, pressure pads and panic bottom, is in his

opinion over elaborate. It takes about five minutes to set it up before you retire to bed, and if you come back downstairs for something you have to cancel it and start all over again. (591)

Though technology could be baffling and tiring at times, it could also give childlike pleasure and excitement.

As he [Vic] approaches the garage door it swings open as if by magic – in fact by electricity, activated by a remote-control device in Vic's pocket – a feat that never fails to give him a deep, childlike pleasure. (599)

In an earlier work *Small World* (1984), Lodge's American Professor Morris Zapp enumerates three things that have revolutionized academic life in the last twenty years, 'jet travel, direct dialing telephones and the xerox machine.' (271)

The first section of Part One does not only introduce Vic and his family but also reveals a great deal about the circumstances of Thatcher's England. Vic reads in the newspaper about the rise in interest rates and the sharp rise in unemployment. He is told that his son will not go to school because the teachers are on strike. Vic's concern over British industry is also obvious when he tells his wife that

'ninety-six percent of the world's microwave ovens are made in Japan, Taiwan or Korea'. (595) Vic believes that the importation of foreign cars in the 1970s marked the beginning of the region's economic ruin. (599)

Lodge also introduces the problems of immigrants in England. In a novel which abounds with intertextuality at different levels, Lodge quotes from Thomas Carlyle and Charles Dickens to describe the gloomy history of the Dark Country during the Industrial Revolution. Mention is also made of Queen Victoria and how the curtains of her train had to be drawn on passing the region so as not to be offended by the ugliness and poverty of the region. The following quotation records foreign visitor's reaction to the source of the region's name as well as the problems facing the immigrant families in England of the 1980s.

Foreign visitors sometimes suppose that the region gets its name not from its environmental character but from the complexions of so many of its inhabitants, immigrant families from India, Pakistan and the Caribbean, drawn here in the boom years of the fifties and sixties, when jobs were plentiful, and now bearing the brunt of high unemployment. (603)

Immigrant workers actually occur in Part Two of the novel when Robyn/ the reader come across them in the foundry where ‘everywhere there was indescribable mess, dirt, disorder’. (681) Most of the workers in the foundry, Robyn noticed, were Asian or Caribbean in contrast to the machine shop where the majority had been white’. (681) Obviously, the immigrants are always given the harder manual work. Believing it is unfair to trick an Asian foundry worker into making a mistake in order to fire him, Robyn ends up provoking a strike of all Asian workers in the factory.

Both Vic and Robyn come from two different and contrasting worlds as Disraeli’s *Sybil* and Lodge’s *Nice Work* would want us to believe.

The university seems to Vic rather like a small city-state, an academic Vatican, from which he keeps his distance, both intimidated by and disapproving of its air of privileged detachment from the vulgar, bustling industrial city in which it is embedded. (600)

To Robyn,

The situation was so bizarre, so totally unlike her usual environment, that there was a kind of exhilaration to be

found in it, in its very discomfort and danger, such as explorers must feel, she supposed, in a remote and barbarous country. (683)

Vic's intimidation and disapproval, and Robyn's exhilaration and excitement were later to join hands through the 'shadow' scheme device. Robyn evokes *North and South* and *Shirley* wherein a sensitive young woman sympathizes with the plight of workers and establishes a romantic relation with a captain of industry. The problems of Thatcher's England cast themselves on both Vic and Robyn. For Vic financial profits and losses added to his worries; for Robyn the 'future of her career was a constant background worry as the days and weeks of her appointment at Rummidge ticked away like a taxi meter' (620). Obviously, University cuts threatened Robyn's career at Rummidge.

Lodge's presentation of Robyn Penrose follows on the heels of Vic's and shows a clear interest in literary theory, the Victorians and the impact of Thatcher's policies. Introducing Robyn Lodge -as- author says, Robyn is 'a character who, rather awkwardly for me, doesn't herself believe in the concept of character'. (608)

Unlike Vic, Robyn comes from a middle class academic family. She is about thirty three years old and as

mentioned earlier, is a temporary lecturer in English literature at Rumbridge University. While currently lecturing on the Industrial Novel from a feminist perspective, she hopes to get employed by the University. However, it seems quiet unlikely on account of the present cuts on the University budget imposed by Margaret Thatcher’s economic policies. The novel abounds with slogans on cars. On Robyn’s red six-year-old Renault Five, the slogan reads, ‘Britain needs its Universities’ (619). One of Robyn’s and Charles’s tutors advice them to go to Oxbridge telling them he had seen the writing on the wall. And the author writes, ‘after the oil crisis of 1973 there wasn’t going to be enough money to keep all the universities enthusiastically created or expanded in the booming sixties in the style to which they had become accustomed’. (613) Tantalized by money making, Charles, Robyn’s longstanding boyfriend from their student days in Sussex, ends up resigning his job as Lecturer in the Comparative Literature Department of the University of Suffolk to surprisingly taking a job in the city as a merchant banker, and again surprisingly to moving in with Robyn’s brother’s girlfriend.

Lodge’s presentation of Robyn Penrose gives him the opportunity to discuss issues of academic interest like language, the relation between capitalism and the classic novel, identity, the ‘self’, intertextuality, feminism, racism,

and so on. Hence, through Robyn, Lodge can explain to his reader, that,

there is no such thing as the 'self' ...
there is only a subject position in an
infinite web of discourses – the
discourses of power, sex, family,
science, religion, poetry, etc. and by
the same token, there is no such thing
as an author. (609)

Lodge's *Nice Work* becomes a practical application of the infinite web of discourses he refers to and a clear example of Derrida's notion of intertextuality which Lodge also defines in his own text as follows:

Every text is a product of
intertextuality, a tissue of allusions to
and citations of other texts; and, in the
famous words of Jacques Derrida ... '*il
n'y a pas de hors-texte*', there is
nothing outside the text. (609)

Robyn is presented as always occupied with her speciality, the Victorian novelists. She observes to her students how the first major English novelist Daniel Defoe was a merchant while the second, Samuel Richardson, was a printer to establish the point that 'the novelist is a capitalist of the imagination'. (608) At home, she is pictured by the

author as ‘mentally rehearsing the plot of Mrs. Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848)’ (612) or, at another time, clicked thinking about ‘the structure of Disraeli’s *Sybil or the Two Nations* (1845)’ (613). While getting ready to leave home, she is caught ‘pondering shifts of point of view in Dickens’s *Hard Times*, (1854) (616). Apart from that, Robyn’s interest in literary theory is ironically depicted by her creator in the following manner:

What Robyn likes to do is to deconstruct the texts, to probe the gaps and absences in them, to uncover what they are *not* saying, to expose their ideological bad faith, to cut a cross-section through the twisted strands of their semiotic codes and literary conventions. (625)

To equip herself with the latest thoughts of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, Robyn subscribed to journals like *Poétique* and *Tel Quel*. Through Robyn, Lodge delights in portraying the intellectual vigour of the 1980s which he satirically describes as a revolution or civil war. For the conservative dons viewed the new ideas imported from Paris as a threat to the traditional values and methods of literary scholarship. But for younger teachers the case was different. Lodge writes,

New ideas imported from Paris by the more adventurous young teachers glittered like dustmotes in the Fenland air: structuralism and poststructuralism, semiotics and deconstruction, new mutations and graftings of psychoanalysis and Marxism, linguistics and literary criticism. (613)

The so called civil war or the struggle among university staff members and the portrayal of professors is a clear reminder of the discourse of the satiric campus novel which goes back to the 1950s. In Britain there appeared Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) and Malcolm Bradbury's *Eating People is Wrong* (1959); while in the United States there were May McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1953) and Randell Jarrell's *Pictures from an Institution* (1954). The tradition continued its development along the years to include in the 1990s works like S.A. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990), D.H.L Jones's *Murder at the MLA* (1993), and James Hynes's *Publish or Perish: Three Tales of Tenure and Terror* (1997). More recently mention could be made of James Hynes's more ambitious and satiric novel *The Lecturer's Tale* (2001), Debra Weinstein's *Apprentice to the Flower Poet Z* (2004), and Chip Kidd's *The Cheese Monkeys*:

A Novel in Two Semesters (2001) (Knight Online). The continued flux and vigour of the campus novel indicate how the peaceful academic scene was lately shattered by crime, honor, mysterious death, and even magic and supernatural forces.

Despite the overwhelming and non-stop discourse on the satiric campus novel and the new perspectives on tackling the academy, Amis’s *Lucky Jim* remains a seminal and classic work. David Lodge, a great admirer of the novel, published an academic article on it in 1963 which he later included in his *Language of Fiction* (1966). He also wrote “*Lucky Jim Revisited*” as the Introduction to the Penguin Twentieth century Classic edition of *Lucky Jim* by Kingsley Amis, 1992. This he later included in his *The Practice of Writing* (1997). Lodge confesses how his novels of university life are greatly indebted to Amis’s *Lucky Jim*. In full admiration Lodge writes,

Amis drew an immortal portrait of the absent-mindedness, vanity, eccentricity and practical incompetence that academic institution seem to tolerate and even to encourage in their senior staff (or at least did before the buzz-word “Management” began to echo

through the groves of the academe in the 1980s) (*Practice* 88).

Philip Swallow, the adventurous character from *Changing Places* and *Small World*, has aged and is now Dean of at Rummidge University. He is described as a tall, thin, stooped man, with silvey grey hair deeply receding at the temples.' Besides, 'He once had a beard, and he is forever fingering his chin as if he missed it'. (626) Swallow has much in common with Amis's portrait of senior academic staff as described by Lodge in the above quotation. Swallow's high frequency of deafness has bizarre results due to the wrong guesses he makes. Indeed, Swallow now looks tired, careworn, and slightly seedy. In his youth he used to travel around the globe attending conferences. But with the new University cuts in the 1980s traveling was highly reduced or as the writer sarcastically remarks 'cuts have clipped his [Swallow's] wings'. (627)

Lodge's brash American Professor Morris Zapp of *Changing Places* and *Small World* is also yet another typical professor of the satiric campus novel genre. He also reappears but only by the final Part of *Nice Work*. Zapp is reputedly modeled after Stanley Fish, Lodge's friend who was Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago from 1999 to 2004. According to Judith Shulevitz, Fish was 'the second-most-

famous English professor in America-after Harvard’s Henry Louis Gates Jr. – [and] is indistinguishable from Morris Zapp.’

Stressing the popularity of both Amis’s *Lucky Jim* and Lodge’s campus novels, Shulevitz goes on to add,

Everyone knows that the character in David Lodge’s trilogy *Changing Places*, *Small World*, and *Nice Work*, the most popular campus novels since Kingsley Amis’ *Lucky Jim*, was based on Fish ... Zapp, a jetsetting, starfucking, and intellectually luminous American deconstructionist whose charm lies in his gleeful disregard for scholarly convention, aspires to become the highest-paid English professor in the world. What’s wrong with that? He asks. (Shulevitz Online)

Both professors, the British Professor Philip Swallow and the American Professor Morris Zapp, are employed by their creator as vehicles for the structuring of the novel’s plot. Swallow imposes on Robyn the government Shadow Scheme, a step which brings her face to face with the novel’s anti-hero Vic and thus initiates the rolling on of the events of

the story. On the other hand, Zapp plays a role in forecasting the happy denouement of the plot. His appearance only comes at the final Part Six of the novel when Robyn meets him at a party and he offers to read the manuscript of her book. She hastens to give to him before his expected departure the next morning. One day, through a phone call from Zapp in America, Robyn gets the happy news of his fascination by her script and of a job offer at one of the Universities in the United States. This is the beginning a good news. Robyn, however, ends up not accepting the offer because Lodge, it seems, preferred to end up his novel in the Victorian solution of the legacy. Lecturing her students on the industrial novel, Robyn concludes saying, 'In short, all the Victorian novelist could offer as a solution to the problems of industrial capitalism were: a legacy, a marriage, emigration or death' (643). Robyn's legacy comes through a letter from her uncle in Australia who tells her she has inherited a lot of money from him.

In a novel that combines the discourse of the industrial novel with that of the campus novel, using devices and conventions from Victorian realism become parodic, comic, entertaining, and subversive. The novel reveals its author's extraordinary power of observation that brings forth details connected to the weather, clothes, food, cars, etc. Describing Amis's style Lodge wrote, 'it is a style

continually challenged and qualified by its own honesty, full of unexpected reversals and undermining of stock phrases and stock responses, bringing a bracing freshness to the satirical observation of everyday life'. (*Practice* 87)

The same thing could be said of Lodge's style. Lodge's comic and fresh description of the noisy Wilcox house which 'vibrates like a sounding-box' (639) under the Wilcox boys's unsupervised occupancy is one scene among others that Lodge alternates in the third section of Part One of the novel. The different alternating short scenes give the quick pace needed to bring Vic and Robyn together and at the same time allows the reader access to see the heroine and anti-hero at their separate work. Lodge's pattern of binary opposition reveals how both are portrayed as efficient and successful at their work but are facing problems: Robyn is unable to get a permanent job at the University while Vic is struggling with an outdated plant and poor labour relations. On the personal level Vic is not on good terms with his wife Marjorie while Robyn's relationship with Charles is described as 'more like a divorce' and thus she is 'not sure whether this is wonderfully modern and liberated of them, or rather depraved.' (624)

The epigraphs on Parts Two and Four are taken from Gaskell's *North and South* and respectively read as follows:

Mrs. Thornton went on after a moment's pause: 'Do you know anything of Milton, Miss Hale? Have you seen any of our factories? Our magnificent warehouses?' 'No', said Margaret. 'I have not seen anything of that description as yet.' Then she felt that, by concealing her utter indifference to all such places, she was hardly speaking the truth; so she went on: 'I dare say, papa would have taken me before now if I had cared. But I really do not find much pleasure in going over manufactories'.

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

'I know so little bout strikes, and rates of wages, and capital, and labour, that I had better not talk to a political economist like you.'

'Nay, the more reason,' said he eagerly. 'I shall be only too glad to explain to you all that may seem anomalous or mysterious to a stranger; especially at a time like this, when our doings are sure

to be canvassed by every scribbler who
can hold a pen.’

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

The polarity between north and south in Gaskell’s title matches the dichotomy between the world of industry and that of the academy. Margaret-Robyn-Lodge’s disinterest in industry was meant to be mended. As Bernard Bergoni writes, ‘Lodge, like a conscientious nineteenth-century novelist, did a good deal of fieldwork in Birmingham factories and other industrial sites, and his imagination responded enthusiastically to the new subjects; to some degree his discoveries run parallel to Robyn’s’. (Bergoni 26)

Lodge’s text parodies the relationship between Margaret and Thornton in Gaskell’s novel by means of creating a similar/ different relationship between Robyn and Vic. And, since ‘doings are sure to be canvassed by every scribbler who can hold a pen’, a polyphony of discourses is the expected result.

Though a specialist in the industrial novel, Robyn’s knowledge was only intellectual and theoretical but never ‘realist’. Her first visit to a factory caused her a nice semiotic problem! Lodge’s text reads, ‘Robyn was well aware that clothes do not merely serve the practical purpose

of covering our bodies, but also convey messages about who we are, what we are doing, and how we feel.' (655)

The actual visit, however, was totally appalling to Robyn and left her exhausted and confused. Lodge remarks how Robyn's mental image of a modern factory was derived from colourful TV commercials and documentaries. But it was a different story in 'real' factories.

At Pringle's there was scarcely any colour, not a clean overall in sight, and instead of Mozart there was a deafening demonic cacophony that never relented. Nor had she been able to comprehend what was going on. There seemed to be no logic or direction to the factory's activities ... The whole place seemed designed to produce ... misery for the inmates. What Wilcox called machine shop had seemed like a prison, and the foundry had seemed like hell. (676)

Robyn's reactions to the factory bring about two different discourses: the media discourse and the industry discourse. The first is linked to what Fredric Jameson termed technological alienation, with 'a whole historically original consumers' appetite for a world transformed into sheer

images of itself and for pseudo-events and “spectacles” (Jameson 321) Capturing the impact of the ‘sheer images’ produced by T.V Commercials and documentaries Lodge writes,

What *had* she expected? Nothing, certainly, so like the satanic hells of the early Industrial Revolution. Robyn’s mental image of a modern factory had derived mainly from TV commercials and documentaries: deftly edited footage of brightly coloured machines and smoothly moving assembly lines, manned by brisk operators in clean overalls, turning motor cars or transistor radios to the accompaniment of Mozart on the sound track. (675-676)

Robyn is presented by Lodge as shocked and confused on her first visit to the factory not only because she comes from the *different* world of academia but also on account of her contemporarity, i.e. of her being the product of postmodernism which transforms reality into images and reinforces the logic of consumer capitalism.

Introducing *British Industrial fictions* (2000) H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight remark how they register

a powerful attention to and valorization of work, a commitment to the importance of labour which is even present in a negative context as in the unemployment novels of the 1930s. The representation of the work of ordinary men and women and the analysis of its economic, social and political implications are the unique contributions of industrial fiction to the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (3)

Lodge's imaginative response to issues registered in the above quotation mainly comes through Robyn-Vic conversations as through Robyn's observations and impressions. The computer-numerically-controlled machine described as 'beautiful' by Vic brought Robyn a totally different and a certainly uncomfortable image

There was something uncanny, almost obscene, to Robyn's eye, about the sudden, violent, yet controlled movements of the machine, starting forward and retreating, like some steely reptile devouring its prey or copulating with a passive mate. (679)

The animal imagery is not the only outstanding impression Robyn gets. The 'barbaric noise' of the foundry was another horrifying experience for Robyn.

Her first instinct was to cover her ears, but she soon realized that it was not going to get any quieter, and let her hands fall to her sides ... It was a place of extreme temperatures ... everywhere there was indescribable mess, dirt, disorder ... It was impossible to believe that anything clean and new and mechanically efficient could come out of this place. To Robyn's eye it resembled nothing so much as a medieval painting of hell.

(681)

Media and arts (or medieval paintings) become one mean through which Robyn appropriates her experience of industry and factories. The factory scenes consolidates Robyn's feminist stance and links it with a polyphony of discourses: the Victorian industrial novel, the academia perspective, the problem of immigrants, and dilemma of industry in the 1980s in England. The unemployment dilemma, exemplified in the novel by the Asian worker

Danny Ram whom Robyn protested against his redundancy, is addressed by Vic when he tells Robyn,

I don't like making men redundant ...
but we are caught in a double bind. If
we don't modernize we lose
competitive edge and have to make
men redundant, and if we *do*
modernize we have to make men
redundant because we don't need'em
any more. (680)

Robyn is also threatened to become redundant due to university cuts. Despite that, she takes pride in her work saying,

Well, it's nice work. It's meaningful.
It's rewarding. I don't mean in money
terms. It would be worth doing even if
one wasn't paid anything at all. And
the conditions are decent not like this.
(680)

The great moral value that Robyn attaches to her work as a University lecturer is significant. Vic provides another version of 'male' valorization of work when Robyn suggests 'creative leisure'. He tells her,

Men like to work. It's a funny thing,
but they do. They may moan about it

every Monday morning, they may agitate for shorter hours and longer holidays, but they need to work for their self-respect. (680)

Equating work with self-respect on one hand or with moral values regardless of economic reward on another, represent two different representations of work as provided by the novel’s protagonists. Towards the end of the novel Vic tells Robyn, ‘But reading is the opposite of work ... Its what you do when you come from work to relax.’ (855) However, Robyn immediately voices her poststructuralist position saying, ‘In this place ... reading is work. Reading is production. And what we produce is meaning’. (Ibid) Meanwhile, the quotation from Dickens’ *Hard Times* which Lodge uses as epigraph for Part Three, stresses the importance of leisure-work-play formula. The epigram reads as follows:

‘People mutht be amuthed. They can’t be alwayth a learning, nor yet they can’t be alwayth a working. They an’t made for it’.

Part Five of *Nice Work* also has another epigram: ‘.. there is a wisdom of the Head, and ... there is a wisdom of the Heart ..’ that comes form the same work. Through such

epigrams Lodge brings a polyphony of discourses into his novel.

While both protagonists (Robyn and Vic) were represented by Lodge as devoted to their work, Brian Everthorpe, the marketing director of Pringles, has often neglected his work. Full of anger at such attitude, Vic attempts to get a confession out of him. He tells Everthorpe, 'What you mean is, you've been looking after interests of Riviera Sunbeds when you should be giving all your attention to Pringle's. Is that ethical?' (885)

Debbie, who started as Robyn's brother Basil's girlfriend and ended up with Charles, works as a foreign-exchange dealer and earns a huge amount of money. Her job requires the barrow-boy mentality, quick wits, and non-stop dealings. Basil explains to Robyn,

'I couldn't last for half-an-hour in Debbie's dealing room – fifty people with about six telephones in each hand shouting across the room things like "*Six hundred million yen 9th January!*" All day. It's a madhouse, but Debbie thrives on it. She comes from a family of bookies in Whitechapel.' (727)

Debbie and her job fascinates Charles who decides to shadow her, a matter which provides Robyn with a reason to get closer to Vic.

Other minor characters also voice their work preferences like Vic’s daughter Sandra who in Part Four of the novel, expresses her desire to become a ‘hairstylist’ rather than going to university. On the other hand, obliged to support herself at university, Robyn’s student Marion Russell takes a succession of part-time jobs including her becoming a kissogram for Vic when he is holding a works meeting at Pringles. Robyn, who as a feminist was shocked earlier by the pin-ups of naked women on the factory walls, naturally disapproves of the sexist aspect of Marion Russell’s work but explains to Vic how it is a well paid job that does not take much of her time. (787)

The novel’s real celebration of the value and commitment to work comes in the final Part Six of *Nice Work*. Robyn is pictured as daydreaming about a reconciliation between the values of the university and the imperatives of commerce. David Lodge writes,

But no! Instead of letting them [factory works] go back into that hell-hole, she transported them, in her imagination, to the campus: the entire workplace – labourers, craftsmen, supervisors,

managers, directors, secretaries and cleaners and cooks, in their grease-stiff dungarees and soiled overalls and chain-store frocks and striped suits – brought them in buses across the city, and unloaded them at the gates of the campus, and let them wander through it in a long procession, ... as they stared about them with bewildered curiosity at the fine buildings and the trees and flowerbeds and lawns, and at the beautiful young people at work or play all around them. (866)

Lodge's/ Robyn's 'long procession' of the 'entire workforce' is certainly impressive in *Nice Work* which plays with intertextuality and recycles the Victorian Industrial novel, the Campus novel, and Literary Theory to produce a 'nice' work about Margaret Thatcher's England.

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