

Selected Metafictional techniques in David Lodge's *Changing Places* (1975)^(*)

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Abstract

Changing Places by David Lodge is the first novel in his campus trilogy. It enlightens selected metafictional techniques used by the writer to unveil the difference between university life in both England and America. Philip Swallow and Morris Zapp- the two protagonists in the novel- take part in a six- month change program to renew their power and save their private lives. In the course of the novel, Lodge expresses serious certain political issues in the 1960s and 1970s including the students' revolution, the Vietnam War and Women Movements. In the novel, the reader discovers that the characters have not only changed their positions but also their values and ideologies. By the open end of the novel, Lodge inquires will protagonists restore their old life or prefer their existence in new changed one.

Keywords:

Metafictional techniques, Change program, self consciousness, parody, irony, contradiction, intertextuality, autobiographical approach

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المخلص

يهدف البحث إلى إلقاء الضوء على التقنيات الميثاخيالية المختارة التي استخدمها ديفيد لودج في رواية الأماكن المتغيرة ويوضح من خلالها الفرق الشاسع بين التعليم الجامعي في كل من إنجلترا وأمريكا من خلال برنامج تغيير الأماكن الذي ابتكره لودج في روايته. يشترك كل من الأستاذين الجامعيين فيليب سوالو وموريس زاب في برنامج تعديل الأماكن لمدة ستة أشهر. وبمرور أحداث الرواية، نرى أن كلا من الأستاذين لم يغيرا أماكنهما فقط بل أخلاقهما وأيدلوجياتهما أيضا. وتثير نهاية القصة المفتوحة جدلا واسعا حيث إن القارئ يتساءل هل يفضل أبطال الرواية حياتهم القديمة أم يفضلون الاستمرار في نمط الحياة الجديد المتغيرة وعلى القارئ أن يختار النهاية طبقا لرؤيته الشخصية.

الكلمات الدالة:

التقنيات الميثاخيالية، برنامج التغيير، الإدراك الذاتي، السخرية، التورية، التناقض، التناص، تحليل الأحداث طبقا للمنظور الشخصي، المحازاة

Introduction

...the root of all critical error was a native confusion of literature with life. Life was transparent, literature opaque. Life was an open, literature a closed system. Life was composed of things, literature of words. Life was what it appeared to be about...Literature was never about what it appeared to be about. (*Changing Places* 47)

Being not only a novelist, but also a postmodern critic and theorist, David Lodge has the temptation to touch social issues in his fiction. *Changing Places* is David Lodge's fifth novel and the first campus one. Its subtitle is *A Tale of Two Campuses*. It was completed in the summer of 1973, and published by Secker and Warburg in February 1975. Sevinc Celgk notes that *Changing Places* subtitle is a literary imitation of Charles Dickens *A Tale of Two Cities*. The opening statement of Dickens' work shows the reason why Lodge uses such a pun in his *novel*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was

the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way . . .(17)

The time when Dickens portrayed his work was that the 1780s when the ideas which were born out of the French Revolution were affecting all nations in the world including England. Similarly, the Industrial Revolution changed the Class system of England. Thus, it is actually a tale of two nations whose values and revolutionary changes directly affected one another. The above mentioned quotation is the description of such an era in which there is no absolute truth and no stable values. This chaotic time is exactly what will be seen in *Changing Places*, the story which takes place in 1969, the year of the Students' Revolution at university and the beginning of women liberation movement. All these events in the background make *Changing Places* a tale of two nations indeed, and even a tale of two academics, Philip Swallow from the UK and the American Morris Zapp join an exchange program between Euphoric State University (California, referring to Berkeley) and England's University of Rummidge (referring to Birmingham). They join an exchanging position program in 1969 and have affairs with one another's wife. Those two characters exchange much else in the course of the story: values, attitudes and ideologies. Almost every incident that takes place in one location has its impact or analogue on the other. Lodge himself is an experienced academic who has taken part the exchange program in 1969 when he left the University of Birmingham for the University of Euphoric State as a visiting associate professor. In *the Practice of Writing*, he writes:

At that time, both campuses, like most campuses, were in the throes of the student revolution; but whereas Birmingham's "occupation" had been a relatively mild mannered and good humoured affair, in Berkeley there was

something like civil war in progress, with police chasing demonstrators through the streets with shotguns and clouds of tear gas drifting across the campus. And if Birmingham was timidly responding to the vibrations emanating from Swinging London, Berkeley was at the leading edge of the Permissive Society, the Counter-Culture, Flower Power and all the rest of the 1960s baggage. (32-3)

The novel involves two professors of English literature “both as it happens, aged forty” and are subjects of an academic exchange places for six months, exerting “reciprocal influence on each other’s destinies” (CP8). They actually mirror each other’s experience in certain respects, notwithstanding all the differences between the two environments, the two characters and their respective attitudes towards the whole enterprise. There is a scheme for the exchange of visiting teachers in the second half of each academic year between the State University of Rummidge in England and that of Euphoria in the States. The link between two such universities, so different in style and so widely separate in location is a sheer coincidence. The reason behind the exchange program is summarized in the idea that the architects of both campuses had the same idea for the chief feature of their designs “a replica of the leaning Tower of Pisa, built of white stone and twice the original size at Euphoric State and of red brick and to scale at Rummidge”(13). The exchange scheme was set up to mark this architectural feature.

It is remarkable that the American professor, Morris Zapp was distinguished while the British, Philip Swallow was not. Zapp was the man who had published articles in *PMLA* while still in graduate school, and was offered his first job by Euphoric State. He had published five distinguished books (four of them on Jane Austen) by the time he was thirty, and achieved the rank of full professor at that age. On the contrary, Swallow was a man scarcely known outside his own department and had published nothing except a few essays and reviews. At the beginning, Swallow is described as “a mimetic man: unconfident, eager to please, infinitely suggestible” (10).

To clarify, Philip Swallow was not lacking in intelligence or ability; but he lacked will and ambition, the professional killer instinct which Zapp abundantly possessed. (15)

As a metafictionalist figure, Morris Zapp is a self-conscious and supportive one. Eventually, he becomes a prominent professor at one of the most prestigious universities in America; he heads his Department for three years under the university's rotating system. Depending on his fame and self-pride, Zapp has no great esteem for his colleagues in the field of literature. They seem to him "vague, fickle, irresponsible creatures, who wallowed in relativism like hippopotami in mud, with their nostrils barely protruding into the air of common-sense" (45). Besides, he hates all other critics, especially those whose opinions are contrary to his own.

At the very beginning, Lodge lets his characters speak realistically; each voice expresses the personality of the character. Lodge's two protagonists are cleverly drawn to personify national characteristics of stereotypical English and American men. On the one side, Philip Swallow is a polite, mild-mannered, diffident fellow, who is introduced to us as a paradigm of the solid family man, devoted to his wife Hilary and their young children. As a professor of literature, he is colorless and unexciting; he has been marking time at Rummidge in a dead-end teaching job, with little hope of promotion. Due to being bored and unsatisfied, he leaves for his new adventures in America. On the other side, Morris Zapp is a famous ambitious academic professor. He has gained world-wide reputation for being the premier expert on the writings of Jane Austen. The characters' exchange and development is so slow in the course of the novel so that voices are switched and mingled with each other. Robert A. Morace illustrates:

These changes serve a decidedly realistic purpose—to record or mirror changes in the character's character. But they also serve a distinctly postmodern purpose insofar as each voice not only changes but becomes, as the novel itself does, a pastiche of various parodically rendered voices (158).

Concerning the feminine identities in the novel, Lodge draws amusing parallelism between the two contradicted wives; Hilary Swallow and Desiree Zapp. Firstly, Hilary, like her husband, is a model of a stereotyped conservative English humorless wife. After she learns of her husband's sexual flings in America, she vents her anger by letting him know that she has just spent much money on installing central heating in their damp and cold Rumridge home. As she writes to her husband:

. . . I thought to myself, here I am, slaving away, running a house and family single-handed for the sake of my husband's career and my children's education, and I'm not even warm while I'm doing it. If he can't wait for sex till he gets home, why should I wait for central heating? I suppose a more sensual woman would have taken a lover in revenge. (150)

On the contrary of the very repressed and correct Hilary Swallow, Desiree Zapp, likes her husband, is tough and disillusioned. When we first meet her, she is embarking on a journey of self-discovery and self-awareness through the women's liberation movement and consciousness-raising groups on the Euphoric State campus. Of course, Lodge deploys his fiction in mirroring the revolutionary American social phenomena of the 1960s and 1970s and the absurd jargon which they engendered. Morace identifies:

The novel's thematic, linguistic, and structural levels all either concern or involve disruptions of one kind or another. Yet because the various disruptions reflect and reinforce each other, the novel's wholeness—its aesthetic integrity—grows out of the artful fragmentation of its parts. The entire novel may be said to function as a large-scale narrative paradox, holding together by breaking apart. (163)

As a metafictional writer, Lodge employs *Changing Places* to express his autobiographical experience in a unique fictional form by applying various metafictional techniques that operate on several levels. Firstly, on the thematic level, the story turns around two professors of English literature engaged in academic pursuits and keen on venting their critical views. Literary criticism not only reminds the reader that s/he is

reading a novel, but also challenges the assumptions upon which the novel is based and questions the validity of novelistic traditions. Moreover, Lodge creates a self-conscious reader who helps in analyzing the events of the novel and understanding the characters' behaviors. Regarding the narrative approach, Lodge addresses his narration and criticism to the reader directly and explicitly, for example "Imagine, if you will" and "Imagine further..." (8) are the most overt examples of the narrator addressing the reader in the novel. Thus, these words help in pointing to the narrator's ability to convey knowledge as it discloses the relationship between narrator and reader and also gives an impression of a teacher-student relationship.

As a modern realistic writer, Lodge chooses to focus on marriage as it is unquestionably one of the main social phenomena in society. Lodge handles marriage in a different way; he presents it as a kind of social contradiction, a device which is usually employed for the depiction of a routine. Lodge confirms:

Bliss! No need to get up for the family breakfast, wash the car, mow the lawn and perform the other duties of the secular British Sabbath. No need, above all, to go for a walk on Sunday afternoon. No need to rouse himself heavily with Sunday lunch, from his armchair, to help Hilary collect and dress their querulous children, to try and find some new, pointless destination for a drive or to trudge out to one of the local parks, where other little knots of people wander listlessly, like lost souls in hell....., as if to emphasize the impossibility of escape. La nausée, Rummidge style. (28)

It is a description of the repeated common activities that Swallow dutifully carried out during his married life in Rummidge. Besides, in the first meeting between Philip and Desiree, they affirm the same idea:

[DESIREE] 'Each generation is educating itself to earn enough money to educate the next generation, and nobody is actually doing anything with this education. You're knocking yourself out to educate your children so they can

knock themselves out educating their children. What's the point?'

[PHILIP] Well, you could say the same thing about the whole business of getting married and raising a family.(82)

After being settled into a routine married life, the four protagonists reach "Ending" where they have completely changed. They have successfully revolted against their routine lives and have apparently adapted to the new ways of life of their host countries: Swallow does not feel British any more, and Zapp is afraid to catch the very typically English disease of "being nice." (93)

On the structural level, the novel follows the linear plot of conventional fiction, from beginning to middle to end, but this comes in a special way; the novel is divided into six chapters: "Flying", "Settling", "Corresponding", "Reading", "Changing" and "Ending". Each chapter contributes to the linear development of the novel. All six chapters are told from what is stated early in the novel as "our privileged narrative altitude"(8). This narrative altitude varies during the novel from one chapter to another. In every part of the novel, Lodge deploys a different story-telling technique to mirror the concern of the narrative act itself. For example, in "*Flying*", he introduces the main characters of the novel together with the scheme which will cause the coming events in their lives. From the very beginning of the novel, Lodge uses the external narrator of "Flying" to establish an explicit communication with the reader and create a bond of intimacy between them. In this sense, the reader is forced to adopt the narrator's point of view from the very beginning. There is, in the course of the novel, a more tricky relation between Philip Swallow and the author himself. However, as Paddy Bostock observes, we should bear in mind that "given the ironic distancing that David Lodge employs for most of his fiction, any assumption that he is Philip Swallow would be open to denial"(41), despite all the biographical coincidences.

In "Settling" the ambiguity of story narration ends. The external narrator of "Settling" does not interfere much in the organization of the

chapter's material. It introduces the starting experience of each of the two main characters, following their arrival and occupation of each other's place. Lodge parallels his narrative in two main threads wavering between them back and forth, though Swallow receives more of the author's attention. In this part, Lodge starts to create the illusion that represents a direct access to the protagonists' minds. He confirms this metafictional concerns of this chapter by inserting quotations of literary theories in the novel. Zapp reads from *Let's Write a Novel*:

Every novel must tell a story... And there are three types of story, the story that ends happily, the story that ends unhappily, and the story that ends neither happily nor unhappily, or, in other words, doesn't really end at all. The best kind of story is the one with a happy ending; the next best is the one with an unhappy ending, and the worst kind is the story that has no ending at all. The novice is advised to begin with the first kind of story. Indeed, unless you have Genius, you should never attempt any other kind. (87)

Right at the centre of the novel, the chapters "Corresponding" and "Reading" embody the act of narrating and the act of reading. Deliberately, Lodge juxtaposes two sections of *Changing Places* with two distinctive narrative techniques: "Corresponding" is presented as a collection of letters among the characters of the novel. This kind of writing flourished in the 18th century with the publication of Samuel Richardson's epistolary in *Clarissa*. Lodge imitates Richardson for many reasons; firstly, the epistolary style of "Corresponding" grants us a high degree of intimacy with the characters and provides more information about their private life and their thinking. Secondly, "Corresponding" is a parody of the conventions of the traditional novel that seemed exhausted for a long time, thus it can be read as a compromise between tradition and innovation. To prove, Lodge crystallizes:

Novelists perceived that by imitating the form of documentary or historical writing they could exert an exciting new power over their readers, obtaining total faith

in the reality of fictitious characters and events. (*The novel now*, 132)

Interestingly, we are, for the first and only time in the novel, allowed to follow the events through the protagonists' wives, who were submissive to their husbands Swallow and Morris. Hilary and Desiree are, through their letters, also allotted more space to express themselves and become more independent. This chapter is devoted to private affairs between husbands and wives, thus it gives the reader a chance to be a self-conscious and predicts a suitable end to the characters' relation.

The creative story-telling technique employed in "Reading", is a common metafictional practice; it is a collection of documentary-type short sections. "Reading" is a gathering of classified ads, newspaper cuttings, press releases, underground press publications and all sorts of printed materials. Lodge criticizes in his *The Modes of Modern Writing*:

Journalese is decoded as true in the sense that facts given are verifiable; but this truth, as metafiction displays, is not neutral or objective, but mainly a matter of conventional trust between reader and writer. (24)

The reader is supposed to put pieces together to follow the narrative thread. "Reading" presents a collection of current social problems, introduces the cause of women, and supports either the student protest or the university establishment. Furthermore, Lodge makes use of this printed stuff as a means of transferring the details of current political happenings on the two campuses. In addition, by the newspaper clippings, we also learn about the political activities of the protagonists: in Euphoria, Philip Swallow is arrested for supporting the students' protest, while in Rummidge Morris is proposed as a mediator between the students and the university authorities.

The fifth chapter of the novel "Changing" features the process of the two protagonists' change. Now, they are living at their counterparts homes, committing adultery with each other's wives. It returns the novel back to the conventional narrative form to surprise the reader with an unexpected end in the next chapter. A great part of the chapter is presented as dialogues between the four principal characters. For example, during the narration of

a day in Swallow's life, the gaps are filled in by a series of flashbacks prompted by Philip's imaginary letters to Hilary. The flashback technique is used more sparingly in the second part of the chapter, devoted to Morris Zapp. Lodge confirms: "Flashbacks should be used sparingly, if at all. They slow down the progress of the story and confuse the reader. Life, after all, goes forwards, not backwards." (186)

Chapter six, "Ending", disrupts the narrative with an unexpected ending; that is the end of a film script. Endings particularly distinguish the postmodernist fiction. The traditional closed ending is the stereotyping one:

in which mystery is explained and fortunes are settled" tying up all loose ends and the modernist open ending—satisfying but not final— have given way to multiple endings, parody endings and non-endings. (Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, 226)

Changing Places' non-ending puts an end to the reading activity, but not to the reader's desire to end the story. It leaves the reader wondering about the future of the four main characters and their final decisions. In addition, M. Alexander asserts:

the novel's problematic ending exposes and disrupts both comic circularity and narrative closure, rejecting in this way the comforts of stereotyped endings, of the familiar narrative form of beginning, middle and end. (37)

The structural parallelism which controls *Changing Places* from the beginning to the end leaves no option for Lodge to choose a close-ending feature. That is to say, in "Ending", in the very last scene of the novel, the four characters gather, but are unable to make decisive decisions. Philip and Morris have now completely dropped the subject of their marital problems and the conversation turns to literary matters. Hilary, the voice of common sense in the chapter, complains: "This is all very fascinating, I'm sure, but could we discuss something a little more practical? Like what the four of us are going to do in the immediate future?" (250)

Lodge points out that the four main characters- Philip, Desirée, Morris and Hilary- meeting in New York to discuss their marital problems, suggests every possible resolution of the story and decides who should live

with whom. For example, they discuss every possible resolution of the story; each couple to divorce and cross-marry, each couple to reunite, each couple to separate but not remarry, the four of them to live together, etc., but without reaching any conclusion. The open ending of *Changing Places* manifests the role of the reader in Lodge's fiction. It is remarkable that, it provides freedom of choice to the reader and everyone can determine his preferred ending according to his/her point of view. The last page of the novel is a passage from Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey*, cited by Swallow and quoted by Morris Zapp. The novel ends with Swallow's comparison of the different ways in which novels and films end:

That's something the novelist can't help giving away, isn't it, that his novel is shortly coming to an end?...he can't disguise the tell-tale compression of the pages...As you're reading, you're aware that there's only a page or two left in the book, and you get ready to close it. But with a film there's no way of telling, especially nowadays, when films are much more loosely structured, much more ambivalent, than they used to be. There's no way of telling which frame is going to be the last. The film is going along, just as life goes along, people are behaving, doing things, drinking, talking, and we're watching them, and at any point the director chooses, without warning, without anything being resolved, or explained, or wound up, it can just ... end.

PHILIP shrugs. The Camera stops, freezing him in mid-gesture.

THE END (251)

Lodge states the fact that, in developing the highly symmetrical and perhaps predictable plot of *Changing Places*, he felt the need to provide some variety and surprise on another level of the text, and accordingly wrote each chapter in a different style (*The Art of Fiction*, 227). He identifies the reasons why he ends the novel in the form of a film-script, "I found myself unwilling to resolve the wife-swapping plot, partly because that would mean

also resolving the cultural plot. [...] I did not want to have to decide, as implied author, in favour of this partnership or that.” (*The Art* 128)

Intertextuality in *Changing Places* is not implied or hidden in the language of the novel; Lodge quotes many critical literary paragraphs by different characters. Hutcheon discusses that intertextuality, the presence in a text of other texts- also plays an important role in the process of installing and subverting the past undertaken by parody in much postmodernist metafiction. Postmodernist intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both the desire to close the gap between past and present and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context(Hutcheon118). Both Swallow and Zapp are professors of English Literature and they are specialized in Jane Austen. This justifies the repeated quotations and the mutual corresponding between their own ideas and ways of thinking.

The intertextual relationship between *Changing Places* and Jane Austen’s works has very important significations on various levels. Firstly, *Northanger Abbey* (1818) – which is repeatedly quoted by the characters - is mentioned by Patricia Waugh as an example of Lodge’s implicit autobiographical tendency. Thus, he presents his own experience through his works. For Lodge, Austen was "perhaps the first novelist to permit the novelist to command the simultaneous double perspective of public and private experience" (Lodge, *The Modes* 39). Secondly, Austen's novels also evoke the issue of the position of women and work to destabilize the male domination in society. As Docherty notes:

Jane Austen's novels, while certainly granting a huge central importance to individual women characters as the main centre of attention and interest, simply operate to legitimize the bourgeois marriage and family which marginalized women in the first place. (173)

While parallelism of the events emphasizes its similarities, the complementarity of the main characters arouses their differences. Contrast is clearly reflected in the protagonists' physical and psychological traits. Relating physical description, a full description of Swallow’s physical

appearance is not mentioned till Desiree describes him in an extremely detailed way in her letter to Morris:

Philip Swallow is about six feet tall and weighs I should say about 140 pound—that is, he's tall and skinny and stooped. He holds his head forward as if he's hit it too often on low doorways. His hair is the texture of Brillo pads before they've been used and is deeply receding at the temples. He has dandruff, but who hasn't? He has nice eyes. I couldn't say anything positively in favour of his teeth, but they don't protude like fangs. His handshake is normal in temperature, if a little on the limp side. (135)

On the contrary, narrating Morris's physical traits starts earlier, but very briefly "gorilla-like arms" (12), "curved spine" (31), "short legs" (89), "heavily built" (129), "somewhat Neanderthal appearance"(137), "big brown hand, hair luxuriant on the knuckles [...] like a bear's paw" (203), and finally, Morris Zapp himself completes this description by admitting he is fat and forty (230). Apparently, the paradox of the two protagonists psychological characterization are numerous, but their relation with students is the most effective one. For Swallow, his relation with students is lovely and friendly; he knows everything about them more than their own mothers. It is clearly described by Morris:

The letter continued in this vein for several pages, describing the emotional, psychological and physiological peculiarities of the students concerned in intimate detail. Morris read through it in total bewilderment. What kind of a man was this, that seemed to know more about his students than their own mothers? And to care more, by the sound of It. (63)

Otherwise, Zapp does not have a strong relationship with neither his colleagues nor his students; it is clearly described by Lodge: "After Zapp, the rest would be silence. The thought gave him deep satisfaction"(44).

To compare between the two universities, both educational and living standards should be illustrated. In the exchange program agreement, each

visitor drew the salary to which he was entitled by rank and seniority on the scale of the host institution, but as no American could survive for more than a few days on the monthly stipend paid by Rummidge, Euphoric State made up the difference for its own faculty, while paying its British visitors a salary beyond their wildest dreams, bestowing upon them indiscriminately the title of Visiting Professor. Lodge explains:

The domestic standard of living of the Rummidge faculty was far below that of the Euphoric faculty, but even the most junior teacher here had a large office to himself, and the Staff House was built like a Hilton, putting Euphoric State's Faculty Club quite in the shade. (234)

Due to the great gap between living standards in both Euphoric and Rummidge States, the most highly-qualified and senior members of staff competed eagerly for the honour of representing Rummidge at Euphoric State, while Euphoric State faced difficulty in persuading any of its faculty staff to go to Rummidge. Lodge emphasizes:

Rummidge wasn't the greatest university in the world, agreed, but the set-up was wide open to a man with energy and ideas. Few American professors wielded the absolute power of a Head of Department at Rummidge. (61)

Regarding the feminist figures in the novel, Hilary Swallow and Desiree Zapp, are also depicted as complementary characters. This complimentarily shows, first of all, in their physical traits: Hilary has "big melon-shaped breasts"(238), and Desiree is flat-chested" (168). On the one hand, Hilary's character fits the stereotype English house- mother type whose main concern is her house affairs and children. In her letters to Philip, her main concerns are, the washing machine, which is making a "terrible grinding noise"(119), and her children. Actually, Philip admits to finding it difficult "to think of her as ontologically different from her offspring"(25). On the other hand, Desiree fits the type of the aggressive independent woman who takes Karate Lessons and gets involved in the Women's Liberation Movement. It is remarkable that both Hilary and Desiree are also in need of a change. While Desiree needs freedom, Hilary needs more attention. They finally achieve their needs, thanks to the new

circumstances. Philip takes care of Desiree's twin when she attends her karate lessons and encounter liberation groups. At the same time, Hilary is entertained and cared for by Morris who encourages her to complete her MA degree in Rumridge and develop her own skills. In this sense, their process of change parallels that of the two protagonists in a minor way.

Conclusion

To conclude, *Changing Places* provides a good example of how Lodge's novels work. There is a binary parallelism in the events of the novel; every incident in the plot is balanced with a similar one between the protagonists. In my view, David Lodge resorts to postmodernist strategies in order to undertake a renewal of the metafictional writings, a task which requires from time to time to remind the reader that he is reading a novel. Lodge could keep the balance of his novel till the very end; his tricky end is a good postmodernist and metafictional solution to the novel's mechanism which he could successfully keep till the last paragraph.

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