This review was written for the James Joyce Quarterly
J. Russell Perkin, *David Lodge and the Tradition of the Modern Novel*
(McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014)

It comes as a shock to those of us who read Lodge's campus novels as they appeared in the seventies and eighties to realise that Lodge is now, at 80, a grand old man of English letters himself. This new study of his work by J. Russell Perkin is a timely reminder of the range and quality of a literary career spanning over half a century, in which Lodge has distinguished himself equally as one of Britain's foremost novelists and as a ground-breaking critic. Full-length studies of Lodge's work have been surprisingly thin on the ground up until now: Merritt Moseley's David Lodge: How Far Can You Go? (1991) covers Lodge's career up to the early eighties; David Ammann's David Lodge and the Art and Reality Novel(1991) is a highly technical attempt to apply the theories Lodge expounded in his critical work to his novels; Bernard Bergonzi's brief Writers and their Work volume (1995) expands the range to include the novels up to the publication of Therapy, and Bruce Martin's volume in the Twayne's English Authors series takes the reader still further, to 1999. These are the only English language monographs solely devoted to Lodge's fiction before Perkin, so this volume is timely, coming as it does as Lodge's memoir, Quite A Good Time to be Born, is published. It is also able to reflect on the fiction that Lodge has produced since the turn of the millennium, in particular the fictionalised biographies of Wells and James in A Man of Parts and Author, Author.

Where Perkin distinguishes himself from his predecessors in in firmly locating his discussion of Lodge, as the title of the volume implies, within the context of the development of the novel in the twentieth century. Perkin takes the long view, so Henry James, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh and H.G. Wells, for example, are prominently featured, alongside Lodge's near-contemporaries such as Muriel Spark, Margaret Drabble and Kingsley Amis. Lodge's relationship with a later generation (Martin Amis, Peter Ackroyd, Ian McEwan, Hilary Mantel) is touched upon too. For Joyceans, doubtless one of the key elements of the book is Perkin's devotion of a whole chapter to Lodge's relationship to Joyce, a connection established by Lodge's declaration that Joyce is "of all modern writers, the one I revere the most." This chapter takes its place in a sequence that examines methodically and carefully the development of Lodge's writing, with a nod to Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence" as a guiding principle, derived from Lodge's own use of the term in a talk about his own debt to Greene.

Perkin begins with the premise that Lodge's liberalism is the lifeblood of his work, and goes on to show how that quality was influenced by a succession of literary mentors, beginning with Greene, the subject of an early critical work, and continuing with Joyce, James and Wells. To these chapters is added an account of Lodge's formative development as a writer and critic in the fifties, in which the context of his particular identity as a chronicler of the life of the English provinces is discussed. This structure gives Perkin the opportunity to examine not only Lodge's career as a novelist, but also his concomitant rise as an important literary critic. Perkin is a useful guide to the ways in which Lodge's critical work can be illuminated by his novels, and vice-versa.

The book is pointedly careful in its approach to its subject, and despite the breadth of the range of reference, is always thoroughly grounded in a close reading of the texts, which is often thought-provoking and revealing. Perkin is particularly adept at teasing out correspondences and echoes of Lodge's predecessors in the novels. These examples prove his point, of course, and demonstrate the close attention to detail that characterizes Perkin's work.

On Joyce, and his influence on Lodge, Perkin is, typically, expansive and thorough. He notes the fact that Lodge repeatedly returns to Ulysses as a touchstone, not only in his critical work, but also in the novels. Perkin points out that Lodge, coming from what he himself called the "Roman Catholic ghetto" of nineteen thirties England, first encountered Joyce not as a representative of high modernism, but as a chronicler of his own socio-cultural world. Perkin's detailed account of the ways in which Joyce's worldview influenced Lodge's is illuminating. The parade of eccentric priests in Lodge's oeuvre is just one example of the continuing parallels between the two authors' fiction, and of course Joyce figures largely in Lodge's critical writings.

Perkin is able to dwell on Lodge's most recent work, and in particular the two novels which take other (historical) writers as their subject – the 'biografictions' on James and Wells. On the Henry James novel, Author Author, Perkin is on solid ground as he shows how James provides Lodge with an example of how to control the public perception of his work, so it is an irony not lost on Lodge that his Henry James volume should have been mired in controversy as it appeared after Colm Tóibín's similarly-themed The Master. Perkin offers a scrupulous account of the affair and its aftermath, and that leads him to his final major focus, H.G. Wells. Perkin points out that Wells has been a constant in Lodge's fictional world since the sixties, and that therefore A Man of Parts represents a continuation of that thread, and also signifies that, as he says, Lodge at 80 is still very much the novelist at the crossroads.

This is an excellent primer on Lodge, written in a scholarly yet accessible style. It does its subject justice, and provides a detailed and unified account of his major work, set in the context of the social and cultural history of his times. It becomes the major critique of Lodge for the current generation, and goes a long way to cementing Lodge's place in the canon of twentieth-century and contemporary literature.