

# POSTMODERNIST ELEMENTS IN DAVID LODGE'S "HOW FAR CAN YOU GO?"

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Šimundža, Toni

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2020

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split / Sveučilište u Splitu, Filozofski fakultet**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:172:681869>

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*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-04-20**

*Repository / Repozitorij:*

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UNIVERSITY OF SPLIT



DIGITALNI AKADEMSKI ARHIVI I REPOZITORIJ

**SVEUČILIŠTE U SPLITU  
FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET SPLIT  
BA THESIS**

**POSTMODERNIST ELEMENTS  
IN DAVID LODGE'S *HOW FAR CAN YOU GO?***

**TONI ŠIMUNDŽA**

**Split, 2020**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**  
**ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**  
**BRITISH AND IRISH LITERATURE OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY**

**POSTMODERNIST ELEMENTS**  
**IN DAVID LODGE'S *HOW FAR CAN YOU GO?***

**STUDENT**

Toni Šimundža

**MENTOR**

Ilonka Peršić, MPhil

**SPLIT, SEPTEMBER, 2020**

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore Postmodernist elements in David Lodge's novel *How Far Can You Go?*.<sup>1</sup> It has become a commonplace that the term Postmodernism, used to denote a period stretching mainly from the 1950s to the 1990s, is difficult to define. Ihab Hassan, one of the pioneers in the studies of Postmodernism as a literary and cultural phenomenon, has highlighted some of the reasons for this. He begins his seminal essay *Toward a Concept of Postmodernism* (1987) by underlining the semantic instability of the term which, as a compound, includes the notion of 'modernism', as well as the prefix 'post'. According to Hassan, the word is problematic because it contains what it wants to 'surpass and suppress, that is modernism'.<sup>2</sup> The prefix 'post' is also unclear. If we use it to refer to the period coming after modernism, we create semantic uncertainty not only because there is no agreement as to when precisely Postmodernism begins, but also because there is no clear-cut line dividing the formal characteristics of Modernism and of Postmodernism.<sup>3</sup> He then goes on to note that Postmodernism should be taken both diachronically and synchronically because we are still living in the age of Postmodernism<sup>4</sup>. Hassan's essay addresses another important problem, namely whether the term should be seen only as an artistic or both as an artistic and a social phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps his most important contribution to this debate is that he maps the

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<sup>1</sup> David Lodge is known not only for his acclaimed works in literary theory but also for his novels, as well as for his work in British academia. His novel *How Far Can You Go?*, published in 1980, won the Whitbread Book Award, and can, as I aim to show, be considered a typical Postmodernist text.

<sup>2</sup> Ihab Hassan, 'Toward a Concept of Postmodernism', p. 3 in Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodernist Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>5</sup> See ibid. 4.

differences between Modernism and Postmodernism, emphasizing irony as one of the key formal elements that differentiate Modernism and Postmodernism.<sup>6</sup>

The problems that Hassan has touched on in his essay have become central to the debate on Postmodernism as a literary and cultural phenomenon. Although there is no agreement as to what the term Postmodernism implies,<sup>7</sup> when precisely it began as a period, whether or not we are still living in it<sup>8</sup>, and whether it is a literary or a broader cultural phenomenon, it has become a commonplace that certain formal features mark Postmodernist literature. In her introduction to Postmodernism, Nicol has summarized these features by pointing out three main elements: text's own self-reflexiveness, its tendency to move away from the realist mode of representation, and its inclination to draw the reader's attention to his or her own interpretation of the text.<sup>9</sup> Theo D'Haen has correctly amplified this list by arguing that metafiction, eclecticism, redundancy, multiplicity, discontinuity, fragmentation, indeterminacy, intertextuality and parody, dissolution of character, and the erasure of boundaries between high and low culture can be seen as typical narrative strategies of Postmodernist literature.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See p. 6. For critics who highlight the importance of Hasaan's seminal work see, for example, Prayer Elmo Raj, 'Postmodern Thought in Ihab Hassan' in *LangLit: An International Journal Peer Reviewed Open Access Journal*, 2 (May, 2016), 104-109, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> Apart from Hasaan, for this argument see, for example, Derak C. Maus, 'Readings on Postmodernism' in Derak C. Maus, ed. *Postmodernism: Literary Movements in Genres*, New York: Greenshaven Press, 2001, pp. 2-29, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Recent studies on Postmodernism raise the question of whether Postmodernism is still alive or not. Peter Hughes, for example, sees it as 'dead' because today's courses on Postmodernism deal with the texts and topics that cannot be considered as belonging to our age. (See Peter Hughes, 'Last Post: Alternatives to Postmodernism'. A Review Article. *Contemporary Studies in Society and History* 38/1 Jan. 1996, 182-188).

<sup>9</sup> Bran Nicol, 'Preface', p. 16. in *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, (University of Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xiii-xvii.

<sup>10</sup> Theo D'haen 'European Postmodernism: The Cosmodern Turn', in *Narrative* 21:3 (October 2013), 271-83, pp. 271-272.

It is beyond my scope in this thesis to explore in detail the contradictions and the implications of the term Postmodernism, or to offer a thorough analysis of all the formal characteristics that can be perceived as recurring in Postmodernist literature. In trying to identify Postmodernist elements in Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?*, I shall rather focus on an exploration of the strategies pervading his novel. I contend that while, on the one hand, Lodge reveals himself grounded on the realist tradition, on the other hand, he disrupts the realist modes of narration. This relationship between realism and its denial can be seen as a typically Postmodernist gesture. I also contend that by using the realist modes of narration and then by denying them, Lodge creates a duality within his text which produces an interpretative tension, requiring an engaged reader.

In order to explore Postmodernist denial of realistic strategies in *How Far Can You Go?*, I shall first focus on an exploration of the relationship between realism and Postmodernism, and then move on to an analysis of Lodge's novel.

## 2. The Relationship between Realism and Postmodernism

It has become a commonplace that one of the key characteristics of Postmodernism is its disbelief in the concept of realism. Yet, most critics agree that despite this disbelief Postmodernism has never truly rejected realism.<sup>11</sup> In order to understand the relationship between realism and Postmodernist aesthetics, it is important to define realism in the first place. In his book, *The Modes of Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and Typology of Modern Literature*, David Lodge makes a distinction between different kinds of 'realism'. According to him, the term can be used in everyday life to denote facts, as well as in philosophy and in art. In defining what he refers to as 'aesthetic realism', he argues that the word is often employed to mean 'truth to life/experience/observation in representation'.<sup>12</sup> The same idea is expressed in a rather general definition of realism: 'Realism is a term used in art to describe a doctrine based upon the truthful and accurate depiction of the models that nature and contemporary life offer the artist.'<sup>13</sup> Both definitions establish the relationship between 'truth to life' or 'accuracy' and representation as two concepts which have become essential to the debate surrounding the term realism. In this sense, the notion of being 'true to life' has been mainly used to denote proximity between reality and its representation. Mathews refers to this proximity as 'objectivity' and correctly argues that

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<sup>11</sup> For this argument, see, for example, Maud Thinard, *Metafiction and Realism in David Lodge's Campus Trilogy: Changing Places, Small World and Nice Work*, academia.edu.

<sup>12</sup> David Lodge, *The Modes of Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), p. 22-24.

<sup>13</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, (July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1999), *Realism*, Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/art/realism-art>.

‘Western thought has been dominated by a fascination with objective representation.’<sup>14</sup> The term ‘representation’ is, on the other hand, inherent in literature itself. As Lodge has suggested:

A verbal text can never be mistaken for the reality it refers to, as an object of visual or plastic art may be mistaken. Writing cannot imitate reality directly (as a film, for instance, can); it can only imitate ways of thinking and speaking about reality, and other ways of writing about it. A working definition of realism in literature might be: the representation of experience in a manner which approximates closely to descriptions of similar experience in non literary texts of the same culture.<sup>15</sup>

Lodge’s quotation points to the question of the complex and frequently discussed relationship between literature and reality. He takes into consideration the fictional aspect of the text aiming to re-construct reality and argues that a fictional text can re-create reality only by using its own means. In other words, according to him, an actual event cannot be re-constructed but rather rendered in fiction through attributes and associations as typically literary devices.<sup>16</sup> Modern critics concur with this idea. Along these lines, Baldick has suggested that realism cannot be seen as a ‘direct or simple reproduction of reality [...], but a system of conventions producing some lifelike illusion of some “real world” outside the text’.<sup>17</sup>

Although the idea of producing some ‘lifelike illusion of the “real world outside the text”<sup>18</sup> has inspired numerous writers throughout literary history, the notion of realistic representation has been associated primarily with 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction.<sup>19</sup> It has become a

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<sup>14</sup> Peter David Mathews, *Strategies of Realism: Realist Fiction and Postmodern Theory* (Center for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, Monash University, 2001), p. 13. PhD thesis Monash University Library.

<sup>15</sup> Lodge, *The Modes of Writing*, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 24. C.

<sup>17</sup> Baldick (qts. in Sardar Alic, *Realism and New Realism in American Literature – Revisiting Philip Roth’s Operation Shylock* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>19</sup> It is important to make a distinction between the realist mode of representation and Realism as a literary movement of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas the former can be discerned throughout literary history,

commonplace that several important factors mark this fiction. Baldick has summarized them in suggesting that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, 'the problems of ordinary people in unremarkable circumstances are rendered with close attention to the details of physical settings and to the complexities of social life which usually arise from social injustice.'<sup>20</sup> Lodge, on the other hand, sees a strong connection between the realist fiction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and historical writing in so far as some realist texts can be consistent with historical facts. In giving evidence for this, he refers to Tolstoy who drew on historical facts in writing his lengthy novels.<sup>21</sup> The presence of the narrator is yet another element which is considered to be important for 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction. It has become a commonplace that the narrator in realist fiction is either first person narrator or third person omniscient narrator. The latter refers to the type of narrator who renders the events from the external point of view and who is in charge of the narrative all the time. As Rayment has pointed out, his position of being omniscient gives him the place and the role of God. He is above the text and guides the reader through it.<sup>22</sup>

The relationship between realism as a period and a mode of writing and Postmodernism is a complex one. Frederic Jameson, one of the most influential critics of Postmodernism, has argued:

I am referring to the so called crisis of representation in which an essentially realistic epistemology, which conceives of representation as the reproduction, for subjectivity of an objectivity that lies outside it,

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the latter refers to a specific period which is characterized by the production of fiction which, for the most part, employs the realist methods of narration.

<sup>20</sup> Baldick qtd. in Alic, p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Lodge, *The Modes of Writing*, p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> For this argument, see Andrew Rayment, 'Literary Realism, Modernism and Postmodernism: A Comparative Introduction' in *A Review Article. Contemporary Studies in Society and History* 38/1 Jan. 1996, 34-38).

projects a mirror theory of knowledge and art... It is in terms of this crisis that the transition in the history of form... has been described ... a shift from a representational to non representational.<sup>23</sup>

The quotation emphasizes that Postmodernism is faced with what he refers to as ‘epistemological crisis’.<sup>24</sup> Mathews has correctly defined this kind of crisis as the denial of the experience of the real.<sup>25</sup> As he has pointed out, Postmodernism sees this denial as being ‘legitimate’.<sup>26</sup> Yet, in arguing that there is a shift in form from ‘representational’ to ‘non-representational’, Jameson also points to the crisis of what we have defined as objective representation.

In his seminal work *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard, one of the most important thinkers and theorists of Postmodernism, has also suggested that in the Postmodernist era the idea of knowledge has changed:

The nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation. It can fit into the new channels, and become operational, only if learning is translated into quantities of information. We can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned.<sup>27</sup>

The quotation makes it obvious that Lyotard sees the Postmodernist condition as influencing the nature of knowledge. According to him, the idea of knowledge needs to be transformed so as to meet the requirements of the new era. In arguing for a new language into which knowledge will be ‘translatable’, Lyotard also points to the necessity of change in representation. Thus, grounded on realism as it is, Postmodernism, in fact, looks for new modes of expression.

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<sup>23</sup> Jameson, qtd. in Mathews, *Strategies of Realism*, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Epistemology is understood in its essential meaning: as a study of the possibilities and the boundaries of human knowledge.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) p. 14.

I shall analyse in what follows Postmodernist elements in Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?* by focusing on the relationship between the realist methods that he employs in his novel and their Postmodernist denial. I shall suggest that Lodge reveals himself a realist in the description of his settings, of his characters, and of the Catholic Church as an institution. Yet, his realist strategies are often undercut. Realistically rendered as his characters are, he also creates a sense that there is something unknown and mysterious about them. This denies the element of realism in so far as the narrator does not seem to be in charge of the narrative. Furthermore, although the novel abounds in realistic passages on the changes within the Catholic Church, Lodge employs metafiction to disrupt the realism of these passages. As I have pointed out in my introduction, the duality between realism and the elements denying it creates a tension in Lodge's text which calls for the reader who is deeply engaged in the process of reading.

### 3. Realism and its Denial in David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?*

#### 3.1. Character Construction and the Description of Settings

*How Far Can You Go?* is a novel which follows the maturation and development of a group of young Catholics in London from the 1950s through the 1970s. It introduces a number of characters, all of them faced with the problem of emerging sexuality. As young and deeply religious, all of them have to decide on how far they ought to go with the member of the opposite sex in matters of sexuality. At first glance, Lodge seems to employ a typically realist method in constructing his characters. Albeit they are not fully developed as is the case in lengthy 19<sup>th</sup> century novels, they belong to what Baldick, in defining realism, refers to as 'ordinary people in unremarkable circumstances.'<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the settings through which they move are depicted with what he identifies as 'close attention to the details and to the complexities of social life which usually arise from social injustice.'<sup>29</sup> Finally, for the most part of the text, these descriptions are given through the eyes of the omniscient narrator as the type of narrator dominating realist fiction.<sup>30</sup>

The novel begins with the description of the setting where these young Catholics gather for a morning mass:

IT IS JUST after eight o'clock in the morning of a dark February day, in this year of grace nineteen hundred and fifty-two. An atmospheric depression has combined with the coal smoke from a million chimneys to cast a pall over London. A cold drizzle is falling on the narrow, nondescript streets north of Soho, south of the Euston Road. Inside the church of Our Lady and St Jude, a greystone, neo-gothic edifice squeezed between a bank and a furniture warehouse, it might still be night. The winter daybreak is too feeble to penetrate the stained-glass windows, doubly and trebly stained by soot and bird droppings, that depict scenes from the life of Our Lady...In alcoves along the

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<sup>28</sup> See Baldick and his definition of realism on p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> See also Baldick above (p. 6).

<sup>30</sup> See my discussion above, p. 6.

side walls votive candles fitfully illuminate the plaster figures of saints paralysed in attitudes of prayer or exhortation. There are electric lights in here, dangling from the dark roof on immensely long leads, like lamps lowered down a well or pit-shaft; but, for economy's sake, only a few have been switched on, above the altar and over the front central pews where the sparse congregation is gathered.<sup>31</sup>

The description is reminiscent of a typical realist novel. Lodge is giving us the details of the church. We know that this is the Church of Our Lady and St Jude; we learn where it is situated, what it looks like from the outside; we also become acquainted with all the details of its interior. Moreover, Lodge creates an atmosphere of darkness and depression through an association of images (the idea of a 'dark February day' and an 'an atmospheric depression' are linked with the image of the 'coal smoke from a million chimneys').<sup>32</sup> This kind of atmosphere echoes typically realist descriptions of the setting which serve the purpose of emphasizing the bleakness of social reality.<sup>33</sup> Lodge insists on this kind of atmosphere not to underline that the social reality of the novel is characterized by injustice and by the negative aspects of industrialization, but rather to introduce, through these images, the negative feelings that these young Catholics experience in having to attend the mass.<sup>34</sup> Later in the text, we, in fact, learn that the reason why they attend the mass is their fear of punishment after death:

As to the others, most of them will not be displeased when mass is over and they can hurry off to a day of largely secular concerns and pleasures. They are here not because they positively want to be, but because they believe it is good for their souls to be at mass when they would rather be in bed, and that it will help them in the immortal game of snakes and ladders.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> David Lodge, *How Far Can You Go?* (London: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 3. In creating a special association between the idea of darkness (it is the morning of a 'dark February day'), the feeling of depression, and the image of the smoke coming out of the chimneys, Lodge his argument in *The Modes of Writing* that reality cannot be reconstructed directly, but rather through 'attributes and association as specifically literary devices' (See Lodge, above p. 9-10)

<sup>33</sup> The drabness of social reality in 19<sup>th</sup> century novels is often caused by the social injustice to which Baldick points.

<sup>34</sup> Modernist writers who tend to move away from realist modes of writing tend to plunge into the psychology of their characters rather than use the descriptions of physical space to render their feelings.

<sup>35</sup> Lodge, , *How Far...* p. 25.

Apart from following realist convention of writing through an insistence on the descriptions of physical details, Lodge, in the above passage, proves to be a realist through one more detail: the passage is rendered through the lenses of the third person narrator who offers an external view of the scene.

Apart from representing the setting realistically, he also gives a realist description of his characters in the first chapter:

To begin with the simplest case: Dennis, the burly youth in the dufflecoat, its hood thrown back to expose a neck pitted with boil scars, is here because Angela, the fair beauty in the mantilla, is here. And Angela is here because she is a good Catholic girl, the pride of the Merseyside convent where she was Head Girl and the first pupil ever to win a State Scholarship to University, the eldest daughter of awed parents who run a corner-shop open till all hours and scarcely know what a university is for. Naturally Angela joined the Catholic Society in the first week of her first term and naturally she joined its New Testament Study Group when invited to do so, and naturally she goes along to the Thursday morning masses, for she has been conditioned to do what is good without questioning and it scarcely costs her any effort. Not so with Dennis. He is a Catholic, but not a particularly devout one.<sup>36</sup>

In describing Denis and Angela, Lodge gives a description of their physical appearance first and then moves on to his explanation as to why both of them attend the mass. This passage continues with the description of other characters who for some reason attend the morning mass:

Michael is interested not in any particular girl, but in girls generally. He does not want a relationship, he wants sex – though his lust is vague and hypothetical in the extreme. At the Salesian grammar school on the northern outskirts of London which he attended before coming up to the University, a favourite device of the bolder spirits in the sixth form to enliven Religious Instruction was to tease the old priest who took them for this lesson with casuistical questions of sexual morality, especially the question of How Far You Could Go with the opposite sex.<sup>37</sup>

We get a sense that he introduces, right at the start, a huge number of characters so as to explain why they attend the mass. What makes this description realist is not its length as a typical feature of 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction, but rather a wealth of information on Angela and Michael's school days. We learn that Angela attended 'the Merseyside convent where she was Head Girl', and that she joined the Catholic society. On the other hand, Michael attended the 'Salesian grammar

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 12.

school on the northern outskirts of London in which he had Religious Instruction. Since Lodge's description of Angela and Michael are rather short, these details about their religious education create the effect of accumulation: the reader gets a sense that he is presented with too many details about their religious education. Yet another realist element is to be found in the type of narration that he uses: once more, in rendering the characters, Lodge also employs third person external narration.

What makes this and the descriptions of other characters also realist is the fact that all these characters belong to what Baldick refers to as 'ordinary people in unremarkable circumstances.'<sup>38</sup> Their status of being 'ordinary' is underlined by the fact that they all live in London and that they all attend the mass on an ordinary day in February. On the other hand, what makes the circumstances 'unremarkable' is the very fact that they regularly and as part of their routine as Catholics attend the mass.

'Rising an hour earlier than usual, in cold bed-sitters far out in the suburbs, they travel fasting on crowded buses and trains, dry-mouthed, weak with hunger, and nauseated by cigarette smoke, to be present at this unexciting ritual in a cold, gloomy church at the grey, indifferent heart of London.'<sup>39</sup>

The quotation points to the extraordinary sense of duty that these characters have in attending the mass. Once more, in describing his characters, Lodge describes the setting: the interior of the church, as well as London itself, are described as gloomy and unattractive echoing realist descriptions of external reality. Once more, the event is rendered through the eyes of the third person omniscient narrator.

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<sup>38</sup> See Baldick and his definition of realism on p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Lodge, *How Far...*, p. 35.

Yet, the realist elements present in the description of the settings and of Lodge's characters in *How Far Can You Go?* are undercut as early as in the first chapter:

Miles, *you recall*, is the ex-public schoolboy, a convert; his handsomely bound old missal bespeaks wealth and taste, his graceful, wandlike figure a certain effeminacy... Back in the pews there is Michael, haggard in his baggy wanker's overcoat and his simulated Doubts, his head weighed down with guilt or the hank of dark hair falling across his eyes, his features slightly flattened as though pressed too often against glass enclosing forbidden goodies... And a girl ... who now comes forward from the shadows of the side aisle, where she has been lurking, to join the others at the altar rail. Let her be called Violet, no, Veronica, no Violet, improbable a name as that is for Catholic girls of Irish extraction, customarily named after saints and figures of Celtic legend, *for I like the connotations of Violet* – shrinking, penitential, melancholy – a diminutive, dark-haired girl, a pale, pretty face ravaged by eczema, fingernails bitten down to the quick and stained by nicotine, a smartly cut needlecord coat sadly creased and soiled; a girl, you might guess from all this evidence, with problems, guilts, hang-ups.<sup>40</sup>

The above passage is rendered mostly through third person omniscient and realist narration. We get the impression that Michael is seen through the eyes of the narrator who is in charge of the narrative in so far as the narrator observes him from the outside and has a full knowledge of what he looks like and of what he does. Moreover, Lodge insists on details in describing Michael and in rendering his act of kneeling down (we learn what he wears and what his hair looks like; we also learn that his features 'flattened'). Yet, the female character introduced after the description of Michael seems to be mysterious and unknown. What creates a sense of mystery is the fact that when she appears in the text the third person narrator ceases to be in control of the narrative. His narration is interrupted by the intervention of the author ('for *I* like the connotations of Violet') who does not even know the girl's name, asking the reader to guess what her name is, and what her problems are.<sup>41</sup> The passage from third person narration to

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 45. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>41</sup> It is important to make a distinction between the narrator and the author. While the author is the actual person who writes the text, the narrator is a fictional construct that resides in the text and tells the story. (See Alan Durant and Martin Montgomery, *Ways of Reading: Advanced Reading Skills for Students of English* (Routledge, 2012), pp. 45-54. Mitras is correct in claiming that in Lodge's novel 'the distinction between author and narrator becomes, in this novel, curiously uncertain'. (John Mitras, 'Pre-Catholic Authority: David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go*', in *A Study of British Catholic Writers and Their Fictions in a Postmodern and Postconciliar World*, pp 90-107, 1997, p. 92).

the authorial intervention creates, at this point, a confusion, raising the question of whether Violet is one of the characters who, together with other ones, attends the mass, or rather a construct of the author who has the intention to break the main narrative. Only if we continue reading the text, we become aware that Violet is not the product of the author who deliberately intrudes into the flow of third person narration, but one of the characters attending the mass: ‘Let’s just take a roll call. From left to right along the altar rail, then: Polly, Dennis, Angela, Adrian, Ruth, Miles, Violet. Michael kneeling in his pew. Edward and Father Brierley on the altar.’<sup>42</sup>

The disruption of the flow of the main realist narration and a sense of confusion that this disruption creates can be seen as a Postmodernist procedure of breaking narrative realism. This disruption requires a careful reader. Not only do we have to figure out if Violet is the construct of the author who intervenes in the narrative; in the first place, we need to understand that the *I* suddenly appearing in the text when Violet is introduced comes from the author rather than the narrator. This is possible only if refer back is the initial *you recall* (‘Miles, *you recall*, is the ex-public schoolboy’). We, in fact, become fully aware that both ‘*you recall*’ and the *I* who likes ‘*the connotations of Violet*’ represent authorial intrusions only after we have related them. In other words, in order to follow the narrative and to fully understand it we need to deeply engage ourselves in the process of reading.

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<sup>42</sup> Lodge, *How Far...*, p.24.

### 3.2. Descriptions of the Catholic Church: The Historical Layer of the Book, Realism and Metafiction

Apart from following the maturation and development of the main characters as young Catholics who have to come to terms with their emerging sexuality, Lodge's novel also explores the historical changes within the Catholic Church.<sup>43</sup> The central event around which the entire novel, in fact, revolves is The Second Vatican Council of the 1960s: 'Pope John died in 1963 to be succeeded by Pope Paul VI who enlarged the Commission and instructed its members specifically to examine the Church's traditional teaching with reference to the pill. Catholics, especially young married ones, waited impatiently'.<sup>44</sup> The main purpose of the council was to change the practices of the mass so as to make the liturgy more accessible: 'The mass was revised and translated into the vernacular... All masses were now dialogue masses, the whole congregation joining the responses.'<sup>45</sup> Secondly, the Council aimed at passing the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* or 'the Pope's long-awaited letter of birth control.'<sup>46</sup>

The presence of the historical layer links Lodge's novel with both the realist tradition and its Postmodernist turn. As we have seen, he himself, in his *Modes of Modern Writing*, has noted that one of the key features of 19<sup>th</sup> century realism is that it draws on historical facts.<sup>47</sup> It has become

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<sup>43</sup> The novel, in fact, works at different levels. The development of the characters parallels the changes in the Church. The text also tracks the changes in British social life from the 1950s through the 1970s.

<sup>44</sup> Lodge, *How far...*, p.53.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.55.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 56. The changes in the Catholic Church go hand in hand with the lives of Lodge's characters in *How Far Can You Go?*. While in first chapter of the novel, these devout Catholics attend regularly the masses, in the second chapter, we are presented with their attempt to decide on how far they ought to go with the members of the different sex. This coincides with the intention of the church to publish Pope's letter on contraception.

<sup>47</sup> See above, p. 6.

a commonplace that Postmodernist fiction is also keen on incorporating historical elements into its narrative structure. In her seminal essay 'A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction', Linda Hutcheon has argued that Postmodernism should be regarded as employing 'metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past'.<sup>48</sup> In this article, Hutcheon, in fact, explores what she refers to as 'historiographic metafiction'.<sup>49</sup> The term, as she and other theorists and critics of Postmodernism after her understand it, refers to the fiction which, in some ways, echoes and/or assimilates past text.<sup>50</sup> An example of such prose is, according to Hutcheon, Fowles's novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.<sup>51</sup> Hutcheon does not go into a detailed exploration of Fowles's novel to show why it can be considered historiographic. She only underlines that it is not important to look for what she refers to as 'historical veracity' since the historical elements are part of the narrative text.<sup>52</sup> Fowles's novel has indeed a narrative line which is set in Victorian England. Moreover, each chapter of the novel begins with a passage from a Victorian text.<sup>53</sup> It has become a commonplace that the novel not only draws on historical facts about Victorian England in developing the story line which is

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<sup>48</sup> Linda Hutcheon, 'A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction' New York: Taylor & Francis Library. (first published by Routledge in 1988), p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Hutcheon's idea of 'historiographic metafiction' certainly invokes the notion of intertextuality. According to Kristeva, who coined this term, a literary, or any other text, does not exist in isolation. All texts necessarily, albeit unconsciously, interact. (For this idea, apart from Hutcheon, see Montgomery, *Ways of Reading...*, p. 67.) Kristeva's idea of intertextuality had an enormous impact on literary theorists and critics ever since it appeared in the late 1960s.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>53</sup> John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (London: Vintage Books, 2004.) See for example: pp. 7; 84.

set at that period, but it also echoes Thomas Hardy both in his themes and in his methods.<sup>54</sup> Fowles himself has admitted that Hardy is a shadow that he sees in the distance from his workroom window.<sup>55</sup>

In interweaving historical data into the narrative of *How Far Can You Go?* David Lodge does not acknowledge any particular influence.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, although he draws on concrete historical events like the Second Vatican Council or the publication of the Pope's letter on birth control, what Hutcheon refers to as 'historical veracity' seems irrelevant to the inner workings of the text.<sup>57</sup> My interest in this chapter is to explore the narrative role that this historical layer plays in the dynamics of the novel, and I contend that in describing the historical transformations within the Catholic Church, Lodge reveals the same inclination towards the employment of realist modes of writing, as well as the same need to move away from them. While, on the one hand, he offers realist descriptions of the Catholic Church and the historical changes within it, on the other hand, he disrupts realism through the use of metafiction, and this also can be seen as a typically Postmodernist gesture.<sup>58</sup> I further contend that not only the tension between realist narration and its denial, but also the inclusion of the historical layer in the book requires an attentive reader who is deeply engaged in the process of reading.

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<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Julia Depriester, 'The shadow I cannot avoid: From Victorian Nostalgia to Existentialist Authenticity in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*', Phd Dissertation, Université d'Artois, Arras Library, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>56</sup> We only know from his biography that he was brought up a Catholic which provoked his interest in Catholicism.

<sup>57</sup> For more historical information on these events, see, for example, Gerald Parson, 'Paradigm or Period Piece: David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?* in *Journal of Literature and Theology*, vol. 6, no. 2, June 1992, 171-190.

<sup>58</sup> D'Haen subscribes to the idea that metafiction is typically Postmodernist feature (See D'Haen above, p. 6). And Linda Hutcheon links 'historical echoes' with metafiction (See Hutcheon above, p. 16).

The first to use the term metafiction was William Gas in his seminal essay 'Philosophy and the Form of Fiction' (1971). Gas argues:

There are metatheorems in mathematics and logic, ethics has its linguistic oversoul, everywhere lingos to converse about lingos are being contrived, and the case is no different in the novel. I don't mean merely those drearily predictable pieces about writers who are writing about what they are writing, but those, like some of the work of Borges, Barth, and Flann O'Brien, for example, in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed.<sup>59</sup>

In this passage, Gass plays with the prefix *meta* which, as Patricia Waugh has emphasized, implies the idea of self-awareness.<sup>60</sup> Gas makes a distinction between writers who are 'writing about what they are writing' and those who use 'the forms of fiction' as a material to create new forms. In making this distinction, he, in fact, suggests that some novelists simply comment on their own writing, while others use new forms in providing this commentary. What is essential is that both think and write about their own process of writing, thus revealing the element of self-awareness. More specifically, as Waugh has suggested, the term metafiction implies a fiction that self-consciously reflects upon its own structure as language.<sup>61</sup> Waugh's study of metafiction is important for two more ideas. Firstly, she underlines the fact that metafiction implies the notion of 'embedding' which can be seen as either the act of inclusion into the narrative or as the gesture of adding to it so as to disrupt the main narrative course. Secondly, Waugh points to the relationship between realism and metafiction in arguing: 'What [metafiction] does is to re-examine the conventions of realism in order to discover – through its own self-reflection – a

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<sup>59</sup> William H Gass, 'Philosophy and the Form of Fiction' in *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (New York: David R. Godine), 1970, 64-73, p. 70.

<sup>60</sup> Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1984), p. 23. A close term to self-awareness and the one that is often used in texts dealing with metafiction is 'reflexivity'. In her study on metafiction, Landa explores the notion of reflexivity and metafiction, and shows that the term has been used both in philosophy and in literature. She underlines the mirror effect of metafiction as a notion, and argues: 'Metafiction is reflexive fiction in the sense not only that mirror images are found in it, but also that these mirrorings and reflexive structures are used as a meditation on the nature of fiction.' (Gracia Landa, Notes on Metafiction, Phd Thesis, academia.edu, p. 2). Reflection for Landa implies doubling and mirroring, as well as mediation on the text on its own status as a fictional work.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 14.

fictional form that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers.’<sup>62</sup> Central to this quotation is the idea that metafiction does not dismiss realism altogether, but rather establishes a new relationship with it.

In fact, throughout the novel, Lodge describes the events happening within the Church:

In other respects the Church undoubtedly was changing. Pope John, against all expectations (CARETAKER PONTIFF ELECTED, Angela and Dennis had read on newspaper placards when they returned from their honeymoon) had electrified the Catholic world by the radical style of his pontificate. “We are going,” he declared, “to shake off the dust that has collected on the throne of St Peter since the time of Constantine and let in some fresh air.” The Second Vatican Council which he convened brought out into the light a thousand unsuspected shoots of innovation and experiment, in theology, liturgy and pastoral practice, that had been buried for decades out of timidity or misplaced loyalty. In 1962, Pope John actually set up a Pontifical Commission to study problems connected with the Family, Population and Birth Control. This was encouraging news in one sense, since it seemed to admit the possibility of change, but disappointing in that it effectively removed the issue from debate at the Vatican Council, which began its deliberations in the same year.<sup>63</sup>

The passage is realistically rendered, and it draws on historical facts providing an additional layer to the book. What is crucial here is the way in which it is embedded into the main narrative.

We learn that Angela and Denis have read about The Second Vatican Council and about the changes that it is about to bring on newspaper placards. This facilitates our process of reading.

The narrative is not abruptly broken: it is rather incorporated into what characters think and feel.

However, these realist descriptions on the historical changes within the Church can, on occasions, be extremely long:

Meanwhile, other changes proceeded at a dizzying pace. The mass was revised and translated into the vernacular. The priest now faced the congregation across a plain table-style altar, which made the origins of the Mass in the Last Supper more comprehensible, and allowed many of the laity to see for the first time what the celebrant actually did. All masses were now dialogue masses, the whole congregation joining in the responses. The Eucharistic fast was reduced to a negligible one hour, before which any kind of food and drink might be consumed, and the laity were urged to receive communion at every mass – a practice previously deemed appropriate only to people of great personal holiness and entailing frequent confession. Typical devotions of Counter-Reformation Catholicism such as Benediction and the Stations of the Cross dwindled in popularity.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 20.

This passage continues the previous one. The description is still realistically presented, and it abounds in historical facts. Yet, Lodge proceeds with his elaboration on the introduction of the vernacular into the mass for almost a page and half. The effect of this is that the reader gets the impression of following a very long essay on the changes in the service of the mass. More importantly, the transition from this historical layer of the book to the main narrative line of the novel which follows the development of the main characters is very abrupt. The previous passages end with the description of how a group of young Catholics founded a journal to make comments on the recent teaching of the Catholic Church.

And from the Continent, from Latin America, through the religious press, came rumours of still more startling innovations being mooted – married priests, even women priests, Communion in the hand and under both kinds, inter communion with other denominations, “Liberation Theology”, and “Catholic Marxism”. A group of young intellectuals of the latter persuasion, based in Cambridge, founded a journal called *Slant* in which they provocatively identified the Kingdom of God heralded in the New Testament with the Revolution, and characterized the service of Benediction as a capitalist- imperialist liturgical perversion which turned the shared bread of the authentic Eucharist into a reified commodity.<sup>65</sup>

Then we soon learn that:

These developments were not, of course, universally welcomed. Evelyn Waugh, for instance, did not welcome them, and wrote furious letters to the *Tablet* saying so. Malcolm Muggeridge did not welcome them, and wrote a polemical piece in the *New Statesman* in 1965 urging “Backward, Christian Soldiers!” But it was none of his business, anyway, Michael thought, reading the article in the College library.<sup>66</sup>

Because of the fact that the transition is rather fast and abrupt, the reader needs to be very attentive and engaged in the process of reading; only a careful reader can figure out which narrative layer he is asked to follow.

Lodge deliberately insists on these long essayistic passages, in order underline how deeply the changes within the Catholic Church as an institution influence the lives of his characters. The effect of these long passages is the realistic tone of the book. Lodge’s

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 22.

descriptions are not only long and full of actual historical facts, but also very detailed and these are the features of realist fiction.<sup>67</sup>

Yet, Lodge's typically realistic strategies which dominate the first part of the book are disrupted through his metafictional comments on his own process of writing. The metafictional comments of Lodge as the author which appear at the end novel are preceded and announced by his authorial intrusions. In the fourth chapter, we come across yet another long passage which recounts the events occurring within the Church:

*The omniscience of novelists has its limits, and we shall not attempt to trace here the process of cogitation, debate, intrigue, fear, anxious prayer and unconscious motivation which finally produced that document. It is as difficult to enter into the mind of a Pope as it must be for a Pope to enter into the mind of, say, a young mother of three, in a double bed, who feels her husband's caressing touch and is divided between the desire to turn to him and the fear of an unwanted pregnancy.* It is said that Pope Paul was astonished and dismayed by the storm of criticism and dissent which his encyclical aroused within the Church. It was certainly not the sort of reception Popes had come to expect for their pronouncements. But in the democratic atmosphere recently created by Vatican II, Catholics convinced of the morality of contraception were no longer disposed to swallow meekly a rehash of discredited doctrine just because the Pope was wielding the spoon.<sup>68</sup>

At the very beginning of the passage, Lodge intrudes into the narrative by stating that his knowledge as a novelist is limited. This not only undermines the possible accuracy of the historical data on which he elaborates here, but also serves the purpose of establishing his distance from the text. Through this initial comment, as well as through his statement that 'it is difficult to enter the mind of a Pope', we, as readers, get the impression that he is not in full

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<sup>67</sup> As we have seen, Lodge has argued in his *Modes of Modern Writing* that 19<sup>th</sup> century novels use historical facts, and Baldick identifies long and detailed descriptions as typical for realist fiction (see above, p. 6).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 65. The emphasis is mine.

control of the narrative. After this comment, the narration continues smoothly, and we are, once more, presented with third person omniscient narration, essayistic as it is ('It is said that...').<sup>69</sup>

This intrusion of the author into the text not only disrupts the narrative but also undermines what Rayment has identified as one of the key features of realist fiction, namely that the narrator, in being omniscient, has the place and the role of God guiding the reader through the text.<sup>70</sup>

Lodge's narrator here is different from the narrators of realist fiction: he does not have the privilege of being omniscient all the time because the author who himself doubts his knowledge intrudes into the narrative.

Lodge's inclination to break the realist mode of narration is also made visible through his use of metafictional comments:

While I was writing this last chapter, Pope Paul VI died and Pope John Paul I was elected. Before I could type it up, Pope John Paul I had died and been succeeded by John Paul II, the first non-Italian pope for four hundred and fifty years: a Pole, a poet, a philosopher, a linguist, an athlete, a man of the people, a man of destiny, dramatically chosen, instantly popular – but theologically conservative. A changing Church acclaims a Pope who evidently thinks that change has gone far enough. What will happen now? All bets are void, the future is uncertain, but it will be interesting to watch. Reader, farewell!<sup>71</sup>

At the very beginning of the passage, Lodge draws the reader's attention to the process of writing, indeed of typing up his last chapter. Through this, he creates, what Waugh, in defining metafiction, has referred to as a 'fiction that self-consciously reflects upon its own structure as language'.<sup>72</sup> What also makes this comment metafictional is what she identifies as embedding,

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<sup>69</sup> At this point, we have to underline once more the distinction between the narrator and the author. As stated before, the narrator is a fictional construct whose task is to tell a story within a narrative text, while the author is the actual person – the creator of the text. p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> For this argument, see Rayment above, p. 6

<sup>71</sup> Lodge, *How Far...?*, p. 145.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

which implies an incorporation into the narrative, as well as an addition to it.<sup>73</sup> Although this metafictional comment comes at the very end of the novel, it seems to be added to the main narrative:

Ruth is headmistress of her school in the North of England, a job which has curtailed her charismatic activities, though she still derives great strength and consolation from a weekly prayer-group attended by interested staff and sixth-formers. I teach English literature at a redbrick university and write novels in my spare time, slowly, and hustled by history.

While I was writing this last chapter, Pope Paul VI died and Pope John Paul I was elected. Before I could type it up, Pope John Paul I had died and been succeeded by John Paul II, the first non-Italian pope for four hundred and fifty years ... What will happen now? All bets are void, the future is uncertain, but it will be interesting to watch. Reader, farewell!<sup>74</sup>

The main narrative line is interrupted by a sudden appearance of Lodge – the author. ('I teach English literature at a redbrick university and write novels in my spare time, slowly, and hustled by history'.) The passage in which he establishes the status of his text as a fictional product and in which the novel metafictionally reflects on itself is physically separated from the rest of the narrative. This suggests that it cannot be seen as an integral part of the narrative, but rather as something that is added to it. In disrupting the flow of third person realist narration, the added part proves that Lodge's inclination is to use typically Postmodernist gestures. Moreover, his statement about his career at university which suddenly breaks the realist narration and then his metafictional comment on his process of writing create a sense of confusion. The reader has to be engaged and attentive in order to figure out that the last passage is a comment made by the author. Lodge's metafictional reflection on his novel has one more effect: it invites the reader to participate in his act of some future writing: 'What will happen?'... It will be interesting to watch.' This creates an additional sense of interpretative uncertainty.

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<sup>73</sup> See above, p. 18.

<sup>74</sup> Lodge, *How Far...?*, p. 145.

In conclusion, we can say that what makes Lodge's novel *How Far Can You Go?* a typically Postmodernist text is a constant interchange between his use of realist strategies which imply interpretative certainty and his denial of them which provokes interpretative uncertainty.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> The contrast between what I referred to as 'interpretative certainty' and 'interpretative uncertainty' echoes Eco's distinction between what he labels as the traditional and the modern work of art. As one of the most important theorists of Postmodernism, Eco, in his influential book *The Open Work*, argues that traditional works of art are built upon conventions and are thus unambiguous. By contrast, modern works of art break the conventions and are, therefore, ambiguous and open to interpretation (see Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1989c), pp. 7-25. Lodge here analyses the works of art that were created at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and are part of literary Modernism as the most experimental period in literary history. What is crucial here, however, is that he sees the works that look for new modes of expression as being open to interpretation. In its denial of realist methods, grounded on them as it is, Postmodernism also looks for new methods of representation and this provokes its occasional interpretative uncertainty.

#### 4. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore Postmodernist elements in David Lodge's novel *How Far Can You Go?*. I identified them as his inclination to use the realist modes of narration, while, at the same time, disrupting them. My analysis started with an examination of the relationship between realism and Postmodernism, and I have argued that realistic features and modes of writing are inherent in Postmodernist literature. Postmodernist texts are thus often pervaded with realist elements: long and detailed descriptions; frequent employment of historical facts and of third person omniscient narration; and depictions of ordinary people in unremarkable situations. I have also contended that the relationship between realism and Postmodernism is complex in so far as Postmodernist literature also looks for new modes of expression.

In exploring the relationship between realistic strategies that Lodge uses in his novel *How Far Can You Go?* and their Postmodernist denial, I have demonstrated that Lodge reveals himself a realist in the description of his settings, of his characters, and of the Catholic Church as an institution. Yet, his realist strategies are often undercut. Realistically rendered as his characters are, he also creates a sense that there is something unknown and mysterious about them. This denies the element of realism in so far as the narrator does not seem to be in charge of the narrative. Furthermore, although the novel abounds in realistic passages on the changes within the Catholic Church, Lodge employs metafiction to disrupt the realism of these passages. Towards the end of the novel, he self-consciously reflects upon the fictional status of his text and upon his own process of writing, thus breaking the realist flow of the main narrative. I have also shown that the duality between realism and the elements denying it creates a tension in Lodge's text which calls for the reader who is deeply engaged in the process of reading. Only an attentive

and careful reader can follow frequent interchanges between realist elements in Lodge's text and the narrative devices that deny them. Finally, I have argued that what makes Lodge's novel a typically Postmodernist text is not only an interchange between realist strategies and their Postmodernist denial through the use of authorial interventions and metafiction, but also a constant alternation between interpretative certainty which is typical of realism and interpretative uncertainty which characterizes Postmodernism.

## 5. Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to explore Postmodernist elements in David Lodge's novel *How Far Can You Go?*. I have identified them in his use of Postmodernist narrative methods which he employs in the construction of his characters, description of his settings, and in the inclusion of historical elements in his book. I have argued that in constructing his characters, describing his settings, and in dealing with historical facts regarding the changes within the Catholic Church during the Second Vatican Council, he uses realist modes of narration. Yet, at the same time, he disrupts these traditional procedures through his employment of authorial interventions and metafiction. This tension between realism and its denial causes interpretative uncertainty, asking for an engaged reader. My main contention is that not only Lodge's inclination to use realist modes of expression while at the same time moving away from them and his decision to incorporate historical elements into his narrative, but also the uncertainty that his mode of narration in this novel produces can be seen as typically Postmodernist gestures.

## 6. Sažetak

Cilj ovog rada jest istražiti postmodernističke elemente u romanu *How Far Can You Go?* Davida Lodgea. Njih sam prepoznao u njegovoj uporabi postmodernističkih narativnih postupaka. Te postupke koristi u opisima svojih likova, mjesta radnje i kroz ugradnju povijesnih elemenata u svoj roman. Tvrdim da u izgradnji likova, opisima mjesta radnje i kroz povijesne činjenice koje se odnose na promjene unutar Katoličke crkve za vrijeme Drugog vatikanskog sabora, Lodge koristi realističke postupke, ali se od njih i odmiče kroz intervencije autora i metanarativnost. Napetost između njegova "realizma" i odmicanja od njega stvara interpretativnu nesigurnost zahtijevajući od čitatelja da u procesu čitanja bude angažiran. Moja glavna misao i tvrdnja jesu da se ne samo Lodgeova sklonost prema uporabi realističnih metoda naracije od kojih se

istovremeno i odmiče te ugradnja povijesnih elemenata u strukturu romana, već i interpretativna nesigurnost koju njegov način pisanja u ovom tekstu stvara mogu shvatiti kao elementi koji su tipični za postmodernističku književnost uopće.

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Obrazac A.Č.

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mr. sc. Ivanka Peršić, pred.

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☐ c) široj javnosti, ali nakon proteka 6/12/24 mjeseci (zaokružite odgovarajući broj mjeseci).  
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U slučaju potrebe (dodatnog) ograničavanja pristupa Vašem ocjenskom radu, podnosi se obrazloženi zahtjev nadležnom tijelu u ustanovi.

Mjesto, nadnevak: Split, 1.10.2020.

Potpis studenta/studentice: Toni Šimundža