

Maurice Couturier

A TRIBUTE TO DAVID LODGE



A happy couple at the Fondation Rothchild at the Cap Ferrat in 2013.

A photograph by M. Couturier

David Lodge, the world-famous novelist born in 1935, quietly departed from our ‘*Small World*’ on January 1st. Many Nabokovians who had met him at the Nice-conferences have already expressed their grief. Yvonne and I are deeply affected by his death: he had been our dear friend for forty years.

In 2006, *The Times* published a long article entitled “The History Men” about David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury, with a nice photograph of them at the top. It was Malcolm, an old friend of mine, who arranged for me and Yvonne to meet David for the first time in August

1986 while he was vacationing with his wife Mary in Brittany. David was then seeking to get his novels published in France, and Malcolm thought that I could help as we had already translated a few of Nabokov's works. Thanks to the young writer Gilles Barbedette, a fan of Nabokov who translated *Gogol* and was editing a series of translations for Rivages, our translation of *Nice Work* came out in 1990, followed by practically all the other novels, many in our translation. David often told us that the French translations of his novels sold more copies than their English editions in Great Britain, especially his campus novels, *Therapy* and *Deaf Sentence*. He enjoyed such a huge success in France that the Ministry of Culture, represented by the Cultural Attaché in London, awarded him *La Médaille des Arts et des Lettres* in a moving ceremony in 1997.

David Loge belongs to a great generation of British and American academics who ended up becoming prominent writers. Until 1987, he was a professor of English Literature at the University of Birmingham, which he caricatured as Rummidge in his three very popular campus novels. He extensively traveled for the British Council, attending innumerable conferences around the world, publishing not only fiction but literary criticism and theory, doing much to acclimatize Russian and French Structuralism in Britain. His monumental success as a novelist owed a great deal to his intelligence and humor, his immense culture, his sexual pantomimes, his attentive observation of people's behavior, not only in the academic world, and his tongue-in-cheek digs at religion, though he long remained a faithful Catholic. There never was an ounce of bitterness in his irony, though. David was a good man and a sanguine pessimist: he said he always envisaged the worst to exorcise it, a thing we had in common. Towards the end of his career, he was gamely trying to write for the stage, like his model Henry James, with less success though. He finally fell back on his autobiography, counting on his colossal archives, aware that he could less and less depend on his imagination and humor.

I would send him my own books but he was unable to read most of them, having no French. He did read *Nabokov's Eros and the Poetics of Desire* and kindly prefaced it, beginning humorously with an evocation of "the Bad Sex Award" established by *The Literary Review*, not to suggest that I should be awarded it, but to pay tribute to Nabokov's poetic handling of eroticism, his poeroticism as I call it. He prefaced a British reprint of *Pnin* and brilliantly lectured in Nice on this novel and *Pale Fire* in connection with the campus novel. Our common admiration for Nabokov largely contributed to our friendship. He would often come to visit us with his wonderful wife, Mary, a strong-willed and extremely considerate, sensitive, and

intelligent woman on whom he depended a great deal. Her death of cancer a few years ago deeply affected him. Yvonne and I mourn them both.

