

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Writing Game

David Lodge

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About the Book

The Writing Game was first performed at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre on 12 May 1990. It was directed by John Adams and designed by Roger Butlin, with lighting by Mark Pritchard. The cast was as follows:

JEREMY DEANE John Webb
LEO RAFKIN Lou Hirsch
MAUDE LOCKETT Susan Penhaligon
PENNY SEWELL Lucy Jenkins
SIMON ST CLAIR Patrick Pearson
Voice of HENRY LOCKETT Timothy West

Also by David Lodge

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The Modes of Modern Writing

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ESSAYS

Write On

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It would be embarrassing to list all the people who read the script of this play at various stages of its evolution, and made valuable comments and suggestions for its improvement, but I should like to acknowledge the assistance and encouragement of three persons in particular: Patrick Garland, Mike Ockrent and John Adams.

DL

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(in order of appearance)

JEREMY DEANE

LEO RAFKIN

MAUDE LOCKETT

PENNY SEWELL

SIMON ST CLAIR

Also: Voice of HENRY LOCKETT

The action takes place at the Wheatcroft Centre, a seventeenth-century farmhouse and barn in Dorset, converted to accommodate short residential courses in creative writing. The time is a recent summer.

THE WRITING GAME

A Comedy

David Lodge

VINTAGE BOOKS

London

ACT ONE

Act One Scene One. Early afternoon.

A converted seventeenth-century barn. An open-plan sitting-room, with door stage left giving direct access to the outside, and two interior doors leading to a bedroom and a bathroom on the ground floor. An open (preferably spiral) staircase leads to a gallery landing, with a door leading to a second bedroom. The bedrooms, insofar as their interiors are visible, are austere furnished with single beds, upright chairs, chests of drawers, pegs on walls. The sitting room is furnished with well-worn, non-matching furniture: a sofa, an armchair, and a coffee table centre stage; a trestle table that serves as a desk, with a battered swivel chair, and a couple of wooden folding chairs, stage right. Downstage left there is a small L-shaped sink unit and work-surface, with electric kettle, instant coffee and teabags on it, and storage for cups, glasses, etc., underneath, and a high stool beside it. Downstage right is an answerphone, with monitor facility and volume control, on a small table with drawer. Rush matting on the stone floor. A small bookshelf mounted on the wall near the downstairs bedroom door contains some well-worn reference books, dictionaries, etc., and a random selection of literary paperbacks. The general effect should be rustic, improvised, and not particularly comfortable. Mounted on the rear wall stage left there is a bust of a distinguished-looking elderly man made some time in the last thirty years.

The outside door opens.

JEREMY (*off*)
Here we are.

JEREMY, *wearing cardigan and corduroy trousers, comes in, carrying a suitcase, followed by LEO, in sports jacket and lightweight trousers, carrying a portable computer in a case. JEREMY is a middle-aged bachelor, slightly fussy in manner. LEO is about fifty, American-Jewish, quite handsome in a grizzled, furrowed way. He looks somewhat depressed and apprehensive.*

JEREMY
It's a converted barn, as you can see. (*He puts down the suitcase*) There are two bedrooms, one up, one down. (*He points*) Bathroom and loo in here. (*He indicates the second door on the ground floor*) Maude hasn't arrived yet, so you can take your pick of the bedrooms.

LEO
Which one do you recommend?

JEREMY
Well, some people in the upstairs room do complain of the birds in the eaves.

LEO
I'll take the downstairs one. (*He puts the computer on the coffee table, and picks up suitcase*) It's a pretty old building, isn't it?

JEREMY
Seventeenth-century. Like the farmhouse.

LEO
Stone floors. Must be cold as hell in the winter.

LEO *carries his case into the ground-floor bedroom. JEREMY follows him to the door, and leans against the door frame.*

JEREMY

Ah, we close from December to March.

LEO *throws case onto bed, opens it and unpacks a few items.*

LEO (*projects voice*)

So what do you do then, Jeremy?

JEREMY

I usually go to Morocco. I sit in the sun and write poetry.

LEO

You're a poet, huh? As well as running this place?

JEREMY

Well, I have published a slim volume or two ... I could show you some of my work if you're interested.

JEREMY *takes a slim volume from the bookshelf.*

LEO

I don't know anything about poetry. I don't really understand why people go on writing the stuff. Nobody reads it anymore, except other poets. (*Comes to doorway*) I don't mean to be personal.

JEREMY *conceals his book behind his back.*

JEREMY

Oh, point taken! The audience is minuscule. But I suppose one goes on because one is obsessed with the *music* of language.

LEO

Music?

JEREMY

Sounds, rhythms, cadences.

LEO

Well, you can get those things into prose.

JEREMY

Oh yes, I agree, absolutely. Your short stories – they're just like poems, I always think.

LEO

I hope not.

JEREMY

I mean –

LEO (*smiles faintly*)

Sure, I know what you mean, Jeremy.

LEO *comes out into the sitting-room.* JEREMY *covertly replaces his book on the bookshelf.*

LEO

We share this room – Maude Lockett and I?

JEREMY

Yes, it's a place where you can read the students' work, or see them individually. (*Smiles*) Or just get away from them for a bit.

LEO *looks slightly anxious.*

LEO

How many are there in this course?

JEREMY

Sixteen.

LEO
Is that all?

JEREMY
Twenty is our maximum, and I'm afraid a few cancelled when Maurice Denton had to withdraw. He has rather a following here. It was ever so good of you to step in at such short notice.

LEO
How did you know I was in England?

JEREMY
There was an interview in the *Guardian*, a few weeks ago.

LEO
Oh yeah.

JEREMY
It mentioned that you taught creative writing at the University of Illinois. I thought you might find it interesting to compare British students.

LEO (*doubtfully*)
If they're all fans of Maurice Denton ... I tried one of his books. Never finished it.

JEREMY
Oh, I'm sure you'll have them eating out of your hand in no time.

LEO
Where do *I* eat, since we're on the subject?

JEREMY
In the main house. You forage for breakfast and lunch. The students take turns to prepare the evening meal,

and wash up afterwards. You and Maude don't have to, of course.

LEO
I'm glad to hear it.

JEREMY
Though some tutors muck in and the students rather like it if they do.

A pause. LEO does not rise to the hint. JEREMY goes over to the sink.

JEREMY
You can make yourself a cup of tea or coffee here. (*He pulls the plug out of the sink and peers in*) Oh Gawd!

LEO
What's the matter?

JEREMY
Last week's community playwrights seem to have clogged up the sink with their Lapsang Suchong. I *told* them to use teabags.

LEO
D'you have a, whaddyacallit, plumber's helper?

JEREMY
I think we call it a plumber's mate. There's one over in the farmhouse. (*Pokes sink outlet*) Ugh. I suppose one could call this a particularly unpleasant form of writer's block.

JEREMY chuckles at his own joke, but LEO seems to think that writer's block is no laughing matter.

JEREMY
Would you like a cup of tea?

LEO

I could use a cup of coffee.

JEREMY

It's only instant, I'm afraid.

JEREMY *fills the kettle and switches it on.* LEO *begins unpacking the word processor.*

JEREMY

I see you've brought your typewriter with you.

LEO

It's not a typewriter, it's a portable word processor. Where can I plug it in?

JEREMY

There's a socket over there. I may have to get you an adaptor. It's a rather eccentric wiring system, with a special sort of plug that you can't buy any more ... Were you hoping to do some writing yourself, then?

LEO

You mean I won't have time?

JEREMY

Well the students *will* bring their unpublished novels with them, though we tell them not to, and expect the tutors to read them. (LEO *looks unhappy*) You just have to be firm.

LEO

Firm?

JEREMY

Ration them. Only one *magnum opus* per person.

LEO

I'm beginning to think this was a very bad idea.