RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

Secret Thoughts

David Lodge

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About the Book

Helen Reed, a novelist in her early forties, still grieving for her husband who died suddenly a year before, is a visiting teacher of creative writing at a university where Ralph Messenger, a cognitive scientist with a special interest in Artificial Intelligence and an incorrigible womaniser, is director of a prestigious research institute. He is an atheist and a materialist; she is a Catholic who has lost her faith but still yearns for the consolations of religion. Ralph is attracted to Helen and she, in spite of her principles, to him. They argue about the nature of human consciousness, and the different ways it is examined in science and literature, as she resists with weakening resolution Ralph's efforts to seduce her. David Lodge has distilled the story of his acclaimed novel *Thinks…* to create a witty and absorbing drama about a moral, emotional and intellectual struggle between two exceptional people.

About the Author

David Lodge's novels include *Changing Places*, *Small World*, *Nice Work*, *Author, Author*, *Deaf Sentence* and, most recently, *A Man of Parts*. He has also written stage plays and screenplays, and several works of literary criticism, including *The Art of Fiction*, *Consciousness and the Novel* and *The Year of Henry James*.

Also by David Lodge

FICTION

The Picturegoers
Ginger, You're Barmy
The British Museum is Falling Down
Out of the Shelter
Changing Places
How Far Can You Go?
Small World
Nice Work
Paradise News
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Thinks ...
Author, Author
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CRITICISM

Language of Fiction
The Novelist at the Crossroads
The Modes of Modern Writing
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ESSAYS

Write On
The Art of Fiction
The Practice of Writing
Consciousness and the Novel
The Year of Henry James

DRAMA

The Writing Game
Home Truths

SECRET THOUGHTS

A play for two actors
Based on the novel *Thinks* …

David Lodge

Harvill *Secker*
LONDON

Secret Thoughts was first performed at the Bolton Octagon Theatre on 13th May 2011. It was directed by David Thacker. His Assistant Director was Elizabeth Newman. The designer and lighting designer was Ciaran Bagnall. The cast was as follows:

HELEN REED	Kate Coogan
RALPH MESSENGER	Rob Edwards

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I am indebted to Benoît Verhaert for the idea of adapting my novel, *Thinks* … as a play for two actors. How this happened is explained in the Foreword. *Secret Thoughts* was performed at the Octagon Theatre on a thrust stage, with minimal props, using music and lighting to mark shifts in time and space. It could, however, be presented on a proscenium stage, and with a more realistic set. To allow for a variety of production styles the stage directions in this text are also minimal. As it went to press before the end of rehearsals there may be some small differences from the play as performed.

D.L.

FOREWORD

I can recall exactly the occasion when I had the first glimmering of an idea for the novel eventually published in 2001 as *Thinks* … It was reading in the Catholic weekly, *The Tablet*, in June 1994, a review by John Cornwell of two books – Daniel Dennett's *Consciousness Explained* and Francis Crick's *The Astonishing Hypothesis*. The review was headed 'From Soul to Software' and it interested me very much. First, it was news to me that consciousness had become a hot topic of enquiry for scientists in many different fields. Second, I was struck by Cornwell's exposition of the challenge that the arguments of Crick and Dennett presented to traditional religious and humanist ideas of the individual self or soul. Crick's hypothesis, to which Dennett would subscribe, is that '"You", your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behaviours of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.' I had a hunch that there might be a novel in this subject, of the kind in which a conflict between two opposed cultures or value systems is explored in a human story.

But first I had to familiarise myself with the research and arguments going on in the field of 'consciousness studies', which embraces neuroscience, artificial intelligence, zoology, psychology, philosophy and many other disciplines, and is infused with the neo-Darwinian evolutionary biology disseminated by popular science writers like Richard Dawkins. This was a considerable task for someone who had 'dropped' science subjects at school as soon as he could. It was educative but time-consuming, and some years passed before I began writing a novel about Ralph

Messenger, a cognitive scientist specialising in artificial intelligence, and Helen Reed, a novelist in her early forties who is still grieving for her husband who died suddenly a year before. She comes as a visiting teacher of creative writing to a university where Ralph, an incorrigible womaniser, is director of a prestigious research institute, and attracts his attention. They argue about the nature of consciousness and related issues while she struggles to resist his sexual advances. He is an atheist and philosophically a materialist; she is a Catholic who has lost her faith but still yearns for the consolations of religion.

Early in their acquaintance Ralph explains that the problem for scientists studying consciousness is that it is 'a first-person phenomenon' experienced by a subjective 'I', but science is an objective, third-person discourse. How can the former be described by the latter? Helen says that novelists have been doing this successfully for nearly two hundred years, by the technique of 'free indirect style' which allows the novelist to combine the inner voice of a character and the voice of a narrator, and she reads Ralph a passage from Henry James to prove her point. Ralph retorts that in real life, unlike fiction, 'We can never know for certain what another person is thinking.' I decided to tell their story from three points of view, two subjective and one objective. Ralph is dictating his random thoughts into a tape recorder to provide data for his research; Helen is writing a diary on her laptop. These discourses describe their developing relationship and alternate with another, impersonal, objective, third-person account of the same events, which is restricted to reporting what they say and do, without describing their thoughts and feelings. Interpretation of these three parallel narratives is left to the reader without authorial guidance.

In the course of my twin career as a university teacher of literature and creative writer I became increasingly

interested in the theory and practice of adaptation, especially in the question of what is gained and what is lost in the process. Narrative is a universal feature of all human culture, and in principle is translatable from one language to another and from one medium to another. The story of *Cinderella* can be told orally or in print, in English or French, as a pantomime or a ballet, a film or a strip cartoon, and still have essentially the same meaning in all these realisations. But more complex and sophisticated narratives are not so easily adaptable. Stage plays have to be 'opened out' when they are made into films or risk seeming artificial, but often lose some of their intensity in the process. Novels tend to contain too much plot and too many characters to be satisfactorily dramatised within the constraints of theatrical time and resources: an entertaining show may result, but much of the quality of the original is lost. Film is a more compatible medium for the adaptation of a novel, because both forms move their stories through time and space in much the same way, and the TV serial is better still, because it gives room to unfold a long and complex story.

Both stage play and film or TV drama can bring a thrilling new dimension to a novel by the physical presence and performance of the actors, but – restricted to showing what can be seen and heard – all these media struggle to do justice to the representation of consciousness, which is silent and invisible. I enjoyed some success, and derived great satisfaction, from adapting my novel *Nice Work* and Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* as TV serials, greatly helped by the fact that in both novels the story unfolds in dramatic encounters and confrontations between the characters, rather than in their minds. The 'stream-of-consciousness' novel – Virginia Woolf's, for example – is the kind of fiction most resistant to cinematic treatment. Using 'voice-over' in film to articulate the silent thoughts of characters must be used sparingly, if at all, because it goes against the grain of