**Analysis of an extract from “*Nice Work*” by David Lodge**

Nice Work is a contemporary novel written by David Lodge and published in 1988. It is part of what today goes under the name of “campus novel”, which is a novel set in an academic environment, based on the pretext of an exchange between the world of work and of university. Nice Work is considered the parody of the Victorian novel Hard Times. The leading characters of the novel are two: Vic Wilcox, who works as the manager of an engineering firm, and Robyn Penrose, who is a temporary lecturer at the fictional University of Rummidge.

In the extract that I am going to analyse, which deals with her introduction, Robyn is characterised by contrast to Vic: she has a different gender from him, she comes from and works in a different environment, they are different by means of the vision of the world that they have. Indeed, the narrator states “[…] *let us leave Vic Wilcox* […] *to meet a very different character*” and tells the reader that Robyn does not believe in the concept of character, while she holds that it is a bourgeois myth, created to reinforce the ideology of capitalism. After saying that, she explains that the rise, the triumph and the deconstruction of the classic novel coincided with the ones of capitalism.

Comments of the narrator are present between brackets in the extract and contribute to the characterisation of Robyn. Indeed, he lets the reader know one interjection she often adopts when she is working, which is “*that is to say*”, an expression commonly used by teachers and lecturers. Only after that, the narrator tells the name of the character he intends on presenting, Robyn Penrose. Her name reminds of a male name, of the name of Robin Hood, making of her a natural fighter, one who fights for what she believes in. Although her surname sounds more feminine.

She is then presented by her social role: she is a temporary lecturer in English Literature at he University of Rummidge. The adjective “temporary”, referred to her job, contributes to the postmodern concept of relativity and unsteadiness.

In the second paragraph, the narrator goes into detail explaining why Robyn believes that the concept of character, which was relevant in the Victorian novel, is an expression of capitalism. Both the novel and capitalism are the result of Protestant ethic, in the sense that they “*depend on the idea of an autonomous individual self who is responsible for and I control of his/her own destiny, seeking happiness and fortune in competition with other autonomous selves*”. It is important to notice that competition is at the basis of capitalism. What is stated in the quote is only a myth: at the end of the 19th century, fundamental assumptions that used to be the pillars of the world were destroyed by the revolutionary ideas and theories of philosophers and scientists such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein and many more. The common aspect of all their theories is the relativity they associated to every aspect of life and thought. Because of this, the world lost its certainties, there were no defined truths anymore.

The novelist is then compared to “*a capitalist of the imagination*”, one who transforms a form of art into a form of mass production. As Robyn goes on lecturing her students, she presents two writers who contributed to making literature a mass-produced cultural artefact: Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson. Indeed, Victorian novels were published in monthly instalments that allowed the writers to satisfy readers’ curiosity after keeping it high for a month every time, inducing the need for something that was not needed. At this point, the narrator comments on Robyn’s gestures, saying that even though she acted as if to imply that there was nothing more to say and that her words were just self-explanatory, she always had more to say. Indeed, she keeps on explaining that “*there is no such thing as the ‘self’ on which capitalism and the classic novel are founded*”. Before letting Robyn clarify her words, the narrator introduces the concept of identity, saying that Robyn and her way of thinking (just like everybody) are a product of those wo have influenced her. Robyn herself states that “*there is only a subject position in an infinite web of discourses*”. Indeed, the message the narrator wants to send is that Robyn’s vision of the world has been influenced by who and what she has read. This means that what Victorian writers believed, a unique identity, does not exist. That illusion made people believe in the concept of the self-made man, an individual who was aware and in control of what he said and what others interpreted. However, an individual like this does not exist, unique identity does not exist, but multiple identities do. According to tradition, the author is he who creates a work of fiction from nothing. The author, as it was conceived by the traditional form of the novel, does not exist because every text is built from quotations from other texts, is a product of many texts which interweave. It means that there are no origins, there is nothing outside the text as stated by Jacques Derrida “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*”. This applies also to people, who produce their ‘selves’ in language. Individuals are what speaks them, not what they speak: these are the fundamental ideas of “semiotic materialism”. It is a philosophy which adopts the laws of semiotic to analyse reality.

The idea of interpretation is therefore one of the main topics of Postmodernism, a movement which could be considered the result of the changes which took place in the 20th century: there are no longer defined truths and everything is relative.

Finally, the last lines present Robyn as both a feminist and a dreamer: “*she seems to have ordinary human feelings, ambitions, desires, to suffer anxieties, frustrations, fears, like anyone else in this imperfect world, and to have a natural inclination to try and make it a better place.*”