Lodge's The Writing Game a clever, funny farce

THE WRITING GAME
By David Lodge.

David Lodge's new play, The Writing Game, is absolutely brilliant. Yes, this is a play about writers and literary pretension, but don't worry, there's plenty of sex, lots of rude words, and it's heaps of fun. And you don't have to be British to understand it.

Of course, if you're an American like Leo Rafkin (David Margulies), you won't understand it. Rafkin is a scrubby and not too successful author, rather better at requesting sex from the nearest available female (though not necessarily at getting it) than at writing English prose. He's loud, he's boorish, he's really rather a creep; in short, the stereotypical American (as Britons regard them).

Lodge, himself a successful novelist of witty works on what happens when British and American academics meet intellectual- ly, socially and - of course - sexually, is viciously observant, his humor searching out all the most unpleasant personality traits of his characters.

The Writing Game is set in a barn, somewhere in the English countryside, where a horror comic on creative writing takes place. The students are entirely un- talented and the teachers full of hang-ups and jealousies, which Lodge fully discloses and even exploits. Graciously, socially and - of course - sexually, is totally lost, English -- upper-class 'twit. Finally, there's Penny Sewell, the student whom we like least of all, the self-loathing and basely suppressed, closeted homosexuality created constant tension.

All three write trash, of course, and the audience is entertained by some of the worst of it, given at "readings" for the students on the course. The students walk out on Rafkin's crude obscenities, adding another chip to the mountain of insecurities not very far beneath the character's excretor exterior.

Jerry Paulson plays the terribly camp Jeremy Deane, who runs the course. Very drippy, Deane is just the sort of person Rafkin is set to hate. In a matter-of-fact, English way Deane takes for granted the clogged-up sink and kettle that has to be emptied, or he phones to ask his wife how much she hates herself. His self-loathing and basely suppressed, closeted homosexuality created constant tension.

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