AN ALIEN PERSPECTIVE ON THE AMERICAN COUNTERCULTURE: LODGE'S CHANGING PLACES

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Abstract: David Lodge's Changing Places is read both in the new tradition of the campus novel, with its title, A Tale of Two Cities, reminiscent of Dickens's towering influence as a great comic author. Lodge can also be included in the dialogic, polyphonic tradition, his novels creating special effects by the use of a plurality of voices and perspectives. This article focuses on one particular perspective, associated with one of the novel's two protagonists, an Englishman seeing an American campus at the height of the countercultural age. The comic vision of the main figures, events and key issues is doubled by a close, documentary, although indirect engagement with real events and people of that time, mainly due to the fact that Lodge himself witnessed it all.

Keywords: counterculture, dialogism, cultural studies, campus fiction, British invasion

David Lodge's *Changing Places*, the British author's first major attempt at updating the one campus formula of academic literature, is essentially a comic novel, with both experimental and traditional fictional ingredients. Whether it can be read for its documentary value or only as a pure work of fiction is up to the readers to decide, depending on their interests. If it engages, humorously and experimentally, but realistically enough, with aspects of traditional culture and the revolutionary counterculture of the late 1960s, with identity as quest in an uncertain age, the novel might be worth examining as documentary material combining the pleasant and the useful. If it deals with the counterculture as a defining feature for many people, especially the baby boomers of the late 1960s in their quest for identity while rejecting the Establishment culture of the previous decade, perceived as an age of conformity, once again, one is on the right track as far as this novel is concerned. It is 'an eccentric microcosm of society per se' (Bradford 35) and, more specifically, an entertaining introduction to the age of the counterculture. This is done by one British author who witnessed some of the most spectacular developments of the age at the University of California, Berkeley, in the tumultuous year of 1969, while being a visiting professor there.

At that time, young David Lodge (born in 1935) was one very important voice to consider in an examination of the plurality of voices which give substance and colour to the 1960s in the contexts in which the counterculture may be seen as a major stream with its dramatic twists and turns. The young author had started his academic life a little earlier and was moving in the right direction to act as a cultural double, or even multiple agent. He had got his BA and MA from UCL in the mid and late 1950s, then, changing places, he moved north, not to Oxford or Cambridge, but to Birmingham, where he got his PhD, started and continued his academic career until his early retirement in 1987. In the early and mid 1960s he was sharpening

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his artistic pen for one particular subgenre that would make him famous as a novelist: campus fiction.

It is worth noting one detail that appears to be extremely significant in this examination of cultural and countercultural conversations in the 1960s, both in Britain and in America. David Lodge had been at Birmingham University for several years when the central event in the emergence and development of cultural studies occurred there, making it, in retrospect, 'the Mecca' of the new forms of critical inquiry. The creation of what would become the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964 and subsequent events over there were linked to such prominent figures as Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige (*Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, 1979), Paul Willis, Patricia McCabe (who must have been one of David Lodge's students around 1970), Angela McRobbie (*Postmodernism and Popular Culture*), Richard Johnson.

David Lodge's attitude towards the nonconformist, rebellious youths of the late 1950s and early 1960s who, like the Beats and beatniks in the US, will pave the ground for the countercultural movements of the subsequent years, can easily be seen from the early portrayal of Charles Boon, Philip Swallow's former student at Rummidge University, the fictional version of Birmingham University, where Lodge was already teaching. Boon is described in relation to the group Philip Swallow associates him with, the Teddy-Boys, who are reminiscent of the British Teddy Boys as a distinct subculture of the 1950s and early 1960s.

The way Charles Boon comes over through Philip Swallow as focaliser shows him as one of the young people that are likely to have been attracted to the less middle-class program that had started at Birmingham University, the cultural studies programme, already announcing the countercultural ethos of the 1960s. Boon is one of those 'clever young men of plebeian origin who, unlike the traditional scholarship boys (such as Philip himself), showed no deference to the social and cultural values of the institution to which they had been admitted'(35).They are perceived as frequently under the influence, unwashed and unshaven, rebellious youths that cause disciplinary problems. Students like Boon, Swallow remembers, contributed to underground student newspapers that caused libel suits for indecent treatment of authority figures. They occasionally resorted to petty theft and shoplifting, most likely as 'revolutionary forms of undermining the system.'

To a considerable extent, the apparently biased way in which nonconformism and new ways of relating to authority of all kinds in the countercultural age is shown, both in Britain and America, Lodge's disregard, what is more, complete omission of cultural studies as a new academic development, can be blamed on the author's relatively conservative outlook. He had been a scholarship boy who had taken literary studies and traditional scholarship very seriously. However, while taking reading and interpreting literature in earnest, he had decided to deal with it humorously in his fiction, especially his campus fiction.

The best rhetorical device a novelist can use to achieve humorous effects is antithesis, stressing contrast and incongruity, and Charles Dickens as illustrious predecessor was a great master in this respect. What is more, antithesis reminds one of the subtitle of *Changing Places*, which is *A Tale of Two Campuses*, obviously pointing at Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. The less humorous Dickensian novel evokes London and Paris at the time of the French Revolution, while Lodge's more humorous one deals with a provincial British campus and a flamboyant American one at the time of the 1968-1969 student revolutions. As a result, most of the humorous effects will be based on exaggeration and contrast, but the realist dimension will be there all right, in literary conversation with the extra-literary world of the age, as well as with

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experiments in novel writing and critical approaches to literature. Therefore, he will be intent on creating humorous contrasts, in which no character, no campus, no culture is spared. Isn't that the right attitude to adopt in evoking the dialogic, carnivalesque atmosphere of campus life at that time, when defying all kinds of authority was the norm rather than the exception?

Exaggerations and contrasts will allow Lodge to create a highly entertaining narrative without preventing the careful reader from reconstructing, especially if this effort is aided by further documentation work, the world of the countercultural age. Beyond the exaggerations, one can see the facts, developments, real figures that were the starting points in this *roman à clef* with a difference. Will the informed reader detect Birmingham and Berkeley, Ronald Reagan as governor of California or Harold Bloom as authoritative critical voice under the fictional disguise, in addition to other real people and other real places?

Metafictionally, Lodge indicates the approach that the reader can take from the very beginning of the novel, in the first section of it, *Flying*. While Morris Zapp and Philip Swallow are flying to each other's cities, campuses, countries, they are in turn reflectors in an otherwise 3rd person narrative. Approached by Boon, Swallow appears to enjoy becoming the object of his former student's imagined admiration. It will turn out that his expectations will be thwarted, but the reflector recording dramatic changes in the new cultural environment will become systematic in the subsequent sections. Indirectly, through his focaliser's mind, Lodge himself is now poking fun at his own traditional English culture as a whole, which is seen as still considering itself superior to that of the rest of the world, in America included. This is Swallow, imagining how Boon sees him now in the new, apparently much more favourable circumstances:

> The glory of his adventure needs, after all, a reflector, someone capable of registering the transformation of the dim Rummidge lecturer into Visiting Professor Philip Swallow, member of the academic jet-set, ready to carry English culture to the far side of the globe at the drop of an airline ticket (37).

This reminds one that a person's identity considerably depends on that person's self-reflective side, their sense of who they are, but also on what is perceived as being other people's perception of one's self. If in a comic novel like *Changing Places*, dramatic contrasts between the two perspectives are bound to create considerable humorous effects, in real life it might lead to a lot of frustration and disappointment. As Swallow says to himself, the glory of his adventure needs a reflector. Lodge himself needs more than one reflector to tell the tale of two campuses, with the British and American protagonists in each other's country, using, in turn a series of more objective and more subjective ways of mediating 'information.'

Although Zapp and his narrative subplot are less important for this article's focus on an Englishman's perception of the American counterculture, the 'very American' Morris Zapp 'exiled' to Rummidge is important as a foil that provides a dramatic contrast to the 'very British' Swallow. Zapp will be experiencing an equally remarkable character development in what will appear to be 'the opposite direction,' from arrogant self-assertiveness to a more compassionate behavior in relation to his fellow beings. The American finds accommodation in an attic flat owned by Dr. O' Shea, an Irish Catholic living and working in Rummidge. Catholic issues will be, in David Lodge fashion, humorously dealt with in connection with Zapp's interaction with his Catholic landowner, with his niece Bernadette, with the miraculously reappearing Mary Makepeace, in which he will out-Catholicize many Catholics through his unexpectedly compassionate attitude. For reasons of space, although Zapp is to be seen as a great comic character embodying an American stereotype, he assumes a secondary position here, allowing Philip Swallow to be instrumental in the novel as a vehicle, both as involved character and as

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focaliser, of a set of funny perceptions of the picturesque world of the counterculture on one of the revolutionary American campuses, represented by Euphoric State University.

In the plane scene, in Charles Boon's company, Swallow is aware of the fact that he is a dim lecturer back home, and that he would like to be seen as a glamorous visiting professor teaching the Americans about English culture. When readers learn this, they are likely to laugh and expect the opposite. But they may be in for surprises in a long series of unexpected comic situations, in which both the British side and the American side of the antithetical approach will be subjected to humorous treatment.

Thus, immediately afterwards in the same Swallow – Boon exchange, the former is thinking of telling the latter about what he considers, from his previous American experience, to be the rigours of the American doctoral programmes, in which Boon seems to be enrolled. Both the readers and Swallow himself, with Zapp about to complete the information, will be exposed to the revolutionary changes that the countercultural age brought to American campuses, in which such figures as Jane Austen or Henry James lost their cultural appeal and authority. Now, Boon, who has been to and at Euphoric State University, Plotinus, is in a better position to put Swallow in the picture, much to the latter's surprise.

Morris Zapp himself functions as a reflector and one of the two major sources of contrasts and parallellisms between Rummidge and Euphoric State. The reason for applying for the academic exchange with Rummidge is already known to the readers, so his version as given to his Dean of Faculty, Bill Moser, appears to be untrue: 'I think I need a change. A new perspective. The challenge of a new culture'(43)[1]. It will turn out that the exchange will be, among other things, what Zapp says but does not believe, one in the series of unexpected turns that the novel will exploit all through in terms of new perspectives and new challenges posed by a new culture. Some of these challenges are posed by what is new on both sides of the Atlantic: the counterculture, with the Student Revolution and 'its strikes, protests, issues, nonnegotiable demands'(39) featuring prominently.

Ironically and humorously, both the campuses and the two academics involved in the exchange appear to be experiencing critical moments, even identity crises. The students no longer feel they belong in the system and are critical of the Establishment. Morris Zapp, for himself, seems to be undergoing a very painful experience: he has achieved so many things and so much, he has got everything he has wanted so far, and he finds his needs to be modest ones:

> a temperate climate, a good library, plenty of inviting ass around the place and enough money to keep him in cigars and liquor and to run a comfortable modern house and two cars. The first three items were, so to speak, natural resources of Euphoria, and the fourth, the money, he had obtained after some years of strenuous effort (41-42).

The terrible thing is that there was nothing else he could desire. The complication came from his wife, Desiree, who wanted a divorce for very good reasons, which might mean for Zapp having to move out of his comfortable home. This also involves being almost certainly denied custody for his children, and having to eat alone at the Faculty Club. The deal about a postponement of the divorce proceedings amounted to Zapp leaving home for at least six months. This explains the initially inexplicable: a successful professor at Euphoric State choosing to go on a transatlantic exchange to the far from glamorous Rummidge University. The change in perspective that this surprising decision will have on Zapp will be considerable. The

[1] This and subsequent parenthetical page numbers from Lodge's *Changing Places* refer to the book's edition mentioned in this article's bibliography.

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authoritarian academic had hated the idea of other scholars holding views different from his pronouncements. Zapp had wanted to finally and definitively state everything on Jane Austen from all the possible critical angles so that no one else had anything else to add. He runs the risk of becoming a figure of the past in the highly dialogic, revolutionary atmosphere that is emerging at the time of the Student Revolution in America. Zapp thinks without much enthusiasm about what he considers to be the 'gentle inarticulacy' that the new countercultural generation has brought about. This new attitude, he believes, anticipating such positions as Allan Bloom's in *The Closing of the American Mind*,

> had become so fashionable that even his brightest graduate students, ruthless professionals at heart, felt obliged to conform to it, mumbling in seminars, Well, it's like James, ah, well the guy wants to be a modern, I mean he has the symbolism bit and God is dead and all, but it's like he's still committed to intelligence, like he thinks it all means something for Chrissake - you dig?'(46).

Zapp vaguely realizes that, in addition to partially and temporarily solving his marital problems, a change in perspective can be beneficial for him at this stage in his academic career. He will leave the more spectacular side of the countercultural panorama of 1969 to his Rummidge counterpart, who will have to deal with the new dramatic American environment of Euphoric State as epitome of the dynamism of the new age. However, the exchange appears to exert an influence on the two protagonists' identities even before they land in each other's country.

Thus, a male chauvinist and an arrogant and authoritarian Morris Zapp is an atheist Jew who does not appear to care much about any of his fellow beings, at least in the first section of the novel, *Flying*. However, he is outraged to realize why everyone on his charter plane is of the opposite sex. The woman sitting next to him on the plane, Mary Makepeace, puts him in the picture. It has to do with the difference in legislation between Britain and America in 1969. The Catholic Church and fundamentalist Protestant churches, a large section of conservative Americans were against the feminist pro-choice claims, and Harvard Sitkoff, in his account of postwar developments in the US, describes the situation: 'In the 1960s the feminist movement made a woman's control over her body, including the right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, a central demand of modern feminism. In response to these changed public attitudes, several states repealed or modified their anti-abortion statutes' (8).

Although Zapp is neither Catholic nor Protestant, he appears to be shocked to see that he is the exception on the charter plane: the American female passengers are flying to Britain to take advantage of the more liberal laws concerning the abortion issue. It turns out that he is one special kind of atheist, a nominal atheist, one that fears God. He does not want the God he does not believe it to strike with an angry lightning bolt the plane full of female sinners he has the misfortune to be on. Although the initial effect might be humorous, the subsequent course of the narrative will show Zapp showing almost paternal concern for such sinners as Mary Makepeace and Bernadette, trying to bring them on the straight path, an unforeseen development for what expectations one might associate with such a character at first.

Philip Swallow does not have to wait until he lands ... in the Land of the Free and of the Currently Countercultural to be immersed in the turmoil of the events, figures, organizations and movements animating the culturescape, as Charles Boon, much to his former teacher's despair, bombards him with an hours-long commentary about

> [...] the political situation in Euphoria in general and on the Euphoric State campus in particular. The factions, the issues, the confrontations; Governor Duck, Chancellor Binde, Mayor Holmes, Sheriff O'Keene; the Third World, the Hippies, the Black Panthers, the

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> Faculty Liberals; pot, Black Studies, sexual freedom, ecology, free speech, police violence, ghettoes, fair housing, school busing, Viet Nam; strikes, arson, marches, sit-ins, teach-ins, love-ins, happenings (48-49).

The lecturer being lectured by his former student has difficulty and little interest in following Boon's speech, with its long enumerations of the villains and heroes of the countercultural age (Governor Ronald Duck, the hippies, the Black Panthers, the police, the anti-Vietnam war activists) but is amused, even fascinated, by the slogans on his interlocutor's innumerable lapel buttons, which he considers a new literary medium. Jokingly, he wonders whether, before long, such messages as those on the lapels (MAKE WATER NOT WAR, KEEP GOD OUT OF AMERICA, or FUCK D*CK!) will provide subjects for doctoral dissertations. Lodge must have known all along that his less conventional colleagues from Birmingham University, the somewhat marginalized (by the English Department) members of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, were already embarking on that academic path, and similarly revolutionary approaches to culture were to be adopted in America as well, as Swallow will realise.

A name had emerged to define a certain attitude (at the time written as a phrase, *counter culture*) and what it strongly opposed or defied. In 1968, Theodore Roszak had published *The Making of a Counter Culture*, and its subtitle defined the opposing sides: *Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*. The book acknowledged Ginsberg's *Howl* as a sort of founding document of this new movement, while also seeing it as distinct from the more politically committed SDS and the more radical, race-driven Black Panthers (Roszak 67).

Philip Swallow's introduction to the free-love, psychedelic dimension of the counterculture happens after the first Department meeting he attends. He returns to his rented apartment at the top of a two-storey house on Pythagoras Drive, Plotinus. The rent is unexpectedly low, as it is a slide area, the ground dangerously, if slowly, ready to move downhill, but Philip doesn't know it yet. This may be one reason why he shares this building with students, who might already have dropped out: it is 1969, and youthful opposition to the Establishment usually involves dropping out of school, choosing instead drugs, sex, and rock'n'roll (the British Invasion, more specifically the Beatles, had already conquered America five years before). Swallow realizes that he has mislaid his keys. Fortunately, the students renting the first floor (what he would have called the ground floor back home) are at home and up to something. Melanie Byrd, one of them, tentatively and slightly opens the door, realizes that it is not the police raiding the place, but the innocent visiting professor, welcomes him in. He will be invited to a special kind of awareness raising event, in which marijuana is the main catalyst. Swallow, like any well-behaved British academic, is not particularly interested in pot, but the introduction to the countercultural Human Be-In and intuitive spontaneity had already been done.

'Turn on, tune in, drop out,' summed up the countercultural philosophy. This had been the psychedelic slogan promoted by Timothy Leary, who had been a Harvard psychologist experimenting with drugs in the early 1960s. Richard Brownell describes Leary's transition from Harvard to the core of the countercultural ethos and to the hearts of the temporarily dropping out students of the time: 'His experiments drew negative attention at Harvard due to his own habitual use of the drug [LSD] and his experiments with undergraduate students. The university fired Leary in 1963, but he continued his experiments and became a spokesperson for the drug'(Brownell 45). A few years later, in 1966, the US government would ban LSD.

That drug and marijuana had become the forbidden fruit, which, bitten from the tree of psychedelic knowledge in the countercultural Eden of the time, promised new existential

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insights. This also applied to such young people as those introduced by Melanie Byrd - Carol, Deirdre and the three picturesque-looking male students - to the newcomer to the improvised Human Be-In or encounter group. It was a way of dropping out which was not in the sense of dropping out of college only, but of detaching oneself from the constraints of the world around, a hippie attitude. This has to be contrasted with other forms of resistance to the Establishment, later dramatized in the novel (politically motivated, new left SDS students, peaceful civil rights activists, more violent Black Panthers, second-wave feminists, anti-Vietnam demonstrators).

After the gin and tonic, rather than the usual orange juice, at the Department meeting and then a few smokes with his new friends here from a circulating joint of pot, Swallow already appeared to be in the right mood to learn about the benefits of an encounter group: to get rid of one's inhibitions, to overcome loneliness, 'the fear of loving,' to recover control over one's own body, to defy the taboos of middle-class morality, etc. As a matter of fact, the influence of the 'euphoric state' on Swallow, produced by alcohol and pot and the attraction exerted by Melanie on him, accounted more than any hippie philosophy that the others seemed to espouse. Philip Swallow, although still inebriated, virtuously withdraws to his apartment upstairs, to be soon followed by Melanie, herself trying hard to avoid the excesses of human communication that the other brothers and sisters are about to engage in. Swallow generously shelters the young lady, to finally fall into temptation before long. Sleepily, Melanie calls him 'Daddy,' which reminds him of who he is, a respectable *pater familias* back in Britain: 'He stealthily disengaged himself from her embrace and crept back to his king-size bed. He did not lie down on it: he knelt at it, as though it were a catafalque bearing the murdered body of Hilary, and buried his face in his hands. Oh God, the guilt, the guilt!' (103)

David Lodge humorously exploits the conscience pangs and the self deception mechanism that Philip Swallow uses to prove to himself that he is a moral, decent man, a victim of circumstances, but one who might go on being subjected to similar experiences, without expressing very clear intentions to that effect. He tells himself that he needs to have a 'heart-to-heart' discussion with Melanie to clarify what he felt, hoping she could help him with this important issue, in very ambivalent, very non-assertive (British?) terms: 'What he had vaguely in mind was a mature, relaxed, friendly relationship which wouldn't entail their sleeping together again, but wouldn't entirely rule out such a possibility either' (108). Obviously, Melanie will not encourage his non-assertive advances, although Swallow will hear her speaking on the Charles Boon Show about a new concept of interpersonal relationships 'based on sharing rather than owning,' on 'a socialism of the emotions'(109). The encounter group episode is the first instance of the conventional, indecisive Brit moving from innocence to countercultural experience in Plotinus, Euphoria, thus marking one of the dramatic character developments triggered by the academic exchange.

After meeting the relaxed, nonconformist members of the mildly psychedelic counterculture in the Melanie episode, the more conformist, although guilt-ridden Swallow is to be shocked by his American students, once he gets to know their literary favourites: 'I had a student in my room the other day, obviously very bright, who appeared to have read only two authors, Gurdjieff (is that how you spell him ?) and somebody called Asimov, and had never even heard of E. M. Forster' (123-124).

The next thing innocent Swallow learns is about the emergence of identity politics and about students' strikes and boycotts. He is approached by a student called Wily Smith who, in spite of the light colour of his skin, claims to be black, eager to write an autobiographical novel about him as an oppressed African American. Smith begs Swallow to accept him in his creative

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writing class, only to show him how American students support the Third World's students' strike, much to Swallow's surprise. The Brit describes his experience to his wife, Hilary, in one of his letters home: 'Wily Smith harangued his fellow students and persuaded them that they must support the strike by boycotting my class. There's nothing personal in it, of course, as he was kind enough to explain, but it did seem rather a nerve'(124). Swallow does not appear to understand the students' revolutionary ethos, naively believing in the students' right to study and get tuition, rather than in the right to boycott the courses they had chosen to enrol in. However, largely due to his connection to Charles Boon, whom he shelters for a while, Swallow will get closer to one of the highlights of the radical political movements of the time, the fight over what came to be called the People's Garden.

The most revolutionary episodes which Swallow witnessed in his 1969American adventure will be 'objectively' rendered in the fourth (out of the six) sections of the novel, *Reading*. They will be mediated, unlike other sections, by dramatic fictional clippings from radical and mainstream newspapers covering the involvement of the students and Philip Swallow himself turning into a living legend of the People's Garden story. They will be completed in the subsequent section with 3rd person and personal accounts, mainly by Swallow. Lodge, who had been at Berkeley University, like his British fictional protagonist, Swallow, in 1969, uses the real story of the radical activism around the People's Park to comically dramatize the interaction involving the police, the militant students, the various figures of the Establishment over a plot of land near the University which acquires for some militants a particular significance. The students claim the lot as neither the University's nor the state's. Initially, like all America, all land belonged to the Native Americans, so the militant students want to turn this piece of land into a People's Park, and go about developing it as such, encountering the resistance of the police.

David Lodge avoids the possible accusation of taking sides in this epic confrontation, while exploiting the comic dimension to the utmost, with Philip Swallow as central character. Thus, while casually driving by, Swallow stops to give a lift to a group of students, including Wily Smith, carrying bricks from a demolition site to the People's Park. The students see an approaching police car, provocatively shout, 'the pigs,' run away, thus making the cops suspicious. They search the car, find the bricks and arrest the innocent driver. He goes to jail, is soon released on bail, and immediately turned into a hero by the militant press.

Since this is seen as an episode of the students' just struggle against the Establishment, Swallow joins Charles Boon on the select list of two prominent Brits in the countercultural mythology, another memorable European contribution to the new rebellious and nonconformist ethos of the 1960s with such predecessors from the so-called British Invasion as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

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