NUANCES OF EXILE IN DAVID LODGE'S FICTION

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Although the idea of travelling plays such an important part in David Lodge's novels that it would be difficult to locate one single text that does not entail some kind of journey, exile seems to be the one variety of geographical displacement missing from the otherwise lengthy list ranging from the quest to the pilgrimage, the voyage of discovery and even the considerably less glorious package tour. In fact, if we apply the strictly political definition valid in the later imperial period according to which "exsilium was a general term used to express a punishment, of which there were several species" (Smith 515), none of Lodge's protagonists seem to fit in the category of exile, with the possible exception of the morbidly ambitious Rummidge lecturer whose "humourless determination to succeed in every form of human competition" ironically triggers his expulsion from the department:

> The same characteristic trait, displayed in a party game called Humiliation devised by Philip Swallow many years before, cost Howard Ringbaum dear – cost him his job, in fact, led to his exile to Canada, from which he has only recently been able to return by dint of writing a long succession of boring articles on English pastoral poetry amid the windswept prairies of Alberta. (*SW* 319)

As far as the seriousness of the crime committed is concerned, there seems indeed to be no significant difference between the unexpected (and uncalled for) admission to having seen the Laurence Olivier movie but never having actually read the text of *Hamlet*, made by a member of an English Department eagerly expecting the results of his tenure review, and any act of defiance or actual treason committed by a citizen of the Roman Empire.

However, while Ringbaum's fate seems to represent the only instance in Lodge's entire fiction of exile according to the Roman understanding of the term as "banishment, a physical separation and a geographical dislocation from home enacted by a state's or a regime's" – or in this particular case a faculty department's – authorities, contemporary dictionary definitions reveal that the word could be justifiably employed in reference to numerous other protagonists, not exclusively because the current epoch seems to constitute an "age of displacement that applies pressure to orthodox understandings of exile" (Allatson, McCormack 10).

The Oxford English Dictionary, selected by Lodge himself as the ultimate authority on terminological queries – the most notable example being the entry on 'duplex' inserted in the second paragraph of *Changing Places* – provides alternative interpretations of exile, currently referring not only to "the state of being sent away from one's native country or home, especially for political reasons or as a punishment" but also to a "long stay away from one's country or home" and the status of any person "who lives away from her or his country from choice or because forced to do so" (*OED*). Moving on from Ringbaum's banishment, it would be quite challenging to assess the subtle interaction between personal inclination and lack of choice at work in Morris Zapp's decision to spend six months in England. Initiated as an attempt to postpone an imminent divorce and possibly lure Désirée with the promise of a long-denied European holiday and culminating in the uncomfortable need to keep his word and the resigned acceptance of Rummidge as the only available destination, the experience seems from the very beginning bound to be an unpleasant one: "He felt in his bones he wasn't going to enjoy England: he would be lonely and bored." (*CP* 40)

His gloomy premonitions are supported not only by the marked contrast between Rummidge, "a large, graceless industrial city sprawled over the English Midlands at the intersection of three motorways, twenty-six railway lines and half-a-dozen stagnant canals", and his own place of residence, "considered by many cosmopolitan experts to be one of the most agreeable environments in the world" (*CP* 10), but also by the shock experienced by his colleagues at Euphoric State, an institution that had cunningly exploited its vast financial resources to transform itself into a major university "buying the most distinguished scholars it could find and retaining their loyalty by the lavish provision of laboratories, libraries, research grants and handsome, long-legged secretaries" (*CP* 11). Their by no means exaggerated reaction is justified both by their star professor's well-known aversion to travelling and the sheer obscurity of his destination, occupying as central a position in Morris Zapp's universe as Tomis did in the Roman Empire:

> Why should Morris Zapp, who always claimed that he had made himself an authority on the literature of England not in spite of but *because* of never having set foot in the country, why should he of all people suddenly join the annual migration to Europe? And, still more pressingly, why did a man who could have gotten a Guggenheim by crooking his little finger, and spent a pleasant year reading in Oxford, or London, or on the Cote d'Azur if he chose, condemn himself to six months' hard labour at Rummidge? Rummidge. Where was it? What was it? Those who knew shuddered and grimaced. Those who did not went home to consult

> encyclopaedias and atlases, returning baffled to confer with their colleagues. (*CP* 33)

While all these arguments seem to confirm the idea that the use of the term to describe the period spent by Zapp in Rummidge needs no further justification than the current meaning attached to it, it is quite interesting to note the extent to which his initial experiences mirror the hardships undergone by perhaps the most famous exile in literary history, albeit one who preferred to describe himself "not as exsul, which he consider[ed] a term of reproach, but as relegatus" (Smith 515-517). This choice is reinforced by the actual wording of his sentence, mentioned in the initial reference to the edict – "since in it I'm called *relegatus* and not exile, and special words cover my possessions." (*Book TII*) – in his 'Prayer to Augustus' – "I'm not called an '*exul*' by the terms of your decree. […] You ordered me to view Pontus' fields as a '*relegatus*' (*Book TV.II*) – and yet again in 'An Insult To His Wife':

> Still the one who called me 'exile' judges wrongly:
> a milder sentence punishes my fault. (…)
> He applied the word *relegatus* to me not *exul*:
> my case is sound because he judged it so. (…)
> And you, the one whose mouth calls me 'exile',
> stop burdening my fate with that lying name! (*Book TV.XI*)

It is only in 'A Detractor' that the tragic nature of his actual fate proves stronger than his obsession with correct terminology and he finally considers employing the previously rejected term to describe his condition: "I still pay a heavy penalty, by exile, and my place of exile." (*Book TIII.XI*)

As far as Morris Zapp is concerned, exile seems the only term that can describe the seemingly endless three weeks between his arrival and the short holiday in the course of which he displays a considerably less stoical acceptance of hardships than Ovid – "Don't think it's so much the comforts of city life / that Ovid looks for, though he does still seek them" (*Book EI.VIII*) – by taking advantage of all the comforts provided by the London Hilton:

> He had already showered twice since checking in, and walked about naked on the fitted carpet, bathed in fluent waves of heated air, had climbed back into bed to watch TV and ordered his lunch from Room Service – a club sandwich with French fries on the side preceded by a large Manhattan and followed by apple pie *à la mode*. All simple, everyday amenities of the American way of life – but what rare pleasures they seemed in exile. (*CP* 94)

The discrepancy between his apparently simple needs – "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" (*CP* 35) – and the low budget drabness (Childs 9) of Rummidge academic standards and British living conditions in general becomes apparent soon after his arrival:

> Morris Zapp was less enchanted with his view – a vista of dank back gardens, rotting sheds and dripping laundry, huge, ill-looking trees, grimy roofs, factory chimneys and church spires – but he had discarded this criterion at a very early stage of looking for furnished accommodation in Rummidge. You were lucky, he had quickly discovered, if you could find a place that could be kept at a temperature appropriate to human organisms, equipped with the more rudimentary amenities of civilized life and decorated in a combination of colours and patterns that didn't make you want to vomit on sight. (*CP* 47)

Notwithstanding modern man's considerable control over environmental factors and the by no means dramatic climatic conditions in Britain, once the aesthetic disappointment is partially overcome Zapp's major concern seem to be the cold, incidentally one of the many realities the novel humorously defamiliarizes (Martin 38):

> Simply keeping warm was Morris Zapp's main preoccupation in his first few days at Rummidge. On his first morning, in the tomb-like hotel room he had checked into after driving straight from London airport, he had woken to find steam coming out of his mouth. It had never happened to him indoors before and his first thought was that he was on fire. (*CP* 48)

It is equally interesting to note that although Robin Dempsey's destination is bound to be more reminiscent of Ovid's Tomis in terms of extreme weather conditions and cultural isolation, Zapp's former colleague seems to dismiss these particular disadvantages as trivial details: "Well, the campus is a bit bleak in winter, outside the town, you know, on the edge of the moors, and mostly prefabricated huts in those days." (*SW* 232) It soon becomes apparent that his overly optimistic attitude is motivated by the desire to conceal the punitive nature of his displacement and to present the time spent in Canada as a welcome change from his previous job:

> I was glad to shake the dust of Rummidge off my feet, I can tell you. That was ten years ago, Darlington was small in those days, still is, I suppose, but it was a challenge, and the students are quite good, you'd be surprised. Anyway, I was happy enough, but unfortunately Janet didn't like it, took against the place as soon as she saw it. (*SW* 232)

Given the considerably greater contrast between the harsh winters of Tomis and the clement climate of Rome, it comes as no surprise that weather features equally prominently in Ovid's writings, whose texts abound in references to the extreme temperature: "frost and foes, and the sea closed by the binding cold" (*Book TII*), the "earth gripped with freezing cold […] Further there's nothing but uninhabitable cold" (*Book TIII.IV*). It must be noted however that while his hatred of his surroundings is at least as markedly expressed as Zapp's – "I can't stand the climate, I'm not used to the water, and the land itself, I don't know why, displeases." (*Book TIII.III*) – the main sources of his discomfort are considerably more serious than mere weather conditions:

> yet I'm not so much tormented by this weather, never
> free of cold, this soil always hardened by white frost,
> these barbarian tongues ignorant of the Latin language,
> this Greek speech submerged in the sounds of Getic,
> as by the fact that I'm encircled, and shut in on all sides
> by nearby conflict: a thin wall scarcely keeps the enemy out. (*Book V.II*)

If Morris Zapp's rather low discomfort threshold makes his version of English winter sound just as dramatic as Ovid's descriptions, few readers would expect the similarity to extend to the inhabitants of their respective places of exile, the British being universally perceived as a considerably more sophisticated nation than their former imperial subjects. The unfamiliar cold naturally results in similar sartorial references, although the comedy characterising Lodge's entire fiction naturally makes the descriptions of Hilary Swallow's and further on Mary Makepeace's outfits considerably more amusing than Ovid's mention of the way "Men keep out the dreadful cold with sewn trousers / and furs: the face alone appears of the whole body." (*Book TIII.X*) Thus, Zapp's clumsiness ensures that his first encounter with Philip's wife finds him initially "staring at a pair of thick fur-lined boots and the hemline of a shaggy fur coat" (*CP* 71) and later on observing a woman "looking rather like a brown bear emerging from hibernation" (*CP* 72), yet his attempt to find some solace in a strip-club entails a similarly unappealing visual experience: "As she scuffed past in

boots like Mrs Swallow's wearing a headscarf and carrying a little plastic zipper-bag she looked about as sexy as a Siberian Miss Five Year Plan." (*CP* 97) Surprisingly enough the parallel is not confined to this superficial level, as Ovid's ominous "I live among the barbarian races" (*Book TIII.X*) seems the perfect summary to the unflattering portrait of his temporary countrymen drawn by Zapp long before his actual arrival on the Rummidge scene: "He had neither affection nor respect for the British. […] At parties they wolfed your canapés and gulped your gin as if they had just been released from prison." (*CP* 39)

However, not even Zapp's firm belief in the British lack of academic standards and social subtlety can prepare him for the actual encounter and prevent the "state of culture shock" (*CP* 51) experienced in the course of his first visit to the Rummidge campus, where the sight of the primitive system of communication still employed by his host department triggers hysterical coughing and wheezing and almost leads the rather impressionable secretary to fetch a porter:

> The noticeboard distantly reminded Morris of the early work of Robert Rauschenberg: a thumb-tacked montage of variegated scraps of paper – letterheaded notepaper, memo sheets, compliment slips, pages torn clumsily from college notebooks, inverted envelopes, reversed invoices, even fragment of wrapping paper with tails of scotch tape still adhering to them – all bearing cryptic messages from faculty to students about courses, rendezvous, assignments and books, scribbled in a variety of scarcely decipherable hands with pencil, ink and coloured ball-point. The end of the Gutenberg era was evidently not an issue here: they were still living in a manuscript culture. (*CP* 50)

The most uncanny point of similarity between the effects of their environments on Morris Zapp and Ovid respectively consists however in a rapidly diminishing faith in their linguistic abilities. Surrounded by "Thracian and Scythian tongues", the Roman poet finds that words fail him and he has "forgotten how to speak" (*Book TIII.XIV*), whereas Morris derives no benefits from having the same mother tongue as his new colleagues, who return from their holiday only to avoid him, "bolting into their offices just as he emerged from his own" or looking "straight through him as if he were the man who serviced the central heating", and then abruptly change their behaviour pattern to suggest "long but not deep familiarity" (*CP* 59) and to thwart any attempts at conversation:

> Morris came into the University most days to work on his *Sense and Sensibility* commentary and at first he appreciated the peace and

> quiet; but after a while he began to find these amenities oppressively absolute. […] Morris felt himself cracking under this treatment. His vocal organs began to deteriorate from disuse – on the rare occasions when he spoke, his own voice sounded strange and hoarse to his ears. He paced his office like a prisoner in his cell, wondering what he had done to provoke this treatment. Did he have halitosis? Was he suspected of working for the CIA? (*CP* 58-59)

It is therefore hardly surprising that Zapp's own reaction consists of a gradual transition from relief to perplexity and finally degenerates into mounting paranoia as he realises he is quite likely to "pass through the Rummidge English Department without anyone actually speaking to him", being merely fended off for six months with "little smiles and nods" until "the waters would close over him and it would be as if he had never disturbed their surface" (*CP* 59). Notwithstanding these gloomy predictions, the rest of Morris Zapp's stay turns out to be a much more pleasurable period than he would have ever anticipated, to such an extent that the word exile no longer applies to his experience and the discussion must turn to different texts and rather less entertaining situations.

Indeed, although the term itself is not employed in reference to other protagonists and no other novel contains such a minute description of the mundane discomforts of living in a foreign space, Lodge's texts abound in characters whose evolution entails considerably more haunting experiences of exile than Morris Zapp's. In *Out of the Shelter* Kath Young's list of reasons for wanting to leave her native country contains many of the details that make Morris Zapp's sojourn there unbearable, including the confined living quarters and the cold – "she hated their poky little house, with rooms so small that you kept bumping into furniture every time you moved, where everyone was trapped in the back living-room for half the year because the rest of the house was cold as a tomb, and as damp" (*OS* 162-163) – yet the privileged and apparently carefree existence she leads in post-war Germany and later in the United States cannot conceal the growing void in her life. In the course of one of her conversations with Timothy, Kath comments on the similar motivations driving all the members of the expatriate community in Heidelberg away from home, in an attempt to flee some past sorrow: "I have a feeling that all of us, at some time in the past, were badly hurt. (…) We want to forget, perhaps that's it." (*OS* 167) However, although on the surface Vince and Greg appear to be the only authentic outcasts, "driven out into the wilderness" (*OS* 270), rejected by the rest of their circle and by society at large because of their deviant sexuality, Kath herself is destined to remain single and therefore experience a sexual and emotional exile far more devastating than the self-imposed geographical one (Morace 153) from Britain and her parents.

Whereas Kath's decision to abandon her native country represents little more than a quest for prosperity and an escape from a monotonous existence, Ursula's apparently similar motives actually hide an unspeakable childhood trauma in the light of which her flight to the United States and her life in the Hawaiian paradise reveals its exilic nature. Ursula is not the only character in *Paradise News* whose evolution can be read in these terms, as her nephew Bernard can be regarded as the main representative of an interesting category of protagonists to be found in Lodge's novels, namely that of religious exiles. Given the strict rules of Catholicism, Bernard's decision to renounce "the priesthood, the Catholic Faith, and celibacy" (*PN* 211), precipitated by the public exposure of his affair with Daphne, is synonymous with excommunication, an actual expulsion from the privileged ranks of true believers, which justifies the grief of his extremely religious parents. A similar reaction accompanies the announcement made by Angela's brother Tom in *How Far Can You Go?*, yet the other protagonists view such desertions as part of a widespread trend, "so common these days, people scarcely raised an eyebrow." Their prediction that "there won't be any priest left, soon" is corroborated by the path taken by Austin Brierley, the once enthusiastic clergyman whose friends end up watching "his vocation like a guttering candle, wondering when it would go out" (*HF* 168).

Perhaps the most interesting religious exile in Lodge's fiction is however Clare Mallory, the former novice who is revealed to have left "the convent under a cloud" (*P* 62) and who remains painfully aware of her fallen state as it clearly emerges from her simple confession to Mark: "I was asked to leave. No recriminations, no sermons. But there was no appeal. I was simply told that I had no vocation. I left." (*P* 153) Unlike the three male protagonists mentioned earlier, whose "sense of being in the Church and at the same time something of an outsider" (Bergonzi 30) is followed by the personal decision to start a new kind of life, her irrevocable dismissal entails external prompting. It is however Mark's desertion that truly seals her fate as an exile, depriving her of her only remaining defence from reality and of the alternative identity as girlfriend and future wife assumed to compensate for the lost quality of bride of Christ. Her desperate search for a quiet spot where to "shed her troubles" (*P* 208) and her resigned conclusion that there was "only one place left for her" (*P* 209) confirms the role played by religion and love in her existence, both meant to provide a refuge from the daunting world outside and a sense of belonging to a well-defined group.

An even more subtle but equally oppressive feeling of being an outcast accompanies Adam Appleby's tortuous one-day journey through London and perpetual struggle with his doctoral thesis, financial worries and pregnancy scares. The distinction drawn between scholarship and domesticity, "opposed worlds, whose common frontier was marked by the Museum railing" (*BM* 96) suggests two possible ways of applying the

metaphor of exile, that is both to the scholars "curled, foetus-like, over their books" (*BM* 44), isolated from any practical aspect of life and unwilling to leave "the warm womb, where they fed upon electric light and inhaled the musty odour of yellowing pages", and to the "women who waited outside" (*BM* 45). Adam himself however is an exile in relationship to both of these spaces, being prevented from enjoying domesticity by his impractical nature as well as by the clash between Catholic teachings on family planning and the actual cost of living, and from feeling truly at home in the academic world by his lack of enthusiasm and painful awareness of the pointlessness of his research. Throughout the novel Adam constantly feels first an outsider, being the only passive observer among dozens of diligent academics – "Everyone but himself seemed to be working with quiet concentration: you could almost hear a faint hum of cerebral flywheels and sprockets busily turning." (*BM* 48) – and later on an actual impostor among so many "fatigued or contented" people who had spent the entire day reading and taking notes or who had "worked through the evening with quiet concentration" after their day-time job, especially when they stood respectfully aside as he carried his huge, tottering pile of unread Lawrentiana to the central counter." (*BM* 146) His flexible approach to reality and fiction and propensity for unfortunate accidents moreover ensure that he experiences not only a "reversal of the natural order, with himself outside the railings, and his family inside" (*BM* 96) but also a brief immersion into a parallel life of crime awaiting behind one of the library's secret doors:

> It was as if he had dropped suddenly from the even pavement of a quiet residential street into the city's sewers. He had crossed the frontier – there was no doubt of that; and already he felt himself entering into the invisible community of outcasts and malefactors – all those who were hunted through dark ways shunned by the innocent and the respectable. A few steps had brought him here, but it was a long way back. Never again would he be able to take his place beside the scholars in the Reading Room with a conscience as untroubled as theirs. (*BM* 90)

The plight of Adam Appleby and similar characters in Lodge's fiction can perhaps be better understood in reference to the theory promoted by the protagonist of *Ginger You're Barmy*, who sees society as nothing but "a collection of little self-contained boxes, roped untidily together and set adrift to float aimlessly in the waters of time, the occupants of each box convinced that their was the most important box" (*GB* 186). Jonathan's firm belief that the secret of success consists in "determining which box would be most pleasant for you, and getting into it" and making the more unpleasant boxes one is forced to inhabit in the meantime as comfortable as possible coincides

with the realisation that Mike lacks the necessary attributes to fit in such a system and therefore belongs to a category of people destined to spend their entire life as outcasts:

> Luck or cunning. And if you didn't have either, you were like Mike, at home in no box, vainly trying to ignore the existence of boxes, tossed and buffeted by the pitiless winds that blew outside them. For it was better to be in the most uncomfortable box than outside, in the confusion of the elements. (*GB* 186)

It is however quite interesting to note that of all the protagonists mentioned so far Mike Brady seems the only one at peace with his condition, his status as an outsider being a direct result of his refusal to accept any compromise, to renounce personal freedom and principles for the sake of a conventional and comfortable existence.

Given his intellectual level and his numerous accomplishments, Desmond Bates is perhaps the most haunting of Lodge's protagonists in that his exile is triggered not by any failure to adapt to academic or social standards but by a physical disability over which he has little if any control and which threatens his hopes of a normal existence. While it would appear that his father is the only genuine outcast in the family, often regarded as a vulgar intruder inadvertently "invited into the drawing room by a member of [the] family" (*DS* 171) and discouraged from attending social events – "he should be free to absent himself from the party […] he might prefer to have a plate of cold turkey and pickles in his own room, with a portable television for company" (*DS* 192) – Desmond finds that his increasingly severe deafness makes his presence equally undesirable: "from the hall, where I skulked dejectedly, I saw her chatting and smiling serenely, but I had no doubt that inwardly she was still seething." (*DS* 195) His sense of isolation best emerges from the suicide letter he drafts at Alex Loom's suggestion, starting as a mere linguistic exercise but gradually revealing the painful sense of alienation brought about by the inability to engage in successful communication with those around him:

> Everything I suffered now – frustration, humiliation, isolation – multiplied exponentially. Barely able to hear *anything*. At cross purposes in every conversational exchange. In the home a silent, withdrawn, unresponsive companion at the best of times; a surly, self-pitying misery at the worst. A damper on every party, a dud at every dinner table. (*DS* 152)

While Desmond's increasingly successful response to the lip-reading classes he attends throughout the narrative would suggest the possible avoidance of

such an end, his plight remains an interesting reminder of the tragedy and degradation involved in any exilic existence (Pavel 305) but above all of the fact that such an "anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider" (Said 181) does not necessarily entail actual mobility across geographical and political space. The real drama of many of Lodge's exiles does not reside in the impossibility of returning home but in their eccentricity or perceived shortcomings, and the solution consists not so much in an actual journey back to one's point of origin but in successfully overcoming past traumas and failures, adapting to a given environment or coming to terms with one's true identity.

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