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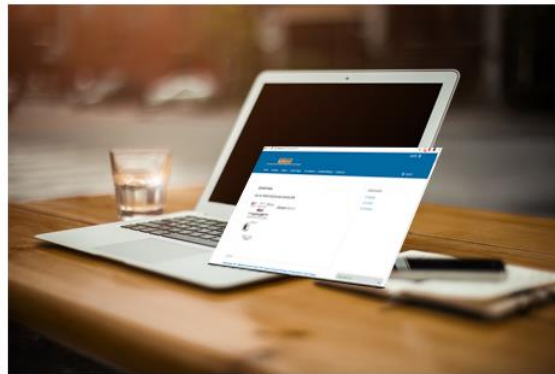
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### David Lodge's *Out of the Shelter*: Dialogic Narrative and the Problem of Literary Recidivism

Abstract:

In his "Afterword" to the revised edition of *Out of the Shelter*, David Lodge has described the novel as a generic combination of the *Bildungsroman* and the Jamesian 'international' novel of conflicting ethical and cultural codes. Although he had previously published three other novels, *Out of the Shelter* was the first to turn on international travel, a feature of most of his later fiction. It represents the first of many cultural exchanges between Britons and Americans that characterize Lodge's fiction. It is also his most directly autobiographical novel. Timothy Young, the central figure, is Lodge's counterpart in *Out of the Shelter*. In the character of Timothy, Lodge shows an acute and sensitive understanding of adolescence. He filters public events through the consciousness of the boy, and effectively catches the climate of feeling of the immediate postwar period. One of the most engaging attributes of *Out of the Shelter* is its sharp and moving presentation of a restricted childhood, and an adolescent consciousness trying to overcome the limitations of family and environment. In his shyness and naiveté, in his persistent curiosity, and in the series of epiphanies that define his developing awareness, Timothy resembles the young Stephen Dedalus, though Lodge's portrayal of Timothy's sexual longings takes on an increasingly comic tone more similar to Kingsley Amis, with whom Lodge has admitted a strange community of feeling, than to Joyce. Timothy learns a lot as he emerges from the shelter, and the reader shares the boy's sense of himself as absurd as well as vulnerable. In this narrative Timothy is poised between two worlds, two sets of values, two meanings; the choices he faces are dialogically presented rather than monologically distinct. As the narrative nears its end, Timothy finds himself discontented, not because he has failed to mature but because the process of 'coming out of the shelter' is continual. He comes to realise that his desire for shelter and his counter desire for freedom cannot be reconciled, only dialogized.

Keywords: Adolescent consciousness, *Bildungsroman*, cultural exchanges, dialogized, ‘international’ novel.

The doubleness of David Lodge’s fourth novel, *Out of the Shelter*, first published in 1970 and reissued in 1985 in a substantially revised edition, is evident even in the history of its composition and publication. Although largely based on a trip that Lodge made to post-war Germany when, like his protagonist Timothy Young, he was sixteen years old, *Out of the Shelter* bears as well the clear imprint of his first visit to America, thirteen years later, and it anticipates his second, to assume a visiting professorship at the University of California at Berkeley, which he undertook shortly after completing the manuscript in 1968. The novel is, therefore, as Lodge has pointed out, “autobiographical in origin, but not confessional in intent” (“Introduction,” *Out of the Shelter* ix). He has described *Out of the Shelter* as a generic combination of the *Bildungsroman* and the Jamesian “international” novel of conflicting ethical and cultural codes, citing *The Ambassadors* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as its “most obvious literary models” (“Afterword,” *Out of the Shelter* 275). Of the two, however, it is clearly Joyce’s influence that is by far the more pervasive and that renders the novel so “fully achieved.” What one finds is not the parodic play of Ulysses that Lodge adapted so effectively in *The British Museum is Falling Down*; instead it is the “realistic truth-telling and poetic intensity” of Joyce’s earlier style, the aims of which were “still worth pursuing” in so far as “the heightened realism” of Joyce and the other classic modernists had not yet been “exhausted” (qtd. in Vinson 401; “David lodge Interviewed” 116).

In his afterword to the revised edition of *Out of the Shelter*, Lodge recalls travelling as an unaccompanied 16 year old to Heidelberg, where he spent a summer vacation under the supervision of his mother’s sister, a civilian secretary for the United States Army. Lodge calls this venture “one of the formative experiences of my life,” in that it strengthened his self confidence and “opened new horizons for future aspiration” (“Afterword,” *Out of the Shelter* 274). This opportunity to go beyond the “limited means and possibilities” of postwar England—to venture among what he later recalled as “this rather affluent and euphoric American expatriate community, which was really having a ball post-war Germany (Haffenden, 148) – gave the young David Lodge “a privileged foretaste of the hedonistic,

materialistic good life that the British, and most of the other developed or developing nations of the world, would soon aspire to, and in some measure enjoy” (OS 276). Lodge’s counterpart in *Out of the Shelter* is Timothy young. The novel’s first section (“The Shelter”) describes the situation of Timothy and his family early in the war and just after it. While Lodge relies mainly on memories of his own childhood, the opening chapters, in the details of air raids and various restrictions on everyday life, resemble other accounts of wartime England. Specifically, such details recall first hand reports and vivid memoirs, such as Vera Britain’s *England’s Hour* (1941) and John Lehmann’s *I Am My Brother* (1960), as well as fiction—not only the many novels written during the war, such as Graham Greene’s *The Ministry of Fear* (1943), but even those written afterwards, including Elizabeth Bowen’s *Heat of the Day* (1949) and Greene’s *End of the Affair* (1951), which make integral use of such material.

Lodge departs significantly from this wartime genre, however, in the perspectives and related styles he employs: he uses the five year old Timothy’s point of view in the first two chapters and that of Timothy at age twelve in the third and final chapter of “The Shelter”; for the second and third sections (“Coming out” and “Out of Shelter,” which together comprise three quarters of the novel), he uses the perspective of Timothy the sixteen-year-old. While presenting everything from Timothy’s point of view, the novel’s narrative method involves what Lodge terms “a ‘covert’ authorial voice” (OS 281). Like the view points of the five-year-old and the twelve-year-old, that of the adolescent is rendered through “a slightly more eloquent and mature style than Timothy himself would have commanded” (282). In presenting this naive consciousness at various stages, Lodge has acknowledged the influence of James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and some of the *Dubliners* stories and also of Henry James’s *What Maisie Knew* (OS 273); he has also recalled his “conscious imitation” of Joyce’s *Portrait* in writing the early part of *Out of the Shelter* (*Practice of Writing* 127).

The novel begins in London, with Timothy and his mother sheltering with a neighbourhood family during an air raid. For the little boy, the war offers limitless pleasure and enjoyment:

a Mickey Mouse gasmask that steamed up when you breathed and his father getting a tin hat and a whistle and Jill crying because her dad was going away to join the Air Force and the wireless on all the time and black paper stuck over the front-door

windows and sirens going and getting up in the middle of the night because of the raids. It was fun getting up in the middle of the night. (Lodge, *OS* 3)

But when German bombs damage the shelter's interior, Jill (the other family's little girl) rushes out, her mother goes in search of her, and both are killed by further explosions. After Timothy and his mother are removed to the country for a time—during which he begins boarding school—they return to London. For the balance of the war they are visited periodically by his much-older sister Kathleen, who has finished school and wants a more exciting life than London and her home situation promise. Eventually she goes to work for the United States Army, and by the end of the war she has been transferred to Paris.

The immediate postwar years for Timothy and his parents are marked by signs of seemingly permanent economic privation in Britain and of Kathleen's increasingly rich lifestyle. Now transferred to Germany, Kathleen gets home only occasionally and then not at all after Christmas 1947. The three following years pass uneventfully, as the increasingly restless Timothy grows into adolescent and as the absent Kathleen, her letters of increasingly new friends and exciting travel, becomes an object of increasing speculation for her parents as well as for Timothy. The novel's second section ("Coming Out") focuses on the family's preparation in response to a sudden invitation from Kathleen that Timothy join her in Heidelberg for a holiday and on his trip there and reunion.

All of this prepares us for the extensive account of Timothy's four weeks away from England and from the ordinary controls of home. During this time he is, above all, an impressionable observer. The observation process begins, of course, during his travel, as he observes intently the sounds, sights, and protocols of the foreign people and places to which he is introduced, and continues until he falls asleep his first evening in Germany. That evening ends with Timothy, who is lodged in a room in a women's hostel offered by a friend of Kathleen's, keenly aware of a couple having sex in the room next door. By this point, he has begun to observe Kate (as Kathleen's friends call her) and, as she introduces him to Heidelberg, to wonder more concretely about her life there. He notices especially the Americans he meets: Don Kowalski, a teacher recently released from the army who befriended him on the train to Heidelberg, and Kate's two friends, Vince and Greg, who to Timothy seem typically American in their brashness, their flashy cars, and their secretive work in postwar Germany.

Ten days after arriving in Heidelberg, Timothy recalls the flood of impressions and discoveries he has experienced on his own, in the company of Kate and her many friends, and with Don, with whom he soon met up again. The wonder with which Timothy first encounters the goods and services available to American military personnel illustrates the force with which his entire outlook is being altered; we see the “orgy of curiosity and covetousness” of his daily visits to the PX and his sense that the trunks of American cars “opened greedily like the jaws of whales until they were gorged with paper bags and cartons” (Lodge, *OS* 125). His initiation into the postwar consumerism not yet available in England in the early 1950s defamiliarizes many things well known even to English readers by the time the novel was written, as when at an ice-cream parlour he asks about the purpose of “the small metal boxes, fitted with buttons and knobs, that were fixed on the wall above each table” (178).

Such details help to sustain the feel of Timothy’s entering a larger world from which the war and its aftermath, plus his English upbringing generally, had separated him and to establish the credibility of his quite rapidly changing perspective. Although Lodge had previously published three other novels, *Out of the Shelter* was the first to turn on international travel, a feature of most of his later fiction. While Timothy is under Kate’s watchful care during his time in Heidelberg, and while he has a number of guides in this strange environment, no one interest him as much—and no one comments as knowledgeably on contemporary events—as Don Kowalski. Through this device Lodge spells out some of broader implications of what Timothy is witnessing. Don’s many discussions with Timothy—which Lodge places sporadically throughout the novel’s main section, as a counterpoint to the boy’s meeting with other people—relieve the narrative of what otherwise might have been a weighty load of political and historical background and represents the first of many cultural exchanges between Britons and Americans that characterize Lodge’s fiction.

As perhaps the first self-proclaimed intellectual Timothy has known, Don presents an unconventional way of thinking that especially challenges the boy’s sheltered upbringing. He alerts Timothy to McCarthyism, the excesses of Allied bombing of German cities, and the parasitic aspect of the American presence in postwar Germany. He suggests that the 1945 election defeat of Churchill, which Timothy learned from his parents to deplore, constituted a victory of “politics over patriotism” and proof of the British people’s immunity to dictatorship (Lodge, *OS* 146). From the beginning of their relationship, Timothy’s sense of Don’s singular attitude towards the war is confirmed as the American reveals his wartime

status as a conscientious objector and his obsession with postwar Eastern Europe stemming from his polish-Jewish background. Over the course of their brief time together Timothy's outlook is dramatically complicated by the older man's, as when, after viewing the devastation of civilian life in Frankfurt, he remembers his earlier romanticising of British airmen and their sacrifices but now wonders "how it would be to discover, in the total knowledge that come after death, that your terror and pain had been entirely futile?" (222).

But for all of its merits as a corrective to the boy's limited background, Don's outlook is in some ways as narrow as Timothy's. By the time Lodge began to write *Out of the Shelter*, he had been teaching at the University of Birmingham for several years and had visited the United States for six months on a fellowship. Before completing the novel, he would serve a stint at Berkeley as a visiting faculty member. The character of Don, therefore, reflects considerably more contacts with Americans, and particularly with American academics and intellectuals, than either Timothy or the teenage Lodge had in 1951. It is significant that Don aspires to enter graduate school and eventually becomes a professor, as Lodge's characterisation of him represents an implicit critique of the attitudes and behaviours that academic life often reinforces—a critique Lodge would pursue more explicitly, though more amusingly, in later novels.

Despite Don's intelligence and the keenness of his observations, and despite his observations in drawing Timothy out of the shelter, Don's viewpoint appears inadequate in that it involves a smug readiness to judge and dismiss the values of others. This is why for Robert Morace the character of Don "invites both approval and dismissal" (Morace 150). It is also why, for example, Don's encouragement of Timothy to study architecture strikes an intolerant, patronizing note:

--if you were an architect, what would you want to build?

--I dunno. Churches, maybe.

--Churches? Don seemed amused.

--What's wrong with churches? Timothy said defensively.

--Nothing. Nothing at all. I just wonder whether we need any more churches?

--We do in England—Catholic ones, anyway. The ones we've got are crowded aout.

--If I were an architect, I'd go in for building schools and universities—they are the churches and cathedrals of our age. (Lodge, *OS* 145)

The certainty with which Don counters Timothy's observations about a situation the boy may understand at least as well as he weakens his position and typifies the arrogance and relentless pedagogic urge of his approach to human problems. These are the things Kate remembers most about Don many years later: there were times when I'd say something about the news, or a book, or a movie, and he'd sort of look at me, as if he was wondering whether to set me straight or let it pass" (Lodge, *OS* 267). More than a difference in age accounts for the fact that while Don advocates an open mind, Timothy seems more open minded.

Although Timothy's experience with Don helps him to see postwar (and Cold War) realities in a clearer light and ultimately moves him beyond his lower-middle-class beginnings to the rewards of upward social mobility—including an academic career he cannot even imagine until many years later—his personal growth centres at least as much on the emergence of his adult sexuality. Significantly, Lodge frames the story of Timothy with sexual incidents: the first is the five-year-old's sex play with little Jill in the air-raid shelter; the last is Timothy's sexual initiation with a pretty American teenager living in Heidelberg. These, plus the many related incidents in between (including an older woman's attempt to seduce him) and the way such incidents merge with Timothy's moral and religious sensibility, transcends the claims made on him, as well as on the reader, by the more public and impersonal issues of politics and nationality.

Lodge's tracing of Timothy's sexual development represents the novel's most Joycean element. The brief business with Jill contributes to the entire effect of an opening chapter that, in its emphases and style, many critics have linked to the opening of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Later, in his shyness and naiveté, in his persistent curiosity, and in the series of epiphanies that define his developing awareness, Timothy resembles the young Stephen Dedalus, though Lodge's portrayal of Timothy's sexual longings—at an English beach resort with his parents, in a train with a group of English school girls, in the women's hostel, and amid various groups of young people in Heidelberg—takes on an increasingly comic tone more similar to Kingsley Amis, with whom Lodge has admitted a "strange community of feeling," than to Joyce (Jackson 474). Park Honan has further refined the Joycean connection by acknowledging the "limpidity, the naiveté and the symbolic quality" of Timothy as Lodge portrays him yet nothing—and praising—the absence of "artificial bravura" in that portrayal. Indeed, Honan maintains, *Out of the Shelter* explores "more convincingly than any other postwar novel" the "complex innocence of sexuality" (172-73).

Timothy's most telling—most amusing—sexual discoveries come, significantly, in the company of Americans. In this the novel's major concerns merge nicely, to produce what one reviewer in 1970 described as “a kind of Anglo-American encounter very remote from anything ever envisaged by Henry James, yet central to the English experience of the past twenty-five years” (Bergonzi 46). Timothy's culture shock stems primarily from witnessing the lifestyle Kate has taken on among her American expatriate friends, a lifestyle especially identified in his mind with the sexual frankness of Vince, Greg, and the others. The mixture of adventure and inadequacy he feels among them increases in his encounters with American teenagers, who seem so much more socially advanced and self-assured, and it often produces amazing results, as when he responds to an American boy's macho remark about a girl they see (“She shows her tits to guys for a dollar”) by countering, “Seems expensive. . . . You can see quite a lot for nothing” (Lodge, *OS* 179).

For much of the novel, though, it is sister Kate who unwittingly fuels Timothy's most intense speculations, sexual and otherwise. And it is through his relationship with her—a relationship the novel's epilogue extends to America many years later—that the terms of his maturation are defined. Having being deputized by his parents to find out why Kate will not come home and spurred by their wild imaginings, he assumes that sexual license prevails among her group of friends, wonders initially whether Vince and Greg are married, and even imagines, when Kate takes him to visit an orphanage, that she has been hiding an illegitimate child.

Gradually he learns the less sensational but no less compelling truths about his sister and her situation, especially her determination to escape the drabness and limited opportunities of English life and to go eventually to the United States. She tells him of her sexual innocence on first arriving in Europe (“I was still a good Catholic in those days” {Lodge, *OS* 166}), of her disillusionment at the chance discovery that the one man she had come to love was married, and of her intention now to have a bit of fun and avoid being hurt further. She also tells of having lapsed from her previously strict religious practices, and shocks Timothy with the family secret her parents would never admit, that she was born six months before their marriage.

Timothy's growing understanding and respect for her sister as they move down this “endless slope of disclosure” contribute to her sense of leading a full life: “there were times when he thought it must be the fullest life in the history of boyhood” (Lodge, *OS* 167, 168).

They contribute, too, to the complex of conflicting loyalties he is experiencing—such as the conflict between absolute belief in the war against Hitler and scepticism about its methods and outcomes, between dislike of the Germans as “the enemy” and personal sympathy for the German people he meets, between the morality of home and religion and his desire for sexual pleasure, between his mission to bring Kate back home and his respect for her wishes, and between the urge to condemn her relationship with Don when he finds them making love and the strange pleasure he feels at what is happening between them.

Robert Morace sees this preoccupation with Timothy’s being “poised between two worlds, two sets of values, two meanings” as one of the novel’s key reflections of Joyce’s writing and argues that in this work, as in Lodge’s other novels, the choices her characters face are “dialogically presented rather than monologically distinct” (Morace 145). At the end of the epilogue, Timothy—now 30, with a wife and children he loves and a promising career—reflects on his extraordinary fortune:

He was so lucky it was almost a scandal, he thought to himself. . . . Don, divorced, Vince and Greg driven out into the wilderness, his parents growing dully old, shedding one human interest after another. . . . When one thought of all the thwarted, broken, cramped lives . . . and the deaths. The unnumbered deaths of the war, of his war and all the wars, lives cut off unseasonably, at random, with no reason. (Lodge, *OS* 270)

But suddenly his thinking shifts to “the familiar fear that he could never entirely eradicate—that his happiness was only a ripening target {and} that somewhere, around the corner, some disaster awaited him, as he blithely approached” (Lodge, *OS* 270). Morace links this shift to “similarly dialogical endings” at earlier points in the novel: “{Timothy} remains discontented,” Morace argues, “not because he has failed to mature but because the process of ‘coming out of the shelter’ . . . is, as Lodge defines it, continual. His desire for shelter and his counter desire for freedom cannot be reconciled, only dialogized” (Morace 154). Such a reading may represent a forcing of Bakhtinian terms, onto the novel. Rather than discontentment, Timothy’s momentary entertainment of this “familiar fear” seems to represent what Lodge has termed “a temperamental cautiousness” (Haffenden 151).

Of course, the entire epilogue device has been criticized, notably by Dennis Jackson, who judges it “an awkward and contrived effort to tie up some of the plot’s loose ends” (Jackson, 475)—an observation not related to Jackson’s view that the novel as a whole lacks intensity. For Morace, these and other problems are contained in the novel’s “literary recidivism,” principally the failure of its narrative method and, frequently, its language to sustain the heightened realism it intends (Morace 144-45). Recalling the attempts to write “a really ambitious socio-cultural novel, in the form of a *Bildungsroman*,” Lodge has remarked that “it didn’t quite come off,” and he has conceded that had he later taken on the kind of project *Out of the Shelter* represents, he would have employed “more stylistic variety, more differences of perspective” (Haffenden 151). Given his considerable personal investment in this, his most autobiographical novel, Lodge recalls the “crisis of faith in myself” he felt at its commercial failure (“{F}rom the publishing point of view it was a total flop”) and the small number of reviews it received (Haffenden 150).

Even so, initial responses to *Out of the Shelter* did offer some consolation, such as the *TLS* reviewer’s observation that the novel’s “bringing together of individual consciousness and public history is extremely well done, in a way that is rare in contemporary fiction” (Bergonzi 45) and Park Honan’s assessment of it as “Lodge’s latest and finest novel” (Honan 1972, 172). The *TLS* reviewer of the revised edition 15 years later was similarly untroubled by the problems noted in academic commentary on the novel. Instead, he praised the “fine sense of pace” and “tone of the narrative” with which Timothy’s development was represented (Hawkins 599). Indeed, *Out of the Shelter* provides a valuable and convincing account of postwar England and Germany, and of the contrasts between the British and American outlooks at this time—accounts and contrasts that still resonate in contemporary Anglo-American relations. And while a current reader might criticize the novel’s harsh treatment of Kate’s friends Vince and Greg—who, ironically counter to Timothy’s initial suspicions, turn out to be homosexuals—the numerous references to the 1951 Burgess-MacClean spy scandal help contextualize such a perspective. That all of this is seen through the eyes of a sensitive English boy makes Lodge’s novel all the more remarkable, if not unique.

Writing such a novel in the late 1960s reinforced Lodge’s sense of separation from younger people who did not remember World War II (he admits to “feeling myself on the other side of the wall from everybody who came afterwards”): “I wanted to recover that sense of growing up through the war and into the period of austerity, being a meritocrat, and so on”

(Haffenden 150). He built into *Out of the Shelter* his later recognition of 1951 as a year of “crucial transition” in British life between austerity and growing prosperity, represented in the conservative party’s defeat of the Atlee government (Lodge, *OS* 276). Particularly useful in rendering this and other transitions is Timothy’s unfolding relationship with Rudolf, a young German slightly older than he who spent time in a British war camp and who takes Timothy home with him. As much as anything else, talking with Rudolf about life in Germany during the war and meeting Rudolf’s ex-Nazi father (“the first certified specimen Timothy had met”) move Timothy beyond the “distorting lens of a wartime childhood” and help concretize his worldview generally (*OS* 187, 274). This more complex attitude is reinforced on a more personal level when, many years later, he compares his situation with that of Kate, who is nominally successful in the new life she has chosen in America yet unhappy at not being married.

*Out of the Shelter* is a rich book, and it is clearly even richer for the hundreds of changes (deletions, restorations, additions, and transpositions, most of them minor but virtually all of them careful and judicious) that Lodge made for the revised edition—among them the replacement of quotation marks and related conventions of third-person narrative with the more direct Joycean dashes to indicate dialogue. No doubt the original publisher’s mishandling of the manuscript and its botched printing, amusingly described in Lodge’s afterword to the revised edition, contributed to the novel’s failure in 1970. And no doubt his success with later novels, especially *Changing Places*, accounts in part for *Out of the Shelter*’s being reissued in the mid-1980s and gaining a more favourable reception then. Regardless, *Out of the Shelter*, even in its original published version, reveals Lodge’s considerable command of the techniques of traditional realism as well as of Joycean counters to them and represents an interesting treatment of many of the same concerns and issues central to his later writing.

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