

LITERARY SPACE IN DAVID LODGE'S *SMALL WORLD*

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Abstract

The chronotope, as defined by Bakhtin, provides a very specific space for a story to unfold in and to create an interaction between the real world and the seemingly fictional one. *Small World* contains a great number of connections between the scholars and the works they represent, which give voice to symbols that portray and shape another reality. A strong sense of privacy within the inner world of the characters is overshadowed by the public display and attention of the conference, awakening the chronotope as a portal to a distinct transitory experience connected to previous literature.

Keywords: Chronotope, Intertextuality, Academia

The intriguing and sometimes bizarre society that is the centre of *Small World* is a lot more than just a very funny satire. It is also a shrewd and allegorical critique of literature, sex, Romance, and the pursuit of success. Above all, it is a clear example of a very intimate connection between a scholar and his work, to the point where the scholar, not as accidentally as it may seem, adopts the spirit and behaviour of some of the characters that he knows well and has studied and lectured to their very soul.

According to Bakhtin, “narrative texts are not only composed of a sequence of diegetic events and speech acts, but also – and perhaps even primarily – of the construction of a particular fictional world or chronotope” (Bemong 15). The chronotope, as defined by Bakhtin, characterizes the two most important aspects of any narrative: time and space. More precisely, it connects a character’s position and movement in space with the passage of time. There is an evident connection between a sense of location and that of history, which together define the nature of communication based on speech variety, dialogue, and time-space alternations.

“*Small World* is packed with literary echoes and allusions: there is scarcely a character or event that does not have its analogue in medieval and renaissance literature” (Lodge xvi).

Every character, novel, conference, and space appearing in the novel, consciously or unconsciously, is part of the phenomenon of intertextuality.

When portraying his characters and their individual stories, Lodge takes them through the hardships of life, and with their help interweaves chronotopes with history, psychology, topology and cultural awareness. This rich, symbolic background becomes a canvas for historical developments, problems of generations, geographical variety and confusion, psychological development, and altered perceptions of the purpose of life. Literary chronotopes provide a distinct type of space for the story to unfold in.

This space is introduced through dialogue, and then continues to develop, grow and become a very noticeable being of its own through architecture, attire, weather and politics, all of which are bursting with elements of history. It is further divided into the private spaces of the book's characters, the public spaces of conferences, and the global space of everyone else observing the academia at work. Space is not a simple backdrop for a story to take place in front of. Instead, it is connected to a particular historical era to such an extent that "present, past and future [are] linked by a process of genuine growth, which means that change does not take place in an arbitrary fashion (not just anything can happen)" (Morson and Emerson 1990: 405).

The concept of a chronotope, according to Bakhtin, determines "to a significant degree the image of man in literature" (1981: 85), and as such, time and space are also relevant to the cognitive processes which connect the study of literature and human consciousness. The conference, through the motifs of meeting, parting, travelling, betrayal, etc., combines the fictitious worlds of novels and the real life of scholars. It is interesting to observe how conferences cause these two worlds, which can usually be easily told apart, to play against each other and transgress the laws which normally define them. In the preface of the book, Lodge forms a connection between the tales of literary conferences and the quests of older stories. Such is the case with the *Canterbury Tales*, where there are recurring instances of religion, betrayal, righteousness and conspiracies. "As the poet Geoffrey Chaucer observed many years ago, folk long to go on pilgrimages. Only, these days, professional people call them conferences" (Lodge 223).

In a somewhat desperate attempt to re-excite the attendees of the almost completely uneventful conference at the University of Rummidge, Bob Busby proudly declares to everyone in earshot that the conference will now move on to more exciting matters in the form of a medieval banquet, which will include "'mead, and minstrels and' – he rubbed his hands together in anticipatory glee – 'wenches'" (Lodge 256). While the medieval banquet in *Small World* is set in the 20th century, the symbolism of the three key elements of the celebration is just as strong as it was in their original gatherings in the 15th century.

Mead has long been a very important part of Norse mythology. In the Aesir and Vanir War, it was referred to as the Mead of Poetry, because it was believed that whoever drank it would become a poet or a scholar (Simek 84). Likewise, minstrels and wenches were both very characteristic of royalty and high society, as only they could afford to have such entertainment at the time. This excitement for a medieval banquet, as is displayed by Busby and other characters, suggests that modern forms of entertainment have not changed much from their medieval predecessors. Real time and space, combined with the subjective time and space of a character, are an author's way of illustrating the influence of history on human values and the present day context. Through the recognition and application of chronotopes we uncover "a mutual

interaction between the world represented in the work and the world outside the work” (Bakhtin 1981: 255).

The first dimension to understanding the importance and effect of the chronotope in a literary work is its distinctive structure of time and space that defines ‘reality’ within the world of the text as conceptualized within that world itself (Beaton 181). However, in Bakhtin’s addendum to the essay, written in 1973, a new dimension of the chronotope is observed. One that creates a relation between the fictional world and the real one out of a perceived relation between space and time, at the point of time where the work is either written or read (1981: 252).

Aesthetic experiences, as physical representations, often have a much greater impact on collective human consciousness than emotive ones, because they are remembered through visual signals that are a lot easier to share with others. Purely emotive memories are very personal and difficult to describe, because they can only be fully understood through the body of their beholder. For this reason, the mention of a Medieval Banquet holds very characteristic elements of mead, minstrels, and wenches, which instantly come to mind in an almost identical representation to anyone who knows the ways of the banquets of the times. On the other hand, mentioning alcohol, entertainment and attractive women, would yield much more versatile mental images.

Bakhtin believed that “only I – the one and only I – occupy in a given set of circumstances this particular place at this particular time; all other human beings are situated outside me” (1990: 23). While this is true in a physical sense, when it comes to emotions and memories, it is possible that other individuals and their world views can be conjured up in the mind, and as a result could change the mind owner’s perception, decisions and behaviour, without another person being physically present.

However, motifs and literature references are not easy to spot for every reader. During a reader’s cognitive development they acquire genre memory, motif recognition, literary references and a greater understanding for the purpose of the novel. A chronotope can only be considered a chronotope if it calls to mind an image that is connected to what the reader is reading. Literary imagination and practical reason must interact. The chronotope of a text changes every time it is read, and every time it is read by someone else. If no literary or historic imagination is used in the process of analysing a symbol in a written work, the purpose and meaning of the chronotope are lost. The most dominant of chronotopes define and limit the way in which human perception and character can exist in the narrative (Ladin 223).

One of the most enduring chronotopes in Western literature is the “chronotope of the road” (Bakhtin 1982: 244), which in this case has conferences as a destination point. Apart from tracking a character’s physical advancement throughout his journey, the road chronotope also analyzes the character’s wonderings within himself, which are often more important than the physical ones, where “the choice of a real itinerary equals the choice of ‘the path of life’” (Bakhtin 1982: 120). A chronotope is always a part of the world that it stands for.

Almost every character in *Small World* takes to the road to conferences in search of escape, discovery, freedom, and rebellion. The road chronotope is also used as a way to critique the society and environment from which the character is trying to escape (Laderman 1). To add to this view, Bakhtin argues that the chronotope of the road is also associated with the motif of encounters, particularly those that are random. He considers them the point where “... the spatial and temporal paths of the most varies people representatives of all social classes, estates,

religions, nationalities, ages – intersect at one spatial and temporal point” (1982: 243), which is why the literary conferences in *Small World* are the ultimate crossroads for such events.

A conference changes according to its geography and history, and it also changes in the way that it is *seen* by others. The distance taken to reach the conference and its distance from ‘home’ is perceived differently by its attendees. If a scholar has previously been to a place in their travels, the next time they return to the same place it will be “closer” than it would appear to someone who is there for the first time. “Closer” not in the sense of conventional space and time, but in the feelings, memories and experiences which the previous trips will evoke. As such, an experienced scholar like Morris Zapp will find it a lot easier to manoeuvre himself through the environment and temporal differences of conferences than a newcomer. He will also be able to understand his own place on the social scale of his profession, and from there continue to develop in his career.

Although fictional works are certainly the main topic of discussion, conferences are by no means fictitious. Instead, they are a very real social space, which is imbued by the history that has created it (Lefebvre 97). In *Small World*, the success of a conference is often immediately judged by the university that is holding it. “At Oxford or Cambridge you would expect at least a hundred and fifty” (Lodge 229). The importance of a place is determined very strongly, and quickly, by its historical background. Oxford and Cambridge have had some of the world’s greatest literature icons as their students, such as Oscar Wilde, T. S. Eliot, and W. M. Thackeray, whereby simply being present at such a location would make one feel like part of history. On the other hand, a new location such as Rummidge may only be interesting to new scholars like Persse McGarrigle, who have no other previously attended conference to compare it to, and who, as such young scholars, are happy to be invited to any conference at all, as long as they have a place to share ideas with their peers, and absorb the vast knowledge of the professors.

The conference location is reminiscent of a castle, saturated with the time of a historical past that is specifically recognisable to the attendees. The castle was the place of gathering of historical figures in the past as the conference is the gathering of influential figures from the present. The castle, like the conference, is decorated with footprints of centuries and generations of previous attendees, all of which can be spotted in the architecture, furnishings, portrait galleries, legends and traditions that enliven every corner of its space.

But not all castles are by default enriched by centuries of history. This is why the conference at Rummidge is so unsuccessful. The professors have no sense of history at such a place (unlike that in Oxford or Cambridge, for example), and so it feels as if they have been asked to play chess without a chess board. Time in Rummidge is without event and therefore almost seems to stand still. There are no ‘meetings’, and no ‘partings’ in the sense of new encounters and discoveries. It is an awkward time that drags itself slowly through space, and therefore it cannot serve as the primary time of the novel. Rummidge is the quiet beginning of the adventure that will follow.

Professor Morris Zapp understands that a ‘global campus’ has now developed in the world of the academy. It “knows neither national nor linguistic boundaries” (Martin 40). As Achenson notes, Lodge is interested in the global campus not because it is familiar to him, but because the university world is, in his view, “a kind of microcosm of society at large, in which the principles and conflicts that govern collective human life are displayed and may be studied in clear light and on a manageable scale” (78).

Through the advancement of technology, the means of transportation and communication have dramatically increased in speed and reliability. Places that once took a long time and a lot of money to reach have now become much “closer” destinations, making the entire world a much smaller place than it once was. The same is true for sharing information. Books, essays and dissertations are now widely available electronically. Because of this, not only has the campus in *Small World* gone global, so have the lives of its attendees, along with their privacy. What follows is a “creative treatment of actuality” (Morris “Re-thinking Grierson”), and from it, awakens the relatively newly coined “documentary chronotope”.

The term seems to have first appeared in 1997, at the “Visible Evidence Conference” of documentary filmmakers in Chicago. It was introduced by Professor Michael Chanan, who used it to connect the similarities and differences between real and fictional space. “Fiction and documentary are different families, they have different genealogies, but they also tend to intermarry, and as a result, some of their features migrate from one family to the other” (Chanan 2000).

The documentary air of *Small World* is evident through the extensive description of everyday lives, and the scope of realism through which the fictional world becomes a construction that is immediately recognisable by the reader, since it very closely resembles the world they too live in. This is not purely achieved through dialogue, but through the logic of temporal and spatial devices such as close ups (a way of organising space) and flashbacks (a way of organising time). Through the relations of these devices, and the way they influence the cultural and historical conditions of the novel, the documentary chronotope becomes frequent on the pages of *Small World*.

It relies on a number of cultural “documents” (political, religious, geographical, literary), which serve as symbolic references to the past, the present, and the future in the novel. Although *Small World* is a satire and overall work of fiction, the author himself has said that he has based events, places, and characters on his own real life experiences. This blurs the novel’s lines between reality and fiction, and produces a work that a reader can also, to a certain extent, treat as a documentary. Not in the sense that all elements of the novel should immediately be considered facts and typical behaviour in the academia, but as a reminder that even the documentary, with its aim to show a life portrayed surreptitiously, is itself without clear boundaries. Because “even when it imitates fiction, [the documentary] is a form of selection from the existing world” (Chanan “The Documentary Chronotope”).

Creating the required landscape in a novel is not simply an aesthetic act for the need of a background. A reader must remember that these landscapes are always written by an observer who, regardless of how much previous experience he has in the mentioned world, can only go so far as to see it from his own eyes, and often remains blind to other truths hidden in that particular space and time. “... landscape is itself a physical and multisensory medium... in which cultural meanings and values are encoded, whether they are *put* there by the physical transformation of a place in landscape, or *found* in a place formed” (Mitchell 14).

In pursuit of the UNESCO Chair of Literary Criticism, the scholars of *Small World* embark on a journey that is in many ways an analogy to the search for the Holy Grail. There are frequent references to the Arthurian legend, which are expressed both in the characters’ names and the plot. Modern conferences “resemble the pilgrimage of medieval Christendom, allowing the attendees to indulge themselves in all the pleasures and diversions of travel, while appearing to be austere bent on self-improvement” (Lodge 223). Some of them, rather than creating an

impression that they are genuinely interested in the most recent research, make themselves smutty, veiny, dishonest, very competitive, and when grouped together easily create a Vanity Fair.

Morris Zapp sees university life in the same way. Namely, as a stage on which various fights take place. “You know Freud’s idea of primitive society as a tribe in which the sons kill the father when he gets old and impotent, and take away his women? In modern academic society they take away your research grants. And your women, too, of course” (Lodge 267).

The scholars in *Small World* are representations of the knights of chivalric romances; wandering around the world in pursuit of ladies, glory, honour, recognition, and the modern Holy Grail, which takes on many forms: money, love, professional success, Literary Theory, adventure and writing inspiration. The presentations of research papers are compared with “penitential exercises” comprising the tests which the hero of a quest has to face on his way to the Holy Grail. A conference also endows its participants with authority, so they return home “with an enhanced reputation for seriousness of mind” (Lodge 223). Like the Grail, the UNESCO Chair would in many ways heal its owner. It would provide him or her with a very comfortable life, very little work, and absolute recognition in the scholarly world.

As the story progresses, distinct voices begin to echo from the characters, which take us back to many participants of the original Arthurian Legends, and the characteristics, motifs, dreams, moral views, and understanding of the world which history has washed up to the present day. One by one, the scholars begin to speak with the voices of literary history’s previous adventurers.

One of the novel’s most adventurous characters, Persse McGarrigle, is a modern version of Perceval, who was one of King Arthur’s Knights of the Round Table. Much like Perceval, Persse begins his journey as a young, naïve, first-time conference attendee. His first conference attendance is his very own ritual of initiation. It will provide him with new experiences, allow him to see places, meet people, and widen his knowledge of the world and of his own research. Persse’s strong spiritual beliefs and devotion to Catholicism have somewhat kept him at a distance from foul language and temptation. However, enticing influences from outside of his spiritual world in the shape of Angelica Pabst, cause the young knight to turn head on many of his beliefs as he embarks on a wild chase to keep up with the constantly disappearing Angelica.

Persse McGarrigle’s following of his mother’s advice to visit his aunt in Rummidge is reminiscent of Chretien’s young Perceval who fails to ask the question in the castle of the Fisher King just because he was taught by his mother to speak only when asked to do so. The Celtic influence on the Arthurian legends is alluded to by the young poet’s Irish origin, Ireland being a country strongly influenced by the Celtic culture. Angelica Pabst’s name derives from ‘angel’ and from the German “Papst” (pope). The reference to the pope, the highest rank in the Catholic Church, makes Angelica a worthy Grail to pursue.

And while Persse is looking for Angelica, she in her turn is looking for a suitable theory of romance. She is a modern version of the heroine from the Italian epic poem *Orlando Furioso*. Her tendency to disappear at the most crucial of moments in the story is very similar to Princess Angelica’s disappearance from Orlando, whose love for her makes him forget his duties to protect the emperor in the hopes of reuniting with her.

Arthur Kinfisher is modelled from T. S. Eliot’s great poem, *The Waste Land*. The unhappily impotent professor is connected to the older pagan myth of King Fisher, who ruled over a parched, infertile kingdom. The kingdom suffers because its king is a man who is always wounded in his legs or groin. His presence in the novel alludes to a sterility afflicting both

writers and intellectuals of the modern times. The king is indeed passive, but he remains at the top of the social hierarchy. In spite of being no longer able to come up with an original idea, he continues to be considered a “king among literary theorists”, a man who “kind of personifies the whole profession of academic literary studies” (Lodge 344).

After hearing Persse’s question he finds his intellectual creativity again, and decides to take the UNESCO Chair for Literary Criticism for himself. Although this does cause shock among the land of passionate scholars, the King’s rebirth also heals the entire land, the world of literary critics and creative writers. Wars end, peace is restored, and everyone can go home and work harder on their careers. Desiree Byrd and Ronald Frobisher regain their inspiration as writers, as well. A weak king cannot lead his followers to a better future, but a revived king can be given a second chance.

Many of the scholars in *Small World* have a very hard time coming up with new ideas and putting them down on paper. Instead, they either completely come to terms with the fact that they are unable to publish anything, like Philip Swallow; constantly rewrite the same papers over and over again, like Morris Zapp; plagiarise other scholars’ work, like Sigfried von Turpitz; or live in a world of frantic attempts to connect thoughts and create worthy literary theory and criticism, like Rodney Wainwright. Whatever the reason for such lack of production of new material, a long period without intellectual or literary advancement would cause parched minds and stagnation in literature.

Further literary references from Arthurian Legends are those of Sigfried von Turpitz and Fulvia Morgana. Von Turpitz’s black-gloved hand that is never revealed to anyone, hides inside it a sinister evil, comparable with that of the Black Hand in the story of *Sir Gawain at the Grail Castle*. Fulvia Morgana represents the powerful sorceress of the Arthurian Legends, Morgana le Fay (“The Fairy”). An unhappily married woman, she enchants a number of men into being her lovers, much like Fulvia attempts to make the most of Morris Zapp’s sleep over.

Professor Sybil Maiden, on the other hand, does not represent a fictional Arthurian character, but the early 20th century independent scholar and folklorist, Jessie Laidlay Weston. Her work *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) was mentioned in T. S. Eliot’s notes on *The Waste Land*, and was a very important resource for David Lodge as well. Miss Maiden is there to interpret the story of the Grail to Persse and the readers, and serves to remind them of their past and to connect their present meaning and purpose to ones that have already happened in literature.

Each choice that is made by a character makes them a somewhat different person than how they started out. When all these changes are grouped together, they represent a character’s growth, and also give additional information to the reader, allowing them to either agree or disagree with the new changes. The novel shows that a choice that is made by the character at one moment could easily be made differently at another point in space and time. The character not only changes internally, but is also shaped by society, which in turn is shaped by those inside it. “Individual people genuinely develop, which is to say, their changes are not simply the revelation of qualities given from the outset [...] People do not develop the way a seed grows into a plant; their choices at every moment reshape them bit by tiny bit” (Morson 1991: 1083). This is the same change that Persse goes through. Starting off his life in the novel by being quite a conservative fellow, he gradually lets go of his original beliefs and behaviour in pursuit of the woman he loves.

“You see before you,” he began, “a man who once believed in the possibility of interpretation. That is, I thought that the goal of reading was to establish the meaning of texts. I used to be a Jane Austen man” (Lodge 249). Zapp is an example of a character whose views on the idea of literature have been greatly affected by space and time, to the point where years and years of research into the work of Jane Austen he abandoned even though, if completed, it may have “eventually put [them] all out of business” (Lodge 249).

‘Lived time’ characterizes in many ways our own everyday experiences. It affects the current space we live in greatly, for every time we step into the unknown or have something happen to us, our point of view somewhat changes. Chronotopes are understood by a reader through the mind reconstructing the present by looking back at the past and everything that it has already learned from it (Bemong 2010). As soon as a familiar reference or motif is spotted, the mind combines all possible relations from the past with the existing condition and draws a conclusion. How strong this conclusion is depends both on how influential the chronotope is, and how much is known about it.

About the adventure hero and the adventure space, Bakhtin writes: “The individual changes and undergoes metamorphosis completely independent of the world; the world itself remains unchanged” (1982: 119). The world moves on its own independent trajectory from the individual. Depending on where one finds oneself in the world and at what point in time, the spatial situation can either be dramatically changed or remain the same. When space changes, new stimuli and experiences present themselves, which additionally alter the character’s surroundings and his behaviour.

All cultures naturally attempt to assert their supremacy over others, and each one considers itself better than the rest. David Lodge’s entire Campus Trilogy focuses on the effect of cultures on one another, and what happens when scholars from all over the world are present in the same space. What must be left at the door before entering a conference is precisely this regard for your own culture as being the superior one, because such behaviour disregards others, and endangers the academy’s freedom. Nevertheless, the biggest competition for space in the novel is that of Britain and America.

While they may be researching the same topics, the environment in which they are doing so is very different. The American University of Euphoria looks out onto a wonderful panorama of both natural and artificial landscape, including both seaside hills and typical American skyscrapers. Rummidge, on the other hand, is “a vista of dank back gardens, rotting sheds and dripping laundry, huge, ill-looking trees, grimy roofs, factory chimneys and church spires” (Lodge 57). Rummidge’s Victorian aspect is interrupted by new, modern buildings impersonating the American fresh new style. As Hardt and Negri note, “if the nineteenth century was a British century, then the twentieth century has been an American century; or, really, if modernity was European, then postmodernity is American”. Since Morris Zapp himself regards Rummidge as a city under strong American influence, it appears that this is a kind of reverse colonisation. Moreover, American Arthur Kingfisher is considered the ultimate authority when it comes to literary theory.

Thus, the American literary critics are more famous and modern than their British counterparts, who are defined as a conservative lot in this respect, too. As the American way of living is more tempting than the British one, Philip Swallow who, in *Changing Places*, is said to be “a mimetic man” (Lodge 10), appears as a colonised one in *Small World*. He confesses to his friend, Morris Zapp, that it was in America, during the exchange program from *Changing Places*

that he found the long wished for intensity of experience. Presented in such a light, Britain means routine and boredom to Philip Swallow, while America stands for the unexpected, the unpredictable, or, in other words, adventure.

The ultimate example of American imperialism is the biggest conference organised by the MLA in New York. The conference is so influential that it is well known by linguists and literary critics on both sides of the Atlantic. The fact that this conference is hosted on American territory constitutes further evidence for the assumption that there is a new centre of the world.

The dimensions of a chronotope are many. There may be folds in a chronotope, which is why the observer's point of view may miss significant details because of the point from which the observer views the chronotope, their professional background, as well as knowledge and interest in a particular topic. "Chronotopes are mutually inclusive," writes Bakhtin, "they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships" (Bakhtin 1981: 252).

In Bakhtin's view, chronotopes are the gateway to the specific temporal experiences with which art is concerned in its most elementary form. The aesthetic experiences expressed by artistic chronotopes combine the cultural context with the dynamics of human consciousness (Bemong 51).

"The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers" (Bakhtin 1981: 254).

Space is a very private and intimate matter. The modern novel's chronotope displays a strong sense of privacy within the inner world of its characters. High value is placed on everyday life and ordinary actions which, simple as they may seem, give voice to symbols that portray and shape another reality.

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