

## THERAPY AS A SUBVERSIVE AND LIBERATING NOVEL<sup>1</sup>

AÍDA DÍAZ BILD  
Universidad de La Laguna

### RESUMEN

La primera parte de este artículo analiza el modo en que en *Therapy*, de David Lodge, el humor funciona como una fuerza subversiva y liberadora que derriba todas las barreras que esclavizan al hombre. Por un lado, el miedo y el sentimiento de intimidación desaparecen, permitiendo al narrador mirar con optimismo hacia el futuro; por otro, el carácter sagrado que se suele atribuir a las instituciones humanas se destruye, mostrando así como no hay nada sacrosanto en nuestra sociedad, cómo todo es susceptible de ser ridiculizado. La segunda parte se centra en el carácter polifónico de la novela y analiza cómo el uso de diferentes géneros y estilos, es decir, la heteroglosia interna de la obra, impide que el autor imponga su propio punto de vista sobre la vida y la literatura.

David Lodge's aim as a critic has always been to demonstrate that realism is as aesthetically valuable as any other kind of creative writing. If in *The Mo-*

---

<sup>1</sup> The research for this paper has been financed by the DGICYT of the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture, Research Project PB95-0321-C03-02

*des of Modern Writing* he seemed to find the way to defend the realistic novel by using the difference between metaphor and metonymy established by Jakobson, Bakhtin's theory has served to confirm his faith in the formal richness of prose fiction. Critical works like «Joyce and Bakhtin: *Ulysses* and the Typology of Literary Discourse», «Lawrence, Dostoevsky, Bakhtin: D.H. Lawrence and Dialogic Fiction», *After Bakhtin. Essays on Fiction and Criticism* reveal Lodge's admiration for the Russian thinker, whom he believes to have provided the only theory capable of transcending the opposition humanism/poststructuralism. Lodge has mainly concentrated his attention on two aspects of Bakhtin's thinking: on the one hand on the notion that prose fiction is polyphonic - an orchestration of diverse discourses culled both from oral and written speech, without any of them dominating the others; on the other hand, on the novel's carnivalesque irreverence towards all kinds of authoritarian, repressive, monologic ideologies. For a reader of David Lodge's novels this twofold emphasis is easy to understand, since it defines what he does as a creative writer. In his books we always find a multiplicity of voices and in those in which the element of comedy appears, it works as a regenerative force that not only liberates the author from the literary forces that oppress him, drawing him to parody and pastiche, but also allows him to criticize official and authoritarian visions of life. It is precisely in his latest novel, *Therapy*, that laughter emerges again as an instrument of freedom, an instrument which allows the narrator to confront and overcome his fear and the writer to undermine institutions.

But before analysing the novel in detail it is necessary to examine Bakhtin's ideas on laughter in order to understand not only the significance that this critic attached to it, but also the crucial role it plays in *Therapy*.

In contrast to those who reduce humour either to negative satire or to a fanciful element deprived of philosophical content, Bakhtin defends the gay, universal and ambivalent character of laughter and emphasizes the link there is between the latter and the procreating act, between laughter and birth, fertility, abundance. For the comic feature nothing is eternal or stable, everything can and must be renewed. The notion of an absolute and indisputable truth is rejected, whereas the relativity of prevailing doctrines, beliefs or ideas is welcomed. In fact, one of the main functions of laughter is to show that reality is rich and contradictory and that, therefore, the official version of events that the serious genres impose on man is just a tissue of lies, which ties us to the past and prevents us from having a new outlook on the world.

This explains the revolutionary and anti-authoritarian character of laughter and why in it we find the victory of the future over the past, of the new over

the old. In a land without frontiers there is no room for fear: «Complete liberty is possible only in the completely fearless world<sup>2</sup>».

The official and serious culture, on the other hand, is based on violence, prohibition, and limitation and therefore leads to intimidation and fear. Nevertheless, a qualification must be made here. For Bakhtin not all this kind of literature is dogmatic and intolerant; many of its manifestations are defined by their universality and ambiguity and, conscious of offering just a partial vision of the world, invite laughter and parody to function as a corrective and a complement. In fact, sometimes both elements, the serious and the comic, coexist within a literary work. Bakhtin defines this relationship very clearly:

True ambivalent and universal laughter does not deny seriousness but purifies and completes it. Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naïveté and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality. Laughter does not permit seriousness to atrophy and to be torn away from the one being, forever incomplete. It restores this ambivalent wholeness<sup>3</sup>.

Whereas seriousness leads the human being to desperation, laughter gives him hope and allows him to face and transcend any situation.

If we are looking for an illustrative example of this perfect blending of the serious and the comic in contemporary literature, *Therapy*<sup>4</sup> will provide it. Like in all the other novels written by David Lodge, the starting point for creation is his own experience: «One of the sources of the novel is a certain introspection about my own moods...In middle age, I've found myself prone to more depression and anxiety than I can give a rational explanation for<sup>5</sup>». The main character, Laurence Passmore, is the scriptwriter for the popular sitcom *The People Next Door* and seems to have everything a man could dream of: success, money, a comfortable, modern house, a good car, a beautiful and intelligent wife and a platonic mistress. Nevertheless, he is not happy and suffers from depression, anxiety and lack of self-esteem. Obviously, a subject like this would have led to a melodramatic book, but it is precisely Lodge's delight in comedy and the absurd<sup>6</sup> which allows him to avoid falling into false sentimentality and

<sup>2</sup> MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, *Rabelais and His World*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 122-3.

<sup>4</sup> All references to the novel belong to the Secker & Warburg edition, London, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> JENNY TURNER, «Words Never Fail Him», *Guardian Weekend*, 29 april 1995, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> JOHN HAFFENDEN, *Novelists in Interview*, Methuen, London & New York, 1985, p. 165.

enables Laurence to confront his reality without sinking under it. As a matter of fact, Lodge himself has defended the presence of the comic element in the novel: «I wanted to find some humour in his plight<sup>7</sup>». There are many devices in the book by means of which seriousness is undermined, but there are three that we find particularly interesting: the humorous comments that the narrator makes when dealing with his own frustration, his identification with Kierkegaard, and the reversal of narrative climaxes by approaching the facts from the point of view of other characters.

In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin states that laughter «liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor<sup>8</sup>» and Laurence seems to be applying this maxim to his own life through most of the novel. To start with, in the first pages he shows a healthy capacity to laugh at himself by offering us a very peculiar self-description where we find extracts like the following:

My chest is covered with what looks like a doormat-sized Brillo pad that grows right up to my Adam's apple: if I wear an open-necked shirt, wiry tendrils sprout from the top like some kind of fast-growing fungus from outer space in a old Nigel Kneale serial. And by a cruel twist of genetic fate I have practically no hair *above* the Adam's apple. (p. 19)

Tubby is 58 years old and inevitably as men get older the possibilities of pleasure and achievement narrow and a process of physical deterioration starts. The narrator is very well aware of this fact, but instead of adopting a tragic tone as befits a society in which only those who are young and strong are appreciated, he treats this aspect of his life with large doses of humour. So he is capable of overcoming or at least facing the little breakdowns of his body, mainly the spasms in his knee. We have a very good example of this when he compares himself with Long John Silver when playing tennis, always dragging the right leg, or when he describes himself and his other three friends practising this sport:

I play with three other middle-aged cripples at the Club. There's Joe, he's got serious back trouble, wears a corset all the time and can barely manage to serve overarm; Rupert, who was in a bad car crash a few years ago and limps with both legs, if that's possible; and Humph-

<sup>7</sup> JENNY TURNER, «Words Never Fail Him», p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 94.

rey, who has arthritis in his feet and a plastic hip-joint. We exploit each other's handicaps mercelessly...It would bring tears to your eyes to watch us, of either laughter or pity. (p. 26).

In this sense it is really funny the way in which Laurence tries very hard to figure out things that are even worse than a pain in the knee or his general sense of despair. So, for example, one day he decides that he is going to shut his eyes for a bit and behave like a blind to remind himself of how lucky he is to see. The experiment does not last long because he hits himself precisely on the right knee (where else could it have been?) and the pain is terrible.

But if there is an aspect of physical deterioration that really terrifies a man it is that of impotence and Passmore becomes one of its victims. Melodrama is once again avoided here and the approach is really comic. The first thing he decides to do is not to tell Miss Wu, to whom he goes for acupuncture, about his «malfunction», in case she considers the idea of sticking needles in his scrotum. Then he tries to masturbate and the whole experience is undermined by the introduction of comedy. From the use of Paul Newman's Own Salad Dressing instead of Vaseline, which makes him smell like «Gabrielli's *pollo alla cacciatora*», to his listening to a girl on the phone who reminds him of EEC agriculture regulations by the way in which she describes with much sighing and groaning the peeling and swallowing a banana, the whole episode is a farce, that shows that the world does not end there.

The fact that both his bad knee and his problem of impotence, or what the narrator ironically calls «Internal Derangement of the Knee» and «Internal Derangement of the Gonads» respectively, are linked to his depression and therefore only last as long as he is in this anxious state, must be underlined here, since it is certainly because of its temporal character that Lodge can handle the situation with humour. Curiously enough, these are the same circumstances that define the sitcom Laurence writes: different tribulations arise, but the audience knows that at the end they will be solved and everything will get back to normal again. In this sense it is interesting the way in which Laurence talks about the «therapeutic social effect» (p. 104) of the series, because he, who writes scripts that will make other people laugh, knows the healing effect of laughter on people.

To end with the analysis of the comic and ironic statements of Passmore in reference to his plight, we must mention his comments on the definitions the dictionary offers and his reflections on the way words are used. He defines himself as a «looker-up» (p. 116), always doing a lot of looking up in order to compensate for his poor education. Obviously, there is nothing wrong or strange in doing so; what transforms it into a subversive element is the fact that very

often these digressions are introduced while narrating serious events, thus destroying any solemn approach to them. There are many instances in the novel, but we have chosen one which we think is very representative. It refers to Sally's announcement that she wants a separation:

After Sally dropped her bombshell that evening (what exactly is, or was, a bombshell, incidentally? And how do you drop one without blowing yourself up? Is it a grenade, or a mortar shell, or was it a primitive kind of aerial bomb that they lobbed out of the open cockpits of the old biplanes? The dictionary isn't much help) (p. 202)

It is precisely while looking up a word in the dictionary, «Angst», that Laurence discovers the figure of Kierkegaard. Immediately he identifies himself with the Danish philosopher with whom he believes he has many things in common: Kierkegaard wrote a journal and he is doing the same; Kierkegaard's book titles like *Fear and Trembling*, *The Sickness Unto Death*, *The Concept of Dread*, *Either/Or*, *Repetition* seem to be speaking directly to his condition; Kierkegaard's relationship with Regina resembles his with Maureen; after a sentimental disappointment both men can only write or, to be more precise, in the case of Laurence, «wank, and write» (p. 210), in that order; etc.. Laurence goes so far as to say that he and Kierkegaard have become one and the same thing: «I think Kierkegaard is the thin man inside me that has been struggling to get out, and in Copenhagen he finally did» (p. 209).

This brief summary of some of the references to Kierkegaard in the novel could give the idea that they help to provide the book with a touch of deep philosophical content. Nevertheless, in the hands of Lodge they become a source of comedy and, again, a way of correcting seriousness by means of humour. This aspect of the book has been explained by the writer himself in the following terms: «Well, I thought the idea of an almost entirely uneducated writer of sitcoms becoming obsessed with Kierkegaard seemed to have a comic potential<sup>9</sup>». In fact, many of the gay moments spring from Passmore's reactions to the philosopher's writings. If we take into account that the only modern poet the narrator reads is Philip Larkin, it is easy to understand the difficulties he has in following Kierkegaard's thinking. His puzzlement at the latter's ideas is very humorous, but perhaps the best moments are those of «epiphany», those in which Laurence considers that he has got the gist of what he is reading. One of the most brilliant instances takes place when the narra-

<sup>9</sup> JENNY TURNER, «Words Never Fail Him», p. 18.

tor explains Kierkegaard's concept of repetition and applies it to marriage. He comes to the conclusion that repetition in marriage is liberating and positive, not boring and negative, and believes that Sally and he are very good examples of that. He even congratulates Kierkegaard for having understood this institution so well. Ironically enough, the next thing we hear is that Sally wants a separation.

But Passmore's «grasp» of the Danish philosopher extends not only to his writing but also to his life. He seems to see through the latter much better than anyone else and imagines that he is the only one who knows the whole truth. The quasi-melodramatic tone he adopts becomes really comic, since he does not realize that his obsession with Kierkegaard instead of illuminating him is merely blinding him. Here is an instance:

I asked him what he died of. «An infection of the lungs», he said.  
«But in my opinion it was really a broken heart. He had lost the will to live. Nobody really understood his suffering...» (pp. 174-5)

Nobody, but Laurence, of course.

However, Laurence's main problem is that nobody takes his interest in Kierkegaard seriously and whenever he refers to the Danish philosopher, the other characters listen to him as to a lunatic. This is vital in the novel, since it reveals, as we will see later on when dealing with the criticism of institutions, that one of the functions of comedy is to destroy the mystique that surrounds professions or people. Whereas Laurence compares Kierkegaard to a saint, for the rest of the people, his life and work have no appeal at all. If Amy describes his friend's comments on Kierkegaard as «hardly coherent» and adds the patronizing phrase «poor dear», Ollie, the producer of *The People Next Door*, has a great struggle to keep a straight face while the scriptwriter is trying to convince him to do a series on the philosopher. The contrast between the earnestness with which Laurence tells all the facts of Kierkegaard's life and work and Ollie's ironic stance towards what he is hearing is truly comic. Ollie does not find anything interesting, attractive or dramatic in the story and therefore reacts to Laurence's explanations with great scepticism:

This whatsisname, Kierkegaard bloke, was the son of a wealthy merchant in Copenhagen, we're in what, the Victorian period, early Victorian. The old man was a gloomy, guilt-ridden old bugger, who brought his children up accordingly. They were strict Protestants. When he was a young man Kierkegaard kicked against the traces a bit. «They think he may have gone to a brothel once,» Tubby said. «Just once?» I said. (p. 173)

As this quotation shows, Ollie's way of summarizing the main points on Kierkegaard reveals his irreverence towards the whole theme. It must be explained that the scene takes place in a pub, while the producer is having lunch with a friend whom he is informing of his meeting with Laurence. Obviously this adds to the element of farce, since not only is the location hardly appropriate for such a conversation, but Ollie is continually interrupting his «solemn speech» to comment on the food or drink.

However, perhaps the character that has the best justification for ignoring Kierkegaard is Samantha. Laurence invites her to go away with him for a weekend to Copenhagen. She believes that he wants to seduce her, but very soon what she thought was going to be a romantic journey turns into a kind of pilgrimage. The very first thing they do is to visit the City Museum where there is a Kierkegaard room and whereas for Samantha there is nothing interesting in what she sees, Laurence «poured over them as if they were sacred relics» (p. 184). He stares at a picture of Regina, Kierkegaard's former girlfriend, and says that she looks like Samantha. Evidently, the latter does not share her companion's respect for Kierkegaard and thinks: «She had dark brown eyes and hair to match, so I suppose he meant she had big tits» (p. 185). She even goes so far as to call her «silly cow» because of her behaviour with the philosopher.

If the visit to the Museum takes place on Saturday, on Sunday the excursion becomes even more exciting: they go to the cemetery where Kierkegaard and Regina are buried. When at last Samantha summons the courage to invite Laurence to sleep with her, he answers that he cannot because of Kierkegaard. The contrast between the scriptwriter's seriousness and elevated tone and the girl's down-to-earth answers brings the scene to a comic climax:

«...and especially when we went to the room in the museum, it was as if I felt his presence, like a spirit or a good angel, saying, Don't exploit this young girl!...» «But I'm dying to be exploited,» I said. «Come and exploit me, in any position you like...» (p. 190)

Only once does somebody seem to take Laurence's views on Kierkegaard seriously. This happens when, walking with Maureen to Santiago de Compostela, he is interviewed by a British television unit which is making a documentary about the pilgrimage. He delivers an existentialist interpretation of the figure of the pilgrim and everybody is impressed by his speech. But when they discover that he is Laurence Passmore, the writer of a comic series, they think that the whole thing has been just a joke and dismiss his ideas.

If it is the other people's view on Kierkegaard which subverts seriousness in the novel, it is also the other characters' narration of one of the most impor-



tant events in Laurence's life —his decision to have sex with women different from Sally «for revenge, for compensation, for reassurance» (p. 204)— which undermines one of the climaxes of the novel and turns it into a parodic anti-climax. There are two devices used by Lodge to create this effect. On the one hand, the affairs are told by women who are not so eager as Laurence to have a sexual encounter with him and, therefore, can be more objective and less sentimental about the facts. On the other hand, the circumstances that surround the narration of the different stories prevent it falling into melodrama.

Three women are involved in Laurence's sexual quest: Amy, Louise and Samantha. We know everything about Amy and Laurence's first and last physical intercourse through the former's sessions with her psychoanalyst, thus removing any form of romanticism from the events described. Then again, Amy, who really had no interest in going to bed with Laurence, cannot help being critical about the place chosen by her lover to «Do It», the south of Tenerife, and about the act itself, making comments that are truly hilarious since they are said by someone who is indifferent enough to view the adventure with irony. Here is, for instance, her opinion of their «honeymoon» resort:

Well, given a choice between the Siberian salt mines and a four-star hotel in Playa de las Americas, I'd choose Siberia any day. Playa de las Americas is the name of the resort where we stayed...There's actually a huge great volcano in the middle of the island. Unfortunately it's not active, otherwise it might erupt and raze Playa de las Americas to the ground. (p. 152)

The solemnity of their first sexual encounter is destroyed by Amy's view of it. She has to restrain herself from falling into hysterics when Laurence approaches her with a knee-support and an elbow bandage and keeps giggling when she is supposed to moan. Her final verdict truly destroys any false sentimentality and reverent approach to sex:

Of course I said it was wonderful, though to be honest I've had more pleasure from a nice hot bath at the end of a long day, or really a top-class Belgian chocolate with a cup of freshly-ground Colombian coffee. Frankly. (p. 160).

If Amy opens her soul to her psychoanalyst, Louise unfolds her heart to a friend on the phone. Her continual interruptions of the conversation to answer other calls and her tendency to change the subject show how superficial her interest in the whole affair is, in contrast with the poor Laurence who takes it

very seriously. It is precisely the lack of deep involvement on Louise's part that allows the author to paint the story with comedy. The fact that Louise is American must be underlined here, since Lodge in his novel often uses the contrast between two cultures to introduce humour. Thus, many of Louise's statements are comic because they are the result of her reacting to a civilization which is alien to her: «But he turned me down, in the nicest possible way, because he loved his wife...Yeah, there are such men, Stella. In England there are, anyway...» (p. 164)

As far as Samantha is concerned, much has already been said when describing her journey to Copenhagen with Laurence. It is necessary to add here that the reader gets to know about their adventure during the visit she pays to a friend who is in hospital and who cannot speak because her wisdom teeth have been taken out. Samantha immediately takes advantage of the situation, not only by talking without breathing, but also by eating her friend's food, including the grapes she has brought her. The latter can only nod and shake her head and use her eyes to defend herself from Samantha's verbal outpouring. The whole context is, then, quite humorous, especially when Samantha decides to explain the «plot» of the porno film she watched at the hotel in Copenhagen:

...they all had the most tremendous orgasms - no really, they did, Hetty, honestly. At least the men did, because they pulled their willies out to show the semen squirting all over the place. The girl rubbed it into her cheeks as if it was skincare lotion. Are you feeling all right, darling? You're looking a little pale. The time?... (pp. 188-9)

At the beginning of this essay we analyse how in Bakhtin's theory laughter is always associated with unofficial thought and unofficial language. This explains why for him one of the main functions of the comic mode is to mock institutional mystiques and orthodoxies. And this has been precisely Lodge's stance towards professions in his novels: satirize and question them. The main difference between *Therapy* and the previous novels is that in the latter Lodge's target was the academic world to which he belongs, whereas in the former the object of his parody are the different kinds of therapy that contemporary man is being offered in order to heal him both physically and psychologically. Laurence has been persuaded to try some of them: «I have a lot of therapy. On Mondays I see Roland for Physiotherapy, on Tuesdays I see Alexandra for Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and on Fridays I have either aromatherapy or acupuncture» (pp. 14-5). Although through the ironic explanations Laurence provides of each of them the reader learns how they work, it is obvious that Lodge's main interest lies in the sphere of psychiatry. As in his campus novels,

he is here also capable of standing back to see the absurd and ridiculous aspects of the reality he is portraying. To reflect it he has chosen a protagonist well in his fifties who has come too late to therapy and is, therefore, quite sceptical about it. He does not understand, for instance, why psychiatry is divided into various branches, when, whatever their contents and methods, none of them really seems to function. Thus, when he explains the differences between a psychiatrist and a cognitive behaviour therapist and they way they work, he ironically adds in both cases «That's the theory, anyway» (p. 15). He even makes jokes about the father of psychoanalyses, explaining that once he used the Spell-checker on his computer with the name "Freud" and it came back with the suggestion «Fraud?» (p. 82).

At this point it must be observed that this disrespectful reference to Freud is not something rare in Lodge's creative writing, since in his novels he often criticizes those academics who follow a Freudian interpretation of the text. Lodge undermines the tendency to find a hidden sexual explanation behind every single phrase, and this is also obvious in *Therapy*. Amy remembers during one of her sessions with her psychiatrist her mother talking about «the facts of life» in the kitchen while chopping carrots "as if she would like to cut off their willies" (p. 143). She tries to find what association it has with the present moment and is dismayed at the thought that it is really about herself and Laurence. Again, when Laurence realizes that he votes for a party, but wants a different one to win, he exclaims: «I felt as I imagined Freud's patients felt when they broke down and admitted that they had always wanted to have sex with their mummies and daddies» (p. 87).

Laurence is also amazed at the way a session with an analyst passes. As an onlooker he can see it from a distance and does not find much sense in paying someone just for listening to one's problems for an hour, without hardly making any suggestion. The sole idea that an analyst earns his wages even if the patient does not speak at all seems of course outlandish to Laurence, who thus destroys the magic halo that analysts very often erect above their work. In this sense there is a hint in the novel that those professionals are just fulfilling a role that years ago belonged to priests.

The reticence that the therapists in the novel show about referring to money is also quite interesting. As a matter of fact, they are never paid directly by their patients, as if their profession were above the material world. This attitude is also demystified, since, whatever their approach is to money, they never reject or waive their fees. They are not different from the rest of human beings, no matter how hard they try to place themselves in a superior position; they have the same needs, appetites and desires as everybody else. Tubby summarizes this idea with great irony: «It's not surprising, really, this reticence. Healing

shouldn't be a financial transaction - Jesus didn't charge for miracles. But the rapists have to live» (p. 67).

We started this essay by explaining the important role that Bakhtin attached to laughter. It is necessary now to add that, in fact, Bakhtin also believed that laughter was a vital element in the formation of the novelistic discourse, tracing the roots of the novel to the parodying-travesty genres of classical literature —the satyr play, the Socratic dialogue and Menippean satire— and to the unofficial culture of carnival which perpetuated this parodic tradition throughout the Middle Ages. These forms prepared the ground for the arrival of the novel in many respects: they forced man to realize that reality is contradictory and not unified, thus paving «the way for the impiety of the novelistic form<sup>10</sup>»; language was conceived not only as a means of direct expression, but itself became an object of representation; the myth of a single and unitary language was destroyed. It is precisely this last aspect which is of special interest to us. The novelist is conscious of the existence of a great variety of languages, all of them equally relative and limited and therefore rejects the notion of a sole and unified language, centre of the ideological world. The novel thus liberates language from the power of myth, destroying any mythic and magical attitude to language and the word. The linguistic medium is no longer something sacred and sacrosanct which contains the whole truth, but merely one of the many possible ways to hypothesize meaning:

Language is transformed from the absolute dogma it had been within the narrow framework of a sealed-off and impermeable monoglossia into a working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality<sup>11</sup>

The object is liberated from the power of language and the absolute bond between language and thought is denied.

But for this radical change to take place, for laughter to liberate the object from the language in which it has been trapped, the condition of polyglossia must exist: «Only polyglossia fully frees consciousness from the tyranny of its own language and its own myth of language<sup>12</sup>» The phenomenon of polyglossia occurs when languages and cultures lose their sealed-off and sealed-sufficient character and start mutually animating and illuminating each other. Each

<sup>10</sup> MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1992, p. 59.

<sup>11</sup> MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, p. 61.

language begins to sound differently and their role and actual historical meaning are revealed.

And only under the condition of polyglossia can heteroglossia, the internal stratification of any national language into social dialects, professional jargons, generic languages, etc. achieve its fullest development. This speech variety within language is of primary importance for the novel, since authentic novelistic discourse is defined by its artistic organization of individual voices and heteroglossia: «Language is present to the novelist as something stratified and heteroglot<sup>13</sup>». In the novel languages become implicated in each other and illuminate each other. Thus, the notion of the unity of literary language does not refer to a single language system, but to a dialogue of languages. This polyphony that defines the novel explains its revolutionary and liberating power, since it prevents the author from imposing a single point of view:

«The possibility of employing on the plane of a single work discourses of various types, with all their expressive capacities intact, without reducing them to a single common denominator - this is one of the most fundamental characteristics of prose<sup>14</sup>».

In the novel everything remains open and unresolved. This explains why it could only fully emerge during the Renaissance when the finite and enclosed quality of the old universe was destroyed and the decentering of the ideological world defended.

According to Bakhtin, one of the basic forms for appropriating and organizing heteroglossia in the novel are the «incorporated genres». The introduction of various genres, both artistic and extra-artistic, into the novel intensifies its speech diversity and allows the discourse to become «a full and comprehensive reflection of its era<sup>15</sup>». Precisely, one of the most outstanding features of *Therapy* is the use of different genres and styles which reminds the reader of a former book by Lodge, *Changing Places*, which moves from an epistolary section through a documentary section to a film script<sup>16</sup>. We think that the best way to appreciate the stylistic richness of *Therapy* is by analysing each of the four parts of the book separately.

<sup>13</sup> MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, p. 332.

<sup>14</sup> MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. CARLYLE EMERSON, Manchester, 1984, pp. 200-1.

<sup>15</sup> MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, p. 411.

<sup>16</sup> Obviously, there is a great difference between *Therapy* and *Changing Places*, since the latter inclines more to the experimental pole and the former to the realistic one.

When the reader opens the book he discovers that he is being presented with a journal. Very soon Tubby explains that he is writing a diary as a kind of therapy and emphasizes the fact that, although he is doing it only for himself, he has to address someone: «I can only write as if I'm speaking to someone» (p. 21). As a matter of fact, he establishes a dialogue with his audience, using expressions such as «to tell you the truth», «if you know what I mean», «you'd be surprised», etc.<sup>17</sup> But what is really interesting about the diary, which occupies a great part of the book, is that, although it starts by being quite informal in language and sometimes even in structure, as the novel develops and Passmore gets more conscious of his own life, it becomes stylistically more refined. On the other hand, Lodge, faithful to his carnivalesque approach to artistic creation, cannot help introducing a self-conscious joke when Tubby compares his own work with that of the novelist:

That's what TV is - all lines. The lines people speak and the lines of the cathode-ray tube that make up the picture. Everything's either in the picture, which tells you where you are, or in the dialogue, which tells you what the characters are thinking and feeling, and often you don't even need words for that - a shrug of the shoulders, a widening of the eyes will do it. Whereas if you're writing a book, you've got nothing but words for everything: behaviour, looks, thoughts, feelings, the whole boiling. I take my hat off to book writers, I do honestly. (p. 18)

The confessional genre dominates the first part of the book, but it is not the only one. There is a monologue, written without paragraphs, by means of which Tubby offers us a description of himself; two lists, one with the good things about his own life and another with the bad ones; a character's words are expressed in script form, providing the annotations typical of this genre like, for example, «(JAKE *drains glass*)» (p. 121); the narrator, obsessed with the incompetence of the British Rail, which he uses at least once a week, provides us with «QUAINT TALES OF BRITISH RAIL NO. 167» (p. 118). But the list does not finish here. We must also include the introduction of fragments taken from a variety of texts, all of them stylistically different, such as the Bible, the dictionary, Kierkegaard's books, a script, a poem by Philip Larkin, etc.

The second part of the book not only represents a break with the previous one, but becomes an illuminating instance of another form that, according to

---

<sup>17</sup> The use of this device reminds us of the game that is established between narrator and reader in *How Far Can You Go?*, a novel that differs from *Therapy* in being more of a postmodernist product.

Bakhtin, serves for introducing and organizing heteroglossia in the novel: the language used by characters. What we find in this section is a series of dramatic monologues by the characters close to Tubby, who thus give us their personal view of him. Obviously enough, all of them have different temperaments and ways of telling their stories. One of the characters even asserts that «this is my story and I'm going to tell it in my own way» (p. 155). This explains why the reader is so surprised to discover in the third part that Tubby has written the monologues, again as a kind of therapy, which, according to Alexandra, will help him to realize that people do not despise him, but respect and sympathize with him. Unfortunately, it does not work the way it should, because, as Tubby tells us: «Being the sort of writer I am, I couldn't just summarize other people's views of me, I had to let them speak their thoughts in their own voices. And what they said wasn't very flattering» (p. 212). This statement is of paramount importance. On the one hand, it shows Bakhtin's belief that in the novel the voices of the various characters must never be subordinated to the author's, but retain their integrity and independence. On the other hand, it is a reaffirmation of Lodge's practice as a writer thus becoming an element of formal self-consciousness by means of which Lodge defends his own concept of the creative process. In fact, since the publication of his first novel, *The Picturegoers* (1960) critics have praised the way in which he allows his characters to speak in their own voices. The writer himself has given a very Bakhtinian explanation for the use of this technique:

«The more the characters are allowed to speak for themselves in the narrative text, and the less they are explained by an authoritative narrator, the stronger will be our sense of their individual freedom of choice - and our own interpretative freedom<sup>18</sup>»

All the monologues are addressed to someone whose lines are just implied and in this sense it should be pointed out that the first one is quite curious since it reproduces the format of a statement to the police.

The third part starts and finishes with the journal, but its most outstanding feature is the story we are being told in the middle. It is titled «Maureen. A Memoir» and is about the narrator's relationship with Maureen. What makes it so revelant is the fact that the apparently informal style of the journal disappears and we are being confronted with a text that belongs to the very best realistic tradition. It is obvious that the author is aware of the aesthetic possibilities of

<sup>18</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement*, 5 November 1982.

the story he wants to tell and exploits them with great mastery. Tubby admits that he has never done anything like this before and that it really has been hard work. This is how he defines his task:

Perhaps I'm turning into a book writer. There's no «you» in it, I notice. Instead of telling the story as I might to a friend or somebody in a pub, my usual way, I was trying to recover the truth of the original experience for myself, struggling to find words that would do maximum justice to it. I revised it a lot. (p. 260)

As a matter of fact, from now on, his style changes completely as would be expected of a writer who has achieved maturity. Thus, when he goes back to the journal after the «memoir», although we still find examples of informal language and syntax, we discover a cohesion and artistic achievement that was lacking before. Nevertheless, sometimes his writing betrays that he is a script-writer, like when he presents his conversation with Bede, Maureen's husband, as a fragment from a script.

In spite of the intertextual game with Kierkegaard, the introduction of variety of styles, the presence of elements of formal self-consciousness, etc. *Therapy* is basically a realistic text. This becomes especially obvious in the fourth and final part of the book, where the author offers the reader a traditional ending, that is to say, a close ending. We even find in the last two pages the typical «winding up» of Victorian fiction, by means of which the fortunes of the main characters are very briefly summarized. Of course, a journal is not the best tool to finish a novel in such a way. That is why Lodge starts this fourth part with an entry from the diary, where Tubby describes what, according to him, are the main differences between book-writing and script-writing and between the former and a journal. In the first case it is just a matter of tense (past/present); in the second one it is a question of endings: the writer of a journal does not know how it is going to end, whereas the novelist does. Once these definitions are given, he explains that he is going to tell his quest of Maureen across Spain and what has happened till the present moment in “a more coherent, cohesive narrative, knowing, so to speak, how the story ended” (p. 286). The justification for including at the end of the novel a traditional discourse and not a journal is that his laptop broke down during his journey through Spain and therefore most of the time he could only write down a few notes which did not do justice to what had really occurred. Anyway, what is evident is that again different styles are being used: the confessional, which takes only two pages, and the realistic which covers the rest of the book.



---

As a conclusion, it can be said that *Therapy* is a very good example of the healing and liberating power that Bakhtin, together with Lodge, attribute to laughter. Throughout the whole novel comedy acts as a subversive and regenerating force that pulls down all the barriers that enslave man. On the one hand, not only are fear and intimidation defeated, allowing Passmore to look forward to the future, but the sacred character of human institutions destroyed, thus showing that nothing in society is sacrosanct, that everything is liable to mocking criticism. On the other, by means of the element of heteroglossia present in the novel the author is prevented from imposing his own viewpoint on literature and life.