

David Lodge

**CHANGING
PLACES**

A Novel

CHANGING PLACES

A Tale of Two Campuses

David Lodge

SECKER &
WARBURG

LONDON

First published in England 1975 by
Martin Secker & Warburg Limited
14 Carlisle Street, London W1V 6NN

Copyright © David Lodge 1975

SBN 436 25660 6

Printed in Great Britain by
Willmer Brothers Limited, Birkenhead

*For Lenny and Priscilla, Stanley and Adrienne
and many other friends on the West Coast*

Although some of the locations and public events portrayed in this novel bear a certain resemblance to actual locations and events, the characters, considered either as individuals or as members of institutions, are entirely imaginary. Rummidge and Euphoria are places on the map of a comic world which resembles the one we are standing on without corresponding exactly to it, and which is peopled by figments of the imagination.

I *flying*

HIGH, high above the North Pole, on the first day of 1969, two professors of English Literature approached each other at a combined velocity of 1200 miles per hour. They were protected from the thin, cold air by the pressurized cabins of two Boeing 707s, and from the risk of collision by the prudent arrangement of the international air corridors. Although they had never met, the two men were known to each other by name. They were, in fact, in process of exchanging posts for the next six months, and in an age of more leisurely transportation the intersection of their respective routes might have been marked by some interesting human gesture: had they waved, for example, from the decks of two ocean liners crossing in mid-Atlantic, each man simultaneously focusing a telescope, by chance, on the other, with his free hand; or, more plausibly, a little mime of mutual appraisal might have been played out through the windows of two railway compartments halted side by side at the same station somewhere in Hampshire or the Mid-West, the more self-conscious party relieved to feel himself, at last, moving off, only to discover that it is the other man's train that is moving first . . . However, it was not to be. Since the two men were in airplanes, and one was bored and the other frightened of looking out of the window – since, in any case, the planes were too distant from each other to be mutually visible with the naked eye, the crossing of their paths at the still point of the turning world passed unremarked by anyone other than the narrator of this duplex chronicle.

“Duplex”, as well as having the general meaning of “twofold”, applies in the jargon of electrical telegraphy to “systems in which messages are sent simultaneously in opposite directions” (*OED*). Imagine, if you will, that each of these two professors of English Literature (both, as it happens, aged forty) is connected to his native land, place of employment and domestic hearth by an infinitely elastic umbilical cord of emotions, attitudes and values – a cord which stretches and stretches almost to the point of invisibility, but never quite to breaking-point, as he hurtles through the air at 600 miles per hour. Imagine further that, as they pass each other above the polar ice-cap, the pilots of their

respective Boeings, in defiance of regulations and technical feasibility, begin to execute a series of playful aerobatics – criss-crossing, diving, soaring and looping, like a pair of mating bluebirds, so as thoroughly to entangle the aforesaid umbilical cords, before proceeding soberly on their way in the approved manner. It follows that when the two men alight in each other's territory, and go about their business and pleasure, whatever vibrations are passed back by one to his native habitat will be felt by the other, and vice versa, and thus return to the transmitter subtly modified by the response of the other party – may, indeed, return to him along the other party's cord of communication, which is, after all, anchored in the place where he has just arrived; so that before long the whole system is twanging with vibrations travelling backwards and forwards between Prof A and Prof B, now along this line, now along that, sometimes beginning on one line and terminating on another. It would not be surprising, in other words, if two men changing places for six months should exert a reciprocal influence on each other's destinies, and actually mirror each other's experience in certain respects, notwithstanding all the differences that exist between the two environments, and between the characters of the two men and their respective attitudes towards the whole enterprise.

One of these differences we can take in at a glance from our privileged narrative altitude (higher than that of any jet). It is obvious, from his stiff, upright posture, and fulsome gratitude to the stewardess serving him a glass of orange juice, that Philip Swallow, flying westward, is unaccustomed to air travel; while to Morris Zapp, slouched in the seat of his eastbound aircraft, chewing a dead cigar (a hostess has made him extinguish it) and glowering at the meagre portion of ice dissolving in his plastic tumbler of bourbon, the experience of long-distance air travel is tediously familiar.

Philip Swallow has, in fact, flown before; but so seldom, and at such long intervals, that on each occasion he suffers the same trauma, an alternating current of fear and reassurance that charges and relaxes his system in a persistent and exhausting rhythm. While he is on the ground, preparing for his journey, he thinks of flying with exhilaration – soaring up, up and away into the blue empyrean, cradled in aircraft that seem, from a distance, effortlessly at home in that element, as though sculpted from the

sky itself. This confidence begins to fade a little when he arrives at the airport and winces at the shrill screaming of jet engines. In the sky the planes look very small. On the runways they look very big. Therefore close up they should look even bigger – but in fact they don't. His own plane, for instance, just outside the window of the assembly lounge, doesn't look quite big enough for all the people who are going to get into it. This impression is confirmed when he passes through the tunnel into the cabin of the aircraft, a cramped tube full of writhing limbs. But when he, and the other passengers, are seated, well-being returns. The seats are so remarkably comfortable that one feels quite content to stay put, but it is reassuring that the aisle is free should one wish to walk up it. There is soothing music playing. The lighting is restful. A stewardess offers him the morning paper. His baggage is safely stowed away in the plane somewhere, or if it is not, that isn't his fault, which is the main thing. Flying is, after all, the only way to travel.

But as the plane taxis to the runway, he makes the mistake of looking out of the window at the wings bouncing gently up and down. The panels and rivets are almost painfully visible, the painted markings weathered, there are streaks of soot on the engine cowlings. It is borne in upon him that he is, after all, entrusting his life to a machine, the work of human hands, fallible and subject to decay. And so it goes on, even after the plane has climbed safely into the sky: periods of confidence and pleasure punctuated by spasms of panic and emptiness.

The sang-froid of his fellow passengers is a constant source of wonderment to him, and he observes their deportment carefully. Flying for Philip Swallow is essentially a dramatic performance, and he approaches it like a game amateur actor determined to hold his own in the company of word-perfect professionals. To speak the truth, he approaches most of life's challenges in the same spirit. He is a mimetic man: unconfident, eager to please, infinitely suggestible.

It would be natural, but incorrect, to assume that Morris Zapp has suffered no such qualms on his flight. A seasoned veteran of the domestic airways, having flown over most of the states in the Union in his time, bound for conferences, lecture dates and assignations, it has not escaped his notice that airplanes occasionally crash. Being innately mistrustful of the universe and its

guiding spirit, which he sometimes refers to as Improvidence (“How can you attribute *that*,” he will ask, gesturing at the star-spangled night sky over the Pacific, “to something called Providence? Just look at the *waste!*”), he seldom enters an aircraft without wondering with one part of his busy brain whether he is about to feature in Air Disaster of the Week on the nation’s TV networks. Normally such morbid thoughts visit him only at the beginning and end of a flight, for he has read somewhere that eighty per cent of all aircraft accidents occur at either take-off or landing – a statistic that did not surprise him, having been stacked on many occasions for an hour or more over Esseph airport, fifty planes circling in the air, fifty more taking off at ninety-second intervals, the whole juggling act controlled by a computer, so that it only needed a fuse to blow and the sky would look like airline competition had finally broken out into open war, the companies hiring retired kamikaze pilots to destroy each other’s hardware in the sky, TWA’s Boeings ramming Pan Am’s, American Airlines’ DC 8s busting United’s right out of their Friendly Skies (hah!), rival shuttle services colliding head-on, the clouds raining down wings, fuselages, engines, passengers, chemical toilets, hostesses, menu cards and plastic cutlery (Morris Zapp had an apocalyptic imagination on occasion, as who has not in America these days?) in a definitive act of industrial pollution.

By taking the non-stop polar flight to London, in preference to the two-stage journey via New York, Zapp reckons that he has reduced his chances of being caught in such an Armageddon by fifty per cent. But weighing against this comforting thought is the fact that he is travelling on a charter flight, and chartered aircraft (he has also read) are several times more likely to crash than planes on scheduled flights, being, he infers, machines long past their prime, bought as scrap from the big airlines by cheapjack operators and sold again and again to even cheaper jacks (this plane, for instance, belonged to a company called Orbis; the phoney Latin name inspired no confidence and he wouldn’t mind betting that an ultra-violet photograph would reveal a palimpsest of fourteen different airline insignia under its fresh paint flown by pilots long gone over the hill, alcoholics and schizoids, shaky-fingered victims of emergency landings, ice-storms and hijackings by crazy Arabs and homesick Cubans wielding sticks of dynamite

and dime-store pistols. Furthermore, this is his first flight over water (yes, Morris Zapp has never before left the protection of the North American landmass, a proud record unique among the faculty of his university) and he cannot swim. The unfamiliar ritual of instruction, at the commencement of the flight, in the use of inflatable lifejackets, unsettled him. That canvas and rubber contraption was a fetichist's dream, but he had as much chance of getting into it in an emergency as into the girdle of the hostess giving the demonstration. Furthermore, exploratory gropings failed to locate a lifejacket where it was supposed to be, under his seat. Only his reluctance to strike an undignified pose before a blonde with outsize spectacles in the next seat had dissuaded him from getting down on hands and knees to make a thorough check. He contented himself with allowing his long, gorilla-like arms to hang loosely over the edge of his seat, fingers brushing the underside unobtrusively in the style used for parking gum or nosepickings. Once, at full stretch, he found something that felt promising, but it proved to be one of his neighbour's legs, and was indignantly withdrawn. He turned towards her, not to apologize (Morris Zapp never apologized) but to give her the famous Zapp Stare, guaranteed to stop any human creature, from University Presidents to Black Panthers, dead in his tracks at a range of twenty yards, only to be confronted with an impenetrable curtain of blonde hair.

Eventually he abandons the quest for the life-jacket, reflecting that the sea under his ass at the moment is frozen solid anyway, not that that is a reassuring thought. No, this is not the happiest of flights for Morris J. Zapp ("Jehovah", he would murmur out of the side of his mouth to girls who enquired about his middle name, it never failed; all women longed to be screwed by a god, it was the source of all religion – "Just look at the myths, Leda and the Swan, Isis and Osiris, Mary and the Holy Ghost" – thus spake Zapp in his graduate seminar, pinning a brace of restive nuns to their seats with the Stare). There is something funny, he tells himself, about this plane – not just the implausible Latin name of the airline, the missing lifejacket, the billions of tons of ice underneath him and the minuscule cube melting in the bourbon before him – something else there is, something he hasn't figured out yet. While Morris Zapp is working on this problem, we shall take time out to explain something of the

circumstances that have brought him and Philip Swallow into the polar skies at the same indeterminate (for everybody's watch is wrong by now) hour.

Between the State University of Euphoria (colloquially known as Euphoric State) and the University of Rummidge, there has long existed a scheme for the exchange of visiting teachers in the second half of each academic year. How two universities so different in character and so widely separated in space should be linked in this way is simply explained. It happened that the architects of both campuses independently hit upon the same idea for the chief feature of their designs, namely, a replica of the leaning Tower of Pisa, built of white stone and twice the original size at Euphoric State and of red brick and to scale at Rummidge, but restored to the perpendicular in both instances. The exchange scheme was set up to mark this coincidence.

Under the original agreement, each visitor drew the salary to which he was entitled by rank and seniority on the scale of the host institution, but as no American could survive for more than a few days on the monthly stipend paid by Rummidge, Euphoric State made up the difference for its own faculty, while paying its British visitors a salary beyond their wildest dreams and bestowing upon them indiscriminately the title of Visiting Professor. It was not only in these terms that the arrangement tended to favour the British participants. Euphoria, that small but populous state on the Western seaboard of America, situated between Northern and Southern California, with its mountains, lakes and rivers, its redwood forests, its blonde beaches and its incomparable Bay, across which the State University at Plotinus faces the glittering, glamorous city of Esseph – Euphoria is considered by many cosmopolitan experts to be one of the most agreeable environments in the world. Not even its City Fathers would claim as much for Rummidge, a large, graceless industrial city sprawled over the English Midlands at the intersection of three motorways, twenty-six railway lines and half-a-dozen stagnant canals.

Then again, Euphoric State had, by a ruthless exploitation of its wealth, built itself up into one of America's major universities, buying the most distinguished scholars it could find and retaining their loyalty by the lavish provision of laboratories, libraries, research grants and handsome, long-legged secretaries. By this year of 1969, Euphoric State had perhaps reached its peak as a

centre of learning, and was already in the process of decline – due partly to the accelerating tempo of disruption by student militants, and partly to the counter-pressures exerted by the right-wing Governor of the State, Ronald Duck, a former movie-actor. But such was the quality of the university's senior staff, and the magnitude of its accumulated resources, that it would be many years before its standing was seriously undermined. Euphoric State, in short, was still a name to conjure with in the senior common rooms of the world. Rummidge, on the other hand, had never been an institution of more than middling size and reputation, and it had lately suffered the mortifying fate of most English universities of its type (civic redbrick): having competed strenuously for fifty years with two universities chiefly valued for being old, it was, at the moment of drawing level, rudely overtaken in popularity and prestige by a batch of universities chiefly valued for being new. Its mood was therefore disgruntled and discouraged, rather as would be the mood of the middle class in a society that had never had a bourgeois revolution, but had passed directly from aristocratic to proletarian control.

For these and other reasons the most highly-qualified and senior members of staff competed eagerly for the honour of representing Rummidge at Euphoric State; while Euphoric State, if the truth were told, had sometimes encountered difficulty in persuading any of its faculty to go to Rummidge. The members of that élite body, the Euphoric State faculty, who picked up grants and fellowships as other men pick up hats, did not aim to teach when they came to Europe, and certainly not to teach at Rummidge, which few of them had even heard of. Hence the American visitors to Rummidge tended to be young and/or undistinguished, determined Anglophiles who could find no other way of getting to England or, very rarely, specialists in one of the esoteric disciplines in which Rummidge, through the support of local industry, had established an unchallenged supremacy: domestic appliance technology, tyre sciences and the biochemistry of the cocoa bean.

The exchange of Philip Swallow and Morris Zapp, however, constituted a reversal of the usual pattern. Zapp was distinguished, and Swallow was not. Zapp was the man who had published articles in *PMLA* while still in graduate school; who, enviably offered his first job by Euphoric State, had stuck out for twice the going salary, and got it; who had published five fiend-

ishly clever books (four of them on Jane Austen) by the time he was thirty and achieved the rank of full professor at the same precocious age. Swallow was a man scarcely known outside his own Department, who had published nothing except a handful of essays and reviews, who had risen slowly up the salary scale of Lecturer by standard annual increments and was now halted at the top with slender prospects of promotion. Not that Philip Swallow was lacking in intelligence or ability; but he lacked will and ambition, the professional killer instinct which Zapp abundantly possessed.

In this respect both men were characteristic of the educational systems they had passed through. In America, it is not too difficult to obtain a bachelor's degree. The student is left very much to his own devices, he accumulates the necessary credits at his leisure, cheating is easy, and there is not much suspense or anxiety about the eventual outcome. He (or she) is therefore free to give full attention to the normal interests of late adolescence – sport, alcohol, entertainment and the opposite sex. It is at the postgraduate level that the pressure really begins, when the student is burnished and tempered in a series of gruelling courses and rigorous assessments until he is deemed worthy to receive the accolade of the PhD. By now he has invented so much time and money in the process that any career other than an academic one has become unthinkable, and anything less than success in it unbearable. He is well primed, in short, to enter a profession as steeped in the spirit of free enterprise as Wall Street, in which each scholar-teacher makes an individual contract with his employer, and is free to sell his services to the highest bidder.

Under the British system, competition begins and ends much earlier. Four times, under our educational rules, the human pack is shuffled and cut – at eleven-plus, sixteen-plus, eighteen-plus and twenty-plus – and happy is he who comes top of the deck on each occasion, but especially the last. This is called Finals, the very name of which implies that nothing of importance can happen after it. The British postgraduate student is a lonely, forlorn soul, uncertain of what he is doing or whom he is trying to please – you may recognize him in the tea-shops around the Bodleian and the British Museum by the glazed look in his eyes, the vacant stare of the shell-shocked veteran for whom nothing has been real since the Big Push. As long as he manages to land his first job, this is no great handicap in the short run, since

tenure is virtually automatic in British universities, and everyone is paid on the same scale. But at a certain age, the age at which promotions and Chairs begin to occupy a man's thoughts, he may look back with wistful nostalgia to the days when his wits ran fresh and clear, directed to a single, positive goal.

Philip Swallow had been made and unmade by the system in precisely this way. He liked examinations, always did well in them. Finals had been, in many ways, the supreme moment of his life. He frequently dreamed that he was taking the examinations again, and these were happy dreams. Awake, he could without difficulty remember the questions he had elected to answer on every paper that hot, distant June. In the preceding months he had prepared himself with meticulous care, filling his mind with distilled knowledge, drop by drop, until, on the eve of the first paper (Old English Set Texts) it was almost brimming over. Each morning for the next ten days he bore this precious vessel of the examination halls and poured a measured quantity of the contents onto pages of ruled quarto. Day by day the level fell, until on the tenth day the vessel was empty, the cup was drained, the cupboard was bare. In the years that followed he set about replenishing his mind, but it was never quite the same. The sense of purpose was lacking – there was no great Reckoning against which he could hoard his knowledge, so that it tended to leak away as fast as he acquired it.

Philip Swallow was a man with a genuine love of literature in all its diverse forms. He was as happy with *Beowulf* as with Virginia Woolf, with *Waiting for Godot* as with *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, and in odd moments when nobler examples of the written word were not to hand he read attentively the backs of cornflakes packets, the small print on railway tickets and the advertising matter in books of stamps. This indiscriminating enthusiasm, however, prevented him from settling on a "field" to cultivate as his own. He had done his initial research on Jane Austen, but since then had turned his attention to topics as various as medieval sermons, Elizabethan sonnet sequences, Restoration heroic tragedy, eighteenth-century broadsides, the novels of William Godwin, the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and premonitions of the Theatre of the Absurd in the plays of George Bernard Shaw. None of these projects had been completed. Seldom, indeed, had he drawn up a preliminary bibliography before his attention was distracted by some new or

revived interest in something entirely different. He ran hither and thither between the shelves of Eng. Lit. like a child in a toyshop – so reluctant to choose one item to the exclusion of others that he ended up empty-handed.

There was one respect alone in which Philip was recognized as a man of distinction, though only within the confines of his own Department. He was a superlative examiner of undergraduates: scrupulous, painstaking, stern yet just. No one could award a delicate mark like B+ / B+? + with such confident aim, or justify it with such cogency and conviction. In the Department meetings that discussed draft question papers he was much feared by his colleagues because of his keen eye for the ambiguous rubric, the repetition of questions from previous years' papers, the careless oversight that would allow candidates to duplicate material in two answers. His own papers were works of art on which he laboured with loving care for many hours, tinkering and polishing, weighing every word, deftly manipulating *eithers* and *ors*, judiciously balancing difficult questions on popular authors with easy questions on obscure ones, inviting candidates to consider, illustrate, comment on, analyse, respond to, make discriminating assessments of or (last resort) discuss brilliant epigrams of his own invention disguised as quotations from anonymous critics.

A colleague had once declared that Philip ought to publish his examination papers. The suggestion had been intended as a sneer, but Philip had been rather taken with the idea – seeing in it, for a few dizzy hours, a heaven-sent solution to his professional barrenness. He visualized a critical work of totally revolutionary form, a concise, comprehensive survey of English literature consisting entirely of questions, elegantly printed with acres of white paper between them, questions that would be miracles of condensation, eloquence and thoughtfulness, questions to read and re-read, questions to brood over, as pregnant and enigmatic as *haikus*, as memorable as proverbs; questions that would, so to speak, contain within themselves the ghostly, subtly suggested embryos of their own answers. *Collected Literary Questions*, by Philip Swallow. A book to be compared with Pascal's *Pensées* or Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. . .

But the project had advanced no further than his more orthodox ones, and meanwhile the Rummidge students had begun agitating for the abolition of conventional examinations, so that his one special skill was in danger of becoming redundant.