The Image of the Library in the Novel *The British Museum is Falling Down* by David Lodge

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Abstract

The paper aims at establishing connections between the storyline involving Adam Appleby, the main character of David Lodge's novel The British Museum Is Falling Down *and the descriptions of spaces Adam occupies. The Reading Room of the British Museum is the location that appears most frequently throughout the novel and plays an important role in the development of the main character. The paper analyses the relation between the space and the individual and the functions of the descriptions of space from the viewpoint of spatial theory, as well as narratology and stylistics.*

Key words: heterotopia, spatial studies, library

A library is a special place in many regards. It is a place of wisdom and revelations, and at the same time, of mystery and confinement. It can serve people and confuse them. The library is a space of strict rules, those of silence and respect. The library is also – surprisingly, given the strict regulations enforcing silence – a space of communication, since knowledge and ideas are being communicated to the visitors.

While the library as a setting of unfolding events has been present in literary texts for centuries, its function significantly differs from text to text. In the present paper, I am going to explore the meaning, role and symbolism of a library as presented in David Lodge's novel *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965), while drawing examples from other works of fiction to illustrate a library's various functions in a range of related literary texts. In this novel, not only does the library provide necessary information for the main character's research, but it also serves as a medium of discovering his attitude towards knowledge in general and academia in particular, as well as providing a reflection of the state of his personal life.

I will look at the image of the library in Lodge's third novel from the perspective of stylistics, as well as from the point of view of narratology, and perform a close reading of passages devoted to the description of the library's interiors, functions, and structures, to analyse the use of libraries as not only figurative but also, sometimes, actual gateways to other worlds, while examining how these spaces convey more information than just the contents of the books kept in them. I expect my research to benefit from my revisiting the relevant theoretical works of Michel Foucault and Mircea Eliade, whose approaches to space and place will define the theoretical framework of this research. As well as adding yet another important contemporary novelist to the list of writers whose works have been discussed in the framework of space-related critical theory, examining Lodge's early work in such a framework can significantly enhance our understanding of his own novelistic practices. Above all else, the "spatial" approach is meant to highlight how the representation of space brings along additional shades of meaning arising from the development of the narrative. However, this dual enterprise needs to be preceded by a brief historical overview of the library as an institution, as such a summary can help to discover connotations of the library's imagery in the novel.

The history of libraries starts as early as in ancient times when the first large collections of texts were private or only included documents that belonged to governments.

The Great Library of Alexandria built in the 3rd century BC in Egypt became one of the first centres of learning and public libraries of the ancient world. In a way this institution served as a reference library, since King Ptolemy I strove to acquire every possible book from all around the world (Manguel 2006: 22). Allegedly, the Library of Alexandria was very similar conceptually to modern-day libraries in many respects, including the ways the books were stored and handled. The primary aim of establishing this library was, however, different from those of the modern days libraries: it was to provide protection to valuable and rare texts of the period (Manguel 2006: 32), whilst, in contrast, contemporary libraries aim at making information as accessible as possible.

From those times on, throughout history, the function and purpose of a library have defined its structure and spatial layout. Scott Bennett in his article "Libraries and Learning: A History of Paradigm Change" introduces the distinction between a book-centred and a reader-centred paradigm in design of library space. According to his study, book-centred library spaces prioritise books over readers by creating no comfortable space for the visitors of a library (Bennett 2009: 185). Conversely, reader-centred libraries provide contemplative spaces (also found in monastic scriptoriums, from which, according to Bennett, this kind of libraries originated) that are designed for the readers' comfort. He presents Sterling Memorial Library as an example of such a space, describing it as having a particular focus on readers, which is "reinforced by a set of reading rooms opening off the nave, rooms dominated by light and reading tables, not by books" (Bennett 2009: 182). As will become evident later, the library of the British Museum as represented in David Lodge's novel *The British Museum Is Falling Down*, is very similar in its features: the Reading Room of the library is spacious, well-lit, and easily navigated.

It is not, however, only the structure of a library itself that is important for the present research, but also the overall place of libraries in the structure of culture, as well as the understanding of a library's role by its visitor. It may be helpful to look at the concept of schema, a group of connected bits of information about an idea or a phenomenon of the world, the one that is based on an individual's, or a collective's, assumptions about the given phenomenon (Short 1997: 227), to understand the place of libraries in culture at large. The general schema, or, more precisely, a frame, i.e. a non-sequential set of information (Minsky 1974: 222), of what a library stands for in the mind of a visitor is determined by its role in the society of a particular culture and time period. The common understanding in the 1960s was that a library is a space of knowledge and wisdom, a heavily regulated system that strives for order, and a space of restrictions and rules. The new philosophy of "community librarianship" aimed at "encouraging the public library to make an irreversible break with its 'conservative' past and to become a truly popular institution" (Black 2003: 201) was still in an embryonic stage, and a library in general, as well as the Reading Room of the British Museum in particular, could be seen as an elitist institution with only a limited number of people allowed to enter on a regular basis.

The above, together with the library's isolation from the surrounding world and the special functions it serves, brings libraries close to Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia, which he defines as "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within a culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1986: 24). This definition is particularly interesting for the present case, because libraries can represent not only the sites of a given culture, but also as depositories of non-existent, or counterfactual, sites found in the narratives contained in the books stored in them. Heterotopias are described as spaces of internal order different from the

outside world, spaces within spaces that have restrictions on the possibility of entering or exiting them. All of these features can be found in a library frame to some extent. Most importantly for the present research, the frame includes such ideas as safety, comfort and order. But this frame is altered from time to time, and the writers of fiction make use of these alterations. For example, a library can often be represented as a frightening and confusing space that one can be figuratively or, as hinted above, even literally, be lost in. Usually, there is a reason for such alterations, which can be found in the narrative. Further on, I would like to offer a discussion of a few narratives that exemplify such schema breaches, and interpret the function of these alterations.

Before considering the image of a library in David Lodge's texts, it is important to take a look at some other fictional libraries represented in literature to understand the place libraries occupy in the literary world. Multiple examples can be found in the fiction of different historical periods, but here I take into consideration the most distinctive, and famous, examples of the texts that represent libraries, and the metaphorical meanings these representations create. *The Library of Babel*, a short story by Jorge Luis Borges opens with the following sentence: "The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries" (Borges 1998: 112). The idea of a library is clearly established at the very beginning of the story as coextensive with the whole world. This metaphor is twofold: on the one hand it represents the world as a collection of human knowledge, and on the other hand, it gives an idea of a library as a location that represents the structure of the universe.

Similar to Borges's representation of multiplicity and endlessness, *The British Museum* comprises ten chapters (and an epilogue) each of which is written in the style of a certain recognised writer. The book itself, thus, becomes a comprehensive library of the late 19th early 20th centuries' literature, "universe". This kind of virtual universality is closely related to the significance attributed to the library by Michel Foucault. In the words of the French philosopher, "the space of language today is not defined by Rhetoric, but by the Library: by the ranging to infinity of fragmentary languages […] continuous and monotonous line of language" (Foucault 1977: 67) — the line of chapters of *The British Museum Is Falling Down*.

It is important to note that the description of Borges's world-library given further on in the text creates an impression of an endlessly self-repetitive fractal-like structure (that of a hexaflake in particular), hence emphasising the idea of infinity, and the endlessness of knowledge, of the space of the library, and of the universe itself. A very similar kind of description that is reminiscent of a fractal can be found in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, which describes the Secretum, the library of the Benedictine abbey where the story unfolds, as a circular labyrinth. This library is also believed to represent the structure of the world (Eco 1986: 186), and the maze-like structure itself alludes to the impossibility of fully grasping the knowledge contained in it, or fully understanding the world at large. Interestingly, the narrow and dark corridors of the library in the text were replaced by infinite staircases in the film of the same name directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud (1988). This change adds another dimension to the already infinite library space, and further enhances the impression of endlessness by adding a vertical dimension to the flat, horizontal maze in the book. At the same time, however maze-like this library may be, it is also an orderly system that organises human knowledge alphabetically. *The British Museum Is Falling Down* organises its characters in a similar manner: the main character's name starts with the letter

"a", his wife's - with the letter "b", and every new member of the family receives a name that starts with the following letter of the alphabet.

The other prominent examples of the use of the space of a library in a compellingly unusual way can be found in genre fiction which allows the literal use of what can only be a metaphor in other novels. Jasper Fforde's description of the Great Library in his fantasy novel *Lost in a Good Book* (2002) is very similar to what has been discussed before: "The library appeared endless; in both directions the corridor vanished into darkness with no definable end" (Fforde 2002: 174). However, this library is not only an infinite collection of books but also an anthology of portals that lead into the realms of fictional narratives. This takes an idea of "a world within every book" literally to create an image of a library as a gateway into knowledge. Similarly, each chapter of the *The British Museum Is Falling Down* can be seen as a portal into a particular author's style. The books do not only take their readers to places but also talk to them: the books of the *Harry Potter*'s fictional world represent another metaphor understood literally — the volumes sitting on the shelves speak to (or rather scream at) the visitors of the library (Rowling 1997: 127).

It is not only the Restricted Section of the Hogwarts Library that requires special permission to enter but also the Reading Room of the British Museum. Almost every library in both real and fictional worlds has a set of regulations that are aimed at excluding the intruder and granting access to the initiates — as any heterotopia does in Foucault's conception (Foucault 1986: 26). Heterotopias are limited in space and time, but these dimensions are twofold in many cases. Foucault calls a modern library "a place of all times that is itself outside of time" (Foucault 1986: 26) highlighting the contrast between the internal "indefinite accumulation" and external enclosure. The same is true for the spatial dimension, as "the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 1986: 25). The internal endlessness, thus, can be contrasted with a limited physical space a library occupies.

David Lodge, who spent a large period of his life working as a university instructor, and being preoccupied with describing the world of academia in many of his novels (the most prominent examples being *The British Museum Is Falling Down*, *Changing Places*, *Small World*, *Nice Work,* and *Deaf Sentence*) takes a close look at the functions and importance of educational facilities, including libraries, in the academic world. The main character of *The British Museum Is Falling Down*, Adam Appleby, is a frequent visitor of The British Museum's Reading Room. Adam feels "at home" in the Reading Room, since he is familiar with the setting, and aware of the internal hierarchical structure:

> He returned to the Reading Room and, wielding the huge volumes of the catalogue with practised ease, filled in application slips for *The Rainbow* and several critical studies of Lawrence … He sat down on the large padded seat, ignoring the envious and accusing glances of the readers in his vicinity. For some reason only about one in ten of the Reading Room seats was padded, and there was fierce competition for the possession of them.
>
> (Lodge 1983: 46)

However, Adam's expectations of how the library should function are not always met. The following is the first description of the protagonist's visit to the reading room in the story. The paragraph establishes the frequency of Adam's visits, the fact that he is familiar with the procedures of entering, and, most importantly, that he is allowed to ignore them:

> There was one feature of his diurnal pilgrimage to the British Museum that afforded Adam a modest but constant gratification, and that was the fact that, as a familiar figure, he was not asked to show his card on entering the Reading Room. When he passed the door-keeper with just a nod of greeting he assumed, he hoped, an air of importance for the group of casual visitors who invariably hung about outside the door, trying to peer into the Reading Room.
> 'Could I see your card, sir?'
>
> (Lodge 1983: 35)

The main character's sense of significance derived from the assumption of belonging through being exempt from abiding by the rules is being shattered by the attendant's peremptory question here. The flouting of his presupposition of how the system should work (or, rather, work for him) creates a tension that is further intensified by subsequent developments. The narrative style changes along with this intensification. Now that Adam is required to go through a bureaucratic procedure of renewing his library card, the narrative appears as follows:

> Adam, or A as he would now more vaguely have identified himself, had been all through this before, but could not be sure whether he had dreamed it or actually experienced it. He was trapped. Behind him was a locked, guarded door; in front of him a long corridor terminating in a room. He could not go back. He could not stay where he was—the men in the room at the end of the corridor, warned by the bell, were expecting him. He went reluctantly forward, down the long corridor, between the smooth polished wooden cabinets, locked and inscrutable, which formed the walls, stretching high out of reach. Craning his neck to see if they reached the high ceiling, A felt suddenly dizzy, and leaned against the wall for support.
>
> (Lodge 1983: 36)

A comparison of this to a passage from Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial* can shed some light on the reasons for such changes in style:

> Far away on the main altar was the glitter of a large triangle of candles. K. couldn't have said for certain whether he had seen them earlier. Perhaps they'd only just been lit. Sextons are professional creepers, you never notice them. When K. happened to turn round he saw, not far behind him, a tall, thick candle fixed to a pillar. It was also lit but, beautiful as it was, it was insufficient to illuminate the altarpieces, which were mostly hanging in the darkness of the side altars. In fact it only served to increase the darkness.
>
> (Kafka 2009: 147)

Mimicking Kafka's novel, Adam's name turns into A, and the character gets lost in the endless spaces of the location (a cathedral in the case of K., and the library in A's case). It becomes apparent that the narrative is formulated in such a way as to show that, in the eyes of the character, the library becomes a place of endless bureaucracy, thus abiding in another respect by the spatial principles of heterotopia — the unity of confinement and endlessness. Since Kafka is famous for his critical and largely pessimistic view of official institutions, this pastiche brings some of Kafka's attitudes into the focus. The feeling of helplessness follows A through the endless corridors of the British Museum. The sense of helplessness, however (and with it, most probably, the allusion to Kafka's *The Trial* as well), derives not only from the character's impression of the institution's complicated requirements, but also from the

internal turmoil he is going though: Adam's wife might be pregnant with the family's fourth child, which is a highly unfavourable situation for everyone involved. The reason for this pregnancy is the ban on contraception for Catholics, which affects the life of Adam's family significantly (even though it is difficult to call him a firm believer, he routinely tries to follow all the rules prescribed by the inherited religion). Hence, it is possible to conclude that Adam's attitude towards the library is a projection of his current point of view regarding another institution determining his life alongside the library, namely, the Catholic Church.

Another connecting link to religious conceptions, notably the metaphoric embodiment of the church as a parental or a maternal figure can be found in the description of the Reading Room of the British Museum that opens with a clear allusion to body parts, the parts of the female reproductive system in particular, hence a typical "library" schema of an orderly institution is breached by an association with a womb:

> He passed through the narrow *vaginal passage*[1], and entered the huge *womb* of the Reading Room. Across the floor, dispersed along the radiating desks, scholars curled, *foetus-like*, over their books, little *buds* of intellectual life thrown off by some gigantic *act of generation* performed upon that *nest* of knowledge, those inexhaustible *ovaries* of learning, the concentric inner rings of the catalogue shelves.
>
> (Lodge 1983: 44)

The quotation above, as well as the following ones, represents the internal subjective focalisation by Adam, whose thoughts are preoccupied with his wife's potential pregnancy, which results in recurring imagery associated with childbirth. At the same time, this passage can be interpreted as a representation of the rebirth of an individual through being exposed to knowledge, a *rite de passage* of sorts that leads from the state of not-knowing to the state of knowing.

It is important to note that the rite of passage is often held in a special place, one that carries significance for the group in question. Whether it is a wedding, a confirmation or a graduation, one of the features that unite all of them is the space where they are enacted. All of these ceremonies are performed in the locations of importance for the society, very often in sacred locations.

In his book *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade talks about two modes of existence (and two types of spaces associated with them) – the religious and the secular. They are two opposite existential situations, which, being reflected in arts, create distinctive languages and properties of the narrative. He elaborates that sacred space, contrary to any other, is strongly defined and consistent: "In the homogeneous and infinite expanse, in which no point of reference is possible and hence no orientation can be established, the hierophany reveals an absolute fixed point, a center" (Eliade 1959: 20). The profane space, in contrast, does not have any particular characteristics, which makes it neutral and homogeneous. Hence, Eliade concludes, it is only possible to "live in a real sense" in the sacred space, since it makes it possible to obtain orientation in the homogeneity of the profane (Eliade 1959: 23). On the contrary, Michel Foucault argues that the spaces people occupy, both internal and external, are significantly heterogeneous. Even highlighting the variety of differences, he, however, admits that this multiplicity of spaces is "still nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred" (Foucault 1986: 23), hence acknowledging the existence of *axis mundi* or at least a certain kind of centrality in his heterotopology.

This distinction is of value for the present analysis because, while the Reading Room of the British Museum is definitely described as an important, almost sacred space for Adam,

the structure of the location does not completely fall into the category of a "sacred" space, although it carries a number of similarities with Eliade's view on the nature and features of such spaces, similarities to be discussed later in the analysis.

Coming back to the first description of the Reading Room that appears in the text, the following quotation reinforces the previously established image of the library as a mother figure taking care of a child:

> The circular wall of the Reading Room *wrapped* the scholars in a *protective layer* of books, while above them arched the *vast, distended belly* of the dome. Little daylight entered through the grimy glass at the top. No sounds of traffic or other human business penetrated to that warm, airless space.
>
> (Lodge 1983: 44)

The anthropomorphism of the space of the Reading Room and associations with a woman and a mother shows, on the one hand, the level of comfort associated with this place in Adam's mind. On the other hand, the need for protection, and the lack of agency, can also be interpreted as a desire to retreat to the infantile state (presumably, to avoid the responsibility for the situation outside of the Reading Room, i.e., at home, where the threat of his wife's potential pregnancy puts an overwhelming responsibility for the whole family on Adam). The character establishes connection with the space of the Reading Room, and the Reading Room seems to be "responding" to him.

This is how Adam sees the Reading Room — as looking down on its visitors, and the visitors as looking down on the books they read:

> The dome looked down on the scholars, and the scholars looked down on their books; and the scholars loved their books, stroking the pages with soft pale fingers. The pages responded to the fingers' touch, and yielded their knowledge gladly to the scholars, who collected it in little boxes of file-cards.
>
> (Lodge 1983: 44)

The structure of the relationship between the entities in this quotation is reminiscent of a fractal: the parts merge and turn into one another, creating a multi-layered image all having with the tenderness and care associated with gestation and motherhood on the one hand and the act of gaining knowledge and the space of the library on the other.

The description of the Reading Room continues with what could be an objective depiction of the space and shape of things if it were not emotionally loaded with Adam's attitude to the place:

> When the scholars raised their eyes from their desks they saw *nothing to distract* them, *nothing out of harmony* with their books, only the *smooth, curved lining* of the womb. Wherever the eye travelled, it met *no arrest, no angle, no parallel lines receding into infinity, no pointed arch* striving towards the unattainable: all was *curved, rounded, self-sufficient, complete.*
>
> (Lodge 1983: 45)

Even though a library is not literally a sacred space, such significance of the location creates resemblance with what one would conventionally call sacred. The curve and enclosure of the Reading Room are juxtaposed with the sharp angles and sometimes threatening endlessness of the space outside it.

According to Mircea Eliade, a location becomes a focal point of creation for the "strong, significant space" if it is defined as sacred; as opposed to that, a secular space, the one "without structure or consistency, amorphous" (Eliade 1959: 14) does not have any distinctive features.

The quotation above proves the significance of the Reading Room for Adam: not only does it present itself to Adam as harmonious, consisting of "concentric inner rings" (Lodge 1983: 44) and being well-structured, but also as self-sufficient and complete. The library and the Reading Room become sacred for Adam, and this is observable through the narrative. The juxtaposition of presence and absence in the last passage also serves to highlight the important features of the space. "Nothing to distract", "nothing out of harmony", "no arrest, no angle, no parallel lines receding into infinity" (Lodge 1983: 44) — all of these phrases highlight the seeming perfection and completeness of the space described, as the use of the negative form adds emphasis to the description.

It is also important to note that, as opposed to Kafka's cathedral, the space of the Reading Room is finite, and the impression of endlessness comes from a different source. It is the circular structure of the room, as well as the temporal features of the description that contribute to the impression of endlessness. The temporality of the Reading Room is significant as it complements the spatial order.

The four passages quoted above follow each other in the text of the book, and are characterised by decelerated time: these few paragraphs describe what the main character sees in only a few seconds of looking at the Reading Room; but they describe the state that is observable continuously, during the character's every visit to the British Museum. Such a description creates an impression that the Reading Room exists "outside of time", and is not subject to the spatiotemporal limits of the world outside. It is also possible to say that the space becomes fragmented because time is not sequential in a library — the passage of time, and together with it the spatial order, are fractured by the frequent changes in narrative styles referred to above. Although it is most probably not the case in this particular instance, there are other parts in the narrative that may contribute to this sense of fragmentation. Adam calls a part of the library a "maze of iron galleries, lined with books and connected by tortuous iron staircases, [which] webbed his confused vision" (Lodge 1983: 90), and another part is featured through such descriptions as "fire escape to hell" and a "cemetery of old controversies" (Lodge 1983: 91). The latter, interestingly, refers to premises away from the Reading Room, and from the "centre" of Adam's perception of the library. The "fertile" and "caring" Reading Room is opposed to the periphery through death-related descriptions, which, if considered from the viewpoint of heterotopology, can serve as examples of a different kind of heterotopia, a cemetery, which Foucault explains as one that used to be both ideologically and geographically central for a settlement, but moved into peripheral space in the modern world (Foucault 1986: 25). This contrast reinforces the separation of the Reading Room as a distinct "central" space in terms of location and Adam's understanding of it. The descriptions of winding corridors and dark dead ends reinforce the sense of circularity and completeness of the space of the library. But it is not only the spaces outside the Reading Room that can be confusing for the main character. The following passage represents Adam's impression of the Reading Room later in the text. He calls a part of the library "an irritating maze":

> Never before had he been so struck by the symmetry of the Reading Room's design. The disposition of the furniture, which at ground level created the effect of an irritating

> maze, now took on the beauty of an abstract geometrical relief—balanced, but just complicated enough to please and interest the eye.
>
> (Lodge 1983: 92)

However, the rest of the quotation represents a different shift in the main character's and, importantly, focaliser's, attitude towards the perception of the space of the Reading Room. At this point in the story, Adam already knows that his wife is not pregnant. The sense of relief makes him look at the Reading Room from a new perspective. It is noticeable that the allusion to the female reproductive system is absent from the descriptions at this point. He notices the characteristics of the Reading Room that escaped him before: it is beautiful, symmetrical, and complicated in a pleasing way. His attention to symmetry is not coincidental, since symmetry is an organising principle that is closely associated with beauty and perfection (Darvas 2007: 3).

Taking this comparison into consideration, I would like to conclude that the descriptions of space of the library in *The British Museum Is Falling Down* represent not only the location itself, but also the shifting attitude to it of the focalising character.

To better understand the connotations of the library's representation and to broaden the perspective, it can also be interesting to compare the descriptions above to the depiction of libraries in other texts written by David Lodge. A library is a recurring setting in his novels, and, although left in the background, it often plays an important role in either the development of the story or the representation of characters. The following is a quotation from *Deaf Sentence* (2008), in which Professor Desmond Bates, the main character, examines a book checked out of a library:

> I was shocked to find one of them had several passages marked with a turquoise highlighter pen, not just in the margins but with parallel strokes drawn right through the lines of text from left to right. … 'It seems to me extraordinary that anyone educated enough to have access to a university library should do this to a book,' I said.
>
> (Lodge 2009: 74)

The character here mentally sets up a separate category of people "educated enough" to visit a library: just as Adam in *The British Museum*, he believes that the possibility to enter a library is a privilege that grants one special rights, but at the same time subjects one to a set of regulations. And, also similarly to Adam (but in a different set of circumstances) Jonathan, the narrator of *Ginger You're Barmy* (1962) describes "the warm library at nightfall, the feel of new books, the smell of old ones, the pleasantries and vanities of footnotes and acknowledgements" (Lodge 2011: 204) with awe and adoration.

The characters in another novel, *Small World* (1984), however, are less mesmerised by the beauty of libraries:

> "See what I mean?" he panted, with an all-embracing, yet dismissive sweep of his arm. "It's huge, heavy, monolithic. It weighs about a billion tons. You can *feel* the weight of those buildings, pressing down the earth. Look at the Library—built like a huge warehouse. The whole place says, '*We have learning stored here; if you want it, you've got to come inside and get it*.'
>
> (Lodge 1985: 43)

The weight and importance of knowledge seem threatening in this passage. If one wants to receive information, they are required to withstand the pressure of "heavy, monolithic" container that is the library. The author of these lines, Morris Zapp, is critical of the physical library as opposed to the emerging idea of electronic storage, literally weightless, that makes information much more portable, more easily searchable and, most importantly, more available, even internationally (Lodge 1985: 43). Hence, for Morris Zapp, a "usual" library is a concept that is becoming obsolete, and whose weight is a burden rather than a sign of importance.

Sometimes similar opinions are levelled by humour:

> Ronald Frobisher is pictured against a door with frosted glass on which is engraved in florid lettering the word "PUBLIC." This itself is a puzzle to Akira. Is it a public lavatory, or a public library? The symbolism would be quite different in each case.
>
> (Lodge 1985: 105)

Even though irony here is directed at the character rather than the place, it is still possible to notice the parallel that is drawn between a bathroom and a library — both locations combining associations of the private and the public here and the pleasant and the repulsive or threatening there. The expectation of a reader would most probably be that Frobisher is pictured in front of a library (it is difficult to imagine that anyone would want to take a picture in front of a public lavatory), and the mere assumption that Akira brings forward, on the one hand, makes fun of Frobisher, and, on the other hand, creates an association between a bathroom and a library. It becomes apparent that a library is sometimes depicted as a secular, very ordinary place in David Lodge's novels.

Overall, it is possible to say that libraries play a central role in David Lodge's fiction. The functions of the descriptions of libraries in his works vary from humorous allusions to deep immersion into the amazingly complex representation of the characters' motivations and to offering insights into the nature and functioning of the world at large. Some of these descriptions are specifically aimed at conveying the characters' points of view on their lives and circumstances, as in the case of Adam, the protagonist of *The British Museum Is Falling Down*. The image of the library in Adam's eyes imparts his fears and concerns (hence, becoming a metaphoric depiction of certain areas and situations of his life), and changes depending on his attitude towards these concerns. Even though it is not necessarily the case in other novels written by Lodge, the Reading Room of the library of the British Museum becomes a sacred space for Adam, and a focus of his attention. The sense of belonging to it defines his identity to some extent. Therefore, the clear understanding of Adam's attitude and motivation would not be possible without the descriptions of the library, since it is through them that the reader is given a chance to see how Adam's, as a focaliser's of the narration, emotions are represented.

Notes

[1]Here and further: emphasis added

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