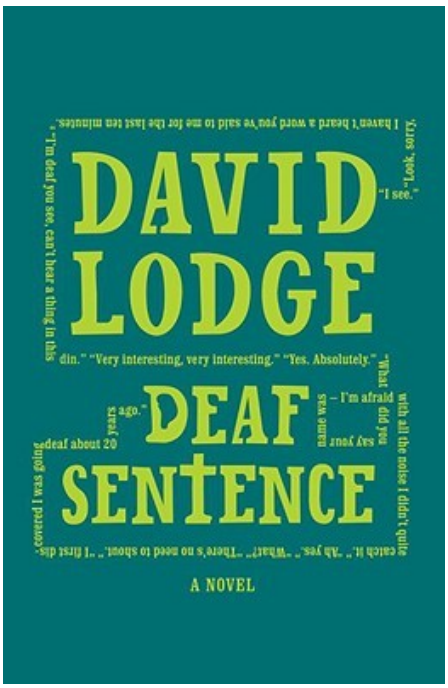


# Deaf Sentence

*David Lodge*

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**Deaf Sentence** David Lodge
Funny and moving by turns, **Deaf Sentence** is a witty, original and absorbing account of one man’s effort to come to terms with deafness, ageing and mortality, and the comedy and tragedy of human lives.

When the university merged his Department of English with Linguistics, Professor Desmond Bates took early retirement, but he is not enjoying it. He misses the routine of the academic year and has lost his appetite for research. His wife Winifred’s late-flowering career goes from strength to strength, reducing his role to that of escort, while the rejuvenation of her appearance makes him uneasily conscious of the age gap between them. The monotony of his days is relieved only by wearisome journeys to London to check on his aged father who stubbornly refuses to leave the house he is patently unable to live in with safety.

But these discontents are nothing compared to the affliction of hearing loss — a constant source of domestic friction and social embarrassment, leading Desmond into mistakes, misunderstandings and follies. It might be comic for others, but for the deaf person himself, it is no joke. It is his deafness which inadvertently involves Desmond with a young woman whose wayward behaviour threatens to destabilize his life completely.

## Deaf Sentence Details

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| Date | : | Published May 1st 2008 by Harvill Secker (first published 2008) |
| ISBN | : | 9781846551680 |
| Author | : | David Lodge |
| Format | : | Paperback 304 pages |
| Genre | : | Fiction, Humor, Academic, Academia, Contemporary |

# From Reader Review Deaf Sentence for online ebook

### Janice says

Lodge's portrayal of hearing loss is amazingly specific and illustrates both the farcical and painful sides of this disability. And the father-son relationship points to how maddening aging parents can be to children who aren't in such fine shape either. The novel takes a surprisingly poignant, moving turn as it approaches its end. The best novel David Lodge has written in the years (in my opinion).

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### Howard says

Not as funny as his best academic novels (Small World, Changing Places, etc), though still containing a number of laugh out loud moments, Lodge here writes movingly about deafness, retirement, aging, and death. His prose is elegant and powers of observation often acute, though I didn't find the visit to Auschwitz/Birkenau particularly strong.

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### Iain Snelling says

Really enjoyed this book. Professor Desmond Bates, a retired linguist, has to cope with his elderley father's decline, an unbalanced PhD student, and an increasing detachment from his wife whose career as a design retailer is taking off just as his finishes, all in the context of his deafness which makes social contact increasingly difficut. Written mainly as a journal, the book is beautifully observed, self-effacingly funny but with deep pathos. Several issues ar resolved by the end, but you don't really see how life will improve for Desmond.

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### Clif Hostetler says

This novel provides an interesting story within a setting that describes the living situation of many in today's "boomer generation"—newly retired with an older parent in failing health along with adult children and grandchildren with their own needs. In this story Desmond Bates, the main character, is in a second marriage with step children and older parents on both sides which enhances the potential for relationship issues.

Desmond is a retired linguistics professor who is plagued with hearing loss which complicates life in all sorts of ways. Much of the story is narrated in first person by Desmond so we learn a lot about linguistics while also learning about hearing loss and the experience of maintaining a hearing aid. The experiences of attending a number of lip reading classes is also described. Desmond's retired life is contrasted with his younger wife's booming entrepreneurial home decorating business which provides some peripheral stress for their relationship.

This is a novel so of course there has to be a suspenseful and potentially dangerous element in the plot to make it worth the reader's time. This element is provided by a young attractive female graduate student who tricks Desmond into providing her academic advice and assistance. Desmond doesn't tell his wife about all

the details which of course makes things more complicated. As we learn more about this graduate student, the potential danger to life and career reputation becomes apparent.

The title's conjuring of thoughts of death fits well with the treatment and discussion of death included in the book near its ending. I thought the author provided an excellent and thoughtful treatment of the subject. I particularly liked the following quotation that the book attributes to the journal of Bruce Cummings, an early twentieth century naturalist. In the book Desmond's son reads it at his grandfather's funeral.

> To me the honour is sufficient of belonging to the universe—such a great universe, and so great a scheme of things. Not even Death can rob me of that honour. For nothing can alter the fact that I have lived; I have been I, if for ever so short a time. And when I am dead, the matter which composes my body is indestructible—and eternal, so that come what may to my 'Soul', my dust will always be going on, each separate atom of me playing its separate part—I shall still have some sort of finger in the pie. When I am dead, you can boil me, burn me, scatter me—but you cannot destroy me: my little atoms would merely deride such heavy vengeance. Death can do no more than kill you.

Here's another quotation of a short poem read by Desmond's wife. There was no attribution.

> Where do people go to when they die?
> Somewhere down below or in the sky?
> 'I can't be sure,' said Granddad, 'but it seems
> They simply set up home inside our dreams.'

The following is from the July 27, 2015 PageADay Book Lover's Calendar:
Known for his sharp sense of humor, British author David Lodge tickles the intellect as well. In this book, elderly and hard-of-hearing Desmond Bates is rather bored in his retirement from teaching, while his wife continues to be in demand as an interior designer. One day Desmond meets a curvaceous American student named Alex and agrees to help her with her thesis. As Desmond becomes embroiled in Alex's problems, his whole settled life is turned upside down. Lodge is a master of dry wit, and his 13th novel does not disappoint.
***DEAF SENTENCE,*** by David Lodge (2008; Penguin, 2009)

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### Antonis says

Πολ? ωρα?ο βιβλ?ο. Ο Λοτζ καταφ?ρνει σε κ?θε μυθιστ?ρημ? του να μιλ?σει για την ανθρ?πινη κατ?σταση χωρ?ς μεγαλοστομ?ες και μελοδραματισμο?ς, ακ?μη κι ?ταν γρ?φει για θ?ματα στεν?χωρα, ?πως εδ? που τον απασχολο?ν η βαρηκο?α, τα γηρατει? και ο θ?νατος. Ανθρ?πινα αστε?ο και συγκινητικ? ταυτ?χρονα.

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### Derek says

Official rating: 4.5*
This is a heartwarming, witty, incredibly humourous book, but at the same time undertoned by great sadness.

It's not one of those depressing reads, but it's power lies in drawing you in to fully relate to the the MCs plight. Deafness, dementia, death, suicide, cancer, stroke, a visit to Auschwitz, plus much more. This is my first David Lodge novel, shame on me. His writing is crisp, anecdotal and reads like a breeze. the characters are well rounded and relatable. A masterpiece.

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### Cheryl says

Sometimes bitingly funny, sometimes sharply and unexpectedly touching, this remarkable book works on every level.

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### Caroline says

I planned to have this book as a bedtime read, but it was hopeless in that capacity, I kept sitting up in bed and hooting with laughter – not a good recipe for pre-sleep soothing. Once I had taken the book downstairs and could enjoy it in daylight though, there was no stopping me. What a fantastic book! It has several strong themes.

• It discusses what it is like to be going deaf, knowing that the end result is going to be absolute deafness. It does this with humour, sadness and insight. I learnt so much about deafness from this book.
• It gets beautifully inside a marriage - and with warmth and insight shows us the dance - the tooing and froing - of a happy relationship. It does this with subtlety and depth (and humour). We see two thoughtful people caring for one another.
• It shows us the problems of trying to care for an ageing parent, plus a love that surmounts a host shortcomings.
On top of all this, we have a cracking story, but I am not going to talk about that as I want to avoid spoilers.

Here’s a snip of humour from the book....

*‘The pastime of the dance went to pot.’ Sylvia Cooper seemed to say ‘so we spent most of the time in our shit, the cows’in-laws finding they stuttered.’*
*‘What?’ I said.*
*‘I said, the last time we went to France it was so hot we spent most of the time in our gîte, cowering indoors behind the shutters.’*
*‘Oh, hot, was it?’ I said. ‘That must have been the summer of 2003.’*
*‘Yes, we seared our arses on bits of plate, but soiled my cubism, I’m afraid.’*
*‘I’m sorry?’*
*‘We were near Carcasonne. A pretty place, but spoiled by tourism, I’m afraid.’*
*‘Ah, yes, it’s the same everywhere these days,’ I said sagely.*
*‘But I do mend sherry. Crap and Sargasso pained there, you know. There’s a lovely little mum of modern tart.’*
*‘Sherry?’ I said hesitantly.*
*‘Céret, it’s a little town in the foothills of the Pyrenees’ said Mrs Cooper with a certain impatience ‘Braque and Picasso painted there. I recommend it.’*
*‘Oh yes, I’ve been there,’ I said hastily. ‘It has a rather nice art gallery.’*
*‘The mum of modern tart.’*

*‘Quite so,’ I said. I looked at my glass. ‘I seem to need a refill. Can I get you one?’*
*To my relief, she declined.*

For every laugh there is about deafness in this reading, there are also hints of a terrible sense of loss and isolation. We take our ability to communicate with one another so much for granted. One of the most touching aspects of the book is a lip reading class that our deaf narrator joins. He is in fact a professor of linguistics. No one at the class knows this, and he relishes his friendship with this group of people who are experiencing the same difficulties.

All in all I had a great affection for the quiet hero of this story, and that was a treat too.

This is a lovely book and an amazingly good read. Highly recommended.

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### Nuno Chaves says

“A Vida em Surdina”, foi o primeiro livro que li no âmbito do projecto Roda dos Livros, que basicamente consiste em fazer circular os nossos livros pelos membros do grupo e depois comparar opiniões e tentar descobrir o que de semelhante ou nem por isso descobrimos em determinada obra, chegando por vezes a reparar em pormenores que passaram despercebidos a quem o leu anteriormente. Uma espécie de leitura conjunta mas em separado, sem prazos, obrigações ou correrias, apenas ao sabor do prazer da leitura.
Este livro foi apresentado num dos encontros mensais do Roda dos Livros pela Márcia (Planetamarcia) que nos leu uns trechos e que na altura não me despertou muita curiosidade, pensei tratar-se de mais um livro inglês, cheio de trocadilhos que ninguém entende por causa das traduções que muitas vezes são complicadas, devido ao estilo muito próprio de certos autores. No mês seguinte e visto que estava um pouco em baixo de forma, o livro que já tinha entrado na “Roda” foi-me literalmente enfiado debaixo do braço, pois segundo a Márcia talvez fosse o livro que eu estava a precisar e ela tinha a certeza de que eu iria gostar. Lá trouxe o tal livrinho da capa amarela para casa e passados uns dias iniciei a sua leitura…
Foi o primeiro livro de David Lodge que li, não conhecia o autor nem o seu género e o que conhecia da estória, eram apenas os trechos que a Márcia tinha lido e a sinopse que li entretanto.
Confesso que entrei na leitura a medo e de pé atrás, mas “encarrilhei” imediatamente na história e envolvi-me muito rapidamente com os personagens. É o protagonista Desmond que nos conta através de uma notas que vai escrevendo ao computador (uma espécie de diário) pormenores da sua vida; do seu passado do seu presente e sobre as expectativas e os receios que tem em relação ao seu futuro.

O personagem Desmond é um recém reformado (antecipadamente) muito por culpa do seu problema de surdez que teima em aumentar com os anos. Desmond Bates disserta sobre tudo, e ironiza muitas vezes não só com a sua vida mas também com a dos que o rodeiam. Para mim o melhor deste livro, foi precisamente o tom irónico, com que foi escrito, uma sucessão de trocadilhos, que muitas vezes nos fazem voltar atrás e largar valentes gargalhadas. Louvo o excelente trabalho da tradutora Tânia Ganho que o fez muitíssimo bem e que não deve ter sido tarefa fácil.
Entretanto surge a personagem Alex Loom, uma jovem e deslumbrante estudante universitária, que aos poucos vai entrando na vida de Desmond e que vai virar de pernas para o ar a vida calma e rotineira do

antigo professor. (nesta altura do livro, lembrei-me por exemplo do filme “Atracção Fatal” e de um outro livro: “Lolita” (mas… para aqueles que ainda não leram este livro apenas vos digo, que vale a pena). Quero ainda lembrar outro personagem magnífico que é o pai de Bates, também ele com problemas de audição, um personagem que vai vendo a sua importância aumentada e que sem dúvida se torna o personagem favorito de quem lê este livro.
O que tem de hilariante esta vida em surdina, tem de comovente e triste, cheguei ao fim, com uma espécie de vazio e com uma certa tristeza em largar o livro, muito por culpa da viagem que Desmond faz à Polónia e posteriormente o caso com que terá de lidar, assim que regressa. E o que dizer mais sobre este livro? que valeu bem a pena ter “rodado” para as minhas mãos, que até ao momento é a melhor leitura de 2013. É um livro que me vai deixar saudades. Excelente.

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### Jeff says

What a lovely and beautifully written novel about a hard-of-hearing linguist trying to navigate through the noises and silences of his life. These noises and silences are at turns confounding & illuminating, disturbing & comforting, and tragic & comic. Lodge takes his time telling this story and some people may not like the pace of the book, which can meander seemingly aimless at times. The beauty, nuance, and insight in this story lay in these perambulations, though. All in all, a lovely and fulfilling read told with humor, sensitivity, and insight.

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### David says

David Lodge is not a flashy writer, but he is an extremely good one. Superficially, his predilection for working the same, relatively narrow, ground (he is a master of the academic novel) might seem constricting. But each of his novels delivers fresh insights, with his signature blend of intelligence, wit, and genuine affection for his characters.

"Deaf Sentence" is no exception. Although it's not as hilariously funny as some of his earlier books, it is - like all of his work - compulsively readable, and ultimately very moving, in an understated kind of way. Lodge's description of the various indignities that deafness brings is hilariously funny and so utterly convincing that you know it has to be based on first-hand experience. There is far more wisdom about aging in this unassuming story by Lodge than, for example, in Julian Barnes's recent, migraine-inducing, bloviation about his own mortality.

When I think of the trio of Julian Barnes, Martin Amis, and David Lodge (I try to think of Christoper Hitchens as little as possible), restaurant analogies come to mind. Amis is the risk-taking molecular gastronomist, brashly confident of his own genius, and hey - if the diners don't always appreciate the flashiness, that’s not his problem. To his credit, when he’s on target, he can be sublime. But the brilliance is hit-or-miss. Barnes is closer to Amis than he might care to admit, thought perhaps not writ quite so large. In general, the quality of his work doesn’t fluctuate quite as much, but he is still capable of succumbing to navel-gazing, and cleverness (or perhaps his consciousness of his own cleverness) is definitely his Achilles heel. You’ll be served some extraordinary meals chez Barnes, but there will be an occasional inedible mess. At the risk of beating this analogy to death, David Lodge, perhaps at the cost of never reaching the Olympian heights attained sporadically by the others, never disappoints, reliably serving hearty nourishing comfort food that leaves the reader satisfied and looking forward to the next visit.

That might sound like damning with faint praise, but is actually meant as the highest compliment. I can think of very few novelists working today who are consistently such a delight to read. He joins a very short list of authors (Margaret Drabble in early and mid-career, Anne Tyler) whose work is reliably intelligent, thought-provoking and interesting without being flashy. Such craftsmanship is rare and not something one should take for granted. I look forward to each new novel by Lodge, and thus far have never been disappointed.

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### Leo says

> ‘Deafness is comic, blindness is tragic,’

The first thing I noticed about Deaf Sentence is that its first sentence draws out for 24 (Kindle) lines. That’s a heck of a lot of lines. And that’s was a heck of a lot of fun. David Lodge sure likes to play with word-order, puns and linguistic stuff and I giggle at the sight of things like that. What can I say? I’m fascinated by languages and their quirks. When I’m reading a book, I’m constantly checking the dictionary for new words or etymologies of words. Obviously, I liked this book from the start.

And two chapters in, I was already pitying the poor translators as well as wondering how they could manage to translate this book. I’m seriously considering getting a Spanish copy. David Lodge knows its too, because he thanks the translators of his books in the acknowledgements.

This book is a tragicomedy, which its funny moments but also very sad and despairing ones. And it is mostly a series of reflections on life in general, little pieces of information I liked very much. I selected a few passages that resonated with me and I also think are better to get an idea of what the book it about.

This one made me laugh:

> “What would be the equivalent of a guide dog for the deaf? A parrot on your shoulder squawking into your ear?”
>
> [...] ‘How did you know?’
> ‘I’m a linguist,’ I said.
> ‘Oh, are you? What languages?’
> ‘Only the one,’ I said.

I selected this passage because I have a “personal” acquaintance (that has to do with a book) with this painting and I liked that it got mentioned:

> But the one that always has the most spectators lingering in front of it, intrigued and puzzled, is lighter in colour tone than the others. It’s known as the Dog Overwhelmed By Sand (none of these titles was Goya’s). It might be a modern Abstract Expressionist painting, composed of three great planes of predominantly brownish colour, two vertical and one horizontal, if it

wasn’t for the head of a little black dog at the bottom of the picture, painted almost in cartoon style, buried up to its neck in what might be sand, looking upwards pathetically and apprehensively at a descending mass of more of the same stuff. There are lots of theories about what the picture means, like the End of the Enlightenment, or the Advent of Modernity, but I know what it means to me: it’s an image of deafness, deafness pictured as an imminent, inevitable, inexorable suffocation.

A part of Beethoven’s Heiligenstadt Testament:

Oh you men who think or say that I am malevolent, stubborn or misanthropic, how greatly do you wrong me. You do not know the secret cause which makes me seem that way to you . . . It was impossible for me to say, to people, ‘Speak louder, shout, for I am deaf.’ Ah, how could I possibly admit to an infirmity in the one sense which ought to be more perfect in me than in others, a sense which I once possessed in the highest perfection, a perfection such as few in my profession enjoy . . . Oh, I cannot do it, therefore forgive me when you see me draw back when I would gladly have mingled with you. My misfortune is doubly painful to me because I am bound to be misunderstood; for me there can be no relaxation with my fellow-men, no refined conversations, no mutual exchange of ideas, I must live alone like someone who has been banished. It’s a very poignant document, an outpouring of suppressed emotion, a cry wrung from the heart. Sometimes, he says, he would yield to the desire for companionship. But what a humiliation for me when someone standing next to me heard a flute in the distance and I heard nothing, or someone heard a shepherd singing and again I heard nothing. Such incidents drove me almost to despair, a little more of that and I would have ended my life - it was only my art that held me back. Ah, it seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt was within me.

What kind of a speech act is a suicide note? It depends of course on what classification system you’re using. In the classic Austin scheme there are three possible types of speech act entailed in any utterance, spoken or written: the locutionary (which is to say what you say, the propositional meaning), the illocutionary (which is the effect the utterance is intended to have on others) and the perlocutionary (which is the effect it actually has). But there are lots of further distinctions and subcategories, and alternative typologies like Searle’s commissive, declarative, directive, expressive and representative, indirect speech acts and on. Most utterances have both locutionary meaning and illocutionary force. The hazy area is the line between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary. Is the perlocutionary properly speaking a linguistic act at all? Austin gives the example of a man who says ‘Shoot her!’ (a rather odd example to invent, when you think about it, a symptom of male chauvinism and misogyny among Oxford dons perhaps). Locution: He said to me ‘Shoot her’ meaning by ‘shoot’ shoot and by ‘her’ her. Illocution: he urged (or advised, ordered, etc.) me to shoot her. Perlocution: he persuaded me to shoot her. The interesting level is the illocutionary: even in this example you can see how the same words can have quite different illocutionary force in different contexts. A little exercise I used to give first-year students was to imagine such contexts. ‘He ordered me to shoot her’, for instance, might describe an SS officer’s command to a guard in a concentration camp. ‘He advised me to shoot her’ needs a little more imagination, there’s such a moral gap between the cool finite verb and the brutal infinitive; some Mafia godfather perhaps, speaking

to a member of his family whose wife has been unfaithful to him. (On further reflection, only beta minus for that one: normally both the weapon and the target must be present for ‘shoot’ to be felicitous.) What about a suicide note that consisted entirely of the words, ‘I intend to shoot myself’? Locution: he stated his intention to shoot himself, meaning by ‘intend’ intend, by ‘shoot’ shoot and by ‘myself’ himself. Illocution: there are several possibilities here. He could be explaining, to those who would find him dead, that he shot himself deliberately, not accidentally, or that he was not shot by another person. He could be expressing the despair which had driven him to this extreme step. He could be making his family and friends feel bad about not having realised he might kill himself, and not having prevented it. Without more context there’s no way of knowing. As to the perlocutionary effect, I suppose that would depend on whether or not he actually committed suicide. Or would it? You don’t need to say or write the words, ‘I intend to shoot myself’ in order to have the effect of shooting yourself. You don’t perform suicide in words as, say, you perform marriage. The perlocutionary level of a suicide note is inseparable from the illocutionary level - its intended effect on those who read it. But that will probably be affected by whether you succeed or not.

After that he expounded to a musicologist from the University a theory he had long entertained that it had been of enormous advantage to song writers of American popular music that so many American place names, because of their Spanish or native Indian origins, were anapaestic, the stress falling on the third syllable, like California, Indiana, Massachusetts, Carolina, San Francisco, or iambic, like Chicago, Atlanta, Missouri, words which were easily set to syncopated music, whereas English place names were typically dactylic, like Birmingham and Manchester or trochaic, like Brighton and Leicester, inherently unmusical. To illustrate the point he crooned, ‘When you go to Birmingham, Be sure to wear a flower in your hair’, and in a creditable imitation of Frank Sinatra, ‘Leicester, Leicester, that toddling town, Leicester, Leicester, I’ll show you around’. Amused heads turned around the room.The musicologist, who had seemed disposed to challenge his argument, seemed impressed, and was certainly silenced, by this demonstration.

I recalled an interesting observation about collocations of happy in a book on corpus linguistics I reviewed years ago, and after a short search I found it. In a small corpus of 1.5 million words the most frequent lexical collocates of happy in the three words occurring before and after it were life and make. Not surprising: we all desire a happy life, we all like things which make us happy. The next most common collocates were: entirely, marriage, days, looked, memories, perfectly, sad, spent, felt, father, feel, home. I am struck by how many of them are keywords in my own pursuit of happiness, or lack of it, especially the nouns: marriage, memories, father, home. Of the verbs, feel is obviously the verb most frequently combined with happy, counting feel and felt as one. Predictably the only adjective among the words, apart from happy itself, is its opposite, sad. It surprised me that the most common adverbs qualifying happy in the corpus were entirely and perfectly, rather than, say, ‘fairly’ or ‘reasonably ’. Are we ever entirely, perfectly happy? If so, it’s not for very long.The most interesting word is days. Not day, but days. Larkin has a wonderful poem called ‘Days’, which also contains the word happy. What are days for? Days are where we live. They come, they wake us Time and time over. They are to be happy in: Where can we live but days? The familiar, nostalgic collocation happy days

doesn’t actually occur in the poem, but it’s inevitably evoked; it echoes in our heads as we read, and reminds us of the transience and deceptiveness of happiness. The days we live in always inevitably disappoint, by not being as happy as they were, or as we falsely believe they were, in ‘the good old days’, when ‘those were the days’. But where can we live but days? Ah, solving that question Brings the priest and the doctor In their long coats Running over the fields A footnote to the above: it occurred to me that negative particles might have been omitted from the analysis of collocations of happy, so I did a check on the small corpus I have on CD here at home, and sure enough, entirely happy is frequently preceded by not or some other negative word like never. But perfectly is usually unqualified. In fact the distribution is almost exactly equal: not entirely happy occurs about as often as perfectly happy, and entirely happy is as rare as not perfectly happy. I wonder why? Corpus linguistics is always throwing up interesting little puzzles like that. I looked up deaf a few years ago in the biggest corpus of written and spoken English available, about fifty million words, and the most common collocation, about ten per cent of the total, was fall on deaf ears (counting fall as a lemma, standing for all forms of the verb). Now it’s no surprise that the main contribution of deaf to English discourse is as part of a proverbial phrase signifying stupid incomprehension or stubborn prejudice; what’s puzzling is the verb fall, given that the human ear is positioned to receive sound waves from the side, not from above. And the enigma is not peculiar to English. A quick dictionary search revealed that German has *auf taube Ohren fallen*, French has *tomber dans l’oreille d’un sourd*, and Italian *cadere sugli orecchi sordi*. Subject there for another article that never got written.

The most moving of those cited in the book was a letter from Chaim Hermann, a Sonderkommando, to his wife, which was written in November 1944 and dug up from a pile of human ashes near one of the crematoria at Birkenau in 1945. The Sonderkommandos were able-bodied prisoners who were compelled to work in the extermination process itself, ushering the unwitting victims towards the gas chambers, removing their corpses afterwards and burning them in the ovens of the crematoria. To refuse the work was to invite instant execution; to perform it brought better living conditions - for a finite period. In a way the Sonderkommandos were the most unfortunate of all the victims of Auschwitz. The great majority of those who died there went unsuspectingly to the gas chambers. The Sonderkommandos lived for months with the certain knowledge that sooner or later they too would be killed, because the Nazis could not risk allowing them to survive as witnesses, and in fact their first duty was likely to be disposing of the corpses of their predecessors on the ghastly production line of death. Chaim Hermann described Auschwitz as ‘simply hell, but Dante’s hell is incomparably ridiculous in comparison with this real one here, and we are its eye-witnesses, and we cannot leave it alive’. He also said that he intended to die ‘calmly, perhaps heroically (this will depend on circumstances) ’, hinting at a final act of resistance, but it is not known whether he achieved that. He himself had no way of knowing whether his wife would ever receive his letter, but in the midst of all this diabolical evil he asked her forgiveness for not sufficiently appreciating their life together, and this was the sentence in his letter that most affected me: ‘If there have been, at various times, trifling misunderstandings in our life, now I see how one was unable to value the passing time.’

> As Wittgenstein said, ‘Death is not an event of life.’ You cannot experience it, you can only behold it happening to others, with various degrees of pity and fear, knowing that one day it will happen to you.

By the way, I was reading this book and Beat the Reaper at the same time, and in both books, the main characters visit Auschwitz. What a coincidence.

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### Oscar says

David Lodge está considerado como uno de los mejores escritores de humor inglés de nuestro tiempo. Es imposible e inevitable no echar alguna carcajada con sus libros. Su tema favorito son las novelas de campus, es decir, aquellos que tienen como protagonista la vida universitaria y los líos en los que se menten los profesores, tanto con sus alumnos como con sus familias.

En 'La vida en sordina' (en el original 'Deaf Sentence', jugando ya con las palabras), Desmond Bates, catedrático en lingüística, es un profesor jubilado que prefirió acogerse a la jubilación anticipada cuando la universidad decidió fusionar los departamentos de inglés y lingüística. Aparte de este motivo, el más decisivo fue que se estaba quedando sordo; apenas oye sin los audífonos. Esto da lugar a muchos equívocos y juegos de palabras (impresionante la labor en la traducción de Jaime Zulaika). Como dice el protagonista: "La sordera es cómica, así como la ceguera es trágica."

Desmond nos cuenta sus problemas por culpa de la sordera; las visitas que realiza a su padre, antiguo músico de orquesta de baile, que se niega a mudarse; el lío en el que se mete al no entender bien a una joven que conoció en una galería... Todo ello aderezado por agudas reflexiones.

Yo no diría que 'La vida en sordina' es sólo una comedia. Te ríes en algunos momentos, pero también te conmueves con otros, como puede ser la relación de Desmond con su padre. David Lodge es un gran escritor, su prosa es culta, refinada y te hace recapacitar.

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### Christi says

What happened to David Lodge? I used to love his witty sense of humor and ability to capture the world of academia, but this novel is just awful. It's as if he took all of his notes and diaries, collected various story possibilities and topics he had found interesting, and threw them together with a few old ideas for characters and plots to make one jumbled mess of a story. I think it was supposed to be funny, but it wasn't. I think it was supposed to be profound, but it really wasn't. Don't waste your time!

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### Jan-Maat says

Death sentence, deaf sentence. Rutirement, retirement. That is this novel in four words. A serious comedy with knowingly laboured puns.

Since the narrator is a retired professor of linguistics who is going deaf this must be a post-campus novel. The narrator's professional knowledge allows him to understand why he can't distinguish any more between the sound of different consonants. Its not quite Beethoven, as the narrator admits but the situation still has its own poignancy.

In addition to this the narrator reflects on his changing relationship with his wife, and his fears about his father both of which are affected by his increasing deafness.

I enjoyed the construction of the characters, the son working in low temperature physics - which involves eliminating the energy from particles - who has eliminated feeling from his life in the wake of his Mother's death, the daughter giving birth as the Narrator visits Auschwitz and as the narrator's father slips away from life.

The narrator is particularly nicely done. He almost reminds the reader that history repeats itself first as tragedy and then as comedy, and this idea is a leitmotiv in the story. First his deafness, introduced as tragedy when the consultant gives him the prognosis but then is swiftly undercut by his second deafness when his hearing aid is run over by a van and his third when his hearing aid is lost beneath the seat fixings of the car. However this idea is also used to serious effect. The visit to Gladeworld (a prison like holiday centre with chalets) parallels the visit to Auschwitz, the Sonderkommando there parallels his own role in the death of his first wife and later his father.

As with Therapy or Thinks there is an interplay between the comic, the serious, the learned and the everyday. This allows Lodge to assert a cultural unity and the work becomes a state of the nation novel. Not in a strident way, but realistic in tone and taking in everything from care homes to the kitchen sink via the supermarket cafe.

Interesting to see how Lodge uses the same material in different ways in his books. The affair with a student taken from Thinks and reused here or the father from Nice Work aged a bit to play a different part in Deaf Sentence.

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