

Inaugural address

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The anacoluthic interruption: biographical fiction and the example of Henry James



The relationship between truth and representation has had a long and eventful history, from Plato's unequivocal privileging of metaphysical Forms over mimesis, to postmodernism's radical and subversive foregrounding of the lack of any possibility of distinction between the two. Written into this history is the biography of the author, whose status has fallen vertiginously from that of mystic prophet and immortal crucible of the truth, epitomized by Coleridge (298) as a dangerous, fearsome figure who has 'drunk the milk of Paradise', to that of a corpse, killed off by Roland Barthes (1967) and his like in the name of truth's constructedness, and the birth of the reader.

It's been 40-odd years now since Barthes made his once outrageous proclamation that the author is dead: I say '*once* outrageous' because the claim has gained such a firm foothold in the academy and in popular culture that it has become normative and, apparently, unassailable. However, as Freud has taught us, that which is repressed can never stay buried for long, and insists itself uncannily in our dreams, our metaphors and our narratives. It is my contention that in recent years, the uncanny author has re-emerged with increasing insistence. The deep soil that covers the much-visited grave of the author has displayed some unnerving disturbance: the headstone is tilted, some commemorative urns overturned, and, in the dead of night, some observers have reported sightings of exhumers at work in the Author's mausoleum.

What these ‘postmortemists’ⁱ all have in common is that they are authors, themselves, and they are all preoccupied with writing about writers and writing. Beryl Bainbridge kneels beside the grave of Samuel Johnson, Peter Ackroyd moves compulsively from Chatterton to Oscar Wilde, to Milton, to Charles and Mary Lamb (and Shakespeare, necessarily); with similar compulsion, Anthony Burgess wanders from Shakespeare to Keats to Christopher Marlowe. Julian Barnes lays a commemorative deerstalker hat and a pipe next to the resting place of Arthur Conan Doyle. Tom Stoppard, Michael Hastings, Stephen Sondheim, Andrew Motion, Michael Cunningham, Malcolm Bradbury: all there. Even that most elusive, crepuscular of writers, JM Coetzee, might be glimpsed, pretending not to be scratching at the headstone of Dostoevsky.

One tomb, in particular, has attracted an inordinate amount of attention. Drawn simultaneously and apparently ineluctably to the same spot in the centre of the cemetery is a *group* of writers. Elbowing for room, they share a look of bemusement; startled, disconcerted and not a little displeased to find one another there. On the periphery stand John Drury, Carol de Chellis Hill, Kathryn Kramer and Elizabeth Maguire. In the centre kneel Emma Tennant, Joseph Epstein, Cynthia Ozick, Colm Tóibín, David Lodge, Alan Hollinghurst, Edmund White and Michiel Heyns. The headstone they have dislodged is inscribed with the name, ‘Henry James’, beneath which, only barely discernible (it’s been vandalized) reads one word: ‘Master’.

In his 2002 essay “‘Le Parjure,’ *Perhaps: Storytelling and Lying*’, Jacques Derrida ponders upon the nuanced distinctions between truth and fiction that are disrupted and

redrawn in a 'text in homage' (164) written about his dear friend, philosopher, writer, Nazi sympathiser and dissembler, Paul de Man. The novel (*Le Parjure*, by Henri Thomas) 'appears', writes Derrida, 'to be narrative, of course ... but poses formidable problems in its relation to the so-called 'real' history ... to *fiction*, to *witnessing*, in short to all the "unknowns" that today can be inscribed under the words *truth* and *reality*, but also *sincerity*, *lying*, *invention*, *simulacrum*, *perjury*, etc' (165). I would like to propose that Derrida's essay offers some strategies for the articulation of a critical response to this new mode of writing, a mode that is not simply 'text in homage', but *author-centric* text in homage. In the course of this lecture, then, I shall take Derrida's essay as a point of departure, ask, and attempt to answer, a few questions I have about this phenomenon, such as: what does it mean to write a novel about a novelist – especially a novelist *par excellence* such as Henry James? What characterizes the narrative moment in which author becomes character, and author's history becomes fiction? Are there points of narratological convergence amongst these texts, and if so, what do these practices tell us about writing creatively about creativity, and, indeed, about authorship? What does the instance of James-centric fiction tell us about author-centric biographical fiction generally, and what might it suggest about the status of the Author, whom we once firmly believed was safely (if regrettably) dead?

In his essay, Derrida ponders upon the deconstructive logic of perjury - a 'false oath' - and the implication of this logic that truth and lying are caught up in a tension of mutual definition. It is precisely this tension that the term 'biographical fiction' embraces: 'biography' promises a truth, but the term 'fiction' promises, swears to, equally

forcefully, a lie. 'Biographical fiction' is therefore, is a 'false oath' (298). The author of such a text is a perjurer, 'pleading guilty and not guilty at the same time' (Derrida 163) and recklessly forging a treacherous path between historical record, '[s]torytelling and lying'.

The metaphor that Derrida chooses in order to express this tension is the anacoluthon – a grammatical term that describes an 'abrupt breach ... of syntax' (161), 'a break or change of direction in speech ... often signaled by a dash'.ⁱⁱ In the course of a meticulous reading of Thomas's novel, Derrida posits a generalized anacoluthia which describes 'the border between fiction and reality, between literature and testimonial document' (186). It represents for Derrida an *interruption* that marks an interstitial moment, where storytelling as truth and storytelling as lying are imbricated. In the words of Hillis Miller, '[a]nacoluthon doubles the storyline and so makes the story probably a lie; it is the middle's perturbation' (quoted by Derrida, 161).

The 'middle's perturbation' is also described by the second term in the title of Derrida's essay: '*Perhaps*'. 'Perhaps', he writes,

hesitates between *creative* invention, the production of what is not – or was not earlier – and *revelatory* invention, the discovery and unveiling of what *already* is or finds itself to be there. Such an invention thus hesitates *perhaps*, it is suspended undecidably between fiction and truth, but also between lying and veracity, that is, between perjury and fidelity. (168)

'Perhaps', I would argue, too, is a subjunctive gesture that characterizes biographical fiction. 'What might James have done? or said? or thought? or written?'. These incarnations of *'perhaps'* are the questions that all of the novels about James ask, in one way or another, and in doing so mark the moment of anacoluthic interruption. The context of the question swears allegiance to the truth of historical record; the answer disturbs the logic of the question and imagines, conjectures, speculates, 'doubles the storyline' and is *'perhaps'* – 'probably a lie'. At once duplicitous and honest, constative and performative (Derrida 190) it swears to and disarms the truth, with its fingers crossed behind its back/in full view.

Of course, in order for the anacoluthon to have any traction at all, it must rely for the conditions of its existence upon its binary opposite: the acolyte, the servant and follower, the devotee of the truth. There cannot be a 'middle perturbation' without a context, we cannot comprehend a doubled storyline unless we can comprehend of a single one; there cannot be an 'abrupt breach of syntax' without a syntax to disrupt. But the acolyte itself is not an unequivocal position. As Derrida observes, the acolyte 'is an attached subject, who ... *assists* in a double sense: he is present and he aids, he supplements ... He can also become the accomplice in a suspicious or even guilty act. ... In this role of the substitute, which is both necessary and contingent, essential and secondary ... [h]e is someone who, repeatedly, *assists*, but not without giving someone the slip a little'. (181)

The authors of fictions about James reflect precisely this aporia. As acolytes, they inscribe, swearing to tell the truth, but their supplementarity is always dangerous, and

threatens to give us ‘the slip, a little’. They write and are written on that most perilous of graphemes, the dash - or the forward slash - between acolyte/anacoluthon.

It is in the spirit of the acolyte who pays homage that the two most well-known novels about James are written: Colm Tóibín’s *The Master* and David Lodge’s *Author, Author*. The titles of these novels give us an apparently unequivocal indication of their purpose: ‘The Master’ was a term of reverence used by James’s contemporaries and adopted by later scholars and biographers, and the phrase ‘Author, Author’ is an invitation to a playwright to receive the accolades of an appreciative audience. Indeed, the first and catastrophic performance of James’s play *Guy Domville* is central to both David Lodge’s and Colm Tóibín’s novels (Lodge 230-265; Tóibín 11-19).ⁱⁱⁱ James was called to the stage after the performance of his play, the failure of which he was fatally unaware. Slipping in backstage just as the play had ended, James heard what he assumed was appreciative calls for his presence. He walked onto the stage and faced his audience.

This is how Tóibín describes what followed:

This was the crowd he had imagined over those long days of rehearsal. He had imagined them attentive and ready to be moved, he had imagined them still and somber. He had not prepared himself for the chaos of noise and busy fluttering. He took it in for a moment, confused, then bowed. And when he lifted his head he realized what he was facing. In the stalls and in the gallery the members of the paying public were hissing and booing. He looked around and saw mockery and contempt. The invited audience remained seated, still applauding, but the

applause was drowned out by the crescendo of loud, rude disapproval which came from the people who had never read his books. (18)

The event has, as newspaper articles and letters tell us, a firm foundation in historical fact; however, the *'perhaps'* that is written into this description - the subjunctive imaginings of what he saw and felt and expected – inaugurates the moment in which acolytes and anacoluthia coincide. The audience's reaction – and Tóibín and Lodge's staging of it - is a clear case of anacoluthia: the logic of tribute demands the response of an audience 'attentive and ready to be moved', but the anacoluthic interruption intrudes in the form of 'hissing and booing'.

The occasion resonates within the deep narrative of these novels, the metaphorical force of their (re)staging of James paradoxically highlighting the elusiveness of their subject. As James is exposed to the glare of the footlights, so is he minutely observed by Tóibín's and Lodge's gaze in their texts. Such observation, however, discovers nothing so much as his spectrality. Much of Lodge's novel, for instance, is devoted to the painstaking journey of delay, deferral, revision and frustration that James travels towards the staging of *Guy Domville*, and one is struck by how much of this novel about an author is devoted to *not* writing. Tóibín's James, by the same token, is haunted by 'nameless and numinous' ghosts; and James himself remains almost mute throughout, a symptom, I think, of the difficulty of establishing James as a stable presence, coloured as this presence is with the hues of tentativeness, provisionality and deferral.

Tóibín and Lodge compensate for their character's resistance to public exposure with an imaginative reconstruction of James's domestic privacy. In Lodge's novel, this deflection into the domestic takes the form of presenting James as a victim of prosaic corporeal imperatives, the frequency of these references providing the giddy mix of caricature and compassion that courses through the narrative. In Tóibín's novel, the hazardous route from privacy to publicity takes the form of a delicate sketching of James's intimate world, of a life characterized by hesitancy and subterfuge. The fictional uncovering of James's mawkish sexual hesitancy places Tóibín on a knife edge between the public dignity afforded by repression and the personal freedom permitted by exposure.

The titles of both Tóibín's and Lodge's novels, then, betray the *irony* of James's Mastery – and their own – and the double bind in which they find themselves. Tóibín's James bears little of the authority or arrogance that one might reasonably associate with Mastery: indeed, the words most commonly used to describe his emotions in Tóibín's novel speak of personal and professional vulnerability. And Lodge's title is remarkably multivalent. The words, "Author! Author!" that call James onto the stage of the theatre and of the novel are repeated throughout Lodge's text, but more often than not are summonses to humiliation and failure. The ending of Lodge's novel, in which Lodge seeks to call James back on stage and reverse history – "*Henry, wherever you are – take a bow*" (382) – is striking and heartfelt, but belated. At the same time, however, in the repetition of *Author, Author* not only does James find reference, but also James and Lodge, thus resisting the hierarchically-determined conduit between creator and created,

master and acolyte, truth and lying; the title of the novel representing above all a cohabitation of the author position.

What I find intriguing about both of these novels is that while they set out to restore James, only to find a persistent, gnawing absence, there is nevertheless an undeniable appeal in the project – an appeal acknowledged by both writers in their post-novel essays and by the enthusiastic reception both novels have received. One way to account for this paradox would be to recognize within the anatomy of the anacoluthic dash a structuring principle of pleasure. For reader and author alike, to circle around ^{iv} James's absence by means of fiction – by, that is, the strategy of 'perhaps' - is to afford an oblique intimation of presence: a tantalizing glimpse that is as thrilling as it is frustrating. Our desire for the author can never be fulfilled – it almost goes without saying – but that need not mean we should dismiss the creative, pleasurable possibilities adumbrated both by our yearning and by the seductive deceptions of perjury that are peculiar to biographical fiction.

The pleasure and perils of acolyteship – and of making 'an abrupt breach of syntax' – are handled considerably more satirically in Alan Hollinghurst's Booker prize-winning novel about Britain in the 1980s, *The Line of Beauty*. The subjunctive 'perhaps' here resides in the persistently implied question, 'If James were here, what would he have observed?'. James is not a character *per se* in this novel, but it is as much 'about' Henry James, his style and his aestheticism, as much as it is 'about' Thatcherite Britain and its lack of both. The central character, Nick Guest – an acolyte manqué, if not an acolyte in fact – desperately attempts to ventriloquize the Master as a defense against the vulgarities and

moral wasteland in which he finds himself. Celibate, sexually hesitant James becomes erotically inflected as the reader is forced to wonder what his reaction would be, were he to watch his devotee romp his way – first exultantly, but with growing cynicism and disappointment – through the gay scene of London at the brink of the Aids epidemic.

Nick is writing his doctoral thesis on style in James: a thesis whose lack of completion is a symptom of aestheticism's vulnerability in a contemporary world of vulgarity in which it all too often translates into snobbery and moral dereliction. The 'line of beauty' refers to Hogarth's ogee, a curve that expresses the *ne plus ultra* of perfection and style: but it soon also comes to represent the line of cocaine in which Nick's estimations of style find their chimerical worth. The line of beauty that describes the sensuous curves of Nick's lover's body also becomes a line of delimitation, an indefinable but uncrossable distinction that bars him off from his desires, whether these desires are for acceptance, love, fulfillment or, indeed, unproblematic communion with his Master.

In this novel, Henry James becomes the alter ego that Nick desires but is precluded from ever possessing. However, it could be argued that it is Hollinghurst, for all his apparent rejection of James's effeteness, who most desires the author in the novel. Nick, after all, is as much an object of Hollinghurst's satire as anything else, and his appropriation of James as a means of signifying his own special aesthetic sensibilities is shown to be just that: a forced colonization, rather than a legitimate entitlement. Hollinghurst, on the other hand, channels James too, in spite of his determination to maintain an ironic detachment. His ill-concealed desire for James is most evident in his appropriation of

James's style as the quintessence of observation. It is also present in the persistent reference to James's novel *The Spoils of Poynton*. This novel - a text that tests precisely the line of beauty that separates the precipice over which a passion for art can tip over in to crudity and moral desertion - is recalled throughout Hollinghurst's own as a standard of moral, aesthetic and narrative nuance. In this instance, the line of beauty as standard and as grapheme tropes the dash, the forward slash, that marks the moment of anacoluthic interruption.

Hollinghurst's novel manages, then, to satirize acolyteship while maintaining a distinct nostalgia for it. What is of particular significance here is the erotic aspect of its anacoluthic logic, a trend that informs many of the biographical fictions about James. In the 1990s, James became something of a cause célèbre for queer theorists, thanks to whom we all now know that James was homosexual, in desire if not in practice. The queering of Henry James has spawned a whole new cadre of acolytes whose project it is to write transgressively about James's transgressions. These writers, queer themselves, find a point of identification with the queer Henry James - but to write about James's sexuality is to 'out' him, to defy the secrecy with which he guarded it from others and, apparently, himself. What we have here is a strong instance of how the acolyte is also 'the accomplice in a suspicious or even guilty act', inasmuch as suspicion and guilt would have determined James's own sexual panic. Such a response is intuitively anticipated in Edmund White's biographical fiction - what he describes as a 'fantasia on the real themes provided by history' (223) - *Hotel de Dream*. In this novel, James's neighbour and fellow writer, Stephen Crane, dictates from his deathbed an intensely

homo-erotic novel to his common-law wife. Reaching the end of his life and his novel more or less simultaneously, he implores Cora to pass it on to James, confident that the Master will see that it is published. Recalling that 'James [might have been] just the least bit sweet on Stevie' (220) she does so. James, however, destroys the novel, writing to Cora that he has 'quietly committed this embarrassment to the fireplace here at Rye. Not a word remains. Naturally, you and I both wanted to silence even the slightest rumour that such a dank inspiration ever besmirched our Stevie's genius, characteristically so sunny and virile. Never fear. Now his reputation is safe. We have protected it' (220-1). There is no historical record to suggest that James did such a thing – in fact, there is no real evidence that Crane's novel was ever written – but it does vividly make the point. To write 'queer' is a clear instance of an abrupt breach of 'straight' sexual syntax. To write queer of Henry James is, paradoxically, to betray him by asserting one's acolyteship and membership of the inner sanctum.

In 1896, plagued by a persistent pain in his right hand, Henry James bought a typewriter, and employed an amanuensis to whom he dictated his novels. This decision provides our James-fixated writers with an extraordinarily productive trope. The amanuensis is, quite simply, the acolyte whose occupation demands complete subservience, who is metonymically the 'hand' of Master. However, the amanuensis, as we shall see, is always interruptive, transgressive, dangerously supplemental, and anacoluthic.

James's last and most enduring amanuensis, Theodora Bosanquet, presides at the centre of Cynthia Ozick's novella, 'Dictation', which imagines a meeting between Bosanquet,

and Lilian Hallowes, Joseph Conrad's amanuensis. Bosanquet, driven partly by sexual desire for Hallowes, and partly by a desire for immortality, persuades her to collaborate in an act of deception. They agree each to smuggle into the texts of the author whose work they are transcribing a line from the other 'Master'. The result is that in 'Henry James's London rooms a small dazzling fragment of "The Secret Sharer" flows, as if ordained, into the unsuspecting veins of "The Jolly Corner," and in Joseph Conrad's study in a cottage in Kent the hot fluids of "The Jolly Corner" run, uninhibited, into a sutured crevice in "The Secret Sharer"' (Ozick 49). The novella presents a succinct commentary on the anatomy of the interstitial realm between telling the truth and lying, between historical fact and *perhaps*, between obedience and transgression that the amanuensis as acolyte inhabits.

In yet another remarkable coincidence in this maze of remarkable coincidences, Theodora Bosanquet also provides the model for Frieda Wroth, the central consciousness of Michiel Heyns's third novel, *The Typewriter's Tale*, who also, incidentally, dabbles in an act of deception by conspiring to steal James's letters. One of the earliest observations Frieda makes about her position in James's household is that she is "neither guest nor servant". This rueful remark describes her liminal status as both writer and amanuensis; of being, on the one hand, in possession of a keen "intellectual hunger" (76) and in an exclusive position of physical and mental proximity with her master, but fated, on the other, to be little more than a device, or a "wistful presence peering in at the windows, as it were, of the stronghold of his art" (77). Intriguingly, the conditions that describe Frieda's occupation and the role she plays in the novel, index Heyns's own narrative

practice in *The Typewriter's Tale* and his status as a writer of biographical fiction. The plot has Frieda Wroth at its centre, and it is through her consciousness that we are asked to observe events. But the self-reflexive deep narrative of the text – its experimentations with style; its preoccupations with the relationships between privacy and publicity, and between discretion and betrayal; its investigation of what it means to be a writer; and above all in the way its sustained chord of wistful yearning is counterpointed by a sensual expression of the heady delights of writing Henry James – demonstrates that the novel is as much about James and Heyns as it is about Frieda.

In her attempts to write a novel of her own, Frieda aims to copy James's iconoclastic late style, with hilarious and parodic consequences. However, the narrative of the novel itself (which, we discover, is written after all, by Frieda) deliberately and vividly recalls James's style; a deeply-felt tribute that is a consequence, I think, of Heyns's keen familiarity with James's work. The reticulation of parody and homage in the novel demonstrates the often perilously fine distinction that the biographical novelist must draw between creative representation and brutal exposure. To simply mimic James's style would be, equally simply, to poke fun at the source. But to engage with James's style at the level not only of allusion, but of the very syntax deployed by the narrative voice of the novel, is to create a palimpsest in which James's writing glimmers through that of Heyns.

Heyns's appropriation of James's words might be regarded in one sense as a fantasy of intimacy, a possibility most clearly articulated in the presentation of mediums and

telepathy in the novel. Frieda's experiments with the Remington lead her to dabble in automatic writing through which she channels other characters in the novel. Heyns's treatment of telepathy is (like his deployment of pastiche) far from simply satirical; rather, it voices a generalized desire for union with the dead. Heyns's and Frieda's incorporation of the phenomenon of automatic writing into their novel presents the possibility of their having a privileged position vis-à-vis Henry James as mediums in possession of a discrete and mysterious power.

The second point to be made with regard to telepathy in *The Typewriter's Tale* is that it is pointedly associated with sexual pleasure. If Frieda's story can legitimately be read as a parable about a writer and his contemplation of privacy, creativity and influence, then its explorations of the erotically-charged aspects of telepathic communication can equally legitimately be read as representing the promise and fantasy of presence and physical closeness with the writer/muse that carries with it all the frisson and allure of forbidden sex, effacing thereby, however chimerically and fleetingly, distance and deferral.

In the course of an interview that followed a seminar on 'Life. After. Theory.', Derrida was invited to comment further on his deconstruction of the acolyte/anacoluthon opposition, and to speculate on its relevance for the future of literary theory. Derrida takes this opportunity to embark on a playful but nonetheless suggestive contemplation of how the first-person conjugation of the verb "to follow" in French is "je suis" – a precise homonym for the verb "to be" (Derrida 2003:14 and 2002: 196). The simultaneity of *following* (which implies a distinct hierarchy of priority over anteriority) with *being* in

this homonymic coincidence, of acolyte with anacoluthon, perfectly describes the deconstructive turn of, for example, the palimpsests at work in these novels about James: our unequivocal apprehensions of authorial origin are unsettled because we have James's words *at the same time as* (not prior to) Tóibín's, or Hollinghurst's, or Lodge's, or Ozick's, or Heyns's. The platonic convention of the superiority of copula over representation is also thus effaced: in order to *be* (a writer) they must *follow*. They must acknowledge their status as anterior and acolyte - "je suis/ I follow" - but to follow, suggests Derrida, *is* to be, to proclaim "je suis/I am".

All of these writers are forced to acknowledge that to write about James is to write in contravention of his explicit and repeated edicts against biography. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that as homage counterpoints parody, and as following becomes being in these novels, so self-justification ameliorates bald betrayal. Heyns acknowledges in an essay that novels such as his are 'treason to the high Jamesian ideal of privacy, discretion [and] proportion' (2004: 3). Commenting on the extraordinary coincidence of meeting Colm Tóibín at Lamb House, Heyns writes that James's home, his "retreat from publicity and scandal and inquiry, had become the site of betrayal: the tower of art had been scaled, the enemy was within the walls. We defied the prohibitions of the man in order to bring tribute to the master" (2004: 4). Writing against the dictates of the Master and within the confines of biographical fiction, Heyns and his co-conspirators nevertheless make it clear that there are irresistible pleasures closely attached to betrayal, and that they might indeed be worth the price. This moral ambivalence speaks, I think, of the imaginative *jouissance* – daring, faintly illicit, compelling – that I have observed to be a consequence of writing

author-centric biographical fiction. The term is especially useful here because it describes a near-erotic pleasure that carries with it joy that is at once delightful and unsettling and destabilizing; sensations, as we have seen, that perfectly describe the mutually determining gestures of acolyte and anacoluthon, that proclaim, 'je suis'.

One could argue that the writers I have mentioned here are simply 'Late Bloomers': that in their reinscriptions of and departures from James they are demonstrating a form of the anxiety of influence, in which the writer must mimic, then kill off his literary father. But I find this solution unsatisfactory: while a fine line of anxiety undeniably courses through these novels, it is easily as well matched by a glee that sits uneasily with Harold Bloom's dismal vision. Bloom describes the anxiety that characterizes the writer's anteriority and misreading in unmistakably negative terms: it is a 'mode of melancholy', a 'dark and daemonic ground' (25). Furthermore, the anxiety of influence is a subterranean psychic secret that fails adequately to account for the frank embodiment of (and desire for) author as character that takes place in these novels. To be and simultaneously to follow is not, significantly, simply a condition of verticality as Bloom's oedipal paradigm suggests, but posits, instead, a horizontal model of co-presence.

The return of the author is no doubt a moment inaugurated by the recent loosening of the firm grip with which high literary theory has held literary studies. It might also be a consequence of a return to pragmatic criticism, to neo-realism, to skepticism about skepticism and impatience with postmodernism. In certain respects, it might be well be a symptom of a rather nasty literary and cultural conservatism that does not bode well for

those of us who continue to believe that truth is constructed, and that remaining alert to this constructedness is sometimes our only defense against dictatorship, religious fanaticism and all kinds of reactionary intellectualism dressed up in the beguiling garb of common sense.

However, the metaphor of the anacoluthon and its function in author-centric biographical fiction provides us with a more positive frame of reference, as well as a more optimistic sense of cultural zeitgeist. These novels about James, and by implication, biographical fictions generically, are openly perjurous yet reject the apocalyptic destabilizations of the relationship between sign and referent that characterizes postmodernism. They are lies, *perhaps*, they are true, *perhaps*. By their imaginative reconstructions, faith in and skepticism about telepathic communion, their erratic memory and memorialization, by writing through 'the unsublatable thickness of time' (Derrida 173), in palimpsest, in the liminal space between parody and homage, and by foregrounding the heady, perilous disobedience that is always a possibility in acolyteship, they disinter and reinscribe the author in such a way as to reclaim his or her authority without anxiety, and without theology. Towards the end of his essay, Derrida remarks that 'the narrator is constantly tormented by a disturbance of identification. He wonders at what moment and even whether he will ever have the right to say 'us'' (186) and goes to some length to stress the significance of the context of the 'theatre of the academy' in which *Le Parjure* is set. In the same spirit, I suggest that the abrupt breaches of syntax I have discussed today, are not a killing off, but a collaboration. Most importantly, they posit, for the theatre of the academy, the possibility of 'us': we are all perjurers in the service of truth. They reject

what has become the lonely, egoistic onanism of reader-centric literary criticism and offer an invitation to celebrate a participatory collaboration of reading, writing, theory and - for many of us in this room - scholarship.

ⁱ I borrow this phrase from Malcolm Bradbury (153).

ⁱⁱ "ANACOLUTHON" *Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*. Ed. Tom McArthur. Oxford University Press, 1998. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Johannesburg University. 3 September 2008 <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.ujlink.uj.ac.za:80/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t29.e69>>

ⁱⁱⁱ My discussion of Tóibín's and Lodge's texts is developed in Scherzinger 2008a.

^{iv} See Catherine Belsey's account of the 'magic circle' (72).



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