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**‘Life After Derrida: Anacoluthia and the Agrammaticality of Following’  
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## **Life After Derrida: Anacoluthia and the Agrammaticality of Following**

we could not not be haunted by the memory we still had of him. We could not not know that we were in some way being observed internally by him, by the spectral vigilance of his gaze, even if this quasi “presence” in no way limited our freedom. In truth, it even sharpened our responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

Writing following the death of his friend Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida delineates (only) three possibilities ‘in the *time* that relates us to texts and to their presumed, nameable, and authorized signatories’: the first is that the author is already dead when we begin to read him, or when that reading orders us to write about him; the second, that the author is living at that same moment, in which case we might know them or not know them, meet them or not meet them, and – in possibly coming to meet them – love them or not love them; the last, that we might read those we knew, met and loved at their death and after their death, that is to say, (immediately) following their death.<sup>2</sup> This final possibility provokes Derrida’s deepest anxiety. For he has written

about authors long since dead, and – perhaps with most risk – about those remaining yet alive, but, he writes,

what I thought impossible, indecent, and unjustifiable, what long ago and more or less secretly and resolutely I had promised myself never to do (out of concern for rigor or fidelity, if you will, and because it is in this case *too* serious), was to write *following the death*, not after, not long after the death *by returning* to it, but just following the death, *upon or on the occasion of the death*, at the commemorative gatherings and tributes, in the writings “in memory” of those who while living would have been my friends, still present enough that some “declaration,” indeed some analysis or “study,” would seem at that moment completely unbearable. (WM, 49-50)

It is no doubt a tribute to Derrida’s immense personal capacity for friendship that he does not consider in this catalogue a fourth possibility – that of writing (immediately) following the death of an author we did not meet, did not know, and therefore who we could not, at least in person, have loved, yet whose texts and whose thoughts we have long been intimate with, have, indeed, long loved. How do we ‘negotiate’ – a word that, etymologically, evokes the disquiet or uneasiness inherent in such a procedure – this task?<sup>3</sup> Is it not, perhaps, even more impossible, even more indecent, even more

unjustifiable – if not, in fact, plain improper – to presume to write, in some sense, ‘in memory’ of someone we did not know?

‘Yet something I did wish to say.’<sup>4</sup>

It is in this predicament that I am, at this very moment, writing (immediately) following the death of the man, Jacques Derrida. His death does not signify for me in the way that it does for those who knew him, who loved him, who enjoyed the gift of his friendship. In the face of their grief, I feel presumptuous to think that I might mourn him. Yet, at the same time, I feel his loss. Not the loss of his person, for that I never knew, nor, strangely, the loss of his work, since there is so much I have still to read, since I know that Derrida’s thought will live on in his writing – ‘life [mine and his?] was going to continue (there was still so much to read)’ (WM, 37). I know that I will keep reading him, that I will continue to think through him, that his influence on my thought and those of others will not lessen due to the absence of the man behind the signature on a plethora of texts we have both read and have yet to read: ‘Jacques Derrida’. But despite knowing all this, I feel bereft.

It is the desire to formulate my sense of loss in terms other than those of mourning – a desire driven by my equally strong sense of impropriety to be feeling such loss at all – that has led me back, on the event of Derrida’s death, to the only text I ever heard him speak, to the one time I met, albeit briefly, Jacques Derrida, the man: ‘Life After Theory’, Loughborough University, Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2001. (I remember

having the uncanny sensation whilst listening to Derrida that day, whilst watching him smoke my friend's liquorice cigarette in the evening, that I was listening to the dead, watching the actions of a ghost. This man had only ever figured for me as the powerful and awesome mind behind the many texts on which I fed. His physical and human presence seemed only a momentary apparition until he returned again to the pages in which I was most familiar with him. Even more, I knew that this would be the only time he would appear before me. I knew that, when I left Loughborough, he would disappear, and that before I had the opportunity to see him again Derrida would die. I listened to him so carefully that day, I watched him so closely, because I knew that from, even in, that moment, and then for the rest of my life, he would always be dead.)

At Loughborough, Derrida presented the paper published in *Without Alibi* (2002) as “‘Le Parjure,’ *Perhaps: Storytelling and Lying*’. Even as I was listening to him speak, I knew that I would return to this text – it placed its urgent demand on me to be read, and to be written upon. I did not know when I would respond to that demand – that time is now. What particularly caught my attention in Derrida's paper was *the anacoluthon*, a substantivised figure derived from the grammatical term *anacoluthia*: literally, a want of grammatical sequence; the passing from one construction to another before the former is completed. Derrida himself had been drawn to this figure by its significance in his friend J. Hillis Miller's recent work on the relationship between narrative and perjury, between, as Derrida's title repeats, storytelling and lying. In “‘Le

Parjure,” *Perhaps*’, Derrida is concerned to investigate further the ‘indissolubly ethico-literary question of testimonial narration and of fiction’ (WA, 170). He does so through a reading - informed by the connotations of the anacoluthon - of Henri Thomas’ novel *Le Parjure* (1964). Although “‘Le Parjure,” *Perhaps*’ is inspired by Hillis Miller’s writing and thought, Derrida wishes to

withdraw this text from the law of the genre “text in homage,” even if sincere, and from the well-known academic scene: a long-time colleague and friend devotes an essay to a friend and eminent colleague, to an influential and distinguished professor whose work - one of the richest and most impressive that he has been given to know and respect in the course of his life - he wishes, along with others, to salute. (WA, 164)

In place of such a text, Derrida instead performs that tribute by giving to Hillis Miller

to read and to judge, the most demanding interpretation possible, but the most trembling as well, of a certain “story” or “history,” and to do this while taking inspiration from the lesson that, like so many others, I have learned from him. (WA, 165)

In order to remember Hillis Miller - and, in doing so, to pay tribute to him in the most ethical way he can - Derrida does not write *about* him but *for* him. In ““Le Parjure,” *Perhaps*’, Derrida is indeed, to some extent, writing *on* Hillis Miller, but not in the sense of providing an exegesis. Rather, his text inhabits the same textual space as Hillis Miller’s work, just as the overlying text in a palimpsest shares the same vellum as the underlying text and is inhabited and haunted by it. As Derrida perceives (in the passage I have placed as epigraph to this paper), this haunting presence of the other in one’s own work is both the demand for, and the mark of, one’s responsibility to them.

Writing for a conference ‘in memory of the thought of Jacques Derrida’, I am struck by the tautological excess of this phrase. ‘In memory of Jacques Derrida’; ‘in the thought of Jacques Derrida’: these two phrases are synonymous, since the most ethical response I am capable of making to Derrida’s death, the most appropriate way in which I can remember him, is to offer to him - even though he is no longer here to receive it - the most demanding reading, writing and thought I am capable of, ‘taking inspiration from the lesson that, like so many others I have learned from him’ (WA, 165). In ““Le Parjure,” *Perhaps*’, Derrida prefaces the reading of the novel that he offers to Hillis Miller with three ‘reminders’, in all of which it is

a matter of figuring out what “to remember” means - and thinking *of* remembering: not forgetting to remember, not forgetting to keep memory,

but also thinking of remembering, which also means in its French syntax: to think *because, insofar as, as long as, insomuch as* one remembers, thought as memory and first of all as memory of self, memory of the other in the self. (WA, 166)

Derrida recognises an inseparable conjunction between memory and thought, whereby thought is memory; whereby one thinks insofar as one remembers, and, conversely, one remembers insofar as one thinks, of oneself, and ‘of the other in the self’. This conjunction finds itself expressed in the English verb ‘to remind’ - to re-mind - which signals ‘already a mnemotechnics at the heart of and not outside the thinking of thought’ (WA, 166). In this essay I do not respond to Derrida’s death in mourning, nor in thinking about mourning, but in the memory of thought.

### **Following: The Anacoluthon in Derrida’s “Le Parjure,” *Perhaps***

In the first of his three ‘reminders’, Derrida comments briefly on Hillis Miller’s recent interest in the relationship between literary fiction and ‘the great and inexhaustible history of the lie, that is, of perjury’ (WA, 166). In this context, Hillis



Miller is particularly interested in, “the implicit multiplicity of the authorizing source of the story”<sup>5</sup>, since, as Derrida explains,

as soon as there is more than one voice in a voice, the trace of perjury begins to get lost or to lead us astray. This dispersion threatens even the identity, the status, the validity of the concept - in particular the concept of perjury, but also and equally the word and the concept “I”. (WA, 166)

Hillis Miller ‘gives several names to this multiplicity of voices or “consciousnesses”’ (WA, 166), either ‘signing or forging a new term (for example, “polylogology,” or even “alogism”), or borrowing it and granting it a new destiny, another working out, as, for example, following Friedrich Schlegel, “permanent parabasis of irony”’ (WA, 166). But Derrida wishes

to insist on the most striking and no doubt the most productive of these figures, the one that assures a powerful general formalization even as it remains rooted and forever inscribed in the fictional singularity of a corpus that *already* produces it in itself, like a sort of general theorem, like a generalizable fiction, if I can put it that way, like a fiction having the value of theoretical truth and an ethical dimension: it is that of *anacoluthon*.

Doubtless more than a figure of rhetoric, despite appearances, it signals in any case toward the *beyond* of rhetoric *within* rhetoric. Beyond grammar *within* grammar. (WA, 166-7)

Derrida's admiration for Hillis Miller is directed here towards the 'necessity and elegance' of the procedure of his reading, writing and thought, whereby it is *in* the text upon which he is writing - in this instance, Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* - that Hillis Miller 'finds what he *invents*: namely, a noun and a concept that he will then put to work in a productive, demonstrative, generalizable fashion - well beyond this unique literary root, well beyond this *oeuvre*' (WA, 167).

Citing Hillis Miller, Derrida traces his concern with

"storytelling (in the double sense of lying and of narration), with memory as a precarious support of narrative continuity, and with anacoluthon's function in both storytelling and lying. Anacoluthon doubles the story line and so makes the story *probably* a lie." (WA, 167)

These concerns provide the matrix for Derrida's reading of Thomas' novel in the rest of the essay. It is not my purpose here to provide a summary of this reading. Rather, I wish to draw attention to the fact that in "Le Parjure," *Perhaps*, Derrida performs the same

process of reading, writing and thinking that he so admires in Hillis Miller's work. Derrida finds the figure of the anacoluthon in Hillis Miller's essay, just as Hillis Miller has found it in Proust. (Interestingly, Hillis Miller's attention was drawn to the passage in Proust by a footnote on the anacoluthon in Paul De Man's *Allegories of Reading* (1979) and, in a further twist, Paul De Man, perhaps, provides the real life model for the character of Stéphane in *Le Parjure*.) Like Hillis Miller, Derrida then proceeds to invent this concept, to put it to work 'in a productive, demonstrative, generalizable fashion - well beyond' (WA, 167) its root in Hillis Miller's text. He does so, in particular, with regard to the discontinuity of the self testified to by the anacoluthon and its relation to the structure of the oath, the promise and the Law.

In their discussions, both Hillis Miller and Derrida, quote the passage in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* in which the narrator describes Albertine's use of anacolutha, and the effect they have:

To tell the truth, I knew nothing that Albertine had done since I had come to know her, or even before. But in her conversation (she might, had I mentioned it to her, have replied that I had misunderstood her) there were certain contradictions, certain embellishments which seemed to me as decisive as catching her red-handed [*qui me semblaient aussi décisives qu'un flagrant délit*], but less usable against Albertine who, often caught out like a

child, had invariably, by dint of sudden, strategic changes of front, stultified my cruel attacks and retrieved the situation. Cruel, most of all, to myself. She employed, not by way of stylistic refinement, but in order to correct her imprudences, abrupt breaches of syntax not unlike the figure which the grammarians call anacoluthon or some such names [*de ces brusques sautes de syntaxe ressemblant un peu à ce que les grammairiens appellent anacoluthes ou je ne sais comment.*] Having allowed herself, while discussing women, to say: “I remember, the other day, I...,” she would suddenly, after a semi-quaver rest, change the “I” to “she”: it was something that she had witnessed as an innocent spectator, not a thing that she herself had done. It was not she who was the subject of the action [*Ce n’était pas elle qui était le sujet de l’action*]. (WA, 168)

Albertine’s ‘abrupt breaches of syntax’ consist in anacoluthic moments of hesitation, and subsequent pronominal shift from ‘I’ to ‘she’. Used in order to avoid the disclosure of her infidelity to her lover, Albertine’s anacolutha reveal an intimacy between the anacoluthon and the way in which the very idea of fidelity is dependent upon a denial of – and, at the same time, is always potentially compromised by – the discontinuity of the self which Albertine’s pronominal shifts exploit. Albertine’s anacolutha enable Derrida to delineate the idea that all those ultimate signifiers of fidelity – such as, the oath, the

promise, and, the Law – are, in essence, vows to refuse or resist the psycho-phenomenological truth that we are never the same at any one moment:

This law, and no doubt it is the Law itself, the origin of the Law, is destined to annul precisely temporal difference. The essential destination, the structural signification of the oath or the given word, is to commit oneself not to be affected by time, to remain the same at moment B, whatever may happen, as the one who swears previously, at moment A. This sublating negation of time is the very essence of fidelity, of the oath, and of sworn faith. The essence or the truth of the Law. But the perjurer, the one who perjurers himself or herself, can always seek to be excused, if not forgiven, by alleging, on the contrary, the unsublatable thickness of time and of what it transforms, the multiplicity of times, instants, their essential discontinuity, the merciless interruption that time inscribes in “me” as it does everywhere. That is the ultimate resource, or even the fatality, of the anacoluthon. (WA, 173)

The anacoluthon determines the (im)possibility of the promise: whatever other form it might take, the promise is always, in essence – and therein lies its gravity – a vow to defy the temporal change, rupture and discontinuity the anacoluthon represents; yet, at the same time, that anacoluthic discontinuity itself provides the grounds for the

disavowal of any promise, since one can always claim one's non-identity with the promiser one once was: "I sincerely promised in the past, but time has passed, precisely, passed or surpassed, and the one who promised, long ago or in the past, can remain faithful to his promise, but it is no longer me, I am no longer the same me, I am another, *I is another*" (WA, 173-4).

Albertine's anacoluthic dissolution of identity suggests the femininity of Derrida's idea of fidelity – a following that is also a not following – which is key to his concept of inheritance. The anacoluthic is that Other which is integral to, but disavowed by, the masculine ideal of fidelity upon which the Law, the oath, the proper name and the traditional patriarchal lineage depends. As such, there is undoubtedly a connection, as Nicholas Royle noted in discussion with Derrida at Loughborough, between the anacoluthon and the figure of the Woman, 'the absolute Other'.<sup>6</sup> In fact, it is precisely as this absolute other that Woman appears for the second time in "Le Parjure," *Perhaps*, in the character of Judith, Stéphane's wife in *Le Parjure*. Judith stands in opposition to 'all these acolytes who do not accompany...Paul de Man, Henri Thomas, Stéphane Chalier, Father Chalier, the narrator Hillis Miller' (WA, 199) and Derrida himself. Her presence exposes 'a kind of *idiocy* of man, of the two men who have understood nothing, the two acolytes, the perjurer and his witness' (WA, 198). Whilst they are 'sleeping in the same body in some way', she 'keeps watch, is stirring about, making decisions, and so on' (WA, 198). It is only she who has the power to arrest

these endless narrative chains of storytelling and lying, to perform the decisive action that terminates that chain, and, in fact, ends not just the novel, but also Derrida's discussion of it – the figure of the Woman ends “Le Parjure,” *Perhaps* just as she ends other Derrida texts such as *Otobiographies* and *Pas d'hospitalité*.<sup>7</sup>

In her decisiveness and her ability to act, Judith exposes the idiocy of these speaking and writing men. But, at the same time, ‘one feels an accusation on the horizon: a couple of men united as one, “a single idiot,” brothers, in sum, seems to denounce the woman’ (WA, 198). Both Albertine and Judith occupy ambivalent positions in this male narration. They are figures of power – of dissimulation and of action respectively – and yet they are also powerless, excluded from the brotherhood of the male by which they are represented. Albertine may provide the anacoluthic model for precisely the relationship that binds these men, but she remains definitively external to it – ‘the example of the eternal feminine, evasive and unpossesable’ (WA, 169). Whereas Albertine originates that textual and verbal relationality, Judith has the power to end it, to abort the word, to ‘keep’ this last word. This seems both a relief – she is the word’s ‘guardian’ – but also a dangerous termination. The transmission of the word falters, and, indeed, ends, in the possession of ‘an impassive and at bottom inaccessible woman’ (WA, 198) who is, again, wholly external to the male line that has up until now secured its transmission. In “Le Parjure,” *Perhaps*, the Woman is at once both envied and despised, necessary and evil, essential and excluded.

This woman, now, here, rereading “‘Le Parjure,’ *Perhaps*’, recalls that woman, then, there, in Loughborough, listening to Derrida speak it. She recalls taking umbrage at such a remarkably traditional figuration and reduction of the female. She recalls Nicholas Royle questioning Derrida on this issue, and Derrida’s response that ‘in many dialogical texts – or texts in which there are not simply two but more than one voice – I try to embody this absolute Other in the feminine voice’.<sup>8</sup> ‘But I’m still the Other,’ she cries. She recalls Derrida’s disavowal of this othering – ‘I was just commenting on the grammar of the text, it is it is *in the text*; it was not my thesis, I was just reading it’.<sup>9</sup> She recalls Derrida’s epigraph to “‘Le Parjure,’ *Perhaps*’:

By “the ethics of reading,” the reader will remember, I mean the aspect of the act of reading in which there is a response to the text that is both necessitated, in the sense that it is a response to an irresistible demand, and free, in the sense that I must take responsibility for my response and for further effects, “interpersonal,” institutional, social, political, or historical, of my act of reading, for example as that act takes the form of teaching or of published commentary on a given text. What happens when I read *must* happen, but I must acknowledge it as *my* act of reading, though just what the “I” is or becomes in this transaction is another question.<sup>10</sup>



In this essay, here, now, this woman seeks to usurp her othered status and join in the femininely engendered but masculinely enacted anacoluthic lineage of following and not following. Mine is a movement which is ambitious and indignant – to include a female voice in that line, and to insist on the necessity and rightness of that inclusion – and anxious – in entering into that line does one relinquish the power of these alternate ‘feminine’ spaces of thought and relationality? What alternate mode(1) of relationality, for instance, might be offered by the lesbian liaisons Albertine’s anacolutha both reveal and conceal? In the rest of this essay I risk, perhaps, betraying Derrida with an excess of fidelity by arresting here these reflections on the Woman. Instead, I wish to take the anacoluthon from Derrida, as he does from Hillis Miller, as he does from De Man, as he does from Proust, as he does from the great grammarians of the past. In my turn, I want to put this figure to work again - to invent it further - by exploring the way in which the anacoluthon lies at the heart of the process of reading and writing - indeed, of thinking - which is repeatedly performed by Hillis Miller, by Derrida and, in this instance, by myself.

### **Interruption**

In “‘Le Parjure,’ *Perhaps*’, Derrida cites Pierre Fontanier’s definition of the anacoluthon in *Les Figures du discours* (1968):

*“It consists in implying, and always in conformity with usage or without contravening it, the companion of an expressed word; it consists, I say, in letting stand alone a word that calls out for another as companion. This missing companion is no longer a companion; it is what in Greek is called Anacoluthon, and this name is also that of the figure.”* (WA, 182)

Fontanier’s definition emphasises, above all else, the interruptive element of the anacoluthon, the element which provokes feelings of disappointment, even loss, at the lack of the expected completion of the inaugural construction or thought. Interrupting the continuity of writing or speech, the anacoluthon leaves the reader or listener, albeit momentarily, with a sense of confusion and frustrated expectation - ‘the similarity between anacoluthon and parabasis stems from the fact that both figures interrupt the expectations of a given grammatical or rhetorical movement.’<sup>11</sup> The anacoluthon causes a perturbation (this is Hillis Miller’s word) - laced, as Fontanier’s definition emphasises, with sadness - which might best describe my feelings in response to Derrida’s death; perturbation, and, unfairly, a sense of betrayal, of infidelity, of a breach of promise (and here we are reminded of Albertine’s anacolutha):

*Anakolouthia* designates a rupture in the consequence, an interruption in the sequence itself, within a grammatical syntax or in an order in general, in an agreement, thus also in a set, whatever it may be, in a community, let's say, or a partnership, an alliance, a friendship, a being-together: a company or a guild [*compagnonnage*]. (WA, 181)

However, Fontanier's definition over-emphasises the absence or lack caused by the anacoluthon at the expense of recognising that the anacoluthon is not simply an interruption of speech or writing. Rather - as the OED definition of 'anacoluthia' reminds us - it is *the passing from one construction to another before the former is completed*. The anacoluthon contains an interruption of sequence, but it also provides an alternative ending; the construction *is* completed, albeit agrammatically. As Sarah Wood so acutely remarks in "“Try thinking as if perhaps...”" (2003) – an essay also 'spun out of' the Loughborough conference, at which she was the female discussant on Derrida's paper – Fontanier's definition of the anacoluthon differs from that to be found in dictionaries and rhetorical handbooks, for in such guides the anacoluthon is

'a non-sequential syntactical construction in which the latter part of a sentence does not fit the earlier'. According to this definition both parts of an

anacoluthic sentence are *present*. The sentence is a metaphorical unity divided by a syntactical disparity. However in Fontanier's rhetorical definition, there *is* a break in presence: one part of anacoluthon is necessarily missing and his description of the figure is laden with impersonal pathos.<sup>12</sup>

In its dictionary definition, anacoluthia is *not* synonymous with aposiopesis, 'a sudden breaking off in the midst of a sentence'. Wood observes that whereas the aposiopoetic sentence depends upon the absence of its second half, the anacoluthon causes us to reflect on the very impossibility of the aposiopoetic:

Can there be a definitive breaking off or leaving out, without the possibility of some anacoluthic attachment, even if that attachment only operates relationally in terms of negation, for example producing something like [an] 'annihilated feeling'...?<sup>13</sup>

In the following section, by continuing to speak after Derrida's death, I enact the anacoluthic attachment of his breaking off. I suggest how the agrammatical continuance of the linguistic definition of "true" anacolutha might provide an interestingly formal model for the event of reading and writing - of thinking - as Derrida understands and

practises it. Still, in closing, I cannot but return to the ‘annihilated feeling’ that remains, despite the unavailability of continuance, in the wake of Derrida’s death.<sup>14</sup>

### **Not Following: That we might go on thinking**

In ‘A Note on the Definition and Description of True Anacolutha’ (1988), Nils Erik Enkvist remarks that ‘the term *anacoluthon* (from Greek *an-* ‘not’ + *akolouthos* ‘following’, hence ‘lacking proper sequence’) has been used by linguists in senses ranging from the very broad to the very specific’.<sup>15</sup> In the broadest sense, ‘anacoluthon’ names ‘any structure deviating from some standard of well-formedness’ (TA, 316), but in this essay Enkvist is concerned to use the term in a more specific sense. He thus defines a ‘true anacoluthon’ (and we will return to the oddness of this expression in a moment) as ‘a blend of two overlapping structures’ (TA, 316): ‘a true anacoluthon consists of two parts, each of which is syntactically correct in itself, as far as it goes (though it can be subject to hesitation, correction, and melioration)’ (TA, 316-7). As Enkvist continues his explanation, it becomes clear that a “true” anacoluthon does not in fact consist of two parts, but of three – an ‘initial structure’, a ‘final structure’, and a ‘centre’ that functions as ‘the overlap string shared by both constructions, the initial and the final’ (TA, 317). In Enkvist’s example, ‘I have been (for the last year) I have been

doing that thing’, the centre of the anacoluthon is placed in parentheses: ‘the initial string [or ‘initial periphery’] is correct up to the second parenthesis ); the final structure [or ‘final periphery’] is correct after the first parenthesis ( ’ (TA, 317). Enkvist illustrates the overlapping structure of “true” anacolutha in the tree diagram reproduced below:

[open access rights to image not obtained]

For further clarification, Enkvist explains that the definition of “true” anacolutha can also be given ‘as a process grammar with three rules’:

- (i) produce an initial structure consisting of a well-formed complete or incomplete string  $X + Y$ ,
- (ii) syntactically disregard  $X$  (which may nevertheless go on contributing to the total semantic and pragmatic information of the discourse, particularly if it is not repeated or paraphrased), and
- (iii) produce an element or string  $Z$  which makes  $Y + Z$  a well-formed string. (TA, 317)

Most interesting in Enkvist's definition of "true" anacolutha is the way in which the centre of the anacoluthon functions as a bridge, as a way of moving from one string, structure, idea or thought, to another that is different from, but (a)grammatically connected to, the first. In this movement, the initial structure is disregarded, but, significantly, 'it may nevertheless go on contributing to the total semantic and pragmatic information of the discourse, particularly if it is not repeated or paraphrased'. We might understand the process of thought, of reading or writing on any text, in a similar way. An author produces a initial text consisting of a complete or incomplete string X + Y. In creating her own text, a reader/writer engages with the initial text, but syntactically disregards X – X remains the part of any initial text which goes on to contribute to the meaning of the final text produced by the reader/writer, but which is not repeated or paraphrased in it. X represents that part of any text we read that influences our thought but which we do not explicitly go on to use. In this instance of my discussion of Derrida's "La Parjure," *Perhaps*, that might include, amongst other things, Derrida's discussion of Thomas's novel, of the relationship between the anacoluthon, storytelling and lying, of the significance of the perhaps, of the relationship between death and the father. All these elements are the X of Derrida's text that I have been influenced by, that have influenced this essay I am writing now, both consciously and unconsciously, but upon which I have not commented explicitly. In contrast, Y represents that part of a text that the reader/writer appropriates, keeps, takes

for herself, and combines with new elements, Z, in order to create a new text, Y + Z. Y is that part of a text which catches your attention, which stays in your mind, that detail that prompts ‘the ecstasy of revelation’ (WM, 38), that enables ‘the *freshness* of a reading’ (WM, 38), that allows you to say something more, something new, something different, and yet something that it would have been impossible to say, that would have been unthinkable, without that initial text. In this instance, Y is the very idea of the anacoluthon which so caught my attention when I first heard Derrida read “‘La Parjure,” *Perhaps*’ at Loughborough in 2001.

The structure of “true” anacolutha thus illustrates the way reading and writing, thinking, happens – the way in which any text is produced out of a prior text, to which it can be faithful only by being simultaneously faithful and unfaithful. This is the agrammaticality of following represented in and by the anacoluthon:

Two infidelities, an impossible choice: on the one hand, not to say anything that comes back to oneself, to one’s own voice, to remain silent, or at the very least to let oneself be *accompanied* or preceded in counterpoint by the friend’s voice. Thus, out of zealous devotion or gratitude, out of approbation as well, to be content with just quoting, with just *accompanying* that which more or less directly comes back or returns to the other, to let him speak, to efface oneself in front of and to *follow* his speech, and to do so right in front



of him. But this *excess of fidelity* would end up saying and exchanging nothing. It returns to death. It points to death, sending death back to death. On the other hand, by avoiding all quotation, all identification, all rapprochement even, so that what is addressed to or spoken of [the dead] truly comes from the other, from the living friend, one risks making him disappear again, as if one could add more death to death and thus indecently pluralize it. We are left then with having to do and not do both at once, with having to correct one infidelity by the other. (WM, 45)

The centre of the anacoluthon is, indeed, as Derrida has described it, both a rupture and an interruption, but, we now see, it is also a bridge, or, perhaps, a fold, that enables the continuation of thinking and discourse: ‘the essential requirement is that the centre must be capable of occurring as an overlap between the initial and the final structures’ (TA, 321). This overlap - and the creation of a final text that is agrammatically related to the initial text (that follows and does not follow it) - is the very condition of fidelity. There are, of course, varying degrees of this fidelity. As Enkvist explains, texts X and Z may be ‘closely related in form and referent’ (TA, 322), but in other instances ‘the choice of semantic content for the final periphery can be relatively independent of the initial periphery’ (TA, 322). Key to this fidelity, no matter how close the relationship between

X and Z, is that Z says at least *something* new. In reading and writing, in thinking, one has to invent, that is, both disclose and create, if only to respect the alterity of the other:

this word “invention”...*hesitates perhaps* 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. (WA, 168)

The anacoluthic structure of breach, fold and agrammatical continuance aids thought by providing the means for this inventiveness. The strangeness of Enkvist’s attempt to fix “true” anacolutha arises from the term’s openness to, and embodiment of, this suspended invention, according to which it operates ‘to dissociate, disjoin, interrupt, at the heart of the word [including its own]...at the very inside of language and discourse, as does a trope in general’ (WA, 194). Hence, ‘the essential role played by the discreet but decisive intervention of the undecidable that is the “perhaps”’ (WA, 168) which Derrida employs above, and which is integral to Hillis Miller’s definition of the anacoluthon, and to any definition in general.<sup>16</sup>

Anacolutha formally allow for the unexpected and the inventive in thinking. Their ‘abrupt breaches of syntax’ engender changes of direction in thought that would not have been possible without the structural and semantic shifts the anacoluthon allows:

They are one way in which a speaker can change his mind and shift structures, perhaps more often subconsciously or unconsciously than consciously. An anacoluthon is the smoothest of all types of structural shift. It does not overtly signal the break in syntactic patterning but bridges the discrepancy by means of the centre shared by the initial and the final structures. In this sense anacolutha hide, or embellish, the break in syntactic continuity between the initial and final structures. (TA, 323)

More than this, the anacoluthic moment of interruption, of forgetting, is in fact integral to thinking: ‘If there is no thinking without the risk of forgetting oneself, if forgetting to think, if forgetting to think *of it* is a fault, if such an interruption, such an intermittence is a failure, then what is called thinking?’ (WA, 163). The forgetting of the X (in Enkvist’s terminology), the interruption at the heart of the anacoluthon, marks ‘the amnesia essential to the movement of truth for finite and mortal beings’ (WA, 194). As Derrida remarks, this finitude is ‘at the origin of the anacoluthic interruption, of discontinuity and divisibility in general, of the disjunction that makes *relation* at once

possible and impossible' (WA, 194). Anacolutha give rise to 'instantaneous substitutions' thanks to 'ruptures in construction' (WA, 183). They evidence 'an irreducible distraction at the heart of finite thought, a discontinuity, an interruptability that is at bottom the very resource, the ambiguous power of the anacoluthon' (WA, 191). By their very discontinuity, their very agrammaticality, anacolutha enable one to carry on thinking even as this continuance must faithfully betray the text one is writing on or the person one is following.

### **Betrayal: 'strange pain, strange sin'**

The agrammatical continuance of the anacoluthon opens the way for new thought and new speech – an after-life, one might say. But is the above account not perhaps a little too hopeful, a little too cheerful? Despite that continuance, one cannot help still feel the interruption of the initial structure, text, speech, work, oeuvre, thought; the very real death, in this instance, of a man. Such is perhaps the reason for the dissatisfaction, the sadness, of any reading or writing, of any thinking – that sense that one has never completely got to grips with the text one is reading, that something beyond our grasp, incomplete and never to be completed, remains. Such is also perhaps the reason for my feeling, even now, as I finish writing this essay that breaks my silence

since Derrida's death (this is the first text I have written since he went), that I am missing him – in the sense, perhaps, that all thinking misses what it aims at, 'not as one misses a target – once and for all – more in the way that one misses a person'.<sup>17</sup> I still feel that to continue to speak now that he is gone is to betray him; that no continuance at all, even the (in)fidelity of an agrammatical following, might have been more appropriate, more respectful, more proper, so close upon Derrida's death; that, in the end, our current loss is so profound, and remains so fresh, that

    '...it may be

    That only silence suiteth best.'<sup>18</sup>

    'But then what, silence? Is this not another wound, another insult?' (WM, 49)

    'I don't know, perhaps it's a dream, all a dream, that would surprise me, I'll wake, in the silence, and never sleep again, it will be I, or dream, dream again, dream of a silence, a dream silence, full of murmurs, I don't know, that's all words, never wake, all words, there's nothing else, you must go on, that's all I know, they're going to stop, I know that well, I can feel it, they're going to abandon me, it will be the silence, for a moment, a good few moments, or it will be mine, the lasting one, that didn't last, that still lasts, it will be I, you must go on, I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me, strange pain,

strange sin, you must go on, perhaps it's done already, perhaps they have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.'<sup>19</sup>

‘As long as the one who is close to us exists, and, with him, the thought in which he affirms himself, his thought opens itself to us, but preserved in this very relation, and what preserves it is not only the mobility of life (this would be very little), but the unpredictability introduced into this thought by the strangeness of the end...’<sup>20</sup>

Sarah Dillon

December 2004

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, “‘Le Parjure,’” *Perhaps: Storytelling and Lying* in *Without Alibi*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 171. All subsequent references to this essay are given in brackets in the text, preceded by WA.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘The Deaths of Roland Barthes’ (1981) in *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 49. All subsequent references to this essay are given in brackets in the text, preceded by WM.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Negotiate’ comes from the Latin, *negotiare*, which is a combination of *neg* – not + *otium*, ease, quiet. This essay was originally presented as a paper at ‘Derrida: Negotiating the Legacy’, a conference held ‘in memory of the thought of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)’, 6-8 January 2005, Gregynog Hall. I would like to thank the organisers of this conference, members of the Aberystwyth Post-International Group, University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, ‘To J.S.’, in *Tennyson: Complete Poems and Plays*, ed. T. Herbert Warren (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> J. Hillis Miller, ‘The Anacoluthonic Lie’ in *Reading Narrative* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), p. 149. Cited by Derrida in *Without Alibi*, p. 166.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘following theory’ in *life.after.theory*, ed. Michael Payne and John Schad (New York and London: Continuum, 2003), p. 12. ‘following theory’ transcribes the discussion that followed Derrida’s paper at Loughborough.

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Nick Royle for drawing attention to these texts in the question he posed to Derrida at Loughborough, recorded in ‘following theory’, pp. 6-7.

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, ‘following theory’, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Derrida, ‘following theory’, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 43. Derrida might indeed respond that ‘after all, one cannot reasonably expect a finite subject to be able, at every instant, in the same instant, or even merely at the desired moment, to remember actively, presently, in an act, *continuously*, without interval, to *think of all* the ethical obligations for which, in all fairness, he should answer. That would be inhuman and indecent’ (WA, 163). It remains to be explored whether Derrida’s lack of ethical responsibility to the Woman here is a singular or a definitive act.

<sup>11</sup> Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 300, n. 21.

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Wood, “‘Try thinking as if perhaps...’”, *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 25 (2003), 159-79: here, p. 174. Wood does not reference the source of her citation here.

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<sup>13</sup> Wood, ““Try thinking as if perhaps...””, p. 173. The ‘annihilated feeling’ is experienced by Clare, one of the central characters in Elizabeth Bowen’s novel *The Little Girls* upon which Wood writes in this essay whilst she speaks of the relationship between thinking, ethics, tropes and the feminine in a manner or mode governed by the ‘interruption and discontinuity’ (161) of and in thinking, reading and writing represented by the anacoluthon. In ‘a potentially endless series of tries, goes, bashes, cracks, shots and so on’ (161) Wood delightfully performs the ‘sheer inassimilable waywardness’ (172) of anacoluthic thinking that it is the purpose of her essay to explore.

<sup>14</sup> Note that a precedent for the use of formal linguistics to elucidate so-called ‘poststructural’ ideas can be found in Jonathan Culler’s essay ‘Presupposition and Intertextuality’ in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

<sup>15</sup> Nils Erik Enkvist, ‘A Note on the Definition and Description of True Anacolutha’ in *On Language: Rhetorica, Phonologica, Syntactica, a Festschrift for Robert P. Stockwell from his Friends and Colleagues*, ed. Caroline Duncan-Rose and Theo Vennemann (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 316. All subsequent references to this essay are given in brackets in the text, preceded by TA.

<sup>16</sup> On the tropic operation of the anacoluthon within the structure of the mark see Wood, ““Try thinking as if perhaps...””, esp. p. 174.

<sup>17</sup> Wood, ““Try thinking as if perhaps...””, p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> Tennyson, ‘To J.S.’, p. 59.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (1959 [1952]) in *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Calder Publications, 1959), p. 418.

<sup>20</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 289-91.