

## DAVID LODGE'S AUTHOR, AUTHOR AND THE GENRE OF THE BIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL

Vanessa Guignery

Klincksieck | « Études anglaises »

2007/2 Vol. 60 | pages 160 à 172

ISSN 0014-195X

ISBN 2252036044

Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

-----  
<https://www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-anglaises-2007-2-page-160.htm>  
-----

Distribution électronique Cairn.info pour Klincksieck.

© Klincksieck. Tous droits réservés pour tous pays.

La reproduction ou représentation de cet article, notamment par photocopie, n'est autorisée que dans les limites des conditions générales d'utilisation du site ou, le cas échéant, des conditions générales de la licence souscrite par votre établissement. Toute autre reproduction ou représentation, en tout ou partie, sous quelque forme et de quelque manière que ce soit, est interdite sauf accord préalable et écrit de l'éditeur, en dehors des cas prévus par la législation en vigueur en France. Il est précisé que son stockage dans une base de données est également interdit.

David Lodge's *Author, Author*  
and the genre of the biographical novel

This essay is an attempt to analyse the mechanisms of the biographical novel in David Lodge's *Author, Author* (2004) which focuses on Henry James's middle years as well as on the few months before his death. By paying special attention to the paratexts and the subtle intertwining of fiction and reality within the text, the paper demonstrates how Lodge manages to strike a delicate balance between imagination and facts. The article also explores the reasons for the prominence of the mixed genre of the biographical novel in contemporary British literature and attempts to situate *Author, Author* in relation to postmodernist historiographic metafiction.

---

*Cet article tente d'analyser les mécanismes du roman biographique dans Author, Author (2004) de David Lodge, qui met en scène Henry James dans les années 1880-1890, ainsi que dans les derniers mois avant sa mort. Par le biais d'un examen précis des paratextes et du tressage de la fiction et de la réalité au sein même du texte, l'article démontre que Lodge est parvenu à opérer un équilibre subtil entre imagination et faits réels. Cet essai propose en outre de déterminer les raisons du succès du genre mixte du roman biographique dans la littérature britannique contemporaine, et s'efforce d'évaluer le statut de Author, Author en le comparant aux métafictiones historiographiques postmodernistes.*

---

Published in 2004, David Lodge's latest novel *Author, Author*, appears as a change of direction in his production, particularly in terms of literary genre. Even though the indication "novel" appears on the cover of the book, its generic status is uncertain, oscillating between the historical novel and the biography. On the one hand, the book reads like a fascinating story with a range of narrative devices, a play on focalisation, strategies of suspense and the choice of one central and dramatic episode, but on the other hand it is a selective and chronological biography of Henry James containing very few invented episodes. In the frame story, which opens and closes the book, Lodge focuses on the last few months before James's death in February 1916, while the main story analeptically deals with his middle years, the 1880s and 1890s, when James decided to write for the theatre

but suffered failures crystallised in the flop of *Guy Domville* (1895), at a time when his friend George Du Maurier, an illustrator for *Punch*, met great popular success with *Trilby* (1893), a novel which is now almost totally forgotten. If, in *Author, Author*, Lodge is experimenting with a hybrid form which is quite new to him, he seems to be participating in a general movement in contemporary British literature that particularly favours the mixed genre of the biographical novel. In his collection of essays, *The Year of Henry James* (2006), whose first long piece traces in detail the composition and reception of *Author, Author*, Lodge explains that his novel appeared just a few months after Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004) and the paperback version of Emma Tennant's *Felony* (2002), which also deal with James's middle years. The purpose of this article is to analyse the mechanisms of the biographical novel in *Author, Author*, pay special attention to the paratexts, disentangle the intertwined threads of fiction and reality, situate the novel in relation to postmodernist historiographic metafiction, but also try and understand the reasons for the success of such a genre at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

### The hybridity of the biographical novel

Over the last forty-five years, David Lodge's literary production has been marked by a great variety of genres and styles, as he is a novelist but also a playwright, a screenplay writer and the author of many books of literary criticism. His fiction includes realistic and what may be termed catholic novels, as well as satirical campus novels integrating postmodernist devices, and as Jean-Michel Ganteau demonstrates, exhibits a proclivity for popular genres such as melodrama or romance (55-77). In this context, *Author, Author* marks a new departure for Lodge: "It was my first 'period' novel, and my first about a real person; its predominant mood was elegiac, its comedy muted" (2006, 64). The novelist thus draws from two ontologically separate realms, fiction and facts, which are brought together in the hybrid expression "biographical novel." On the one hand, the common definitions of the novel emphasize its fictional dimension and its recourse to imagination, invention and illusion. On the other hand, biographies belong to referential genres which are supposed to convey authentic and verifiable facts; historians and biographers are bound by "a duty to historical truth-telling and the availability of evidence," to quote Lodge (2006, 30). Over the years, however, positivist assumptions have fallen apart and the ontological frontier separating fiction from referential discourses has tended to crumble. In *Tropics of Discourse* (1990), Hayden White qualifies historical and biographical narratives as "verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences" (82). White concludes that novels and referential texts, though working with ontologically different material, both partake of a poetic process (125). In Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*

(1984), a subtle combination of biography, fiction, essay and literary analysis, the narrator foregrounds the discursive nature of the representation of the past, be it through historiography or biography, and disputes any claim to exhaustiveness, objectivity and scientific truthfulness: “history is merely another literary genre: the past is autobiographical fiction pretending to be a parliamentary report” (101). On the other hand, fiction can compete with referential discourses as a vehicle of truth because paradoxically, it is often through oblique and indirect ways that the truth can out. Thus, in Salman Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), the narrator says he values “fictions that don’t pretend to be fact, and so end up telling the truth” (123). Many novelists believe in that oxymoronic association of fiction and truth, such as for example Eva Figs who asserted: “the only way to tell the truth is by lying” (71). Thus, ontological boundaries between fact and fiction, authenticity and invention, have tended to fade away and the success of the biographical novel in recent years may be the logical consequence of such a blurring.

Lodge’s definition of the biographical novel in *The Year of Henry James* testifies to the two directions of the genre: “the novel which takes a real person and their real history as the subject matter for imaginative exploration, using the novel’s techniques for representing subjectivity rather than the objective, evidence-based discourse of biography” (8). Lodge’s insistence on the representation of subjectivity is not unexpected as the biographee he chooses in *Author, Author* is well-known for having implemented new ways of entering a character’s consciousness through free indirect style and a complex use of limited focalisation. Lodge then insists on distinguishing the biographical novel from the romantic biography, “a once popular but now somewhat discredited genre which purports to be history but insinuates a good deal of authorial invention and speculation into the narrative” (9). The distribution of adjectives and nouns is of the utmost importance as a biographical novel explicitly presents itself as fiction and therefore does not need to validate the information it conveys, whereas a romantic or fictionalised biography should, to a certain extent, be accountable for the facts referred to. One cannot accuse a novelist of lying because this is what he purports to be doing, as the American writer E. L. Doctorow suggested: “At least we admit that we lie” (in Thompson 20). On the other hand, a biographer is supposed to be aiming for the truth and is therefore deceiving the reader when he strays away from the historical record or fills in the gaps. In his biography of B. S. Johnson, Jonathan Coe laments the fact that he knows so little about his subject’s life in the mid-1950s: “So much of this period is lost, lost beyond retrieval. If I were to write a novel about B. S. Johnson . . . this is the period I would home in on: so little is known, which leaves so much scope for the imagination” (64). Here, Coe points to a crucial difference between a novel and a biography: a biography is selective but nevertheless tries to cover all the known angles of a person’s life, even though diffusely and even if it can only propose an illusion of completeness; on the other hand, a biographical novel will

usually select only a few dramatically interesting episodes and a specific period of the subject's life, and expand these as much as possible. *Author, Author* mixes biographical authenticity with fictional selection and expansion as it deals with two periods of James's life and mostly focuses on the relationship between James and Du Maurier, which is "the backbone of the novel" (Lodge 2005, 25). According to Lodge, the concomitant failure of James's play and success of Du Maurier's novel, which he had first thought of turning into a play (2006, 20), revealed such a rich potential for development that it required "the expansiveness of the novel form" (2006, 21).

### Ambivalent paratexts

Before moving to the text of the novel proper, the paratexts are worth examining as they either implicitly or explicitly point to the ontological hybridity of the text. The title *Author, Author* is remarkable for its polysemy. It literally refers to the cries of the audience in a theatre when the playwright is invited to come onstage and take a bow; the cover illustration confirms this textual hint as it shows a bearded and elegantly dressed man taking a bow. Text and image therefore seem to coalesce to announce the success of a fêted author. However, the lack of any exclamation mark may already suggest a lukewarm reception, and the book indeed reveals that the hopeful introduction was an ironical and deceptive track as, when Henry James came onstage at the end of the first performance of *Guy Domville*, the audience booed him. The omission of exclamation marks actually makes other interpretations possible<sup>1</sup>, as the reader may understand that *Author, Author* will tell the story of a well-known author and celebrate him, either in the form of a biography or hagiography, or through essayistic means. The repetition of the substantive might foreshadow a laudatory tone and a tribute to the author involved, or else point to the couple of biographer and biographee, that is of David Lodge whose name appears in large letters on the front cover and the spine, and whose colour photograph features on the back flap, and Henry James who is iconically portrayed through the front cover illustration and referred to in the blurb. As François Gallix suggests, the redundant title might therefore allude to "the figure of the author in his own text" (129), and indeed Lodge intervenes in the first person in the Author's Note as well as in the last pages of the book. The notion of an interrelation between two authors is all the more justified in the case of Henry James who has often been called a writer's writer, greatly admired by other authors but sometimes thought as being too obscure or even obtuse by the general public. Considering that a great part of the book

---

1. As David Lodge (2006, 58) and François Gallix suggest (129), the use of exclamation marks in the French title, *L'Auteur! L'Auteur!*, limits the meaning of the title to its literal level.

is devoted to George Du Maurier, one may also interpret the two “authors” separated by a comma to be James and Du Maurier, which could have resulted in another title, *Henry & George*, an amusing anticipation of Barnes’s *Arthur & George* (2005), a novel which also intertwines authentic facts about a well-known writer and fiction. Finally the repetition in the title may be a metafictional strategy to announce a reflection of an essayistic form on the notion of authorship, that is the aspirations, tensions, trials and possible self-delusions of a writer, an interpretation which Lodge acknowledges: “the repetition of the word (I felt there was a Blakean rhythm to it, ‘Author, author, burning bright . . .’) expresses the obsessive and all-consuming commitment of writers like James to their art” (2006, 58). This inflection of the title is confirmed by the first epigraph by James, which emphasizes the devotion and allegiance of writers to their work: “Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task.”

The hypothesis of *Author, Author* being a biography (or two biographies) or an essay is however belied by the paratextual indication on the front cover of the Secker & Warburg edition, *A Novel*, which suggests that the book will certainly abide by the forms and conventions of fictional writing. As soon as this basis is secured however, Lodge inserts a disconcerting authorial statement which, instead of asserting that “*the story and the characters are entirely fictitious*”—a formula usually included to prevent libel actions—ostensibly stresses the mixed nature of the book, confirming the fact that “The biographical novel makes no attempt to disguise its hybrid nature” (Lodge 2006, 9):

Nearly everything that happens in this story is based on factual sources. With one significant exception, all the named characters were real people. Quotations from their books, plays, articles, letters, journals, etc., are their own words. But I have used a novelist’s licence in representing what they thought, felt, and said to each other; and I have imagined some events and personal details which history omitted to record. So this book is a novel, and structured like a novel.

The first part of the statement guarantees the authenticity of the events, people and sources referred to in the book, which aims at giving the reader “a kind of ‘reality check’ on the events described” (Lodge 2006, 62). On the contrary, the second part highlights the creative and inventive part operating in the “dark areas” (90) or interstices of history, that is “those aspects about which the ‘official’ record has nothing to report” (87) to quote Brian McHale. The skills of the novelist thus come to compensate for the inevitable flaws of biography. In *The Year of Henry James*, Lodge explains that these thoughts, feelings and spoken words “can never be reliably documented by a biographer” (13). Because of the imaginative dimension in *Author, Author*, the conclusion is definite—“*So this book is a novel*”—without any room left for doubt on the genre of the book. What is more surprising and debatable is Lodge’s suggestion that the book’s discontinuous structure, starting in the last months of James’s life, then

moving back to the 1880s, and ending with the writer's death, is evidence of it being a novel, maybe implying that a biography would have been more chronological. And yet, there exist several examples of original biographies that do not progress linearly from A to Z, simply because life "could never be experienced in such a grammatical straight-jacket" (19), as Alain de Botton playfully remarks in his own fictional biography of an invented young woman, *Kiss & Tell* (1995).

The last paratext which merits attention is the acknowledgements in which Lodge dutifully lists which events and details were invented. Such a didactic process is quite unexpected in a novel which is supposed to rely on imagination, but is not unfamiliar to readers of Lodge's work. Maybe because he was an academic, Lodge has always added prefaces, afterwords or comments to his novels, which are meant to help the reader, or "the person at the back of the class" (2005, 23), understand the work. The purpose of the acknowledgements in *Author, Author* is also to repeat what Lodge stated in his Author's Note, i.e. that nearly everything is authentic, and therefore the reader can trust the reliability of the narrator's discourse, as in a biography: "I wanted to make clear how little I had invented by confessing what I *had* invented" (2005, 23). The fictional additions turn out to concern secondary characters such as James's servants, or to be minor details, often "little jokes" (Lodge 2005, 23) such as, for example, Henry James being knocked off his bicycle by five-year-old Agatha Miller, later Christie, in Torquay.

### The book's generic balance

Within the book, even if Lodge deals with authentic figures and events, many narrative techniques are characteristic of fictional writing as the author recalls his "anxiety that the novel should not read like a biography" (50). One example of these novelistic strategies consists in not identifying the main protagonist—only named "the author" (3)—until the third paragraph so as to create a form of suspense. In the main story focalised through James, the latter is then referred to by his first name, and not by his surname, a fictional device to bring him closer to the reader, which Tóibín also employs in *The Master*: "The intimacy and familiarity of 'Henry' is appropriate to the fictional focusing of the narrative through HJ's consciousness and point of view" (Lodge 2006, 82). When the *Guardian* published an edited extract from the novel in August 2004, a junior sub-editor changed 'Henry' to 'James,' thus applying the *Guardian's* style book designed for factual reporting. This major change unbalanced the subtle generic combination of the book: "It makes the discourse sound like biography, which was the effect I was trying to avoid"; "It undid with a single unthinking stroke the delicate balance I had striven to attain between fidelity to fact and imaginative empathy" (Lodge 2006, 82, 83).

One of the most obviously fictional dimensions of *Author, Author* is linked to the way in which Lodge, in the main story, manages to penetrate

James's inner consciousness through internal focalisation and third-person narrative, thus creating an interior voice in all its meanderings. This interest comes quite logically for Lodge after the publication of *Consciousness and the Novel* (2002), a collection of essays about the representation of human consciousness in fiction in which Henry James holds a major part, and of *Thinks...* (2001), a novel which contains discussions about the rich literary treatment of consciousness. Moreover, James seems to be an adequate subject for such an attempt as he once claimed: "Consciousness is my religion" (Lodge 2004, 91) and developed the technique of the limited point of view at a time when the figure of the omniscient narrator was overpowering. In *Author, Author*, the narrator reminds the reader of James's commitment to the narrative artist's "priceless resource ... of being able to reveal the secret workings of consciousness in all its dense and delicate detail" (283): "He believed the author of fictional narratives should represent life as it was experienced in reality, by an individual consciousness, with all the lacunae, enigmas, and misinterpretations in perception and reflection that such a perspective entailed" (230). What may appear as a challenge for Lodge consists in trying to enter the mind of a late Victorian person and reproduce his view of the world, all the more as James himself argued that the historical novel was condemned to "a fatal cheapness," because the novelist could not think himself back into "the old CONSCIOUSNESS, the soul, the sense, the horizon, the vision" of people from the past (208). James may therefore have thought that a twenty-first-century novelist could not imagine the mind of a late nineteenth-century figure. Lodge has a different opinion however, as he remarks that the late Victorian world is not alienatingly distant from the contemporary one, and is well-documented, so that a nineteenth-century consciousness can certainly be reconstructed (2005, 24).

If most of the novel is focalised through a single consciousness, that of Henry James, the dramatic central scene of the first fateful night of *Guy Domville* is marked by a multiplicity of points of view, conveyed in square brackets, from people who were present either in the audience or onstage during the performance, while James himself was away, attending an Oscar Wilde play at the Haymarket theatre. The narrator announces this new narrative mode explicitly: "while this story, his story, with its drastically limited point of view, was proceeding, other connected stories were in progress, other points of view were in play, at the same time, in parallel, in brackets as it were" (231). This multiple internal focalisation that continues for some thirty pages is meant to compensate for James's ignorance of the development of the performance and to propose a polyocular picture which would be as complete as possible. For the purpose of this scene, Lodge thus combines the skills of a biographer, as he brings together all the known reports of the event, and those of a novelist, as the various perspectives are what allow for the suspenseful dramatisation of the scene.

If some critics praised Lodge for his delicate blend of fiction and facts, others thought that the book was too close to a biography, overly reliant

on facts and on the technique of “telling.” Thus, Alan Hollinghurst, whose Booker-prize winning novel, *The Line of Beauty* (2004), features a scholar of Henry James, wrote that *Author, Author* was “limited, as a novel, by its artless closeness to biography” (21). Hollinghurst argues that the conversations in direct speech, which are necessarily a creation by the novelist, “are often too heavy with back-story and explanations to James of things he would already have known” (21), and he adds that Lodge invented too little as the acknowledgements indeed confirm. One could counter that Lodge’s craft as a novelist was visible in the emplotment of raw data and the speculation of James’s interior life and that the facts conveyed in apocryphal scenes and conversations are meant to assist the reader in his understanding of the situation. James Wood also regrets that Lodge is “manacled” (28) to historical record, and criticizes the way in which he reminds the reader of the biographical details of the famous figures he introduces, such as for example, “Edmund Gosse, versatile man of letters, poet, critic, essayist, translator, recently retired Librarian to the House of Lords, who has known Henry James for thirty-five years” (31). Such an enumeration certainly belongs more to the biographical genre than to the novelistic one, but one may suggest that it also testifies to a pedagogic concern and an attentive care for the general reader. Moreover, one could add that the main story broadly follows two trends. In the first half, Lodge needs to convey to the reader some background knowledge and a certain number of facts about James’s life, hence the greater proportion of “telling” and of narrative passages that relate to the biographical. As Lodge admits, he there complies with “some of the discipline of the biographer or the historian” (2005, 22). In the second half however, Lodge more willingly follows James’s advice to “Dramatise! Dramatise!” and privileges the device of “showing,” creating vivid scenes, including more dialogues, but also penetrating James’s consciousness more frequently. In the frame story dealing with James’s last illness in the present tense, Lodge proposes the points of view of relatives and servants, and situates the death of a single famous person against the background of thousands of deaths in the First World War, which provides both personal and collective drama.

Still, it is true that Lodge remains cautious in his inventive forays, sometimes using adverbs of uncertainty such as “perhaps” or “probably,” as if to draw attention to the fact that he is imagining scenes and cannot therefore be held accountable for their veracity. For example, when James walks to Hampstead to see Du Maurier, the narrator writes: “Henry, having breakfasted well, and perhaps paused on his way for some light refreshment” (42). The narrator thus points both to the impossibility for the biographer of knowing such details and to the novelist’s necessary and therefore acceptable hypotheses. Hence, the adverb “perhaps” sounds like a self-reflexive comment reminding the reader of the mixed genre of the book, rather than only, as Wood argues, the sign of “a biographer’s ignorance covering itself” (30). It is through such devices that Lodge maintains a subtle balance between the fictional and the biographical.

## The recent prominence of the biographical novel

We may wonder why the “biographical-novel-about-a-writer,” a “subgenre of literary fiction” according to Lodge (2006, 10), has acquired such prominence in recent years. Lodge himself offers several reasons and the major one is cultural: he considers the trend towards biographical, historical, documentary, but also autobiographical writing as “a symptom of a declining faith or loss of confidence in the power of purely fictional narrative” (2006, 9-10). He suggests that our culture is characterised by a fondness for facts, news and true documents which leave no room for invention and imagination; thus, we are “attracted to writing which guarantees its authenticity by its references to the real world” (2005, 20). Incidentally, this wariness about fiction is not new and can be traced back to the 1950s in France and in the United States. In *L'Ère du soupçon* (1956), Nathalie Sarraute explained that by the mid-twentieth century, all the conventional devices of fictional writing were viewed with suspicion, so that documents and true facts were deemed preferable to fiction (63). In the 1960s in the United States, several writers also forewent fiction and developed mixed forms such as the non-fiction novel, made famous by Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966), or New Journalism. According to Lodge, writing with a documentary basis requires less effort from the reader who thus has a “more immediate access to the world of the novel” (2005, 20) because he is already familiar with the historical figures presented. Lodge adds a moral argument to the cultural one, marking a difference between the stable nineteenth-century world where novelists could “assume their readers shared basically the same beliefs, the same values, the same ideals of what the good life was, what evil was” (2005, 21), and the contemporary relativistic and multicultural age which is marked by the lack of such a body of common values and the coexistence of different ethical systems. Lodge argues that the contemporary novelist has thus lost his moral authority and finds it more difficult than his ancestors to convince his readers to share his view of life in a fictional novel. Such an argument is of course debatable and Lodge's assumption of a declining confidence in fiction in recent times certainly needs to be qualified, as works of imagination keep being published and meeting great success with readers who do not balk at making the effort to enter an unknown and ethically unstable world.

One could add to Lodge's argument that contemporary culture is very much drawn to the personality and private life of writers, or more generally of public figures, hence the success not only of biographical novels, but also of biographies, particularly in Great-Britain. For some readers, biography even surpasses the subject's work as a literary agent suggests in Martin Amis's *The Information* (1995): “People are very interested in writers. Successful ones. More interested in the writers than the writing. In the writers' lives” (131). In *Author, Author*, Lodge is as much drawn to the writer as to the man, to his art as to his private life. The choice of James can

certainly be traced back to Lodge's academic activities since he read, taught and wrote criticism about the work of James, as F. Gallix reminds us in detail (128). Until then, however, Lodge's dealings with James were mainly scholarly and belonged to the genre of literary criticism. With *Author, Author*, his skills have expanded to biographical facts and Lodge heavily researched his novel, reading several biographies and various sources which he mentions in the acknowledgements but also visiting places where James stayed. This entailed probing into the private life of a writer who, incidentally, was particularly hostile to biography as he asserted in 1914: "My sole wish is to frustrate as utterly as possible the post-mortem exploiter" (in Lodge 2006, 39), and as his secretary, Theodora Bosanquet, confirms in *Author, Author*: "He has an obsession with privacy. He hates the idea of people prying into his life after he is dead" (363). Lodge's disobedience goes against critical concepts such as the impersonality of literature or the death of the author, and may remind the reader of Barnes's earlier betrayal in *Flaubert's Parrot* of a writer who firmly believed in "the insignificance of the writer's personality" (Barnes 1984, 2-3).

Another reason offered by Lodge for the prominence of the biographical novel is more personal, having to do with the waning of inspiration. Lodge argues that mature writers who have more or less drawn from their own experience for their preceding novels and have exhausted this well, may decide to look elsewhere and thus regenerate their imagination (in Lardreau 51). This explanation may be valid for Lodge whose novels have always started on a more or less autobiographical basis, but not for many other writers who have rarely drawn inspiration from their own lives. One could argue moreover that Lodge, to a certain extent, resembles James as, fairly late in life he also became a playwright<sup>2</sup> and, though he was never booed onstage, knew several frustrations and disappointments. More generally and maybe more convincingly, the attraction to real writers as subject matters for novels might be part of the postmodernist keenness on the various forms of intertextuality as a means of exploring one's relation to the literary canonical tradition. This glance backwards can be viewed negatively, "as a sign of decadence and exhaustion" (Lodge 2006, 10), as though writers had exhausted all the possibilities of writing and could only endlessly repeat the models of the past (Jameson 65), or it can be considered positively as an "ingenious way of coping with the 'anxiety of influence'" (Lodge 2006, 10), by directly and explicitly confronting one's illustrious predecessors. Though focusing on James's humiliation as a playwright, *Author, Author*, like Tóibín's *The Master* but unlike Tennant's *Felony*, partakes of a sympathetic celebration of the author and a homage to his art, rather than the more postmodernist ironisation and subversion of the past legacy. Through its imitation of some of James's novelistic strategies

---

2. Lodge's two plays are *The Writing Game* (1990) and *Home Truths* (1998).

pertaining to point of view, and, to a certain extent, its approximation of James's contorted style of speech (Lodge 2006, 54), *Author, Author* may therefore seem to be marked by conservative aesthetic priorities (Gutleben 7). However, it should be noted that Lodge did not attempt to pastiche James's prolix and oblique style of writing, sometimes preferring directness and assurance to irresolution and suspension. Thus, the novel contains blank formulations such as "The truth was" or "It was obvious to Henry that" which, according to Adam Mars-Jones, are "unJamesian, even counterJamesian" (17), and which suggest that Lodge managed to create a voice of his own and thus conjure the anxiety of influence.

What is remarkable about *Author, Author* is that it nods both towards the nineteenth-century Victorian novel and towards postmodernist historiographic metafiction, without completely embracing the characteristics of either. Alison Lee points to the difference between the two types of books:

In the nineteenth-century historical novel, "real" people, places, and events were included or alluded to in order to convince the reader of the 'truth' of the fictional ones. In historiographic metafiction, however, the focus has shifted radically. Instead of historical characters and events proving the truth of the fiction, they point to the indeterminacy of historical knowledge. (52)

As Lodge points out in his authorial statement, all the named characters in *Author, Author* are real, which was meant to "enhance the effect of authenticity" (Lodge 2006, 31); therefore the author's aim is not to convince the reader of the "truth" of fictional protagonists, but rather to grant verisimilitude to real people's thoughts and conversations. Even though in the frame story, the variation of narrative techniques, the multiplicity of points of view and the play on typography, tend to draw attention to the construction of the story, its mechanisms and artefacts, the novel cannot be called historiographic metafiction as the main story is almost devoid of such devices. Moreover, Lodge's purpose is not to point to the irretrievability of the past nor to question epistemological certainties, which is often the goal of postmodernist writers such as Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes, Graham Swift or Kazuo Ishiguro. Nor does Lodge aim at highlighting the ontological gap between fact and fiction by laying bare the seams of his artificial construction. David Lodge speaks in his own name in the first person only in the frame story, in the Author's Note whose aim is to make sure that the novel be not read as a biography, but as a novel (Lodge 2006, 50), and in the passages in italics in the last session where Lodge first imagines meeting James on his death bed and telling him about his posthumous success (373-76) and then provides a detailed literary analysis of James's essay, "Is There a Life After Death?" (379-82). Through these interventions, Lodge foregrounds the ontological frontier between the world of the novel and his own extradiegetic self, and furthers the confusion of genres. Lodge explained however: "I could not do that in the main story without breaking the illusion of historical truth" (2005, 27). And indeed

the writer quickly suppressed other similar instances of authorial intervention, believing that if he laid bare his status of narrator, he would then have to inform the reader when he was “selecting from and embellishing the historical record” (2006, 52), which would impede the impetus of the narrative, prevent him from inventing freely and destroy the effect of verisimilitude. On the contrary, Lodge’s process in *Author, Author* is more conventional and realistic as he calls for the reader’s willing suspension of disbelief, his trust in the story he is being told: “I really wanted to write a novel in which the joins between documented facts and imaginative speculation would be seamless and invisible” (2006, 52).

Thus, despite its formal originalities, particularly in the frame story and the middle narrative of the first night of *Guy Domville, Author, Author* is still a fairly conventional story which enables Lodge to pay homage to the nineteenth-century novel without being an unconditional advocate. It borrows from biography but always keeps a delicate balance between the historical record and the imaginative drive. In an interview in 2005, David Lodge argued that apart from “a few postmodernist tricks,” he wrote “basically traditional literary fiction” (2005, 13). *Author, Author* does not contradict this statement but proves that there still remain several possible paths to explore for the novelist standing at the crossroads.

Vanessa GUIGNERY  
Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne

### Bibliography

- Amis, Martin. *The Information*. [1995]. London: Flamingo, 1996.
- Barnes, Julian. *Flaubert’s Parrot*. [1984]. London: Picador, 1985.
- Coe, Jonathan. *Like a Fiery Elephant. The Story of B. S. Johnson*. London: Picador, 2004.
- Figes, Eva. “B. S. Johnson.” *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 5.2 (Summer 1985): 70-71.
- Gallix, François. “*Author, Author* by David Lodge and *The Year of Henry James*.” François Gallix and Vanessa Guignery, eds. *Pre- and Post-Publication Itineraries of the Contemporary Novel in English*. Paris: Publibook U, 2007. 125-32.
- Ganteau, Jean-Michel. *Le Choix de l’éloquence*. Bordeaux: PU de Bordeaux, 2001.
- Gutleben, Christian. *Nostalgic Postmodernism. The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2001.
- Hollinghurst, Alan. “The Middle Fears.” *The Guardian* (4 Sept. 2004): Review 21.
- James, Henry. *Letters*. Leon Edel, ed. Vol. IV: 1895-1916. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap P, 1984.
- Jameson, Frederic. “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.” *New Left Review* 146 (July/Aug. 1984): 53-92.

- Lardreau, Fabrice. "David Lodge. Grand entretien." *Transfuge* 14 (fév. 2007): 48-57.
- Lee, Alison. *Realism and Power: Postmodern British Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Lodge, David. *Author, Author*. London: Secker and Warburg, 2004.
- . "From Then to Now and Next: An Interview with David Lodge." Eds. François Gallix, Vanessa Guignery and Sophie Gaberel-Payen. *Sources* 18 (printemps 2005): 9-28.
- . *The Year of Henry James or, Timing is All: the Story of a Novel. With other essays on the genesis, composition and reception of literary fiction*. London: Harvill Secker, 2006.
- Mars-Jones, Adam. "James the Second." *The Observer* 12 Sept. 2004: Review 17.
- Rushdie, Salman. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1999.
- Thompson, James R. "'Categories of Human Form': Some Notes on E.L. Doctorow and Historical Consciousness in American Fiction since 1960." *Caliban* 28 (1991): 17-24.
- White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990.
- Wood, James. "The Spoils." *The New Republic* 231.16 (18 Oct. 2004): 28-34.