

DOKTORI (PHD) ÉRTEKEZÉS

**SISTER NARRATIVES: MARGARET DRABBLE'S *THE WATERFALL* AND
A.S. BYATT'S *POSSESSION: A ROMANCE***

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A.S. BYATT'S *POSSESSION: A ROMANCE*

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„Én, Csatári Annamária teljes felelősségem tudatában kijelentem, hogy a benyújtott értekezés a szerzői jog nemzetközi normáinak tiszteletben tartásával készült. Jelen értekezést korábban más intézménybe nem nyújtottam be és azt nem utasították el.”

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Köszönetnyilvánítás

Ez az oldal a köszönetmondás helye. Bár sokaknak címezhetném köszönetemet – többek között barátaimnak, kollégáimnak, tanárainknak és diákjaimnak –, akik segítettek, elviseltek az elmúlt nyolc évben, három embernek szánom köszönetem legjavát.

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A legnagyobb köszönet azonban szüleimet illeti, akiknek mindennapos segítsége felmentett a hétköznapi élet apró, ámde annál időigényesebb feladatai alól, s belém vetett bizalmuk átsegített a nehéz időszakokon is.

UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN
DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN BRITISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES

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DISSERTATION

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A.S. Byatt and Margaret Drabble's sisterhood has been a much discussed topic in literary articles in the last few decades. Their sibling rivalry is legendary, and they are said to have the reputation "as the Joan Fontaine and Olivia de Havilland¹ of British literature" (Green 2). They are intense competitors whose attitudes come from their mother, Kathleen, who studied under F.R. Leavis at Cambridge and served as a possible model of an intellectual woman, although one often frustrated by domesticity. (Eyre 7) The mother figure seems to continue to be a source of disagreement between the sisters: the way Drabble depicted her in *A Peppered Moth* (2000) angered Byatt to claim in public that "I would rather people didn't read someone else's version of my mother" (Byatt quoted by Eyre 8). Her reaction echoes her attitudes toward biographers in *Possession* who are either hunters or sympathisers but, either way, they take over the person they write about.

Another possible source of their antagonism as Drabble suggested was the 1972 death of Byatt's eleven-year-old son, Charles in an accident caused by a drunken driver in Battersea, London, which resulted in the guilt that Drabble felt that her own children were untouched by such tragedy. Their rivalry might also originate in their Cambridge period too when Drabble gained a rare starred double-first over Byatt's still very impressive double first. (Eyre 11)

Whichever is the true source of their sibling rivalry it is clear that their careers have taken different directions, which is best exemplified by Jan Dalley's remark according to which "[. . .] a moment in the BBC *Bookmark* programme 'said it all. Shot one, Byatt at work in the British Library, in shapeless clothing and bottle-glass specs; shot two: Margaret Drabble sleek and glowing, prancing in miniskirt for the cameras in some hip Sixties room'" (Dalley quoted by Eyre 10).

Drabble became a best-selling author as early as the age of twenty-one and her popular success cast a shadow on her elder sister's literary career.

¹ Joan Fontaine and her elder sister, Olivia de Havilland are two Oscar-winning American actresses. Their rivalry stems from childhood and still remains today, despite the pair of them being in their nineties. De Havilland was first nominated for Oscar for her role of Melanie in *Gone With the Wind* and a few years later her sister, Fontaine gained her first best actress nomination for her role as Mrs de Winter in Hitchcock's *Rebecca*. In 1941 they were the first sisters to be nominated in the same category in the same year. ("Olivia de Havilland vs Joan Fontaine" 2, 9)

Since the early 1960s, when Drabble [. . .] established herself with novels like *A Summer Birdcage* and *The Millstone*, Byatt, [. . .] a university senior lecturer and literary critic, has written four less successful novels and been known chiefly as Drabble's sister. Even post-*Possession*, interviewers have felt compelled to compare her work with Drabble's. (Green 2)

In the early sixties Byatt laboured to write her first novel while looking after a young daughter and a son, and she managed to publish *The Shadow of the Sun* finally in 1964, which "received only passing attention from the same critics who hailed Drabble as a virtuoso" (Green 8). This is how Byatt comments on the situation, "I have always felt as though somebody were sort of breathing on my heels and whatever I did was not quite good enough. [. . .] The really irritating thing about it is that my novels have been seen in terms of hers, and I don't see them that way at all" (Byatt quoted by Green 8). Their constant comparison is often extended to the study of their styles and, as Hermione Eyre notes, "Drabble's 'taut lightly-spun style' has been contrasted with Byatt's thick, ambitious tones, crammed with many voices, times and genres" (11). It took Byatt ten years of teaching Victorian literature and researching Coleridge that she wrote *Possession*, which won her the 1990 Booker Prize, which, in turn, brought her sister's support in public.

The odds-favourite was A.S. [. . .] Byatt, whose tour de force romantic novel *Possession* (*sic*) had dazzled reviewers and sold more than 100,000 copies. And sure enough, Byatt's name read from the podium. Yet no one in the room seemed happier than another novelist, Margaret Drabble, who rushed up to Byatt and gave her a kiss. "She said she always knew I would win," says Byatt, "and that she'd money on it." (Green 1)

By now their relationship has become less strained, and despite the public preconceptions the sisters see each other as colleagues rather than rivals to such an extent that the first writer Byatt mentions in her collection of essays and lectures, in *On Histories and Stories* (2001), is her sister.

"If we meet at literary dinners, we will come together in a corner and talk about books," says Byatt. "It will be two people who understand how each other's mind works sharing books. I think the problem is not her and me so much as what

people make of the fact that we both exist. You can make friends with your sister instead of being ferocious competitors. You really can.” (Green 10)

Due to the dazzling success of *Possession* both in Europe and overseas, the sisters’ literary relationship is now often defined just the opposite way as it used to be. “Byatt’s ‘Possession,’ an enormously successful, forbiddingly learned, passionate and, perhaps above all, historical novel, affected readers in a way that Drabble’s intelligent but much here-and-now fictions never quite could,” claims Thomas Mallon in his review on *On Histories and Stories*, which also marks the changing literary position of the sisters (1).

As opposed to the comparative critical approaches mentioned above, the present investigation intends to point out common tendencies in terms of the genre of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*, imagery and structure in Drabble’s *The Waterfall* (1969) and Byatt’s *Possession: A Romance* (1990) without suggesting any value judgement or evaluative comparison. I see these novels as distinct ones, which are very different from many aspects, just like their authors, however, they prove to be part of a literary sisterhood—the female literary tradition—, which definitely calls for their comparative investigation. These two novels are distinct works of two very different people, two sisters, who claim to have hardly anything in common concerning style, artistic method or thematic interest. The novels are also divided by a huge time gap, one being a novel of the sixties, the other a postmodern one, a novel of the nineties, a major reason for which critics situate them in very different literary paradigms. *Possession* is a multifocal, postmodern text, which parallels the Victorian quest for origins, however, its citationality makes this quest an infinite deferral without truly finding out the utmost origin. As opposed to the multi-layered textual universe of Byatt’s novel, *The Waterfall* has two layers which are made explicit in the narrative structure. The novels’ distinct natures originate in their authors’ different artistic interests as well, as Byatt makes it clear:

[m]y sister [. . .] believes passionately that it is the novelist’s duty to write about the present, to confront an age which is “ugly, incomprehensible and subject to rapid mutations.” [. . .] I think it is worth looking at the sudden flowering of the historical novel in Britain, the variety of its forms and subjects, the literary energy and real inventiveness that has gone into it. (Byatt quoted by Mallon 1)

Despite the biographical—and from a literary perspective, accidental—relatedness of the two authors and the numerous differences I have listed above I still consider these novels sister

narratives because both enter into a dialogue with the nineteenth-century female literary tradition. Although they write themselves into this tradition in very different ways, using very different methods, they establish a literary sisterhood not only with the nineteenth-century female literary tradition, but by doing so, with each other as well. As a result of this literary sisterhood, there are several traits that the two novels seem to have in common, most basically, their interest in, and reliance on, the nineteenth-century female literary tradition concerning the most popular genres of the age, the romance, the *Bildungsroman* and the female *Künstlerroman* as well as plot, imagery and character formation.

But who are these sisters as writers whose novels I claim to be sister narratives? What are their artistic interests, recurrent themes and stylistic preferences? Of the two, Margaret Drabble is the younger sister, who—although born three years after Byatt, in 1939—started her literary career much earlier than her sister, in the 1960s. As a Cambridge graduate she started her literary career with *A Summer Birdcage* in 1963 and since then has produced numerous novels, her most recent one being *The Red Queen* (2004), and biographies of Arnold Bennett (1974) and Angus Wilson (1995), and she is editor of both the fifth (1985) and sixth (2000) editions of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*.

On the basis of her output, as a critic claims, “[n]either ivory tower artist nor academician, Margaret Drabble seems attuned to herself and to ordinary experience, vividly rendering the ordinary with intelligence and learning, insight and humour” (Creighton 14). It is easy but mistaken to confuse Drabble’s lucidity and her focus on the ordinary with ordinary work. One recurrent view is that she owes her success to her extraordinary lucky sense of timing rather than her talent. (Creighton 14-5) However, her present-day popularity proves the opposite. Her work attracts both general readers and literary critics because it draws together middlebrow and serious fiction by being contemporary and yet informed with a sophisticated sense of literary history and tradition (Creighton 15), however, some critics and—according to the media—even her sister sneer at her literary achievement.

Fundamentally liberal and humanistic, Margaret Drabble is committed to the idea that novels should be about common human experiences and should be ‘available to a fairly large reading public, by which I don’t mean popular novels, I mean novels that aren’t esoteric or hermetically sealed,’ or exclusively ‘a clever array of symbolic patterning for the scholarly mind.’ (Creighton 15)

Her anti-intellectualism is clearly exemplified by the lack of intellectual pretension in her novels which makes her work easily accessible and popular. This anti-intellectual attitude

is not only Drabble's own since it is a definitive element of the ethos of the English novel. (Bényei 42) The descriptive qualities of the English novel were defined by F.R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition* (1949), which was a strict codification of the canon of the English novel instead of a literary history as originally intended. By this Leavis cemented a monolithic, unhistorical, timeless tradition which determined English literary history for decades and provided only a marginal position for contemporary writers. (Bényei 65) Leavis' inhibiting authority has left a strong mark on Drabble as well, as she herself testifies to it.

[. . .] Leavis did have a great influence on my generation, a profound influence which is still perpetuated by many people who don't even know he existed. [. . .] The Great Tradition that he had taught had a great influence on me. But there was something in me that rebelled against his control of the canon. [. . .] He was extremely powerful. And I think what happened in my case was that when I left Cambridge and Leavis, everything that he'd taught remained very important to me, but I'd escaped from the desire to please the father figure. I felt I could write an inconsequent little narrative that Leavis wasn't going to have to mark [. . .]. ("An Interview" 10)

However, Drabble has never got rid of Leavis' influence completely, maybe, she has never wanted to do so, because her novels show a mixture of qualities of the Great Tradition—like "a work of art should enact its moral meaning" ("An Interview" 10)—and a growing presence of some postmodern elements. "I have noticed that into my own work is creeping an increasingly ironical postmodern not to say at times aggressive tone which was certainly not there when Leavis was the dominant influence on literary theory" ("An Interview" 12). Nevertheless, this ironical postmodern tone that Drabble mentions concerning her departure from Leavis does not classify her as a postmodern writer. Unlike her sister's *Possession*, Christine Brook-Rose's *Textermination* (1991) or Margaret Forster's *The Lady's Maid* (1990), the postmodern quality of Drabble's writing, including her latest novels, is far—not only in time— from what Lidia Curti defines as postmodern when describing the latest tendencies in female literary production. "The contamination of genres," Curti claims, "is most evident in the practice of rewriting, which seem characteristically to mark the literary scene of the end of the twentieth century [. . .]. Most so-called postmodern stylistic devices and aesthetical features are involved in this practice: parody, pastiche, citationalism, juxtaposition of original and copy, the creation of complex authorial webs, temporal leaps and a vision of the present as a vestige of the past" (40-41).

As a result of this, Drabble's "inconsequent little narratives" are read as a continuation of the classic realist tradition (Bényei 58; Cunningham 131), which forms the main body of the history of the English novel. One of the most pervasive critical convictions concerning the English novel is that it is primarily realist by re-presenting the familiar experience of the ordinary, a conviction that presupposes the transparency of language as well. In addition, realism, if interpreted in a broader sense, means the hegemony of empirism and common sense as its fundamental ideology which also requires a strong belief in the referentiality of language. (Bényei 52-3)

[. . .] I was still being described as a writer of realist novels when [*The Realms of Gold* in 1975] came out and that label really still attaches to me quite often in a hostile kind of way. But I think I was already doing something quite different there and I've gone on doing it—sort of moving from realism. Some people call my work 19th century but you can't write a 19th century novel in the 20th century nor am I attempting to. ("An Interview" 23)

The Waterfall, the novel I will interpret in detail dramatises this impossibility of writing a nineteenth-century novel in the twentieth century. The female protagonist, Jane Gray, almost obsessed with the question of 'Who am I?', is a poet who, after driving away her husband with her coldness, gives birth to her second child, a little girl alone and starts an adulterous love affair with her cousin Lucy's husband, James. This love affair ends with an almost fatal car accident after which Lucy, Jane's cousin and alter ego and also James' wife, takes back the man. Then Jane starts a new life of a woman who has (re)gained her femininity first through the experience of motherhood then that of sexuality.

The novel belongs to the numerous post-1945 *Jane Eyre* rewritings, like Elizabeth Taylor's *Classica* (1946), Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) or D. M. Thomas' *Charlotte: Jane Eyre's Last Journey* (2000). Although Drabble positions herself both in connection with and in opposition to the nineteenth-century Great Tradition of realist novels, Bényei, as well as other critics, clearly excludes the possibility of any experimental intention in the case of her novels. In a 1967 BBC recording, "Novelists of the Sixties" even Drabble claimed, "I don't want to write an experimental novel to be read by people in fifty years, who will say, ah, well, yes, she foresaw what was coming. I'm just not interested. I'd rather be at the end of a dying tradition, which I admire, than at the beginning of a tradition which I deplore" (Drabble quoted by Bergonzi 78). However, in my view, the novel I will interpret in detail is an

exception to this rule, which clearly exemplifies Drabble's double self-image as a classic realist writer and an innovative woman writer.

To define Drabble's double position in the history of the British novel Joanne V. Creighton claims relying on Malcolm Bradbury's views:

In short, there is in contemporary British fiction an eclectic resynthesis, a revived and not entirely simplistic liberalism and realism; it is part of its force, its liveliness and its sense of crisis. Margaret Drabble shares with a number of her contemporaries this mediating position between the traditional and the modern, the Great Tradition and other traditions, the literary and the real. (29)

This is how *The Waterfall* functions as a text because Drabble not only borrows certain elements from the nineteenth-century tradition but rewrites them giving priority to reinterpretation. In my reading I focus on this reinterpretative intention concerning primarily the genres of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*, and point out how Drabble's novel rereads its nineteenth-century intertexts while this rereading process makes the narrator of this work reread and rewrite her own "authentic" text and subject position.

The novel consists of constantly oscillating third- and first-person narrative parts, which creates a constant shift in narration. This provides newer and newer positions for the female narrator, Jane Gray, from which she can try and articulate her subjectivity. On the one hand, the third-person narrative parts constitute a wished-for romance while, on the other hand, the first-person parts reflect on the validity of the third-person ones. Although the third-person parts have an impersonal narrator the narrator's presence is clearly marked in the first-person parts. Drabble uses these alternating modes of narration very consciously. As she claims, omniscient narration "[. . .] was a very important movement which said that you must never ever have any consciousness that the book is an artifice. Whereas I think it's fine to say the book is an artifice. [. . .] you're still going to be compelled by something you know to be an artifice" ("An Interview" 23). The fact that the reader is presented an artifice, a construction of the author and traditions, is further emphasized by the presence of nineteenth-century intertexts: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Emma* (1816) by Jane Austen as Drabble's fiction "is located within, enriched by and played off against the literary language, traditions and characters she knows so well" (Creighton 30).

The double narration is primarily differentiated by critics as representations of 'she' as the female body and mind, or the culturally defined female body and the woman writer, the

artist. (Wyatt 241) As opposed to this dominant trend, in my reading I will apply genres as the basis of differentiation: the third-person parts constitute a romance, in which the female protagonist tries to identify with nineteenth-century heroines, whereas the first-person parts write a *Bildungsroman*. Both genres offer the story of integration into society, however, in different ways: the romance provides social integration for the heroine through her relation to a powerful man, such as her father or husband; the hero of the *Bildungsroman* achieves social integration in his own right. Both genres are strongly gendered, that is why the romance and the *Bildungsroman* could not coexist in one nineteenth-century story, and be integrated for the heroine at the resolution. To overcome the contradiction between love and quest, nineteenth-century women writers came forth with an ending in which one part of the contradiction, usually the *Bildung* is set aside or repressed either by marriage or by death. (DuPlessis 3-4) However, *The Waterfall* problematises the relation of the two genres, which is clearly marked by the uncertainties in its critical readings. Ian Wojcik-Andrews in *Margaret Drabble's Female Bildungsromane* (1995) calls attention to the fact that most female *Bildungsromans* should be considered as *Künstlerromans* as well, however, he fails to write about *The Waterfall* in detail either as a *Bildungsroman* or as a *Künstlerroman*. In addition, Drabble's novel cannot be read as a proper female *Bildungsroman* since the protagonist, Jane Gray, is concerned with the male story of development, the voyage-out, as Abel, Hirsch and Langland call it. In this way, the novel swerves from the female literary tradition when it rejects the voyage-in as the only possible story of development for a female protagonist.

The two narrative parts differ concerning their relation to ideology as well. Relying on Catherine Belsey's *Critical Practice* (1980) I claim that the third-person romance functions as a classic realist text which effaces its existence as a text pretending transparency (68), while the first-person parts aim at revealing that there is no unmediated experience and rip open the ideological potentials of the other. I am using the term ideology in the Althusserian sense as Belsey does, and follow her understanding that "[w]hat is represented in ideology is [. . .] not the system of real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" (Belsey, *Critical* 164-5).

In addition to Jane Gray's gradually changing attitude towards her own text, my reading of the intentionally classic realist third-person narrative will reveal its own illusory transparency in the way Belsey theorises this textual process in general:

The realist text is a determinate representation, an intelligible structure which claims to convey intelligible relationships between its elements. In its attempt to create a coherent and internally consistent fictive world the text, in spite of itself,

exposes incoherences, omissions, absences and transgressions which in turn reveal the inability of the language of ideology to create coherence. (Belsey, "Constructing" 603)

This is what we can see in Drabble's text: the third-person parts are told by an impersonal narrator 'who' is the implied source and guarantee of coherence and 'truth.' In *The Waterfall*, just as Belsey claims, "[t]he authority of this impersonal narration springs from its effacement of its own status as discourse" (*Critical* 72) by re-presenting the story to the reader as plausible because it is constructed out of what is (discursively) familiar. (Belsey, *Critical* 47) However, later on in the first-person commentary Jane Gray reveals that "[o]f the truth, I haven't told enough" (Drabble 46), thus questioning the very "guarantee" of coherence and truth.

Jane's wished-for romance is built upon the illusion of the consistency and continuity of the subject. She wants to shape her romance like classic realist texts where

[. . .] in many cases the action itself represents a test of identity, putting identity in question by confronting the protagonist with alternative possible actions. [. . .] But the movement of classic realist narrative towards closure ensures the reinstatement of order, sometimes a new order, sometimes the old restored, but always intelligible because familiar. (Belsey, *Critical* 75)

However, Jane Gray's story ends with an order which is quite incomprehensible to her lover, James, which implies that it must be an unfamiliar scenario, a radical stepping away from classic realist closures.

The first-person parts comment on the validity of the third-person narrative and, at the same time, rip open the ideological potentials of the romance. The impersonal narration is replaced by a strong authorial presence, since it is Jane Gray herself who overtly claims this authority over the production of the third-person narrative. Drabble admits her general interest in authorial intrusions and remarks "I think the narrator is part of the story and can intervene whenever he or she wants [. . .]" ("An Interview" 23). In this fashion, Jane Gray as the first-person narrator feels free to edit, revise and modify her text to her own needs and intentions. The strong presence of the narrator reveals that there is no unmediated experience and if so the sense of a consistent subjectivity is an illusion as well. "'Identity', subjectivity, is thus a matrix of subject positions, which may be inconsistent or even in contradiction with one another. Subjectivity, then, is linguistically and discursively constructed and displaced across

the range of discourses in which the concrete individual participates” (Belsey, *Critical* 61). Jane Gray, who tries but is unable to stick to the privileged discourse of the romance, formulates the same experience in her own way, however, from the opposite point of view:

[. . .] the ways of regarding an event, so different, don't add up to a whole; they are mutually exclusive: the social view, the sexual view, the circumstantial view, the moral view, these visions contradict each other; they do not supplement one another, they cancel one another, they destroy one another. They cannot coexist. And so, because I so wanted James, because I wanted him so obsessively, I have omitted everything, almost everything except that sequence of discovery and recognition that I would call love. (46)

Nevertheless, the first-person narrative parts, in which Jane Gray comments on her ways of “regarding² an event,” supplement the third-person romance in such a way that Jane’s authority over the production the third-person narrative is reinforced as an intentional authorial attitude, which, at the same time, is continually contested by the first-person parts.

The interplay of the double narration results in the emergence of an interrogative text which is characterised by Belsey as follows:

[. . .] if the interrogative text is illusionist it also tends to employ devices to undermine the illusion, to draw attention to its own textuality. The reader is distanced, at least from time to time, rather than wholly interpolated into a fictional world. [. . .] [T]he interrogative text refuses a single point of view, however complex and comprehensive, but brings points of view into unresolved collision or contradiction. (*Critical* 92)

Drabble’s implied author does the same by giving Jane Gray the authorial authority to narrate her adultery as a genuine romance and disillusioning her by it. The romance pattern provides Jane with a sense of coherent identity and a possibility of a coherent story with a nice climactic closure but this illusion is taken into pieces by herself when she presents the actions from different points of view. We, the readers will never know the truth of her story, since the truth of the narrative is distilled through her narrative consciousness and language as well. By the end of her text there is no privileged discourse, instead an interplay of discourses she lives

² Drabble cleverly avoids the use of words such as presenting or representing an event and uses such expressions which are not informed by any theories.

in, and her internal distance from her ideologically constructed romance results in the critique of ideology. Thus she deconstructs her own narrative from within, in the course of which she unintentionally enters her own *Bildungsroman*.

While Drabble's *The Waterfall* proves to be an odd one out in her oeuvre due to its relatively experimental characteristics mentioned above, the other half of this literary sisterhood of texts, A.S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* with its profound use of various postmodern methods proves to be an organic part of its author's literary career.

A.S. Byatt was born Antonia Susan Drabble in 1936. Reading and literature, especially fairy tales, became part of Byatt's childhood since "she identified with characters in fairy tales and myths of a literate household" (Burgass 8). Her attraction to these genres did not fade with childhood, she makes use of them in many of her novels including *Possession* as well.

To avoid their mother's academic deprivation, it was out of the question that both Drabble sisters would go to Cambridge University, but as it happened in the mother's case, Byatt had to face the same alternatives, which she dramatises in most of her novels, e.g. *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964), *The Game* (1967), and her sequel: *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996), *A Whistling Woman* (2002) as well as *Possession*. "The expectations of society [. . .] were [. . .] that these [educated] women were likely to marry young and follow the domestic pattern of their mothers' generation—a particularly unfortunate model for Byatt" (Burgass 9). Facing the dilemma of domesticity and academic career Byatt tried to reconcile the two: after giving up her doctoral research and marrying Ian Byatt in 1959 and giving birth to two children in quick succession she completed her first novel which she had already started as an undergraduate at Cambridge. Besides creative writing she had had a teaching post since 1962 at London University and published her critical study on Iris Murdoch's fiction, *Degrees of Freedom* in 1965. After her divorce she quickly married her second husband and gave birth to two children again and her other critical work: *Wordsworth and Coleridge in their Time* (1970). In the late seventies she started publishing the parts of her projected quartet, *The Virgin in the Garden*, *Still Life*, *Babel Tower*, and most recently, *A Whistling Woman*. The work took over forty years from conception to completion. In the sequels she still dramatises the original problem of female creativity—domesticity and/or art—but, "as the action of her novels moves forwards, or backwards into the mythical time of fairy tale, Byatt betrays a cautious optimism as her female protagonists achieve qualified success or compromise between what have previously been presented as mutually exclusive states" (Burgass 13). As Catherine Burgass claims, "Byatt's fiction prior to *Possession* seems to be that women cannot have it all" (13). It is Maud Bailey at the end of the novel who is the most likely to achieve the balance between

professional success and personal autonomy and romantic desire at the same time offering a modern solution to the female dilemma. (Burgass 14)

Besides the thematic opposition of female artistic creativity and domesticity Byatt extends the focus of her fiction to the thematic play between the role of the artist and critic. Like domesticity and artistic creativity, Byatt experiences the second alternative as well in her academic life, since she herself is a writer and critic at the same time. As an author of both novels and critical works she regularly faces the question of identification and the relation of literature and critical practice. She identifies herself as a writer when asked by journalists and emphasizes her literary skills over the critical ones, saying “I am *not* an academic who happens to have written a novel. I am a novelist who happens to be quite good academically” (quoted by Burgass 15). Considering her oeuvre it is clearly visible that her novels have been quite regularly followed by works of non-fiction, but the intermingling of artistic and critical tones becomes more and more emphatic in her work: her fiction has become more and more self-conscious of being a literary product itself, and her non-fiction has moved from the style of conventional studies to the form of “eclectic collections of essays which demonstrate particular writerly preoccupations” (Burgass 15). She makes good use of her twofold interest both in criticism and creative writing because “[f]or Byatt, the creative process is always essentially critical, a matter of discovering the meaning of what she’s making as she goes along—reading herself even as she writes” (Mallon 2). It is clearly visible in *Possession* that her writing does not alternate between being creative and critical since it embodies them simultaneously.

Byatt privileges, however, the creative over the critical, and asserts the primary importance of literature and the parasitical nature of criticism as early as in her first novel, *Shadow of a Sun* (1964), which was republished as *The Shadow of the Sun* in 1991. Here, the character of the critic, Oliver is based on the figure of F.R. Leavis, whose powerful influence is admittedly present in Margaret Drabble’s works. In the novel Oliver is a hanger-on, which clarifies that Byatt’s “Cambridge experience appears to have calcified a suspicion of dogmatic intellectual authority, and spawned a particular antipathy to Leavis” (Burgass 16). Byatt is suspicious of any literary theory that tries to monopolise literature. Introduced to structuralist theory in the 1960s Byatt sees the theory of language as a self-referent system quite dangerous, and expresses her scepticism of this idea in *Possession*. Roland, at the end of the novel, most probably speaks Byatt’s critical ideas when he experiences the inadequacy of the theory he has been raised in:

He had been taught that language was essentially inadequate, that it could never speak what was there, that it only spoke itself.

He thought about the death mask [of Randolph Henry Ash]. He could and could not say that the mask and the man were dead. What happened to him was that the ways in which it could be said had become more interesting than the idea that it could not. (*Possession* 473)

On other pages—when the reader is presented either with Mortimer Cropper’s or Beatrice Nest’s works—Byatt corrects and sometimes makes fun of post-structuralist excesses by producing their texts and parodying their academic jargon and revealing their potential misreadings. By now—due to the success of *Possession*³ itself—Byatt has established herself as an authority and has no professional need to follow academic trends, which provides her with intellectual freedom to reveal the limited horizons of any literary theory.⁴

To achieve her authorial freedom Byatt has had to fight her way towards literary recognition which took her much longer than her sister. Her intellectualism was not favoured by the British literary environment for long because “British diffidence towards experimentalism, linked to a sort of national antipathy for theory, delayed the incidence of postmodernism in feminist writing.⁵ The seventies and eighties [. . .] saw the continuation of the great tradition of realistic or symbolic-naturalistic fiction [. . .]” (Curti 89). As time passes Byatt’s fiction follows a trajectory which leads her away from the requirements of the Great Tradition as designated by Leavis towards a self-conscious and experimental postmodernism. (Burgass 18) Now, Byatt is difficult to categorise, because, as Eyre remarks, she “actually forms part of a non-conformist tradition that is hard-working and meticulous, but also full of sensuality and pleasure. It’s a tradition that includes George Eliot, capable of combining sentences like ‘I am in love with pleasure’ with full moral discipline” (20).

³ *Possession* won the Booker Prize in October 1990 as well as the *Irish Times*/Aer Lingus Award before the Booker and was subsequently short-listed for the Whitbread Award. (Burgass 71) The novel’s performance was a spectacular success not only in Europe but overseas as well, and was snapped up by Warner Bros. and made into a movie with Gwyneth Paltrow.

⁴ Her theoretical freedom goes hand in hand with the ease with which she wears her learning lightly. Hermione Eyre evokes a talk when she responded to a “fairly solemn art-historical question about the artist’s influence by talking about the colours of the cushion covers she’s just bought for her house in France. No one with lesser academic credentials would have dared such a cosy answer” (17).

⁵ Although Byatt does not identify herself as a feminist writer, she is “quite often tended to be discussed along with other post-war ‘women writers’ ” (Burgass 75). Nevertheless, her original focus (domesticity and/or art) goes parallel with post-war feminist writing. Since her first novels Byatt has widened her thematic interests and she is moving away from the British model and claims to identify herself more as a “European writer”. Moreover, her novels are moving away from her original interest in the female dilemma replacing the theme of female creativity with “a less gender-specific interest in dramatising contemporary theories of knowledge” (Burgass 24).

However, this process of achieving gradual independence has proved to be a road to take alone, as she could not find a possible role model. Her contemporaries' fashionable stance of anti-intellectualism and classic realist fiction—like most of what her sister wrote—was not appealing to her, instead she started producing novels in an anti-Leavis fashion which were dominated by intellectual creativity and self-consciously revealed their construction as literary texts—one of the trademarks of postmodern fiction, which in Byatt's oeuvre, as Burgass claims “really starts to come into play with *The Virgin in the Garden*” (20). Her intellectual stance is highly informed by poststructuralism, which provides a recurrent notion of language in *Possession* as well, namely that language is a self-reflexive construct. For this literariness Byatt is often, and with reason, called an intellectual writer, who luckily has the good sense of proportion with which she mixes “cleverness” and realism in her novels, which she identified in an interview as a “mixture of ideas and sensuality” (quoted by Burgass 22). Her erudition often serves as the cause of accusing her with élitism, but she is not afraid to be called so, in its most positive sense.

One source of this cleverness and seeming élitism in *Possession* can be found in the textual complexity of the novel which constitutes one of its most apparent postmodern traits. As opposed to classic realist texts which efface their own existence as artefacts (Belsey, *Critical* 68), postmodern stylistic devices include pastiche, parody, juxtaposition of original and copy, citationalism, the creation of complex webs of “leitmotifs”, temporal leaps and a vision of the present as a reminiscence of the past. *Possession* is a clever repository of all these devices which, at the same time, does not sacrifice the readerly appeal that makes it such an adventure to read.

Possession plays serious games with the variety of possible forms of narrating the past—the detective story, the biography, the mediaeval verse Romance, the modern romantic novel, and Hawthorne's fantastic historical romance in between, the campus novel, the Victorian third-person narration, the epistolary novel, and the primitive fairy tale ... (Byatt quoted in Burgass 27)

“These fictitious texts, however, all instances of pastiche of one kind or another, are themselves profoundly allusive and citational,” remarks Belsey about the indeterminate textual nature of *Possession* (*Desire* 84) in which several “cited” texts are invented by Byatt herself. In Jameson's view

[p]astiche is [. . .] the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry [. . .] without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor [. . .]. (1963)

But Byatt inserts original texts by authors of the Romantic period as well. These long quotations clearly exemplify her methodology, as she thinks of the quoted blocks as being “like the slides in an art-historical lecture” (Byatt quoted by Mallon 2).

Byatt points at the textual peculiarity of *Possession* in the epigraph by Robert Browning. His poem, “Mr Sludge, ‘The Medium’” delineates the theme of fictionality and/or factuality right before the story is set into motion without calling the reader’s attention to its importance. Mr. Sludge, a morally not completely immaculate medium, is caught cheating and he shares his ideology of cheating and lying in this dramatic monologue. In the section that Byatt includes in the epigraph he refers to poets and writers who cheat and lie of

[. . .] how Greeks
That never were, in Troy which never was,
Did this or the other impossible great thing! (Byatt quoting Browning without page number)

Without calling the attention of the reader Byatt ends the epigraph with a seemingly humble question that applies to her novel to come as well:

‘How many lies did it require to make
The portly truth you here present us with?’ (Byatt quoting Browning without page number)

The relevant question is never answered in the novel though it always lurks in the background as Byatt produces a text of indeterminate nature as it stands between fiction and fact, on the threshold of a fictitious and the real world. Byatt willingly confuses her readers by inserting her protagonists into such a literary environment that proves to be factual, whereas she manages to create such academic contexts in which real literary figures and critics, like Jacques Le Goff, pass as fictitious. In this way, Byatt “participate[s] in Sludgehood”

(Browning quoted by Byatt without page number) and creates such a textual liminality that urges the reader to go on never-ending explorations in the world of *Possession*, and make never-ending attempts at the readerly possession of the novel. In addition, “[w]hat makes the novel a particularly artful literary object and rewards the assiduous reader is the way that the epigraphs, quotations, and inset texts echo and are interwoven with the main narrative strands, making the novel both complex and coherent, multi-layered but unified” (Burgass 29).

This cleverly structured novel gives a historical reconstruction of the biographies of two imaginary(?) Victorian poets, the eminent Randolph Henry Ash, and her contemporary—allegedly lesbian—Christabel LaMotte, and reveal their love story. The novel also provides their prolific writing in the form of diary entries, letters, short and long poems using the language of the Victorian age. As far as the reader knows, these characters can either be real people in disguise, and then one should start investigating who they might be, or fictional figures out of the mind of the author, which implies that the literary pieces are original writings of Byatt as well. Either way, it takes a lifetime’s learning to decipher all the allusions.

Naturally, the wide variety of narrative forms results in the “contamination” of genres—another postmodern trait—which again proves that the text calls attention to its own textuality. Byatt “puts all her linguistic, parodic skills on display, almost as if she had set herself the challenge of imitating as many Victorian genres as possible” (Hulbert 59). This textual and generic heterogeneity goes hand in hand with the refusal of a single point of view which smoothly changes in Byatt’s novel without strongly shocking the reader and breaking the fictional illusion. The more genres Byatt imitates the more tones and styles she uses.

[T]he stylistic blend—from the epic and mythical to the epistolary and diaristic—responds to a deliberate plan but does not allude to multiple personalities or subject splits so much as to a diegetic practice of displacement, a technical exercise of great bravura, and extraordinary *tour de force* proceeding from one narrative slippage to another, in an infinite chain of simulations.⁶ (Curti 43)

Thematic simulations reveal two parallel plots: one is of the lives and love of Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte, two Victorian poets; the other is the progressing research, investigation and love story of Roland Michell and Maud Bailey, two contemporary literary researchers who show first only academic, but later on personal interest

⁶ Simulation is present in the novel not only in terms of genres and styles but in terms of plots and characters which I will elaborate in detail further on.

in the Ash-LaMotte relationship. These narrative lines are intercut and interrupted by relevant citations of seemingly factual—though actually fictional—texts which retard the action. Nevertheless, the impatient reader recognises that these citations are there not only to test their perseverance but also to enrich the story and reveal some of its hidden aspects.

Although *The Waterfall* and *Possession* belong to different ages and different literary paradigms they have much more in common than what is apparent for the first sight. In my view, both novels heavily rely on the nineteenth-century female literary tradition, and, for this reason, it is no wonder that they cannot help applying the two most basic literary genres of the period, the romance and the *Bildungsroman*. Since these two genres cannot exist without contradicting each other within one story for reasons which I will elaborate on in the relevant chapters, it is inevitable that the two contemporary novels have to face this problem as well. However, I propose, that both *The Waterfall* and *Possession* try to synthesise the two genres when they reinterpret their nineteenth-century intertexts, namely they try to read the romance as *Bildungsroman*, and the *Bildungsroman* as romance, which results in a fluid generic fusion of the two. To accomplish this revisionary aim the two novels, naturally, apply various methods, which vary according to the different artistic views of their authors, however, the novels' intention to make a compromise between the contradictions of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* relate them not only to the contested nineteenth-century female literary tradition but to each other as well. For this reason, I propose to read *The Waterfall* and *Possession* as sister narratives which have more in common for their contesting and synthesising attitudes to the genres of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* than for their authors' actual family relationship.

To provide a common theoretical ground for investigating both novels, I am applying Linda Hutcheon's ideas on historiographic metafiction as she elaborates on it in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1992), because this genre proves to be a flexible enough category for texts which – like *The Waterfall* and *Possession* – relate the past to the present and open it up without any sense of teleology. I claim that both contemporary novels qualify as historiographic metafiction, which, in their attempt to relate the past to the present, reread the classic though not at all unproblematic genres of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*. I propose that though *The Waterfall* and *Possession* relate to the two nineteenth-century genres in different ways they arrive at the same solution: while in the nineteenth-century novels the order of the two genres proves to be problematic Drabble's and Byatt's texts apply the two genres parallel. In this way, it is possible to read the romance as a *Bildungsroman* and the *Bildungsroman* as a romance, which results in a special synthesis of the two nineteenth-century genres. In addition, as Lisa Fletcher proposes in *Historical Romance Fiction*:

Heterosexuality and Performativity (2008) the romance can be interpreted not only as a genre but as a mode of relating the past to the present. For this reason I propose that the citational nature of *Possession* can be read as a characteristic of the romance, which affects not only the plot but character formation as well. The most emblematic citational character is Melusina, the ancient goddess in Byatt's novel whose figure not only reinforces the notion of citationality but posits the question of gender into the forefront of *Possession*. I also investigate how far these two contemporary novels get from classic realist texts because on the textual level they prove to be definitely different in their handling various postmodern textual devices. To examine the novels' textual complexity I rely on Catherine Belsey's *Critical Practice* (1980).

I also claim that all the tales and fairy tales that are incorporated or alluded to in *The Waterfall* and *Possession* contribute to the rereading of the generic synthesis of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*, which, is the basis of the literary sisterhood of the two novels. Since tales and fairy tales carry educational value and provide primary gendered plots and role models, they also follow and, at the same time, swerve from the traditional plots of romances and *Bildungsromans*. The tales and fairy tales in the twentieth-century novels problematise the very same issue as the novels' main bodies do: is it possible to fuse the two genres by reading romances as *Bildungsromans* and *Bildungsromans* as romances?

Besides the generic references to the nineteenth-century female literary tradition there are several other traits which relate these two contemporary novels to their foremothers' works. Space is a crucial element of setting a story, which is true not only of *The Waterfall* and *Possession* but of their most central intertext, *Jane Eyre* as well. I propose two forms of space that reinforce the generic synthesis in these two contemporary novels: spatial imagery, especially with reference to the nineteenth-century tradition of images of enclosure, and the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia. To read spatial imagery and point out the various instances of questioning the classic and, at the same time, already revolutionary images of the nineteenth-century female literary tradition I am relying on Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). I base my interpretation of the various types heterotopias the novels apply on Foucault's essay, "Of Other Spaces" (1986). I propose that the revision of images of enclosure provides a way out of the representational trap of women in *The Waterfall*, and, in *Possession*, shows the arbitrariness of the very same images. Heterotopia can function, on the one hand, as an alternative site to contain the transgressive love relation of Drabble's protagonist, but on the other hand, as a structural means of temporal intersections, which reinforces Byatt's understanding of the romance.

As contesting attitudes mean not only questioning but inscribing the very same tradition *The Waterfall* and *Possession* cannot and do not want to step out of the female literary tradition. This doubleness create a sense of possession—the two contemporary novels being possessed by the nineteenth-century female literary tradition—and a sense of repossession—by their contesting attitudes the novels repossess this tradition. This two-way relation inserts *The Waterfall* and *Possession* into the female literary tradition and make them sister narratives.

The structure of the present study reflects the structure of the two contemporary novels. After this introductory chapter Chapter 2 positions *The Waterfall* and *Possession*, first, concerning their genre—historiographic metafiction—which provides a common ground for their parallel investigation and, second, their author's relation to the female literary tradition. Chapter 3 focuses on tales and fairy tales that are incorporated in *The Waterfall*, in *Possession* and in *Jane Eyre*, which serves as a common intertext for both contemporary novels. As tales have always had didactic functions they introduce exemplary stories of either romance or development, which are reread by the novels. The next chapter offers an insight into Drabble's *The Waterfall* as it raises the question if it is possible to read the female protagonist's *Bildungsroman* as a romance. To answer the question I investigate how the novel reads its three nineteenth-century intertexts by Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. Chapter 5 is devoted to the analysis of *Possession*, but here the question is the other way round: is it possible to read the novel whose subtitle is *A Romance* as a *Bildungsroman*? First I read this romance as a quest for origins, then as citationality and finally I investigate the figure of Melusina whose character synthesises citationality, the romance and the *Bildungsroman*. In Chapter 6 I study the subtexts of space as constituted by images of enclosure and the concept of heterotopia in the very same three novels because all of them reinforce their various syntheses of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* with the help of spatial images and heterotopic sites. Chapter 8, naturally, offers a conclusion, which, by the end of this study, will have hopefully become obvious to the reader. Namely, that Drabble's *The Waterfall* and Byatt's *Possession* are sister narratives.

Chapter 2: Literary Paradigm(s)

As I have proposed in the previous chapter, I consider *The Waterfall* and *Possession* to have more in common than it is apparent at first sight. Despite their strong dissimilarity, the authors seem to undertake a very similar task: to write in and about the female literary tradition in a way that is compatible with our contemporary world. For this reason the aim of this chapter is twofold: first, to verify my own thesis I intend to call attention to two important aspects of both works: their relation to their supposed⁷ genre, historiographic metafiction, which is telling about their attitude to postmodernism as well; and, second, to examine the self-definition of their authors as women writers. I consider these two aspects the starting points of my study, as historiographic metafiction can provide a common theoretical framework for the comparative analysis of *The Waterfall* and *Possession*, and the authors' self-definition in relation to the female literary tradition can mark their attitudes towards the very same tradition they continue and contest in these two novels.

“[. . .] the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present [. . .],” quotes Byatt Nathaniel Hawthorne in one of the epigraphs to her novel (Hawthorne quoted by Byatt without page number). Although she selects a quote which is about the characteristics of the romance, it is also suitable to point out the major goal of historiographic metafiction, a postmodern genre, which both novels seem to belong to in my view. “Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological” (Hutcheon 110). Both Drabble's and Byatt's texts open up the past to the present and deprive it from conclusion and teleology but in different ways.

Drabble's text is partly permeated with nostalgia towards the past and despite its attempts to incorporate the past into the present the main reason underlying this gesture is not to contest it but to yearn for it. Her protagonist in *The Waterfall*, Jane Gray, in her third-person narrative gives account of a story that does not at all resemble historiographic metafiction, rather classic realist fiction. Thus Drabble dramatises the interplay of a classic realist text and a historiographic metafiction which tell the same events but the different attitudes of the two narratives to the events they narrate question the validity of any totalising narrative. The two textual layers embody different attitudes not only towards the events they tell but to the literary past as well. Drabble's third-person narrative can be described in Linda Hutcheon's terms, here “nostalgia connotes evasion of the present, idealization of a (fantasy)

⁷ “The categories of genre are regularly challenged these days,” remarks Hutcheon (60) which is clearly marked by the name of historiographic metafiction itself which blurs the boundary of historiography, fiction and metanarrative at the same time.

past, or a recovery of that past as edenic,” which does not characterise historiographic metafiction in general (Hutcheon 39). If yearning for the past occurs in historiographic metafiction it is never an unproblematic attitude, since it is supposed to have a special relation that “critically confronts the past with the present, and vice versa” (Hutcheon 39). However, what Drabble makes out of this simple nostalgia of the third-person narratives is something new: by applying different points of view—first- and third-person ones—and presenting the same events in different enunciative contexts she contrasts the past and the present and relativises, and thus contests Jane Gray’s nostalgia and utopistic attachment. This contesting attitude is the main function of the first-person narrative parts in *The Waterfall* which correct and re-edit the wished-for romance that is provided in the third-person narratives. As a result of the narrator’s handling this nostalgic view of the past and turning it into its contesting rather than its celebratory fantasy Drabble moves her novel closer to historiographic metafiction by the end of the book. Although she does not include any historical personages in *The Waterfall*, a characteristic that Hutcheon finds relevant to historiographic metafiction, narration, its self-conscious textuality, and emphasis on the “enunciative situation—text, producer, receiver, historical, and social context,” just as in typical historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon 115), make the novel an early attempt at the postmodern genre of historiographic metafiction. Its sense of the past is greatly textualised, as it evokes a sense of a past from literary texts. It creates a totalising order of romantic love and, though gradually, “contests it, by its radical provisionality, intertextuality, and [. . .] fragmentation” as typical of historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon 116).

Citacionality, another characteristic feature of historiographic metafiction, is also present in *The Waterfall*, however, in a less subtle way than in *Possession*. Drabble’s novel overtly calls the reader’s attention to the various intertexts it applies, and whenever it does so, the narrator protagonist always relies on a particular quotation which she tries to imitate, cite in her own life. In this way, citacionality, modelling an event or experience on another textualised one, becomes apparent in *The Waterfall* to such an extent that it starts functioning as Jane Gray’s, the female narrator protagonist’s willing mode of existence, which allows the reader to see Jane’s maturation in the light of the nineteenth-century intertexts which she cites as romances.

However conscious artistic a construct this novel seems—and now the emphasis on its being a construct—*The Waterfall* does not venture on postmodern lands as daringly as *Possession* does. In my view, there are two reasons for it: first, it was written in 1969 when postmodern modes of writing were not inaugurated in such a fundamental way as they were in 1990 when *Possession* was first published; second, as far as Drabble’s oeuvre is considered,

The Waterfall counts as a surprisingly novel attempt, an odd one out, since Drabble's other works, even the recent ones, exemplify a massive retreat into the English realist tradition of the novel.

As opposed to her sister's novel, Byatt publishes *Possession* in the heydays of postmodernism, and, in addition, she is part of the academic world with an excellent knowledge of the literary theories of the postmodern. She does not hide her erudition for a second, rather she makes good use of it and places theories in the forefront of her novel to make it a postmodern text.

To make the differences between classic realist fiction and historiographic metafiction more palpable it is worth considering a double description of the two paradigms. When Hutcheon describes historiographic metafiction she modifies the concise description of the paradigm of the nineteenth-century historical novel and inserts the postmodern changes to describe the contemporary genre.

Characters [never] constitute a microcosmic portrayal of representative social types; they experience complications and conflicts that embody important tendencies [not] in historical development [whatever that might mean, but in narrative plotting, often traceable to other intertexts]; one or more world-historical figures enter the fictive world, lending an aura of extratextual validation to the text's generalisations and judgements [which are promptly undercut and questioned by revealing the true intertextual, rather than extratextual, identity of the sources of validation]; the conclusion [never] reaffirms [but contests] the legitimacy of a norm that transforms social and political conflict into moral debate. (Foley quoted and modified by Hutcheon 120)

To characterise *Possession* as historiographic metafiction let me examine it along Hutcheon's suggestions. First of all, are the main characters of the novel representatives of social types? Yes and no at the same time. Although Ash and Christabel are emblematic Victorian figures through whom Byatt pays homage to the period, and their characters are created from traits of several literary figures of the age, Byatt individuates them to such an extent that they seem to become flesh and blood people in the book. Considering the twentieth-century protagonists, Maud and Roland, the case proves to be similar. The reader experiences them primarily as two individuated characters—a man and a woman—and it becomes clear only later that, to a certain extent, they are entrapped in their social type. Besides being Maud and Roland, they are literary critics who are subjected to their theories and their attitudes and views of life and

the world itself, and are affected by their theoretical stance to a great extent. Nevertheless, Byatt rescues them from being simple representatives of “literary critics” by sending them out on a quest, the only successful one in *Possession*, which contests and subverts their presuppositions. Through this Byatt makes them postmodern “heroes”: what they install as a totalising order—postmodern literary theory, which, by definition, should always remember its conscious refusal of any totalisation—becomes provisional and gets subverted through irony.

The conflicts the protagonists face in the course of the novel are caused by the plot and not by “important tendencies in historical development”. Although the nineteenth-century plot line is set at the time of the Victorian quest for origins which resulted from the shattering of the stable worldview in the Enlightenment period, this is the time when Darwin’s evolutionary theory is published and when religion as basics for life becomes questioned, neither Ash nor Christabel encounters conflicts arising from this historical context to such an extent that would influence the story line. Though the “important tendencies in historical development” can be traced in their correspondence, which is abundant in theoretical discussions of the various theories of the Victorian period, and the couple’s first meeting takes place at a breakfast party whose participants reflect on the theoretical turmoil of the age, the conflicts emerge primarily from the parallel plots. The couple’s accidental meeting at Crabb Robinson’s inaugurates a chain of unexpected events which gradually grows into love, then loss, and, finally, the confession of both. Similarly, the conflict that sets the twentieth-century story line into motion falls outside the force field of history: the accidental discovery of Ash’s draft letters to Christabel starts the contemporary plot line which is fuelled by scientific ambition and narrative curiosity.

Historical figures enter the world of fiction here, as Hutcheon suggests above, to provide an extratextual validation to the fictional portion of the novel. An example could be Ash’s and Christabel’s separate meetings with Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Ash was “very young and green” (Byatt 175) when he met the poet, and Christabel was an infant. But, as Hutcheon remarks that the extratextual validating function of a historical figure like this is immediately undercut to reveal its intertextual nature in order to question his or her own validity as created in and by the text. In accordance with it, the next piece of information that Byatt reveals about Christabel and Coleridge’s meeting is that “his pudgy Hand rested on my golden curls—his Voice remarked on their flaxen paleness” and he foreshadows the happy ending of his poem, *Christabel*, which even Christabel LaMotte doubts. (Byatt 178-9) The great poet is reduced to an old man for a moment when he rests his hand on the baby Christabel, his greatness as a historical figure is subverted into human (grand)fatherliness,

which calls for re-evaluation of his previous mentions in the novel as well. This Coleridge is not the real one: he is created in and by the text, he is a construct of narrative fiction, a characteristic that makes historiographic metafiction's relation towards history complex and reveals the narrativised, thus constructed nature of both.

Finally, the nature of conclusion is at stake: does it reaffirm the legitimacy of norm or not? As I will investigate in detail in the section on the various quests for origins, Byatt's fictional world embodies the postmodern yearning for the referent that functions as a parodic parallel of the Victorian quest for origins—a liberal humanist impression that words refer to things in the world—, nevertheless it contests the very same idea all through the whole text. The lost referent is recovered on many levels, as I will point out, but the postscript gives a final twist to the seemingly new order. When the reader feels that there is the full stop at the end of the story, and all protagonists feel safe in the new-old world of the recovered referent, Byatt makes a comma out of this virtual full stop by attaching the postscript in which she reveals a fact (or event?) of Ash meeting her daughter, May/Maia, which no one knows about except for the reader, given the postmodern idea that we know the past only in its textualised traces. This twist at the end of the novel reinstates the postmodern attitude towards any totalising order, any origin and teleology, and results in the moral dilemma concerning the notions of our dominant, liberal humanist culture.

As opposed to Drabble's *The Waterfall*, Byatt's *Possession* is not an odd one out in her oeuvre as she prefers applying postmodern devices in her other novels as well. However, *Possession*, which is a clear example of historiographic metafiction, counts as a turning point in Byatt's career because it was her first novel that made her popular among the reading public both in Britain and overseas immediately after its publication and gained her fame and success.

Besides the two novels' relation to the past and their historiographical metafictional nature it is also important to clarify in the beginning how their authors—Drabble and Byatt—position themselves in relation to the female literary tradition which, in my view, they both continue and contest in *The Waterfall* and *Possession*. Although an author's self-definition in relation to a certain tradition is not always and not necessarily echoed in or justified by their work, it is always interesting to see how they relate to the tradition that they continue and contest at the very same time. Nevertheless, the existence and the role of the author have been highly questionable since Roland Barthes because for him the hand of the modern scriptor⁸ “has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins” (*Death* 1468). Nevertheless, as Hutcheon argues, “this *position* of discursive

⁸ Barthes introduces the term modern scriptor instead of author to avoid any f/Fatherly connotations of the word.

authority still lives on, because it is encoded into the enunciative act,” which is the mode of any postmodern text (Hutcheon 77).

What kind of discursive authority do the writers of *The Waterfall* and *Possession* assume when they posit themselves in relation to the female literary tradition? First of all, some extra-textual data could help to situate the actual writer of *The Waterfall*, Margaret Drabble.

When I started writing there was no women’s movement; there was no feminist criticism. Feminist criticism was born in 1968 precisely, and I published my first novel in 1963. So I was able to write in the innocent pre-feminist theory days when no one was going to get me for writing a sort of feminine book or writing about marriage or clothes. Nobody. There was no prototype feminist novel at all, which made life easier. I had to take feminist attitudes and criticism on board in the 1970s. (“An Interview” 14)

The Waterfall was published in 1969, just before the 1970s wave of feminist criticism that Drabble mentions. The novel is not informed by feminist critical theory to a great extent, unlike *Possession*, however, even without this, its concern for women’s lives and for the female literary tradition that Virginia Woolf articulates in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) is clearly in the foreground. Later on, in the very same interview, Drabble defines herself, saying “I do call myself a feminist. I am a feminist. I’m not the kind of feminist that some feminists are, but I would say that I am a feminist. I want to get it clear. I’m not an anti-feminist or a post-feminist; I am a feminist” (“An Interview” 16). No matter what kind of feminist she is, the way Drabble handles Jane Gray’s, the protagonist’s identification process reveals a deep insight into women’s psyche, and the fact that she chooses primarily Jane Eyre, an emblematic figure of the female literary tradition, as the goal of Jane Gray’s identification reveals her conscious attitude to the female literary tradition. The way she rewrites the nineteenth-century female literary texts highlights her purposes: rewriting means revision, which is not a one-way process.⁹ In my view, Drabble does it by such ease that her novel

⁹ What Drabble does is to interpret the present from the past and, at the same time, she reinterprets the past from the point of view of the present. It is what Susana Onega and Christian Gutleben call refraction in their introduction to their volume, *Refracting the Canon* (2004), which, in their definition, “involves the assumption of a dialectic relation between the canonical and postmodernist texts, affecting the result as well as the source, the new text as well as the old one, the modern product as well as the original prototype” (7). Onega and Gutleben introduce refraction to modify the connotations of intertextuality. They claim that when “Kristeva first coined and defined the term [. . .] in the late 1960s it was part of an attempt at deflecting the focus of literary criticism away from the traditional subject, i.e. the author as the demiurgic originator of a fixed meaning in his/her autonomous creation” (Gutleben and Onega 8). To avoid the hierarchy of texts implied by intertextuality

does not lend itself exclusively to any distinct feminist branch of thought, which enables her to be a feminist without any other labels. *The Waterfall* swerves from any theories that would anchor its meaning and lets meaning emerge from the interplay of the nineteenth-century intertexts and their twentieth-century re-readings.

As opposed to Drabble, Byatt's relation to the female literary tradition and her position as a woman writer is more complex. To continue the list of dissimilarities it must also be noted that her novel incorporates literary theories, including feminist literary theory, to a great extent and with true postmodern blood in its veins contests and subverts it just like the others. When talking about biographers I will note that Byatt puts literary theory and theorists on the pillory, which reveals her own attitude as well. Instead of contemporary theory she places Victorian complexity of the mind in the centre of her fictional universe in *Possession*.

In an interview [. . .], Byatt refers to one of the factors that led to the creation of Ash and LaMotte, namely, her realisation (prompted by Isobel Armstrong, to whom she dedicates the novel) that “the great Victorian poets have never been seen to be as complex as they are”, which triggered off her feeling that some justice should be done to these poets. (Byatt quoted by Tredell, quoted by Pereira 160)

The great Victorian poets, Tennyson, Browning and their fictional embodiment, Ash, are male ones, but the fact that Byatt includes a female poet, Christabel LaMotte, gives a different perspective to the tribute she pays to them. Although Byatt is not too keen to admit it, this gendered view is also an intrinsic part of her writing.

As Margarida Esteves Pereira argues convincingly, “[b]oth in her poetry and in her letters to Ash, Christabel LaMotte echoes the expressed thoughts of many female writers; not only female poets, such as Emily Dickinson or Christina Rossetti, but also novelists like Charlotte Brontë or George Eliot” (160). Just consider the following excerpt:

You do not seem aware, Mr Ash, for all your knowledge of the great world I do not frequent, of the usual response which the productions of the Female Pen [. . .] are greeted with. The best we may hope is—oh, it is excellently done—*for a woman*. And there are Subjects we may not treat—things we may not know. I do

they introduce refraction. “[r]efraction does not study the Oedipal relations between a text and its predecessors” (Gutleben and Onega 9). In their opinion, refraction allows us to obliterate any hierarchical or evaluative distinction between related texts. However, in my view, intertextuality is as much a two-way process as refraction is, because it does not just use texts as “sources” but as “re-sources”. It involves a two-way interpretative activity. For this reason, I do not apply refraction to describe intertextual meaning formation.

not say but that there must be—and *is*—some essential difference between the Scope and Power of men and our own limited consciousness and possibly weaker apprehension. But I do maintain, as stoutly, that the delimitations are at present, all *wrongly drawn*—We are not mere candle-holders to virtuous thoughts—mere chalices of Purity—we think and feel, aye and *read*—which seems not to shock *you* in us, in me, though I have concealed from many extent of my—vicarious—knowledge of human vagaries. (Byatt 180)

Byatt is heavily indebted here to Brontë for the expression of female autonomy and is well aware of the historical and social constraints of nineteenth-century women writers as delineated by several feminist critics.

Similarly to the Brontës, Byatt disguises her sex in her name which, like Currer, Acton and Ellis Bell's names, does not reveal too much of its bearer. By this gesture Byatt might avoid the interest of feminist literary criticism and, at the same time, refuses to be judged as a woman writer. "Much like the 19th-century writer LaMotte, A.S. Byatt still seems to feel that her female condition is a limitation to her career and, therefore, finds it necessary to distance herself from those social limits" (Pereira 161). To prove her point Pereira quotes Byatt:

What frightens me about a critic like Moers is that I'm going to have my interest in literature taken away by women who see literature as a source of interest in women. I don't need that. I'm interested in women anyway. Literature has always been my way out, my escape from the limits of being female.¹⁰ I don't want to get back in. (Byatt quoted by Dusingberre, quoted by Pereira 161).

However, her strong insistence on the authority of the author, her emphasis on the centrality of the canon,¹¹ and the figure of Christabel LaMotte, a strong and active female poet show that Byatt is aware of her uncertain position as a woman writer. Nevertheless, she uses and subverts the very same thematic components that the nineteenth-century female literary tradition brought into fashion: romantic love, fairy tales among others; as well as their imagery: enclosed spaces, female monsters. She reworks and questions the validity of the very

¹⁰ Byatt's insistence on her not being a female writer is clearly emphasised by her own self-definition as a European writer. (Mallon 1) This category, if not exclusively selected for male writers, is not too common to apply to women authors.

¹¹ Feminist criticism has done much to decenter the canon and bring the margins to the front. "Byatt's declared mistrust of feminist criticism in many ways is indebted to her insistence on the centrality of the canon, and on her belief that feminist criticism precludes women writers from being part of it, by relegating them to the margins of literary studies" (Pereira 154).

same genres, the romance and the *Bildungsroman* by offering a generic synthesis of the two. All these make *Possession* a locus of ambivalence between Byatt's position to the mainstream literary canon and a willing undertaking of the female literary agenda.

In my view, both *The Waterfall* and *Possession* qualify as historiographic metafiction, a postmodern genre that provides a common theoretical ground for their comparative analysis, and, though their authors relate themselves to the female literary tradition in different ways, they both undertake to continue and contest it in their novels which I claim to be sister narratives for this very reason.

Chapter 3: Tales as Romances and *Bildungsromans*

Tales have always had educational and socialising functions and provided examples and counter-examples for children amidst the ups and downs of growing up. These primary models or archetypal versions of gendered plots contain all the important elements of romances and *Bildungsromans*. The stories often depict a heroine whose role is to fulfil a romance, or a hero who must complete a quest to gain wealth and position in the end. Thus tales can be interpreted as romances and *Bildungsromans* which perpetuate the social expectations concerning both genders. In addition, fairy tales have proved to function as popular patterns for nineteenth-century narratives as well. For this reason I cannot avoid exploring the role of tales both in Drabble's *The Waterfall* and Byatt's *Possession*, as well as one of the most important literary texts that both novels¹² keep referring to, *Jane Eyre*. All the more so, apart from being a common intertext for both twentieth-century texts, *Jane Eyre* is one of the first and most popular early attempts at synthesising the romance and the *Bildungsroman* by the revision of tales, especially fairy tales.

Although I do not aim to set up any kind of typology for tales, it is important to note that not all of the tales in the novels are of the very same origin. There are classic fairy tales among them that have been adapted by the brothers Grimm, or folk tales, or even a tale of Asian origins. Though their sources prove to be different their functions are similar: they enrich the story they are embedded in, serve as a means of example, advice or warning for a particular character, or help him or her to understand their situation better. In my view, their function is the same as it has been for centuries, to educate men and women to be masculine and feminine along romance and *Bildung* patterns. However, in this case the patterns are sometimes modified or distorted according to the agenda and teleology of the various novels. Nevertheless, I propose that the tales in *The Waterfall* and *Possession* retain their generic characteristics and can be interpreted as another site of a possible synthesis between the romance and the *Bildungsroman*.

With an ethereal female figure¹³ at their centre fairy tales have always been popular not only among children but in other reading publics as well. Fairy tales function as fulfilment of basic psychic needs both on the individual and social level by presenting successful romance stories. As they are part of a widely shared cultural heritage, they inform meaning

¹² Although, *Jane Eyre* is not often alluded to in *Possession*, at one point Sabine de Kercoz, Christabel's cousin remarks that "[i]f she [Christabel] resembles a governess I am sure that she resembles the romantic Jane Eyre, so powerful, so passionate, full of enthusiasms, so observant beneath her sober exterior" (Byatt 336).

¹³ Alban notes that this central female character is a distilled, sophisticated form of a once powerful goddess who is rendered less potent through the workings of patriarchy. (9)

formation and provide traditional formulas—either structural or thematic—for story telling and writing. Considering their history,

[. . .] the fairy tale shifted from being a particular type of folk tale (a wonder folk tale) into the realms of European literary culture via the salons of the late seventeenth-century Paris and the brothers Grimm, to eventually stand as a timeless representative of a type of fiction specifically for children, a prime element in a child's socialisation. (Benson 105)

Romances, especially the popular romance, often incorporate fairy tale elements which ease the reader's task, because both the reader and the writer rely on "the repetition of already known expectations and fulfilments" (Benson 105), which influences Jane Eyre's and Jane Gray's attitudes to their own lives to a great extent. In addition, internalised romantic patterns from folk tales can exert a subtle yet pervasive influence on the structure of the female *Bildung* as well, which is clearly exemplified by Gode's tale in *Possession*.

Literary texts have long persisted on the inclusion of such archaic elements as fairy tales, and their contemporary rewritings—like the twentieth-century novels in this analysis—perpetuate this tradition with a postmodern attitude. Fairy tales, like other folk tales, are sites for conserving social practices, as well as—either literally or metaphorically—their disruption. For this reason, they are used and reused not only by nineteenth-century but postmodern literature as well because they totalise and subvert order at the same time.

Both *The Waterfall* and *Possession* are abundant in various tale elements and allusions, but one of their common intertexts, *Jane Eyre* also consciously incorporates fairy tales. In my opinion, tales function in all three novels to mislead readerly expectations¹⁴ which are based on the internalised plots of (fairy) tales. Although the novels use different methods, all of them subvert, contest or argue with the tales they incorporate, which finally results in a peculiar synthesis of the romance and *Bildung* elements that are offered by the various versions of these archetypal intertexts in *Jane Eyre*, *The Waterfall* and *Possession*.

¹⁴ Here, I refer to the expectations of both the reader—either the implied or the actual one—and the expectations of various fictional characters who function as readers/listeners of fairy tales.

Brontë's Tales

When Karen E. Rowe examines Jane Eyre's education in romance, she claims that fairy tales and their literary versions have been crucial in educating women. (Rowe 69) Similarly, Jane's growth and maturation, especially her confrontation with sexuality, does not follow the patterns of the male *Bildungsroman*, since, according to Rowe, in Jane's story interiority, self-sacrifice and romantic love compose the primary motifs or the major crises of her development. (70).

Instead, Jane Eyre's experience resembles far more the subgenre of the romantic fairy tale that sets forth a limited pattern for female maturation, a paradigm that Charlotte Brontë initially finds appealing, but later renounces because it subverts the heroine's independence and human equality. [. . .] Charlotte Brontë both consciously allows these [fairy tale] patterns to govern her narrative and tempers them with alternative models of mature love. (Rowe 70)

This double relation to fairy tale elements results in a peculiar synthesis of romance and *Bildung* patterns, which, besides the plot, makes *Jane Eyre* one of the earliest and most popular attempts at problematising the coexistence of the two genres.

As a young child Jane Eyre hears the first fairy tales in her life from Bessie. Bessie functions as a figure of *la sage femme* or Mother Goose: a woman who educates Jane by her tales and cares for her in the feminine realms of the house, the kitchen and the nursery. (Rowe 71-2) Jane grows into the fairy tale tradition, which primarily aims at her education into a proper feminine being, while her favourite book is *Gulliver's Travels*, which is more suitable for the education of boys than girls at that time. This dual interest of her personality prevails all along her story and fills her with aspirations to realise the romantic pattern of fairy tales as well as the adventures of *Gulliver's Travels*. This duality overtly surfaces in the plot as well in Jane's attempts at a successful romance and a *Bildungsroman* at the same time.

Jane's position in the Reed family resembles that of Cinderella or Snow-Dröpp: she is an orphan and at the mercy of a cruel step-mother, her brother and sisters constantly humiliate her and keep her in poverty and is treated as even less than a servant. The red room episode highlights Jane's susceptibility to folklore and literary fantasy because what she sees in the looking glass, her self-image, is a "strange little figure there gazing at me with a white face and arms [. . .]. I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's stories represented [. . .]" (Brontë 16). From this early point on to her unsuccessful marriage with

Rochester Jane tends to see herself in the light of fairy tale heroines, which often blinds her to the actual situation. Her romantic expectations raised by fairy tale patterns distort her impressions of her real circumstances.

Jane is rescued from this bad spell of the Cinderella/Snow-Drop parallel by Mr. Lloyd, who is much more like a substitute father figure and a herald of the outside world than Prince Charming. Jane is only a child now, too young to welcome any princes to rescue her. After Mr. Lloyd's visit Jane enjoys an exclusive freedom of reading, primarily of *Gulliver's Travels* which feeds her imagination with strange and exciting geographical areas and their exotic inhabitants and directs her mind to a possible male *Bildungsroman*. She "discovered in it a vein of interest deeper than I found in fairy tales" (Brontë 23). Everything she reads she takes as solid facts, so no wonder that "I doubted not that I might one day, by taking a long voyage, see with my own eyes the little fields houses and trees, the diminutive people [. . .] of the one realm [Lilliput]; the [. . .] tower-like men and women of the other [Brobdingnag]" (Brontë 23). Quite soon, like a giant from Brobdingnag, Mr. Brocklehurst's black figure towers over Jane in Mrs. Reed's parlour, reminiscent of the cruel and devouring wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood*. (Rowe 74) "What a face he had [. . .] what a great nose! and what a mouth! and what large, prominent teeth!" notices Jane (Brontë 34) and echoes the well-known words of the tale protagonist.

Jane's education at Lowood incorporates both the fairy tale pattern and *Gulliver's Travels*: Jane leaves Gateshead behind to travel to the unknown where she can gain feminine domestic skills and humility through servitude with the possible reward of marriage. In this way, she sets out on a quest to receive a proper romance education, which, in the end, offers the first possibility of reaching a synthesis of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* in *Jane Eyre* by providing a subversive rewriting of a proper romance. Here, in Lowood, Jane is primarily influenced by Miss Temple, who, like a fairy godmother, transforms Jane into a respectable young lady; and Helen Burns, who is a devout example of Christian submission. "Lowood inaugurates a new phase in Jane's romantic education, as her adolescent servitude and waiting prepare her for the awakening at Thornfield [. . .]" (Rowe 75).

The next phase of her life, at Thornfield, is imbued with romantic fairy tale patterns to the greatest extent. Here, she is awakened from her waiting by a real Prince Charming who is seen as one because of Jane's romantic deception. "Besides *Cinderella*, Brontë also invokes *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Blue Beard*, and *Beauty and the Beast* as archetypes for Jane's maturation in order to heighten the psychic and moral conflicts engendered by her first confrontation with Rochester's sexuality" (Rowe 77). This part of the story consciously

prefers fairy tales full of romance elements to any *Bildung* plots so that they can be discredited in the long run and counterbalanced by elements of *Bildungsromans*.

Jane encounters Rochester under very unusual conditions for the first time, which both parties try to explain with fairy-tale rationales later—an initiating attitude that prepares the story for fairy tale allusions further on. *Beauty and the Beast* is one of the canonical fairy tales, adapted in the mid-eighteenth century by Madame Leprince de Beaumont especially for the education of young ladies. (Benson 106) It centres upon the transformation of the male protagonist, the Beast, brought about by the servitude of the heroine, Beauty. The change is literal here—from beast to man—and results in happy marriage. The story is based on “conflicts between virtue and bestiality, deceptive appearances and underlying realities, and focuses comparably on the ‘release’ of a bewitched hero and education of an innocent maiden” (Rowe 79), which go parallel in *Jane Eyre*. Although the superfluous issue of beauty and ugliness surfaces in Jane and Rochester’s conversations, a more serious dilemma is at the heart of their developing relationship.

[H]aving cultivated virginal virtues through adolescent self-discipline, both Beauty and Jane must now confront masculine sexuality, symbolised outward by their suitors’ animality. According to fairy tales, young females must overcome lingering fears of male dominance in order to enter successfully into womanhood. (Rowe 79)

Both Beauty and Jane face the same situation, and they react in similar ways but with different results. When the Beast lavishes splendid clothes and his hospitality on Beauty, her terror quickly changes first into tender pity, then eager longing for her suitor. First, Jane’s reaction is quite the same: Jane is so much immersed in her romantic fantasy generated by fairy tales that she does not realise that Rochester’s generosity threatens her integrity. When she leaves for Gateshead to visit the dying Mrs. Reed, just like Beauty does to tend her sick father, she puts her Beast, Rochester to trial. On her return, Beauty sees her lover dying and Jane, when returns, faces the loss of her lover through his intended marriage to Blanche Ingram, who is considered the beauty of the county. Nevertheless, Rochester proposes not Miss Ingram, but his Beauty, Jane, who has miraculously transformed him. At this point of the story the romance plot seems to be completed soon, which means that Jane has successfully got rid of any *Bildung* aspirations and will be settled as a happy romance heroine. She has also been successfully equipped with familiar romance patterns for her oncoming wedding and marriage,

However, mystery lurks in the background all the time, which is signalled by Grace Poole's recurrent hellish laughter. This mystery evokes another fairy tale, *The Blue Beard*, which, like *Beauty and the Beast*, is also based on transformation. However, transformation is not literal but metaphorical here—from man to murderous beast. If *Beauty and the Beast* is a paradigm for a successful romance narrative, this tale exemplifies a failed one, which with its sinister atmosphere serves as a popular paradigm for the female Gothic. (Benson 106) Even before meeting Rochester, during one of her excursions in the upper stories of Thornfield Hall, Jane “[. . .] lingered in the long passage to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third story—narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle” (Brontë 108). It is much later that both Jane and the reader realise how appropriate this impression was. “An inviting heaven that may suddenly transmute into a foreboding prison with attic secrets, Thornfield also externalises Jane's ambivalences, as in dreamy limbo between adolescence and womanhood, she wishes and waits” (Rowe 78). Brontë's allusions to *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Blue Beard* reveal the alternatives that can await Jane: romantic happiness ever after or a husband's violence over his disobedient wife.

The secret that the man holds is here objectified in the form of the bloody chamber, while the menace exuded by the hero is more pervasive and cannot be given a retrospective interpretation that cancels out the energies the initial uncertainty produces. Therefore, the ‘Bluebeard’ tale-type fits far less comfortably as an intertextual strand in the ideal fictional romance [. . .]. (Benson 107)

Blue Beard cannot be pitied and tenderly loved and given forgiveness for his earlier deeds like the Beast. However, he never ever judges himself guilty. The disobedient *cognitive* curiosity of the heroine is commonly interpreted as “over-active sexual curiosity that is read as indicative of a corrupt nature and of the biological tie between this heroine and Eve. The blame is thus shifted away from the male who is at worst guilty of administering an unnecessarily extreme punishment” (Benson 107). Similarly, Rochester never feels guilty for locking up Bertha, which, in his opinion, was only a sad necessity.

Richard Mason's dramatic revelation overthrows Jane's wedding by reasons that explain Rochester's previous grandiose generosity. “Rochester's egocentric compulsion to possess Jane [by the purchase of gorgeous jewellery, satin and lace] becomes sacrilegious when he defiantly rationalises his nuptials as an atonement for previous crimes of passion” (Rowe 80). The most visible mark of his “previous crimes of passion” is Bertha Mason,

Rochester's wife. Having seen Bertha's fight with Rochester Jane comes round to a shocking reality: whether she sees it as "the impression of a voyeuristic fantasy abruptly transformed into a psychodrama that re-enacts a child's distorted vision of parental coupling" (Rowe 83) or not, Jane is not prepared by her fairy tale education in romance for such carnality. For this reason, Rowe claims that Brontë finds the fairy tale lacking for Jane's *Bildungsroman*, because it can give shape only to Rochester's child bride not to that independent woman Jane becomes by the end. (Rowe 88) What comes in between the renouncement of fairy tales right after her aborted marriage with Rochester and the ending is a Christian universe "where innately sinful beings must seek regenerative grace" (Rowe 88). Here Brontë assimilates Shakespeare's concept of romance tainted by echoes from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. By this Brontë "transforms the paradigmatic into a personal history, investing her *Bildungsroman* with a realistic understanding of female needs for assertive choices and an individuality far different from that of acquiescent romantic heroines" (Rowe 87). Thus to gain maturity and unite with Rochester on equal grounds Jane must leave behind the fantasy realms of fairy tales and go on a *Bildungsroman* of her own without taking familiar fairy tale paradigms for granted. In this way, Brontë creates an exemplary story in which fairy tales exclusively fail to prepare the female protagonist for a happy marriage because, as Brontë implies, the romance elements of fairy tales provide inadequate patterns for young women to enter marriage without losing their integrity. For this reason, Brontë synthesises the romance and *Bildungsroman* elements without giving priority to either of them, which results in a radically new concept of the union of man and woman.

Drabble's Tales

Although Jane Gray, the protagonist of *The Waterfall* heavily relies on internalised romantic patterns, fairy tales do not dominate her story to such an extent as we have seen in the case of *Jane Eyre*. Nevertheless, when Jane imitates the story of Jane Eyre she imports all the romance allusions of fairy tales into her own (life)story without considering the relevance of the *Bildung* elements. This one-sided view distorts Jane's impression of how a union of lovers can work on the basis of *Jane Eyre*.

However apt Jane Gray is to adapt her life to romantic patterns her story relies only on three fairy tale elements. The first element is related to one of Jane's basic characteristics, waiting. When looking after her right after bearing her child, James falls in love with her while she is asleep. Her beauty, which she has always consciously evaded, draws the man

closer and closer to her while this attraction finally develops into a relationship that resembles what is set up along the model of *Sleeping Beauty*. Although Jane is susceptible to romantic scenarios it is James who introduces the topic in their conversation, “You wouldn’t go away from me, would you? You’ll wait for me, won’t you?” (Drabble 37). James expects the object of her love, Jane, to be static and passive at the same time, and denies movement and any initiative of her so that she can be there and wait for him. He expects Jane to devote herself to waiting for him making it her only attribute. Here, Jane is willing to take part in the game, “And in the end, then, will you rescue me? [. . .] Oh yes, when it’s time, I’ll rescue you” (Drabble 37). Actually, Jane is confined to her bed because she has just given birth to her second child, Bianca, so even without this imaginary situation she would wait and do nothing else. James establishes this level of meaning by interpreting Jane as Sleeping Beauty, and this romantic “waiting for rescue” attitude feeds Jane’s own fascination with waiting, passivity and dependency, which James expects of her as signs of her love for him. In this way, the fairy tale pattern cements the traditional, patriarchal gender positions, which suits James best.

For a long time in their relationship this “waiting for rescue” theme is the only reference to fairy tales, if one does not consider *Jane Eyre* as a complex secondary imprint of fairy tales. It is only after the almost fatal accident that fairy tales are reintroduced in the text. When James is in hospital with injuries that resemble Rochester’s disabilities, and Jane stays in a hotel assuming the role of Mrs. Otford, James’s wife, by chance, she hears a part of a fairy tale on TV.

[. . .] I heard a man reading the end of a fairy story that I had known as a child, but which I have never since been able to find. There was verse in it that was so profoundly affecting that I stood there transfixed, feeling the hair rise on my head. The serving girl says to the sleeping knight whom she loves:
For seven long years I served for you,
The bloody cloth I wrung for you,
The glassy hill I climbed for you,
Will you not wake and turn to me? (Drabble 198)

Although the usual tale elements, such as the magic seven-year period and the glassy hill, are present, this tale depicts a very unusual pattern, which is partly the opposite of *Sleeping Beauty* and all the other tales that inform *Jane Eyre*, a romantic intertext of *The Waterfall*. Just like in Brontë’s tales, the gender roles are assorted according to the traditional gendered binaries in the latter tale as well: Sleeping Beauty in her confinement is the passive recipient

of love while the prince, who rescues her as every good enough prince should, is the active one coming from the outside world. Here, in the tale on TV, the active-passive binary is reversed: it is the knight who sleeps, his love must be earned by seven long years of servitude. The maid is active in doing her job, nevertheless, she does not go on a quest or venture out to the outside world. Gender roles are not completely reversed because the sign of knightly heroism is present in the form of his “bloody cloth” and the maid serves him by doing the washing and, probably, other household chores. Although the gender roles are blurred to a certain extent, the general view that “[t]he didactic nature of the fairy tale as a model for female behaviour is persuasive: it teaches patience, perseverance, and sacrifice as the means of achieving a place in the existing social order” is valid here as well (Benson 107).

The pattern of this tale is appealing: James is “sleeping” unconsciously in hospital; Jane seems to do simple tasks, visiting him and taking the children to the playground; and the “bloody cloth” is there too, James’s blood-stained shirt.

I used to put his shirts on, for love, in the days when he was alive [. . .]. Now, wearing it, I could see it as a shroud, as a last rite performed for him, for love itself. I slept in it. There was nothing else I could do for him, there was no other way of getting near to him. [. . .] In the morning I washed the shirt in the washbowl, and hung it up to dry, thinking that if I did so he would surely need it again. (Drabble 199)

Wearing and washing his bloody shirt Jane realises that although she was the one to wash and dry the shirt, it was James who served her for a long time in her confinement. “The bloody shirt I wrung for you: the plaintive servitude, the meals he had brought me when I lay in bed, the sheets he had straightened for me, the feminine endings,” realises Jane (Drabble 199). It is time to re-evaluate her relationship with James and arrive at the feminine ending which always gets away from the sublime plot of archetypal romances.

It is the first occasion that feminine endings are mentioned in the novel. As the emblematic question towards the end of the text—“A feminine ending?” (Drabble 231)—suggests a feminine ending always eludes the sublime. Here, the realisation that it is James who plays the role of both the sleeping knight and the serving maid awakens Jane to the realisation that she has no role in fairy tales and, probably, any other internalised romantic patters. The least she must do is to think over her relationship with James whether she has any justification to take part in his life at all. Finally, her answer is no to this question. “Seven years, and those years of hers had belonged not to James but to Malcolm [. . .]” (Drabble 204).

The day after she hears the tale of seven-year's servitude there is another tale presented on TV:

[T]he tale of a princess in China who says she will marry only the man who brings her a blue rose. She rejects a rose of sapphire, and a rose dyed blue, and a porcelain painted rose, and accepts her lover who brings her an ordinary white rose picked from a hedge on the way, turning to her astonished court, saying to them, you are colour blind, this rose is the only blue rose that I have ever seen. (Drabble 198)

Once more, later in the novel, in the moment of re-evaluation the tale surfaces again. In retrospect Jane realises that she and James “[. . .] had met in the shallow stretches of ordinary weakness, and what he had given her had been no miracle, no unique revelation, but a gift so commonplace [. . .]. An ordinary white rose [. . .]” (Drabble 205-6). Like the Chinese princess she was happy to claim this white rose blue, but there was no court to judge colour blind. It was she herself who became colour blind by the illusory nature of romantic patterns she was so eager to internalise. “[. . .] all her gratitude had been given to James, who had done nothing more for her than to change an electric plug and mend the brake of the push chair with a bit of fuse wire and sleep in her bed” (Drabble 204).

Now, Jane falls victim to extreme judgement when she totally discredits fairy tale patterns. Although she tries hard she cannot completely dismiss them in moments of fear and anxiety for James:

We [Jane and Lucy] returned to the hotel, and as we sat in the bar drinking a final drink, she [Lucy] said, ‘It makes no difference, to him, what we think. Does it?’

And I said no, how could it. But we knew better, both of us. Why else had those stories been created, those tales of entranced lovers kept alive through the years by faith, those fables of sleepers and dreamers awoken finally by the intensity and endurance of desire? Will you not wake and turn to me? I must have been mad to think these thoughts. And yet madder still to abandon them. (Drabble 215-6)

Her final stance of abandoning and recovering the importance of fairy tale patterns in meaning formation is an intermediate position with respect to her previous opinions.

The lesson Jane learns during the willing appropriation and dismissal of fairy tales is that, whether we admit it or not, fairy tale patterns give shape to our perceptions of the world because they are internalised from a very early age on. However, it would distort meaning either to exaggerate or overestimate their role in meaning formation. Jane relates to fairy tales just as she does to the other intertexts in her story: it takes her time to find the perfect distance she should take from these familiar stories. Similarly to its nineteenth-century intertexts in *The Waterfall* fairy tales function as stories that help Jane re-evaluate her attitude to the romantic scenario and lead her through her own story of development. *Jane Eyre*, one of the most important intertexts of the novel, established the tradition of discarding the exaggerated effects of fairy tales in order to synthesise the romance and *Bildung* elements. *The Waterfall* reaches a similar goal when Jane Gray applies the three tales to interpret her own situation. While Brontë discredits the fairy tales to get rid of the illusory effects of romantic scenarios, Drabble discards them by presenting more and more critical understandings of less and less romantic tales.

Byatt's Tales

In accordance with Byatt's typical textual method, the inset tales in *Possession* are effectively connected with the main narrative by a densely knitted tissue of imagery and allusion, either explicitly pointed out by one of the characters, or seemingly incidental, and leave the reader to establish the connections.

Byatt includes three tales in *Possession*: "The Glass Coffin," "The Threshold," and Gode's tale. She uses fairy tales for the very same purpose as Brontë and Drabble do, to synthesise romance and *Bildung* elements, but her method is quite different. As we have seen, Brontë and Drabble incorporate fairy tale patterns in their narratives to discredit romantic scenarios in the long run, to prove them unsatisfactory. They both use fairy tales of love and affection which enrich their stories with romance elements. However, they never ever include the text of the fairy tales themselves but argue with them through the plot line which diverges from the original fairy tale patterns to subvert their validity. As opposed to this, Byatt incorporates the fairy tale texts in *Possession* and subverts them not through the plot line but the revision of the fairy tale texts themselves. In this way, Byatt's fairy tales already diverge from the "original"¹⁵ fairy tale patterns and doing so they contest their own credibility and

¹⁵ As for subversion I would avoid calling any fairy tales original, without any subversion, because, as Benson remarks (106), fairy tales not only transmit and maintain social institutions of conformity but provide socially

validity from the outset. Although, for the first sight, these subverted fairy tales seem to be annexes to the main body of the text, they provide a complex network of allusions and images that incorporates them in the main narrative.

“The Glass Coffin” is a rewriting of a Grimm fairy tale, in which the beautiful fair-haired princess is rescued from the glass coffin where she has been imprisoned by an evil wizard for her refusal to marry him. As a critic points out,

Byatt (or LaMotte) elaborates and extends the original by offering two major episodes instead of one and incorporating other folk fairy tale motifs, such as the use of animal helpers and the choice of three gifts. She also uses rich descriptions with far more adjectives than the folk fairy tale and invocations to the reader not to be found in the original. (Ashworth 93)

Byatt incorporates it in her novel as a tale from *Tales for Innocents* written by Christabel LaMotte. Roland reads “The Glass Coffin” under fairy tale conditions: “Roland felt buoyed up by the height of Maud’s great divan. [. . .] there was an incapable sleeper somewhere in his mind, a sleeper bruised and tossing on heaped feather mattresses, the Real Princess, suffering the muffled pea” (Byatt 58). Subsequently, Roland reveals a list of parallels, “Blanche Glover called Christabel the Princess. Maud Bailey was a thin-skinned Princess. He was an intruder into their female fastness. Like Randolph Henry Ash” (Byatt 58).

The protagonist of the tale is a “little tailor, a good and unremarkable man” (Byatt 58), just like Roland who “was a gentle and unthreatening being” (Byatt 141). The little tailor sets out on a journey in search of work and Roland as well “was now essentially unemployed, scraping a living on part-time tutoring, dogsbodying for Blackadder and some restaurant dishwashing” (Byatt 11). This little tailor is not a hero, he is a fine craftsman, a figure “who often appears in Grimm’s tales, sometimes, though not always, as a trickster and usually as a poor man who wins the hand of a princess” (Ashworth 93). Like in Grimm’s version he seeks lodgings and he is finally admitted because the hound trusts him. He does all the housework: “he prepared a splendid pie” and “decorated its top with beautifully formed pastry leaves and flowers, for he was a craftsman, even if he could not exercise his own craft. [. . .] he brought hay to the cow, and goat, golden corn to the cock and hen, milk to the cat and bones and meat from his cooking to the great grey dog” (Byatt 59). In return for his care and attendance he can choose from three gifts: a purse of soft leather, a cooking pot, and a little glass key. He

approved outlets for the repressions which the very same institutions impose upon society. In this way, in my view, fairy tales are always already subversive to such an extent that is socially tolerable.

chooses the last one because he is attracted to its “fantastic fragile shape” (Byatt 59), which means that he chooses art over security. Interestingly enough, he gets this key from his host who is a “little man, with a face as grey as morning ashes” (Byatt 58). Byatt never mentions ashes in vain: just as Roland is sent on his quest by Ash, by his draft letters, here the little tailor enters the world of adventure according to the guidance of the ash-coloured man. After this seemingly unimportant episode both the little tailor and Roland enter a quest story with a proposed romantic reward at the end.

After this elaborately written first episode the little tailor has to trust himself to the west wind and finally descend to an unknown place.¹⁶ There he finds “a heap of glass bottles and flasks [. . .] a glass dome [. . .] a shining glass coffin” (Byatt 62). In the glass coffin a sleeping princess awaits him with “the most beautiful face he could have dreamed of or imagined, a still white face, with long gold lashes on pale cheeks, and a perfect mouth” (Byatt 63). This beautiful princess bears resemblance to both Christabel and Maud, as Roland’s list of princesses informs the readers¹⁷ of the tale before its beginning. The similarity is further emphasised by the fact that the perfect glass coffin resembles “a green ice egg” (Byatt 62) in its wholeness. The egg is Christabel’s emblematic riddle, green is both Christabel’s and Maud’s characteristic colour, and it is Maud whose beauty renders her “[i]cily regular, splendidly null” (Byatt 506). The glass coffin’s description as a “green ice egg” establishes a metaphoric link between the princess, Christabel and Maud, which allows the reader to interpret “The Glass Coffin” not only as separate text within *Possession* but as a text that establishes a new interpretative potential for the whole novel.

The little tailor “knew that this was the keyhole for his wondrous delicate key, and with a little sigh he put it in and waited for what would ensue” (Byatt 63). Just as Roland “took possession of all her [Maud’s] white coolness that grew warm against him” (Byatt 507), so does the glass coffin break into “a collection of icicle splinters, that rang and vanished as they touched the earth” (Byatt 63). The opening of the egg-like glass coffin is described similarly to Maud and Roland’s final sexual intercourse; the princess wakes up to life just as Maud to womanhood.¹⁸

Although the tale has already digressed from the Grimm version, the greatest moment for undercutting readerly expectations still awaits the reader:

¹⁶ Ashworth suggests that the little tailor descends into the realm of the unconscious. (93) However, in my interpretation, I would like to stick only to the allusions and parallels between the tale and the main narrative and exclude any psychoanalytic readings.

¹⁷ Though it is probably Roland who lists the possible princesses before reading the tale, his idea gives a clue not only to him but the reader as well.

¹⁸ Ashworth suggests that Roland rescues not only Maud but Lady Bailey, too, who, in return for his heroic deed, lets him and Maud read Christabel’s correspondence with Ash. Although this rescue is definitely linked to Christabel, I consider it as a sidetrack which does not contribute to the fairy tale parallel.

And the sleeper opened her eyes, which were as blue as periwinkle, or the summer sky, and the little tailor, because he knew this was what he must do, bent and kissed the perfect cheek.

‘You must be the one,’ said the young woman, ‘You must be the one I have been waiting for, who must release me from enchantment. You must be the Prince.’

‘Ah no,’ said our hero, ‘there you are mistaken. I am no more—and indeed no less—than a fine craftsman, a tailor, in search of work for my hands, honest work, to keep me alive.’ (Byatt 63-4)

Both the little tailor and the princess know how fairy tales should go on but now their story takes a surprising turn. The protagonist is not a hero, just a little tailor, his aim is to get work and not to rescue the princess of her heart, and the climax of the story is undercut by irony. From this point onwards the tale cannot continue along fairy tale patterns because its most basic message is subverted: dear princesses, if you wait for the prince to come, do not be surprised to be woken up by some unremarkable tailor.

Although the princess heightens the tension in her exclamation, she is not at all disappointed to hear the tailor deny his princehood. As the tailor learns, she was a misbehaving princess before her enchantment because “I had no desire for marriage, but wished to live unwed and happy with my dear brother and no other” (Byatt 64).¹⁹ First she was silenced by her suitor, the evil wizard, then, put into the glass coffin as a means of punishment. Her silence and enclosure are typical of women’s condition as depicted in the nineteenth-century female literary tradition, and similar to the existence of the inhabitants in the drowned city of Is.

Although they risk the return of the black magician, they dispute “politely, the moral niceties of their interesting situation” (Byatt 66), which resembles Maud and Roland’s recurrent discussions of their attitudes to life and love to a great extent. Even though fairy tales require the hero and the princess to unite and live happily ever after just because the hero rescues the princess and the other way round, the little tailor offers a generous idea, “[. . .] when, and if, you are restored to your rightful place, and your home and lands and people are again in your own, I trust you will feel free to reconsider the matter [of marriage], and remain, if you will, alone and unwed” (Byatt 66). Similarly, “I haven’t got much to offer,” admits

¹⁹ The princess’s inclinations are similar to those of Christabel: both want to live in the company of a friend and family member and exclude sexuality from life.

Roland, “But I could let you be, I could— [. . .] Well, certainly, if I was there [in Amsterdam]. I wouldn’t threaten your autonomy” (Byatt 507). Roland’s words echo the tailor’s proposal of taking nothing but letting the woman have everything.

As Roland and Maud “work it out” (Byatt 507) so do the princess and the little tailor. To make their life complete the little tailor returns to his craft and “made for pleasure what he had once needed to make for harsh necessity” (Byatt 67). Similarly, Roland goes back to reading and writing, but now, for pleasure, for the sake of art.

The expected romantic end proves to be undercut, which foreshadows the anticlimactic ending of Roland and Maud’s love story as well. Both the fairy tale and *Possession* end with the union of two independent persons who agree to form a couple without dominating the other. Besides being an ironic reworking of Grimm’s tale this version modifies romantic patterns, which, by the end of *Possession*, seem to be familiar not only to Roland and Maud but the reader as well. By presenting an unremarkable little tailor as the hero of this anti-fairy tale the author of the tale suggests that the completion of social integration after various adventures, the goal of male *Bildungsromans*, is available for anti-heroes as well. In this way, the anti-romance of “The Glass Coffin” incorporates a *Bildungsroman* of an anti-hero as well.

The second tale that Byatt incorporates into *Possession* is entitled “The Threshold,” which I will interpret in detail with reference to Roland’s citational character. The Childe of the tale corresponds to Roland’s figure, who is sent out on a quest by his (fore)father, here Ash, to find the Herb of Rest. He is helped by a lady, whose beauty is revealed to him after he has chosen him. Like this lady, Maud reveals her true nature to Roland after he chooses her, and it is only with her help that Roland can provide Ash a rest in peace.

“The Threshold” most obviously dramatises the experience of liminality, which is a recurrent theme in *Possession*. The tale does not reveal what the threshold means, what kind of liminality it signals, the only thing that is for sure is that the Childe crosses the dividing line, the threshold between the human and an enchanted, supernatural world in the name of love. The story does not shed light on the nature of what comes after the threshold.

And she [the third lady] drew him on, over and under the threshold of the standing stones, and his horse called out in alarm, but he stepped on unhearing. And although the stones seemed simple enough in the midst of the moor, which seemed vaguely to stretch on behind as it had before, he found it was no such thing, for beyond the lintel was a descending track, winding and winding, between banks of sweetly scented flowers he had never seen or dreamed of, blowing soft dust at him

from their huge throats, and lit by a light neither of day nor of night, neither of sun nor of moon,²⁰ neither bright nor shadowy, but the even perpetual unchanging light of that kingdom... (Byatt 155-6)

Thresholds have manifold meanings in cultural history: they can symbolise an in-between state, a *rite de passage*, a border between forms of existence, liminality. In the tale there is a winding track behind the threshold which probably invites the explorer, the Childe. It is like narrative curiosity that drives Roland to take the next step in his literary quest, to go a step further on in the unknown area to find out what happened to Ash and Christabel and enter the plot of the dead lovers. In the generic universe of the novel the threshold can also be read as a possible crossing the borders between the quest plot—as “The Thershold” is a typical tale presenting a quest—and the romance, the probable love story that awaits the Childe and Roland respectively.

Though there are three fairy-like female figures in the tale, its enigmatic and unfinished nature makes it more like a symbolic story than a fairy tale proper. The presence of a strong narrative voice²¹ calls attention to its artistic nature with its self-reflexive remarks. The mocking, ironic tone of “The Glass Coffin” is absolutely missing from this tale, here, the narrative voice is rather suggestive, but the story and the characters are not so easy to situate thematically in *Possession* as in the case of the previous fairy tale. However, the structural allusions are remarkable: the fact that the tale is positioned fairly at the beginning of the novel corresponds to the initiation story it tells, but, in my view, it gives insight into the end of *Possession* rather than into its beginning. Both the novel and the tale are unfinished, there are only hints at a possible happy ending. All that comes before the ending seems to be only the initiation.

If “The Threshold” does not count as a fairy tale, the third tale-like story in *Possession*, Gode’s tale, could not count as a tale at all. Although Sabine Kercoz, who retells the tale in her diary, does not define its genre, she just calls it “Gode’s story” (Byatt 356), whereas critics classify it “a dark Breton folk tale” (Burgass 56). Even if the story may qualify as a folk tale, it has much in common with folk ballads, although it is written in prose. Like ballads, its “beginning is [. . .] abrupt; the language is simple; the story is told through dialogue and action; the theme is [. . .] tragic” (Cuddon 77). The narrator provides minimal description of the surroundings, and skips some events that directly lead to the crisis. Here, the reader has to calculate what is silenced in the story and fill the gaps in the plotline. This

²⁰ The first two ladies the Childe could have chosen have attributes of the sun and moon respectively.

²¹ The self-reflexive narrator of the tale comments on the impossibility of describing the third lady’s eyes and the changing nature of stories. (Byatt 155)

elliptic style and the frequent repetitions provide a unique atmosphere that supports the tragic theme of the ballad.

In this story, a haughty girl who has spurned a freely-given gift from a suitor, is cursed for her pride. Though not explicit, there is the suggestion or suspicion that she has given birth to a child (and possibly killed it) because there is “blood on the straw.” The miller’s daughter denies both her attraction to the sailor and anything to do with the blood on the straw and is fated to die, pursued by a little imp—the child’s spirit. The suitor, who subsequently marries, is condemned to the same fate. (Burgass 56-7)

The story of a girl who loses her honour is quite common in the tradition of folk ballads since it has an educational and deterrent function for young girls. Christabel LaMotte listens to this ballad in Kernemet where she is hiding during her pregnancy and trying to conceal her condition even from those who surround her there. Gode, the old servant who recites the ballad knows the story well—the spoken and silenced parts as well—and she is the only one in the house who has the exact knowledge of Christabel’s pregnancy and health. Through the story of the miller’s daughter Gode communicates Christabel’s story as well with a warning against a possible ending. Her tale causes Christabel discomfort because she finds that the cap fits.

The tale causes discomfort to the reader as well because it suggests the possible end of Christabel’s child as the only thing for sure is that it was born. Nobody knows about the child and the novel does not share any information about it till the very end. Till then it seems to be sure that Christabel has killed her child, although there is no such proof of it as the blood on the straw in Gode’s story. Gillian M.E. Alban interprets the “blood on the straw” as a “symbolic defloration” and denies the possibility of an actual child by claiming that the miller’s daughter “‘bears’ a symbolic child” (21). As opposed to Alban, who interprets Gode’s tale with reference to the notion of virginity based on the ancient Celtic tale of Arianhrod (22), I propose that there is an actual child in the story. Mothers murdering their unwanted babies are quite common in folk ballads, and the unspoken though strongly suggested death of the baby is more educational for Christabel as well.

After bearing and killing her child the miller’s daughter is pursued by a little imp, her dead baby’s spirit, and this constantly haunting memory drives her mad. Her story is a voyage-in, a female *Bildungsroman* in which the female protagonist transgresses the social norms and cannot be contained within society. The female *Bildung* of the miller’s daughter is

the result of her transgressive romance. Her death, expressive of her social judgement, is her reward, at the same time, because she can finally be united with her lover in death. As a didactic tale it can suggest to possibilities for Christabel: killing her child would be followed by the loss of her sensibility, however, this can finally bring about her union with her lover. Christabel considers the pros and cons of such an act and decides to take the harder way: she decides to give birth to her daughter and ask her sister to adopt the little girl which reduces Christabel only into a spinster aunt. By not killing her daughter Christabel refuses the traditional relationship of the romance and the female *Bildungsroman*, and creates a peculiar story of her pain and suffering without her man and her daughter, alone.

The recurrent image of the dead child prancing and dancing naked appears in the main plotline of *Possession* from time to time. There is a group in Yew Tree²² Lodge, Twickenham, called Vestal Lights, with Christabel LaMotte as a probable member, who are deeply interested in clairvoyance. Their medium is a certain Mrs. Hella Lees, who once reluctantly agrees to admit Randolph Henry Ash to one of their séances because “I was told that Mr Ash had experienced a recent loss, and was in great need of spiritual consolation and comfort” (Byatt 395). Ash visits the event not long after breaking up with Christabel, who has just returned from her secret hiding place in Brittany after giving birth to her child and the suicide of her friend, Blanche Glover. Byatt gives account of the events from two points of view at least: she includes Ash’s letter describing his experiences, and Mrs. Lees’s partial account that is completed by the notes of Miss Judge. In this way, one can detect at least two different opinions on the basis of these textualised traces²³ of the event: Ash’s sceptical view²³ and the sympathising communal feelings of the Vestal Lights. Before Ash disturbs and, subsequently, puts an end to the séance, unusual and seemingly chaotic sentences are uttered in deep trance. Most of the sentences seem inappropriate in the context, however, they gain meaning in the context of the Ash-LaMotte relationship.

The first sentence uttered is “No, no, she will not come” (Byatt 396) is clearly understandable because Ash and LaMotte’s daughter is not dead, thus she cannot appear at a séance in the form of a spirit. The second utterance is seemingly nonsensical “Nobodaddy” (Byatt 396), which may highlight the fact that Christabel decided the future of her daughter alone without the father, so the little girl does not have a daddy, only a “Nobodaddy”. “There is no child,” (Byatt 396) utters the medium which is a source of great misunderstanding: Ash thinks that there is no child because it is dead, however, there is no child among the spirits because it is alive. The last sentence of the paragraph, “Curiosity killed the cat” (Byatt 396),

²² Yew trees recur in relation to protecting and hosting the dead: Yew Tree Lodge houses the séances and a personified yew tree protects Elle and Randolph Henry Ash’s grave from Cropper’s aggressive intrusion.

²³ Concerning clairvoyance, Ash gives voice to his scepticism in *Mummy Possesst*.

sounds the most nonsensical of all, however, it might sound as a warning to the unheeding Ash: his curiosity, his want of the child, metaphorically, kills Christabel. Although Christabel has never been associated with a cat in the course of the novel, I find her the most probable equivalent of the cat in this context. Cats as symbols of femininity are two-natured: they are cute creatures and powerful lionesses at the same time. Also, they are often associated with witchery, which also points towards Christabel, who calls herself and “old witch” in her last letter to Ash (Byatt 500).

Similarly to the members of the séance, the sailor, who is the father of the dead child in Gode’s story, meets the dead:

And the long lines of the waves came in from the Ocean, one after another after another, and always another, and he could see the Dead, riding the crests of them, coming in from another world, thin and grey and holding out helpless arms, and tossing and calling in their high voices. (Byatt 361)

The physical contact with the dead resembles the séances where, for example, Sophia Cotterell, a member at Mrs. Lees’s séances, “held her dead baby on her knee for a quarter of an hour whilst its hands patted its father’s cheeks” (Byatt 391).

Despite his scientific scepticism, Ash is not completely sure about his point of view. In his account he does not elaborate on the possibility of this all being true, he is shocked to draw any conclusions because it would mean that his child is really dead, that “[t]here is no child” as the medium cried. This hesitating frenzy makes Ash resemble the sailor in Gode’s story, who “[. . .] came back to the village a broken man. And he sat in the square with the old men, he in the best of his manhood, and his mouth slackened and his face fell away [. . .]” (Byatt 362). Similarly to the sailor, who repeats “I can hear well enough” and “I wait” (Byatt 362), Ash keeps asking the same question all his life:

There is something I must know and you know what it is. I say ‘I must know’ and sound peremptory. But I am in your hands and must beg you to tell me. What became of my child? Did he live? How can I ask, not knowing? How can I ask, not knowing? [. . .]

‘There is no child’ came through that silly woman’s mouth [. . .]. I tell you Christabel—you who will never read this letter, like so many others, for it has passed the limits of possible communication—I tell you, what with disgust, and

terror, and responsibility, and the coiling vestiges of love gripping my heart, I was like to have made a murderer of myself in good earnest— (Byatt 457)

Ash admits that he almost made himself die just like the sailor. The sailor dies, and in death he joins his love, the miller's daughter and their child. Although death is a tragic loss, it results in a reunion here which makes their love complete. Gode's tale tells that when the sailor dies, the room "smelled of apple blossom and ripe apples together" (Byatt 362), which is echoed in the description of the morning after Maud and Roland's love making.²⁴ Their union makes Ash and Christabel's love complete, their love making is the reunion of their forefather and foremother. In this way, Byatt incorporates Gode's story into the main body of the text in such a way that it gives a clue to the nineteenth-century plotline and is completed and resolved in the twentieth-century one.

Byatt's three tales offer a new way of revising (fairy) tales to reach a synthesis of romances and *Bildungsromans*. She not only alludes to tales as Brontë or Drabble do but also includes the text of the tales in the novel with clear indication of authorship. This allows her to provide already revised versions of tale plots: "The Glass Coffin" is an anti-fairy tale in which romance elements are always undercut, "The Threshold" contains only the beginning of a quest story which is never revealed, and Gode's tale function as the opposite of classic fairy tales in which romance functions not as a happy ending but as a beginning of a tragic story of development. Gode's story, in this way, articulates a story of female development that cannot be contained in and by fairy tales.

All three of the novels, *Jane Eyre*, *The Waterfall* and *Possession*, make good use of (fairy) tales. They all apply them as points of reference from which the plots can diverge, and which can be given new meaning through revision. Brontë uses well-known tales that need not be retold in her novel. Primarily *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *The Blue Beard* provide such internalised patterns that guide not only the reader's expectations but those of the protagonist as well. Brontë proves that if life is interpreted along fairy tale patterns it can often lead to misinterpretations. For this reason, a life story should be revised despite fairy tale patterns however romantic they seem.

Drabble applies fairy tale patterns for the very same reasons as Brontë, however, her tales are alluded to in the text and partly told as well. Jane Gray, the protagonist, uses fairy tale patterns to interpret her own life experience but these internalised patterns fail in life

²⁴ "In the morning, the whole world had a strange new smell. [. . .] which bore some relation to the smell of bitten apples. It was the smell of death and destruction and it smelled fresh and lively and hopeful" (Byatt 507).

since life cheats them utterly. Her wishful romance cannot imitate fairy tales. This shocking realisation makes Jane Gray discard these romantic patterns by presenting more and more critical understanding of less and less romantic tales.

Byatt puts emphasis on revision too, however, in her case, it is not life that revises the tale, but the tales are already revised by their author. This technique is especially striking in “The Glass Coffin,” in which the hilarious differences from any traditional fairy tale patterns call attention to the subversive authorial intention from the very beginning, which result in this anti-fairy tale. The other two tales show other generic revisions: “The Threshold” is not interested in the goals of the male *Bildungsroman*, only in the initiation phase in a typical quest plot, while Gode’s tale tells a tragic romance, which cannot be contained in and by any fairy tales, and qualifies as a female *Bildungsroman*. Byatt includes the complete texts of her tales in *Possession*: two of them are presented as Christabel LaMotte’s tales, the third one is recorded by Christabel’s cousin. Authorship is always clearly marked as opposed to the fairy tales used either by Brontë or Drabble. The textual mosaic of *Possession* is made complete by these three tales because they function as integral parts of the whole text, although they could qualify as individual stories in their own right too. Nevertheless, in my opinion, they should be used as possible keys to the meaning of the whole novel.

In my view, all the tales that are subverted by Brontë, Drabble and Byatt offer models for the protagonists as romances and *Bildungsromans*. Brontë discredits these familiar romance patterns, *The Waterfall* oscillates between the two extremes of either imitating or totally discarding them and finally offers a compromise, whereas Byatt applies not only tales with romantic patterns but stories of development for both genders as well. The revisionary attitudes of the novels with which they relate to the various tales show that the traditional tale patterns, which provide a romance for the heroine and a *Bildungsroman* for the hero, can no longer be taken for granted as reliable sources of social discourses but must be constantly contested and argued with, which also requires for a new understanding of the relation of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*.

Chapter 4: *The Waterfall: Bildungsroman as Romance?*

The romantic expectations of Jane Gray, the narrator protagonist are greatly textualised in *The Waterfall* as it is evoked in the various intertexts that she misreads and rereads. In her rereadings she eagerly refers to the works of three—now—popular women writers of the nineteenth-century female literary tradition, Jane Austen, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë. When Jane Gray rereads their classic stories she encounters different genres: the novel of manners in the case of Austen, the *Bildungsroman* in the case of Eliot, and the romance in the case of Brontë. However, in her re- or misreadings, Jane Gray is able to comprehend them only as romances and she gradually gives a new understanding not only to the genre of the romance, but to Austen's novel of manners and Eliot's *Bildungsroman* as well. I claim that all the three intertexts that *The Waterfall* rereads are various attempts both at the romance and the *Bildungsroman*, however, the two genres' incompatibility within one story is solved by rereading them exclusively as romances.

Women and romance: both in literature and in popular culture these two terms seem so intricately intertwined that they hardly need any explanation. "Women and romance are constructed within the male order and the established tradition of prose fiction that grows out of and upholds that order; they are constructed as marginal and secondary in order to secure the dominance of men and novels" (Langbauer 2). Although the novel "from its start had proved to be a flexible, comprehensive, changeable form, with its internal fragmentation into genres and subgenres" (Curti 36), the romance can be defined as the novel's other, "whatever the novel (hopes it) is not" (Langbauer 3). This loose definition seems convenient not only for its familiar logic—being the other/Other—but also because the genre of the romance has had so many variants in the course of its long history in English literature that it is hardly possible to supply a definition that describes all types of romances properly.

Although my aim is not to propose a fully applicable definition of the romance, it seems necessary to provide a set of criteria according to which one can tell romances apart from all the other genres. The original opposition between the novel and the romance, which resulted in turning the romance marginal and historically prior to the novel, was settled by the nineteenth century. Romance elements could not be easily banished, as they remained alive and well not only on the margins but "in the heartland of the nineteenth-century realist novel" (Radford 12). Here I resort to John Cawelti's approach, who identifies the following features of the romance: (a) the centrality of love relationship with adventure/incident as subsidiary elements (whereas in the thriller/adventure story, incident is central and love elements become subsidiary); (b) in women's romance, the major relationship is between the heroine and the

hero (whereas in male-directed genres it is between the hero and the villain); (c) most contemporary romances have a female protagonist (whereas most adventure stories centre on a male protagonist); (d) romance depends on a special relationship of identification between the reader and the protagonist (Radford 11). When Jane Gray rereads or rather misreads the nineteenth-century intertexts she relies on in her romance narrative she gives priority to the very same romance elements and neglects those which might characterise the intertexts as *Bildungromans*.

By its nineteenth-century intertexts—*Jane Eyre*, *The Mill on the Floss* and primarily *Emma* by Austen—Drabble's text is inevitably linked to the various types of the romance. The romance inserts *The Waterfall* into the interplay of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* as most romances of the age show the features primarily of the romance but make attempts at *Bildung* as well. But as the romance and the *Bildungsroman* could not coexist, and be integrated for the heroine at the resolution, to overcome the contradiction between love and quest in these narratives nineteenth-century women writers came forth with an ending in which one part of the contradiction, usually *Bildung* is set aside or repressed, either by marriage, or by death.²⁵ (DuPlessis 3-4) These two resolutions are the two ends of one scale, as DuPlessis calls them the "euphoric" pole and the "dysphoric" pole.

The "euphoric" pole, with its ending in marriage, is a successful integration into society through being related to a man, a husband, in which the gain is both financial and romantic success in the "heterosexual contract"; the "dysphoric" pole, with an ending in death, is a betrayal by male authority and aggression. (DuPlessis 4)

In addition I propose that the novel of manners is a kind of romance in the sense that it provides value judgements on romantic relationships and praises the ones which are socially appropriate and end in marriage while disapprove the ones which are objectionable in the world of well-bred gentlemen and women.

The problematic coexistence of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*, however, may be settled by another genre, the *Künstlerroman*. The first *Bildungsroman par excellence*, however, went hand in hand with the birth of another genre, the *Künstlerroman*, because Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-6) was the prototype for both genres. The transition between the two genres is an easy one as the hero can achieve maturity—one of the goals of the *Bildungsroman* besides social integration—by becoming a fully-formed artist.

²⁵ These types of resolutions are also found in the tales used as intertexts in *The Waterfall* as well as *Possession*.

The parallel existence of the two genres is rather paradoxical from the very beginning because they originate in the very same text, however, their potentials from a gendered aspect are fairly different. As the hero of the *Bildungsroman* aims at social integration, this paradigm is problematic for female characters because social integration for the heroine can be basically offered by marriage, which is depicted in romances. But as artist figures are difficult to integrate into society, the paradigm offered by the *Künstlerroman* seems to be more suitable to depict women who cannot be contained in and by the romance, whose social integration is doomed to failure. Drabble's novel seemingly fails to disentangle this paradox, however, a potential solution is offered in Jane Gray's character, who, by the end of the novel, develops into a fully-formed artist. Jane enters into a dialogue with her literary predecessors through the intertexts. "Like parental imagos, 'those fictitious heroines [who] haunt me', cannot be simply dismissed but must be argued with, seen through, contradicted, loved, and finally modified into usable figures that can be understood and lived with" (Wyatt 127). Jane is remothered by the women figures of the female—especially nineteenth-century—literary tradition; one reason for classifying the novel as a twentieth-century female *Künstlerroman* in which the daughter figure "becomes an artist to extend, reveal, and elaborate her mother[s]'s often thwarted talents" (DuPlessis 93). As a female *Künstlerroman* *The Waterfall* joins the female literary tradition and thus becomes a sister narrative in this literary sisterhood.

Austen's Romance

In my view, the most subversive of all genres that Drabble applies in *The Waterfall* is the novel of manners. She relies on its most genuine producer, Jane Austen, when she chooses a literary predecessor for revision. The novel of manners is a typical eighteenth-century genre that originated in England and its major subject matter is the set of social conventions of a particular class, usually the gentry, in a particular place and time. Since social conventions were different for men and women in the period, and since the novel of manners addresses domesticity as a mask topic, the genre is strongly gendered and points out such social aspects that served as sources of anxiety for women. For this gendered view the focus of these woman-authored texts have often been termed narrow, however, the manners of domestic life, matrimony and "husband-hunting" carry far wider implications beyond the pouring of tea or finding a proper mate. All these activities and the conducted manners serve as indicators of morals, as well as the state of legislation, emancipation and the most basic social institutions.

As the novel of manners implies certain modes of behaviour and presents some of these as proper, socially acceptable ones it consciously creates a sense of society as a set of constructed relationships which is kept in motion by a prescribed code of conduct. The novel of manners informs the reader about the working of this society and conditions them to its rules in such a persuasive way that its truths become the truth and its world seems to govern the outside world. For this reason I interpret the novel of manners as one of the ideological state apparatuses because it presents, re-presents and thus perpetuates ideology, namely the sex-gender system of patriarchy with a strong sense of social standing. I am using the term ideology in the Althusserian sense as Belsey does in *Critical Practice*, and will understand it as “[w]hat is represented in ideology is [. . .] not the system of real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live” (Althusser 164-5). Once this imaginary relation is given, it is no wonder that literary genres are also means of relating one to the relations of the world in an imaginary way.

Belsey claims that “classic realism is characterised by *illusionism*, a narrative which leads to *closure*, and a *hierarchy of discourses* which establishes the ‘truth’ of the story” (*Critical* 71). By presenting itself ideologically transparent the classic realist text tries to efface the fact that there is no unmediated experience. Instead actions follow a recurrent familiar pattern which provides the reader with “a shared understanding of the text which represents the world” which guarantees “not only the truth of the text but of the reader’s existence as an autonomous knowing subject in a world of knowing subjects” (Belsey, *Critical* 68). However, the reader has to be constantly warned, otherwise the text lulls their awareness of the fact that there is no narrative without ideology. Luckily, the reader is constantly warned by the narrative voice in Austen’s novels that the totalising familiarity of the world as presented in any of her novels is just an illusion because the irony with which she relates to the events she is just telling destabilises the seemingly unquestionable ideology the novel pretends to communicate.

To detect the means of ideological coercion one has to establish the link between the concepts of genre, narrative, subject position and ideological coercion itself. As any social convention, each genre with the corresponding narrative “suggests sequences of action and response, the meaning we give these, and ways of organising experience by choices, emphases, priorities” (DuPlessis 4), thus relates us to the world as we imagine it. The characters which have been traditionally associated with these narratives offer certain subject positions—ideologically informed representations—to the reader with which he or she can

identify in the course of reading, but according to this identification he or she is interpellated by and becomes subject to the ideology communicated by the text.

This investigation poses the question: what is the role of the novel of manners primarily exemplified by Austen's *Emma* in the self-in-the-making process of the female protagonist of *The Waterfall*, who temporarily identifies with subject positions offered by this typically eighteenth-century genre? What ideology is she coerced in the course of these identifications? I claim in this analysis that behind the cover story of domesticity and Emma's aborted *Bildungsroman* Jane Gray reads the hidden, the unspoken because socially unacceptable romance story which comments on either her parents' marriage or her own views on love.

One of the most popular and central subject matters of the novel of manners is finding the perfect mate, and, for this reason, the novel of manners is generally intertwined with the romance. In my view, the novel of manners is perfectly suitable to channel the protagonists towards a socially acceptable and decorous romance, which can and has to end in marriage to be sanctioned by society. The question is of major importance for Austen's heroines, including Emma. However, when Gillian Beer describes the romance as wish-fulfilment literature (1) she fails to call attention to the fact that from their very origins, most romances have dealt with transgressive love relations. The medieval romances of either Guinevere and Lancelot or Tristan and Iseult—the romances *par excellence*—focus on a transgressive love relation: adultery. When Jane Austen draws the proper romance pairing for us, Emma and Frank Churchill, she follows the tradition of presenting transgressive love relations in romances (now adultery), but by the end she sets aside this line, and obeys the moral requirements of her own age by providing a well-polished cover story²⁶ and formulating a nice closure—Emma marrying Mr. Knightley—as expected by a proper novel of manners.

The romance, being the novel's Other,²⁷ inevitably carries ideological constraints, however, its intricate intertwining with the novel of manners in this case implies even more explicit ideological potentials. The decorous surface of manners—the cover story of socially acceptable romances—present in Austen's novels is a spectacular representation of an imaginary relationship to the world that one lives in, namely, patriarchy.

²⁶ “No less than the blotter literally held over the manuscript on her writing desk, Austen's cover story of the necessity for silence and submission reinforces women's subordinate position in patriarchal culture. [. . .] At the same time [. . .] under this cover story, Austen always stimulates her readers 'to supply what is not there' ” (Gilbert and Gubar (154-5).

²⁷ The romance can be considered the novel's Other for various reasons: its popularity among women writers and the female reading public made it a less prestigious genre, which was also supported by its subject matter, love. Although the two terms—novel and romance—used to be synonyms in the beginning their meanings had split by the nineteenth century and started to name two different genres.

“Manners are of more importance than laws,” claims William Burke, “They give their whole form and colour to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them” (quoted by Monaghan 3). In achieving her social vision Austen focuses on manners with a keen eye, especially when presenting formal social occasions like balls or dinners. According to her cover story, “her main subject—polite social relationships between members of the landed classes within the context of the village and the great house—is one that, far from being escapist, takes us immediately to what her society thought of as being its very heart” (Monaghan 5).

In the game of identification Jane Gray in *The Waterfall* refers to Austen emphasizing especially the ideological construct of manners and morals and, as an undercurrent, identifies with the ironic, comic subversion typical of Austen’s text. “Both my father and my mother came from such genteel middle class descent that Jane Austen herself could have described their affiliations with ease” (Drabble 54), remarks Jane Gray when she talks about her family background. However well her family affiliations would suit Jane Austen, this family background exemplifies an oscillation again: this family is seemingly identical with the genteel middle-class families in Austen’s novels but, at the same time, it is their reversal. In Austen’s texts fathers tend to have wives from relatively poor but decent middle-class families, but here, it is Jane’s mother who can take pride in her two brothers, a barrister and a clergyman. The reversal of the social status of the parents implies the instability rather than the reversal of traditional gender roles in the family. The mother’s social superiority to the father defines her behaviour (Drabble 54) whereas the father, too, “could not forget that he should have been born to better things” (Drabble 54). This never-ending social rivalry between the parents, in which the father is doomed to failure, destabilises the mother’s gendered position concerning social status as well as sexuality because she is dissatisfied to be the wife of a man of lower social standing, who is considered, for this reason, to be incapable to give her physical pleasure.

“‘Marriage and family warmth are so important,’ [her mother] would say, ‘and happy homes like ours so rare,’—she, who flinched from any physical approach, whose eyes grew white with alarm when my father touched her shoulder or her arm,” comments Jane Gray on her mother’s behaviour (Drabble 55-6). Under the cover story of the mother’s words lies her hidden frigidity which stems from the lack of a son, which

[. . .] would at least have given my mother an outlet for all her flirtations, coy and pointless charm, which she never in my knowledge directed towards a legitimate sexual object—certainly she never bestowed any of it upon my father, whom she

regarded, as he her, with a thinly-disguised contempt. [. . .] They presented a united front to the world, because their survival demanded that they should, because they could not afford to betray each other in public: but their dissension found other devious forms, secret forms, underhand attacks [. . .]. (Drabble 57)

Coming from a family like this, “a landscape civilized out of its natural shape” (Drabble 57), Jane should have learnt to distinguish what people say from what people do, but she claims she is “unable now [. . .] to distinguish between falsehoods rendered true by passion, and truths made false by duplicity” (Drabble 55). Despite her claim she is definitely able to see the difference between the two sides of the coin as she ironically criticises her mother’s behaviour in a distanced rather objective voice, “My mother was thought, generally, to be a charming woman: she was pretty, flattering, gracious: and yet I know the profound depths of her insincerity, or I would hear her in private savage, relentlessly, the antecedents of those very people she took such pains to charm” (Drabble 55). The gap between the cover story of decorous social behaviour and the “covered story” of the parents’ hatred towards each other is ripped open in *The Waterfall*, thus the parents’ novel of manners—their acting in public to be seen as a happy and charming family—fails to totalise the ideology that it is supposed to coerce. Jane Gray is the first “reader” of this story as a child, and even at that early age she experiences its incongruity. As an adult when she narrates her childhood memory she uncovers the story of their parents’ marriage without forgiveness.

Similarly to Austen’s characters Jane’s parents are obsessed with notions of class and rank. “With them, awareness of rank is a disease: it seems to be the core of their existence, it has displaced any of the significant centres of life, it eats them up, it devours them” (Drabble 59). Class and rank, name-dropping and middle initials on letters and suffering for a G instead of an H are exactly the manifestations of patriarchy that Jane Austen ridicules below the cover story of propriety, as what she “asks us to laugh at most often are the power structures of her world—wealth, social status, patriarchy” (Fullbrook 42). Drabble follows suit when she imitates Austen’s characters who invite the reader to understand the “duplicitous ability to speak with the tact that saves them from suicidal somnambulism on the one hand and contaminating vulgarity on the other, as they exploit the evasions and reservations of feminine gentility” (Gilbert and Gubar 183)

The cornerstones of the value system of Jane Gray’s parents are the very things she herself hates, “[. . .] my own parents were hypocrites, [. . .] their social attitudes were dishonest, [. . .] the solid virtues to which they paid lip-service were as nothing to them

compared with the vain honours and titles and glories which, at every speech day, they solemnly denounced” (Drabble 55).

Jane senses the metaphorical cracks in the discourse on propriety not only in family issues but in love relations as well. She starts interpreting Austen’s writing as if it reflected on her own life experience, her own wished-for romance. In this way the parents’ story and Austen’s stories function similarly in *The Waterfall*. Although Jane Gray claims to hate Jane Austen, I propose that the Austen references are as much central to the understanding of *The Waterfall* as the other intertexts that she does not claim to hate because these references also contribute to the rereading of classic genres as romances. Once Jane Gray bursts out:

How I dislike Jane Austen. How deeply I deplore her desperate wit. Her moral tone dismays me: my heart goes out to the vulgarity of those little card parties that Mrs Philips gave at Meryton, [. . .] to Lydia at fifteen gaily flashing her wedding ring through the carriage window, to Frank Churchill, above all to Frank Churchill, lying and deceiving and proffering embarrassing extravagant gifts. Emma got what she deserved, in marrying Mr Knightley. What can it have been like, in bed with Mr Knightley? Sorrow awaited that woman: she would have done better to steal Frank Churchill, if she could. (Drabble 57-8)

Drabble does not focus on one single novel by Austen as the quotation proves, but what connects the references is the fact that both female protagonists who are evoked either overtly or covertly have to go through a story of maturation that is completed by a romance ending. The allusions to *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)—Mrs. Philips at Meryton and the newly wed Lydia—evoke the consideration and growing maturity of Elizabeth Bennet, who has to reconsider her hasty judgements on Mr. Darcy. The clear references to *Emma* remind the reader of the heroine who has “the power of having rather too much of her own way” (*Emma* 5). She has to find out that she has been manipulated as a pawn in Frank Churchill’s game, and finally gives up her relative independence, realises her own marital, that is, social and financial interests and marries Mr. Knightley. Thus she returns to the feminine sphere relying on her modesty, reticence and patience, qualities that are considered properly feminine. Although *Emma* is not the only novel that *The Waterfall* rereads by Austen, I consider it the central intertext by Austen since Drabble’s female protagonist, Jane Gray, shows the strongest emotional reactions to *Emma* of all the Austen texts.

In the quotation above Jane Gray mentions Frank Churchill as the greatest deceiver, thus the most original figure who seemingly cares about decorum but cheats it as many times

as possible. He knows the rules of propriety, so he can successfully manipulate others. Rosalind Miles in analysing Austen suggests that “the orthodox ‘romance’ pairings are carefully drawn in for us—Emma and Frank Churchill [...]—in order precisely to illustrate their inadequacy and to invite us to reject them as possibilities” (44).

Jane Gray’s interpretation works exactly in the opposite way. She does not see this “orthodox ‘romance’ pairing” as something inadequate. She considers it to be a more original pairing and less governed by the rules of decorous behaviour than the final pairing of Emma and Mr. Knightley, which suits Jane to interpret her own relation with James. Even Knightley’s name suggests to Jane Gray the quality of this knightly relationship: governed by the morals of manners, both partners living up to the surface of moral expectations. Jane Gray considers Emma and Mr. Knightley the precise embodiment of the cover story she hates, a proper pairing that can perpetuate only these ideologically constructed surface values. But, in a way, knightly love was not like that, by definition it was adulterous even if at a Platonic level. The question of “What can it have been like, in bed with Mr Knightley?” (Drabble 58) is the voice of outspoken sexual desire that has become absolutely impossible for Emma by resigning to the “proper” feminine role and choosing Mr. Knightley. As there is sexual attraction between Emma and Frank Churchill, Emma’s desires are silenced by choosing Mr. Knightley. That is why Jane thinks that “sorrow awaited that woman” (Drabble 58) in her marriage, and for this reason it would have been better if she had had Frank Churchill.

This question is not of secondary importance for Jane Gray as she tries to understand the desires of the female body. Through her choice Emma decides to join the patriarchal society, which after her relative independence and autonomy can guarantee nothing the like only mastery over her. After marrying Mr. Knightley she has no choice but to live up to the decorous surface, behave in a ladylike way and give up her attempts at any kind of *Bildung* which awaited her in the beginning as she was a woman of relative independence and in no need to marry for financial and social stability. Thus “[h]er proper negotiation with class and gender makes a heroine from an improper hero” (DuPlessis 7). The story of a hero—the “voyage-out” (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 4-7)—is denied of Emma because of her gender, that is why she can function only as an improper hero, and the only possible place for her is that of the romance heroine, who finally marries the hero, Mr. Knightley. In this way, the story fits into the tradition of nineteenth-century romances, because, as Miller remarks, “[. . .] female *Bildung* tends to get stuck in the bedroom” (quoted by DuPlessis 4), or, in my interpretation, rather, in church, since getting stuck in the bedroom would imply transgression instead of the containment of the romance in the ideological network of (the novel of)

manners, but if it is the marital bedroom, it is ideologically contained. This resolution in *Emma* is considered highly problematic by Jane Gray as well.

The ideologically informed decorous surface of propriety, in my opinion, is closely related to what Gilbert and Gubar call the cover story, the story told by the narrator (154-5), but there is always a marked distance between the cover story and the narrator, a discrepancy from which Austen's comic subversion stems. According to Belsey a classic realist "text effaces its own existence as text, [. . .] if only in terms of the shape of the text on the page, the novel seems merely to transcribe a series of events, to report on a palpable world, however fictional" (*Critical* 68). The text pretends to be transparent, like Austen's cover story. However, whereas we cannot suppose a theoretical awareness on behalf of Austen, it almost looks as if she had realised that ideology can be best criticised from within its own discourse so she provides gaps and silences in her text that make the reader supply what is not there, read between the lines to construct Austen's ironic critique of ideology which, written into the transparent and familiar romance story, with all its contradictions emphatically constructs the counter-discourse of the cover story. The same is true of Drabble's cover story and narrator: this discrepancy of the two is present in the heteroglossic nature of the novel that results from its double narration and the constant use of intertexts.

It is Austen's finest comic subversion—pretending to present a nicely polished, transparent "all's-well-that-ends-well" cover story in an ironically distant narrative voice—that Jane Gray senses. In the course of her self-in-the-making process she identifies not with the decorous cover story and the "proper feminine" subject positions offered by this well-polished romance, but peeps under the surface through the cracks and would like to identify with a "misbehaving" romance heroine who does not follow the route of patriarchy, but is on the verge of entering an improper love relation with Frank Churchill. However, Jane Gray refuses the role of the Austen heroine completely when she refuses the ideologically informed cover story. She does not find it a satisfactory role to be caught up in that patriarchal society. In the end, Emma does not risk her manners and morals, rather joins Mr. Knightley who, ironically enough, does not resemble the knights of medieval romances in his conduct of women. Instead he is a handsome nineteenth-century caricature of these original knights, who entered adulterous love relations with married women and were not brother-like good friends of young ladies. It is for this reason that Jane Gray finds the original romance pairing of Emma and Frank Churchill a more perfect match since in that relationship no cover story would distort and control their behaviour similarly to her own love affair with James. Jane Gray considers Emma a hypocrite in the sense she considers her parents too, as none of them

dares to behave according to their desires, but rather behaves under the cover of ideologically acceptable or even advisable manners and morals.

Reading a seemingly transparent classic realist text Jane Gray faces the hierarchy of discourses. In the course of her self-in-the-making Jane Gray evades ideological coercion “proper”: she does not identify with the cover story which would perpetuate the privileged discourse of patriarchy, she does not become a “proper woman,” she does not obey patriarchy. Although there is no ideological coercion proper as such I prefer using the expression to emphasise the double ideological potential of the text: one being “proper” by the fact that it is expected from the romance, that it is patriarchal and is informed by the privileged discourse of the cover story; the other being subversive by turning the former upside-down and inside-out by evoking the adulterous love relations of medieval romances. Instead of welcoming the privileged ideological coercion of the cover story Jane Gray identifies with the counter-discourse: she willingly embraces the subversion of ideological coercion “proper,” as she identifies with the “misfits,” the metaphorical cracks of the ideologically informed cover story, she enters an adulterous transgressive love relation, and maps patriarchy by testing its limits. In this sense, the genre of the romance in its intertwining with the novel of manners does not condition Jane Gray to what the reader supposes at the first sight: she is not conditioned to patriarchy. “Once upon a time, the *rightful end* of women in novels was social—successful courtship, marriage—or judgemental of her sexual and social failure—death. These are both resolutions of the romance” (DuPlessis 1, emphasis added). Although most romances communicate these two means of women’s integration into society *Emma* has an undercurrent that comes from the original narrative of the genre of the romance which is highlighted by the ironic narrative voice and the genre, the novel of manners, it is embedded in. In this way, the genre of the romance in the context provided by the novel of manners works in a surprising way in the intertextual relationship of *The Waterfall* and *Emma*: it is coerced inside-out, and, ironically enough, goes against patriarchy. Jane Gray understands the falsity of the cover story in Austen’s texts but fails to recognise Austen’s ironic attitude, nevertheless *The Waterfall* does exactly the same as Austen did, as it rips open the discrepancies of the socially appropriate cover story of public expectations and the actual state of human relationships. Jane Gray, the narrator protagonist continues what her literary foremother, Austen has begun. However, the greatest difference between the two narrative techniques is that while Austen plays this double game in a very refined and sophisticated way by the use of an ironic narrative voice, Drabble’s narrator openly expresses her dissatisfactions.

The game between Drabble's text and Jane Austen's novel is a step in the multiple attempts at ripping open the illusory transparency of the romance: what Austen does with the cover story and the narrative voice is much more emphatically present in Drabble's text, since it multiplies this ironic relationship of the cover story and the narration by the use of the first- and third-person narration and the constant play with the intertexts. This multiple game results in multiplying the gaps and contradictions in the text between genres, generic variants, (cover) stories and narrative voices which necessarily assume the impossibility of a stable subject position from the very beginning since the "subject-in-process" position is constantly shifting from gap to gap.

Brontë's Romance

In Drabble's novel the original, wished-for romance story is provided by Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the popular story of a plain governess, which is also categorised as a *Bildungsroman*, a feature that Jane Gray, the producer of the third-person romance story in *The Waterfall* completely ignores. She neglects the fact that before Jane Eyre first attracts the love of Rochester she has to go through a long and painful story of development to become a young lady who is equipped with all the education that she needs to get employment as a governess to lead a relatively independent life. Similarly, Jane Gray takes no notice of Jane Eyre's second phase of development after fleeing Thornfield when Brontë's Jane becomes an independent woman: she makes her own living, inherits a considerable fortune and finds her family. She is no longer dependent on anyone including Rochester as she is independent considering work, financial background and emotions. Jane Gray fails to give importance to these *Bildung* elements in her references to *Jane Eyre*, however, these are the very parts that could reveal how she could achieve romantic love by imitating Jane Eyre. In addition, Jane Gray does not notice either that Jane Eyre's education in romance fails to bring the expected success and she has to abandon her romantic ideals based on fairy tale patterns. Without these lessons Jane Gray has to realise at her own expenses what she has skipped in her rereadings.

Jane Gray in *The Waterfall* looks for her own narrative as Jane Eyre does. However, there is a major difference between the two: Jane Eyre wants to articulate her own story in opposition to stories told by others about her (Séllei 146) and, in this way, find her subject position, whereas Jane Gray—showing greyness as an intentional copying of Jane Eyre—intends to find her subjectivity by positioning herself in a story told by others. It is Jane Eyre's story that fills Jane Gray with nostalgia and, at the same time, attracts her providing

the illusion of subjectivity in the position of Jane Eyre. In this subchapter I will investigate the narrative dynamism of Jane Gray's identification with Jane Eyre in the romance of emotional and sexual attraction and the traps of this wishful process which forces Jane Gray to realise her own difference from her literary predecessor. I will also examine how Jane Gray reads the concept of *grande passion* and, finally, point out how she modifies her previous misreadings of the romance of Jane Eyre.

Jane Gray's identification with Jane Eyre appears in the third-person narratives, and the narrator comments on its validity and, at the same time, "on the tradition within which it generates its meaning" (Hannay 4) in the first-person parts, which clarifies Jane Gray's role in the complex network of the text. She is both the "author" of the third-person romance and, at the same time, its omniscient narrator, and she is the reader of her "own" romance story who "all" claim a strong narrative presence in the first-person parts. In this way, besides the strong "authorial" voice, the novel "disarmingly incorporates the reader's sceptical voice—Jane 'reads' and criticizes her own 'story' [. . .]" (Creighton 56). In this textual complexity it gradually becomes clear for Jane Gray that this kind of identification does not provide one with subjectivity, only with its illusion, and the continual disillusionment gives her a growing sense of lack. The reflexive first-person parts shed light on the differences between the two stories—the wished-for and the 'real' one—and also write the story of Jane Gray, a kind of *Bildungsroman*, which unwillingly results in the emergence of her subjectivity—a kind of subjectivity which radically differs from the illusion offered by *Jane Eyre*. However, it is worth noting that I use *wished-for* and *real* as a binary within the constructed and fictitious world of the novel denoting the wished-for romance and the real (and by definition fictitious) life story of Jane Gray as it is presented in the first-person parts.

Nóra Séllei in her *Jane Eyre* interpretation focuses on the process of articulating one's own story, and emphatically calls attention to the fact that the female voice, a speaking woman is problematic herself in patriarchal cultures, and as such she should not even violate the codes of feminine discourse. (142) Charlotte Brontë violates this code system by the use of a masculine voice by a female narrator (Séllei 142), and doing so she invites the harsh criticism of her contemporaries. Jane Gray's relation to language is also problematic in the patriarchal code system because she is a poet: she masters something from which she is excluded by her immanence as opposed to transcendence. *The Waterfall* further complicates the possible relations to language by the fact that Jane Gray's husband, Malcolm, is an artist,

he sings poems to music. “[A]ddicted to words, [. . . her] only passion” (Drabble 86)²⁸ Jane falls in love with him during a performance. “Love at first sight: I have heard of it: and like a doomed romantic I looked for it and found it” (Drabble 86) and it is only much later that she realises the great mistake she has made, “I forgot that the words were not his [. . .]” (Drabble 87). Malcolm’s relation to language and to transcendence is indirect,²⁹ so this kind of discourse he has access to does not provide him with a transcendent subjectivity.

Relations towards language are further complicated by James’ appearance. James is cousin Lucy’s husband, who regularly visits Jane immediately after she gives birth to her daughter, Bianca. Their love relation starts during her post-partum recovery. A woman right after childbirth during her six weeks’ ban on intercourse is a taboo: that is the only social norm that James observes—partly, however his speech and behaviour deny all the other social codes as if they did not exist at all. The most conspicuous event in this respect is when during his second visit James utters a sentence which is non-existent in the socially coded world, “I want to be in that bed. The only place in the room is in that bed”³⁰ (Drabble 32). This transgressive sentence sets Jane and James’ transgressive love relation into motion, which becomes reminiscent of adulterous medieval romances.

Significantly, Jane’s room (or attic?) is outside society functioning as an alternative world with the bed in the middle which is the site of childbirth and, not much later, sexual intercourse. Jane’s room can be seen as a heterotopia, the only possible site for this adulterous romance, since it has “the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites,³¹ but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault 24). Drabble describes this room as an alternative site as well everything being cold, warm, wet, dry, soft or harsh. (9) Here only proximity exists, distance and seeing do not. Everything is palpable and near, things do not have their definite contours and borders like Jane: neither her body, nor her subjectivity has definite contours. Psychoanalytic readings of the novel, for example Jane Wyatt’s, point out that the room functions as a womb in the text (Wyatt 132): the sensory images and the act of birth make it into such a site for the two lovers in which gender and other socially coded norms and

²⁸ Interestingly enough, Byatt uses very similar words to describe her relationship to language, “My professional and human obsession is the nature of language, and my best relationships are with other writers” (Byatt quoted by Green 6).

²⁹ Although Creighton suggests that Malcolm is a homosexual (57), she does not consider his relation to transcendence and language only focuses on his failed marriage.

³⁰ Though Byatt’s novel hardly ever echoes *The Waterfall* word by word a very similar sentence is uttered in *Possession* as well, however, still in bed it is Christabel who claims after her first lovemaking with Ash that “[. . .] I have no desire to be elsewhere” (Byatt 284).

³¹ Foucault defines site as follows, “The site is defined by relations of proximity between points or elements; formally, we can describe these relations as series, trees, or grids” (23).

discourses do not exist. For this reason this is the only site, a heterotopic one, in the text where James can utter his sentence quoted above.

The inapplicability of gender defines the love relation of Jane and James as long as they do not enter society with all its coded, structured discourses. The imagery of childbirth which is given priority over images of sexuality confers meaning upon their love relation. It becomes irrelevant who the mother or the offspring is in this sexual proximity since the lovers are mutually reborn in this relationship, “A woman delivered. She was his offspring, as he, lying there between her legs, had been hers” (Drabble 151).

As opposed to Wyatt’s view, I do not claim that sexuality is the first experience to give Jane a sense of subjectivity. Instead, I would rather insist that the bodily experience of motherhood is prior to sexuality not only chronologically but concerning meaning as well, since, even Wyatt admits, “making labour the metaphor for sexual pleasure and lactation the metaphor for sexual desire gives maternity discursive priority over romance” (134).

If *Jane Eyre* is considered radical concerning gender and discourse then *The Waterfall* is even more so since it suspends the presupposition that in the world there are genders of two kinds at least. However, this suspension is valid only in Jane’s room, since, as a heterotopia, it subverts a set of relations—namely gender—which is taken for granted outside heterotopias. This quality of the room makes it the only possible site to contain Jane and James’ adulterous love relationship, thus heterotopia reinforces the generic revision of the romance. As soon as the lovers enter the world and society, they have to find the terms to name their relationship, they have to make out stories to contain this transgressive love relation in socially constructed categories: sometimes James introduces Jane as his cousin or takes her to Norway as Mrs. Otford, as his wife giving her a false name.³² Everything goes back to its place by the car accident: Jane suddenly realises that this relationship, which cannot be contained by social norms, cannot go on. After the accident Lucy, James’ wife appears and agrees with Jane: she takes back her husband. Afterwards Jane and James’ relationship becomes socially legitimised: they become friends and occasional lovers, and the heterotopic world of the room in the attic never returns to their relationship.

But what does Jane Eyre have to do with this strange story of Jane Gray? Jane Eyre’s story is the example for Jane Gray she wants to copy and intends to imitate in her relationship with James. The wished-for romance of Jane Eyre and Rochester provides the illusion for Jane Gray she wants to live as reality and when commenting on differences between the two Janes’ life stories in the first-person narrative parts she is shocked to realise that it cannot be

³² When Jane registers at the hotel as Mrs. Otford, Lucy, Jane’s alter ego arrives and registers as Jane Gray. This changeability of names also calls attention to the fact that Jane and Lucy are not related only by James but function as doubles as well.

taken for reality at all. These are critical moments of her self-in-the-making, her unfolding *Bildungsroman*. “It won’t, of course, do: as an account, I mean, of what took place. [. . .] Because it’s obvious that I haven’t told the truth, about myself and James. [. . .] I’ve merely omitted: merely, professionally, edited” (Drabble 46) or some pages later, “Lies, lies, it’s all lies. A pack of lies. I’ve even told lies of fact, which I had meant not to do. Oh, I meant to deceive, I meant to draw analogies, but I’ve done worse than that, I’ve misrepresented” (Drabble 84).

However, one thing is for sure, Jane Gray’s story puts Jane Eyre’s story into a new light since Jane Gray reinterprets Brontë’s text when she reflects on the impossibility of reliving her illusions provided by her literary predecessor. What does being willingly G/gray mean to Jane Gray? Being like Jane Eyre? Or rather feeling safe in the seemingly stable gender system of Brontë’s novel? Both, in my view. For Jane Gray the story of Jane Eyre provides the illusion of a stable gender system of the romance which she misreads as *grande passion* without realising the real source of Jane Eyre’s integrity and the changes she goes through during her *Bildung*. The romance of Jane Eyre makes Jane Gray long for a certain kind of harmony that can be found in that story but is missing from hers. After her liberating sexual intercourse with James, when she could be most innocent concerning her “sexual salvation,” (Drabble 151) Jane Gray is still uncertain about her emotions, “I did not, even at that time, think myself born into happiness forever. It seemed, rather, like some inevitable doom, better known than unknown. I was never to find it easy; it wasn’t easy” (Drabble 151). Resulting from this lack of harmony, Jane Gray tries to identify with Jane Eyre because she finds that both of them share the same position in the structure of love. She does exactly what Barthes describes as a natural effect of any reading process. “The subject painfully identifies himself [or herself] with some person (or character) who occupies the same position as himself [or herself] in the amorous structure” (*A Lover’s* 129). This homology brings into play the identification process which, according to Roland Barthes, is the key to all love stories since all the lovers in the world are related by a network of homologies. (*A Lover’s* 130) Thus Jane Gray reacts as a lot of other readers of *Jane Eyre* would do.

Several analogies can be detected between the stories of the two Janes, however the differences can be traced right along the analogies as well. Séllei points out that Jane Eyre and Rochester’s first memorable encounter opposes the lovers’ first meeting both in fairy tales and romances since it negates them at every point by transgressing conventions at the same time. (Séllei 169-71) Where they meet is outside discourses of power: Rochester is not a rich nobleman, Jane is not his employee, Rochester is neither handsome nor polite, rather he has a strange, irregular face and is cursing. Strengthened by the strong dissimilarities of the

situation from any romance scenes, Jane stays and helps. Similarly, Jane Gray and James's first encounter is outside all discourses of power, and, in their case, some of the boundaries that are not crossed or transgressed in the original story are invalid: the boundaries between gender roles disappear, and Jane's new childbirth completely negates the conventions of romances. In both stories the lovers behave and talk in a way that is socially improper. As if the roles were switched: Rochester is a fallen man (literally as well) and the so called fragile female helps him, whereas Jane Gray is nursed and caressed by James as a baby is looked after by its mother.

What is the illusion of *Jane Eyre* that attracts Jane Gray? What is present in the first Jane's life that is missing from the other's? That kind of harmony that is reached by the end of *Jane Eyre*: now Jane is able to exist in the inseparable duality of the material and immaterial, of soul and body, which was denied of her by both men—Rochester and St. John—in the text previously, and this duality puts an end to the exclusiveness of binary oppositions; not immaterial *or* material, not spiritual *or* bodily but the two together almost utopistically. (Séleui 197) At the end of her story *Jane Eyre* exclaims, "Reader, I married him" (Brontë 444); after one third of her story Jane Gray claims, "Reader, I loved him" (Drabble 84). The main difference between the two sentences lies not only in the social acceptance of the relationships described by them, but in the fact that while the first conclusion has strong implications to the present as well, the second one is only about the past. However, Jane Gray is still attracted to *Jane Eyre*'s story in the remaining two thirds of her narrative. It is not romantic love that Jane Gray misses, or not a Rochester of her own, but the kind of subjectivity that *Jane Eyre* enjoys in her second and final encounter with Rochester. This subjectivity seemingly equals romantic love, that is why Jane Gray sticks to James so ardently. However, she does not notice her own ironic attitude towards *Jane Eyre*'s romantic exclamation. Jane Gray is seduced by the centrality of romantic love to such an extent that she can value only this in *Jane Eyre*'s story and it makes her blind to the fact that marriage does not necessarily equal love, and she fails to recognise her potentials in not being married to James.

In her account of what has happened Jane Gray resorts "to that old broken medium" (Drabble 46), the romance to tell "that sequence of discovery and recognition that I would call love" (Drabble 46). To tell what she wants to, Jane eliminates everything that does not fit into the "intertext on love she inherits" (Wyatt 127) from her literary predecessors, mainly Charlotte Brontë. Her love of James bears the imprint of love in *Jane Eyre* as the quotation imports the values from *Jane Eyre* to *The Waterfall*:

Reader, I loved him: as Charlotte Brontë said. Which was Charlotte Brontë's man, the one she created and wept for and longed for, or the poor curate that had her and killed her, her sexual measure, her sexual match? I had James, oh God, I had him [. . .]; the world that I lived in with him—[. . .]—it was some foreign country to me, some Brussels of the mind, where I trembled and sighed for my desires [. . .] as that lonely virgin in her parsonage. Reader, I loved him. And more than that, I had him. He was real, I swear it. (Drabble 84)

Jane Eyre never utters the sentence in her text, 'Reader, I loved, him.' However, Jane Gray reads this illusory sentence as the major value of Brontë's novel. Shattering the binary opposition between real and imaginary—a major debate between the first- and third-person narratives—Jane Gray now questions what is 'true': the ideal romantic love for an imaginary figure, or the dull proximity of the curate. Brussels with the Pensionnat Heger³³ was Charlotte Brontë's "promised land" (Ruijssenaars x), as she wrote to a lifelong friend in 1841, however, later on as a married woman she could have it only as an illusory land of the mind with an illusory figure at its centre, Constantin Heger. Jane Gray carries over the value of passionate romantic love with these allusions, regardless of the distortions it imposes on reality. Jane Gray experiences romantic love as she thinks Charlotte Brontë did since "she both loves James and makes it all up: she both 'lies' and tells the kind of truth Brontë tells, investing the real with an imaginative intensity that makes it come alive" (Wyatt 143). But this concept of romantic love is not enough for Jane Gray to find a subject position from which she can articulate her own story because it offers only a fictional pattern of love that she can only imitate.

Luckily, Jane Gray finally realises that she has fallen victim to self-deception and by starting a genuinely new independent life she tries to create the kind of harmony Jane Eyre enjoyed with Rochester in the end: she cleans up her house, hires an au-pair for the children, writes well and prolifically and ventures out into society, among people. The fact that Jane cleans up her house has metaphoric implications as well, since houses were often associated with women representing their confinement. But James does not understand what is going on: he seems to have got stuck at the ideal world of romantic clichés and does not realise its fictionality.

The concept of romantic love is interpreted and misinterpreted in several ways in *The Waterfall*, which misleads Jane Gray as well in her wished-for identification. Rochester calls

³³ For interesting details of the Pensionnat Heger it is worth consulting Eric Ruijssenaars' *Charlotte Brontë's Promised Land*.

romantic love *grande passion* and always applies this term to such shallow affections like the one she felt towards Céline Varrens. He never calls his love of Jane Eyre *grande passion*. This term, if misread, denotes romantic love, however, thorough investigation clarifies that *grande passions* in Rochester's life have been socially expected love affairs, since a gentleman of his age and social standing was expected to have a lover/lovers and, in a gentlemanlike way, to look after the young lady financially as well. In my reading, *grande passion* does not mean either passion or suffering as the etymology of the word would suggest, rather a gentlemanlike extravagancy to indulge in. Séllei claims that Rochester tells the story of Céline Varrens to Jane instead of Bertha's story (176), according to which *grande passion* is based on erotic attraction and hierarchic dependence. Jane Gray realises this misreading only little by little, and she becomes gradually aware of the fact that what she is looking for is something else, not *grande passion*.

To make Jane Eyre's story come true in Jane Gray's James should have become Rochester, which almost happened so. James is badly hurt in the car accident: his eye and right arm are injured. The only difference is that he recovers and loses neither his arm nor his sight. His injuries are not by chance: they remind the reader of those of Rochester as well as of the Biblical retribution for adultery. The ability of sight and the *male gaze* are of major importance in both stories. Rochester wants to force his story on Jane Eyre to contain her in his story, and when he goes blind he loses his power to objectify her and, at the same time, gains a greater intimacy by being dependent on touching only. (Séllei 197) His loss of sight, in a psychoanalytic interpretation, is a symbolic castration, a price paid for his metaphoric incestuous desire which could have been fulfilled by marrying Jane (Sadoff 528), who, in Wyatt's view, wants to get united with the father figure, Rochester. (Wyatt 31)³⁴ Although James falls in love with Jane in a heterotopic world where touching is the primary sensory experience and gender roles are inapplicable, he falls victim of his own gaze: he gazes at the sleeping Jane—who resembles the Sleeping Beauty in her amazing passivity and eternal waiting, a fairy tale heroine whose figure is reinterpreted in *Possession* as well—and falls in love with her. In their story James has the power of the gaze, it is only in his absence that Jane looks at his belongings, a postcard with his message on it and his car magazines. The absence of James is substituted with his objects, his writing; the transcendence of language which belongs to him is a substitute for his presence. They look into each other's eyes only once, but

³⁴ I do not agree with Jane Wyatt's view that Jane and Rochester's second encounter in Ferndean and their marriage is a fulfilment of their Oedipal desires (31) since they meet in radically changed power positions and all the transgressive elements are missing from their new relationship that were present in Thornfield. Nevertheless, Rochester's first marital proposal can be interpreted as an incestuous desire if one considers the Rochester-Jane-Bertha triangle, in which Rochester functions as the father figure, Jane as the daughter and Bertha as the avenging mother.

in the mirror, not directly: right before the accident.³⁵ The Jane-James identity and exchangeability which kept their relationship going disappears with this look, and they realise who exactly they can see in the mirror. It is like entering an opposite mirror phase. (Csatári 186)

In the light of the concept of heterotopia, it is no wonder that the mirror functions this way. Michel Foucault emphatically focuses on the mirror as both a utopia and heterotopia in which the interplay of reality and virtuality is a vital element. In the case of Jane and James the mirror functions as a heterotopia because “[f]rom the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and reconstitute myself there where I am” (Foucault 24). Unlike in the mirror phase, Jane and James have to realise at this crucial moment that the person they see in the mirror is the other. In this way, the Jane-James identity and exchangeability cease to exist, and having fallen back to reality, Jane becomes Jane and James becomes James again.

Jane Gray realises that if she wants to live to experience that kind of idyllic harmony which Jane Eyre enjoys at the end of her story, she has to turn James into Rochester and it would also serve as a neat ending, a perfect conclusion to her story. Without this, however, her story does not have a nice closure. “A feminine ending? Or I could have maimed James so badly, in this narrative, that I would have been allowed to have him, as Jane Eyre had her blinded Rochester” (Drabble 231). Although Jane Gray still yearns for the romance’s formulaic solutions as both an artist and moralist, she cannot rewrite her story to have James die³⁶ because “it would violate the pattern she has established of denying the romantic conventions” (Hannay 44). In this way, the real story of her inconclusive affair with James replaces the romance, which without any possible endings is unfinished and unfinishable. She “emphatically refuses the romantic trajectory of Jane Eyre, mounting in intensity toward a final ecstasy by declining to make use of the potential for sublimity in her reunion with James by the side of the waterfall. Instead she keeps tacking on postscripts” as signs of her ongoing self-definition, her own *Bildungsroman*, “that dispel sublimity to reflect the way things

³⁵ Similarly, Jane Eyre never dares to look at her master in the eye at Thornfield. However, when Rochester’s secret is revealed to her during their wedding ceremony the situation changes. “I looked at Mr Rochester; I made him look at me,” adds Jane when she recounts the disastrous incident (Brontë 288). At the most critical moment of their relationship they look into each other’s eyes: everything is revealed, they are no longer blinded by romantic illusions induced by fairy tales.

³⁶ It could have been a nice sublime ending to have James die which could have left Jane Gray praise him as her only eternal lover but this dénouement would have trapped Jane in the romantic scenario again. However, she realises this risk and, in addition, she is well aware of the fact that Rochester does not die either which allows Jane Eyre to get united with him in a radically different context than in Thornfield.

happen in everyday life: just one thing after another” (Wyatt 147). Thinking ironically about ideas of paying a price of love with either impotence or thrombosis she puts an end to her text with a relativising half sentence, “I think” (Drabble 239).

This half sentence, however, is the most genuine articulation in the novel, which marks the successful completion of the protagonist’s *Bildung*. Jane Gray starts this text as a self-appointed Jane Eyre, who wants to play the role of the nineteenth-century romance heroine. However, this attempt is doomed to failure because, as Drabble claims, “you can’t write a 19th century novel in the 20th century nor am I even attempting to” (“An Interview” 23), and Jane realises it only little by little. This recognition process gives Jane access to a more conscious attitude, a more subjective discourse: now she refuses to find her subjectivity in a story told by others about someone else, but rather she writes her own which is hers because it does not belong to anyone else. The story of the nineteenth-century heroine ends with a romance preceded by a complex and significant story of development, which Jane Gray does not take into account. Jane Gray aims exclusively at the romance and, while doing so, she turns her story into a *Bildungsroman*. Thus in this twentieth-century *Jane Eyre*-rewriting two classic genres, the romance and the *Bildungsroman* are revised: their order in the narrative and proportion is reversed. *The Waterfall* writes itself into the nineteenth-century female literary tradition by not only its simple continuation but by entering into a dialogue with it and doing so shaping its own genuinely twentieth-century narrative. Jane Gray’s reading of Jane Eyre’s romance becomes her own *Bildungsroman*.

Eliot’s Romance

Either the Brontë or the Austen intertexts have generally been characterised as romances with emphatic elements of the *Bildungsroman* but the third intertext that *The Waterfall* applies, *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot, has hardly ever been categorised as a romance. In this analysis I claim that, despite this critical tradition, *The Waterfall* rereads Eliot’s novel as a romance and does not make use of its potentials as any kind of *Bildungsroman*. This misreading, however, is typical of the female protagonist’s reading strategy who reads all the other nineteenth-century intertexts in a similar way.

Besides the romance the other typical nineteenth-century genre is the *Bildungsroman*, which is highly problematic in the female literary tradition. As the *Bildungsroman* provides the story of social integration for the hero, its plot is not easy to transfer into a gendered context, for a female protagonist. As I have already pointed out in the previous subchapter,

the prize and the only means of successful social integration for women was marriage, and if the female protagonist failed to reach this goal she could be only reconciled with society through her elimination, through death. It seems to me, that in such a strict system there is hardly any place for any female *Bildung*, which is clearly marked by the critical disagreement of categorising *The Mill on the Floss* which Drabble uses as an intertext for testing the limits of the *Bildungsroman* and rereads it as a romance.

Locating its origins in the Goethean story of development, even the broadest definitions of the traditional *Bildungsroman* presuppose a male protagonist and interpret human development in masculine terms, which signals the exclusively masculine relevance of the genre. While emphasizing gender differences, Abel, Hirsch and Langland's contemporary definition of the genre

[. . .] shares common ground with the presuppositions and generic features of the traditional *Bildungsroman*: belief in a coherent self (although not necessarily an autonomous one); faith in the possibility of development (although change may be frustrated, may occur at different stages and rates, and may be concealed in the narrative); insistence on a time span in which development occurs (although the time span may exist only in memory); and emphasis on social context (even as adversary). (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 14)

Nineteenth-century stories of *female* development, on average, radically differ from the genre as characterised above.

Female fictions of development reflect the tensions between the assumptions of a genre that embodies male norms and the values of its female protagonists. [. . .] The heroine's developmental course is more conflicted, less direct: separation tugs against the longing for fusion and the heroine encounters the conviction that identity resides in intimate relationships, especially those of early childhood. (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 11)

According to the authors of *The Voyage In*, two narrative patterns predominate in stories of female development: the first one is a story of apprenticeship which chronologically shows a continuous development from childhood to maturity, a paradigm that adapts the linear structure of the male *Bildungsroman*, like the one the reader encounters in certain parts of *Jane Eyre*; the second type of narrative patterns the story of awakening and portrays a break

from marital authority. In this narrative paradigm the story often becomes a story of adultery in which the significant changes are internal, due to which “flashes of recognition often replace the continuous unfolding of an action” (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 12).

The third alternative version of the narrative of development, in Abel, Hirsch and Langland’s opinion, is the failure of both previous paradigms, an attempt at the *Bildungsroman* that cannot contain a heroine, like Maggie Tulliver. Her “long suicide” (Eliot 336) suggests her failed attempt at the masculine genre which results only in self-destruction and, finally, in death. However, Abel, Hirsch and Langland do not interpret Maggie’s death as a necessary loss but celebrate it as a glorious resolution to her story, which is the only possible ending in their view.³⁷ As opposed to stories of development that are founded on separation, autonomy and social involvement, “Maggie, especially, illustrates a different form of development—rooted in childhood, marked by her insistence on continuity, located in the inner self, culminating in death, it is nevertheless a development of a total individual, spiritual, moral, intellectual, emotional, even sexual” (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 37). Her story is the voyage-in which, instead of going out to society to find her place and, through this, social integration, focuses on the heroine’s turning inwards and her emotional maturation.³⁸

Surprisingly, critics do not agree whether Maggie’s character changes at all during her growing up. While Virginia Woolf emphatically claims that Maggie develops (“Heroines” 104), Barbara Hardy states that although Maggie’s experience changes her character is not transformed. (Hardy 185)

The Maggie who pushed Lucy into the mud, who ran away, who used her doll as a scapegoat, who cut off her hair, who wanted to give Tom the bigger half of the jam-puff and immediately forgot his existence in devouring it, this Maggie is still present in the old Maggie, with adult appetites, adult control over trivial acts, and adult lack of control over grave ones. The strength of personal love which animates her sense of duty as she renounces Stephen owes something to the stern voice she listened to in Thomas à Kempis, and forgot, and heard again, but much to the generous lovingness that was there in the little girl. (Hardy 184-5)

³⁷As opposed to this, Henry James claimed, “[a]s it stands, the *dénouement* shocks the reader most painfully. Nothing has prepared him for it; the story does not move towards it; it casts no shadow before it” (James 68).

³⁸ Abel, Hirsch and Langland’s view creates the sense of an alternative feminine culture which is based on women’s Otherness/otherness. (Séleil 266)

Because of this lack of definite development of character Hardy classifies Eliot's novel as a "tidy *Bildungsroman*" which breaks the pattern of the genre "by its fidelity to the stubborn and unchanging nature of human character" (185).

A second view, Susan Fraiman's, reads Maggie's story as a novel resembling the Gothic, which—like the romance—has feminine characteristics, though she continuously relates Maggie's adventures to the masculine paradigm of the *Bildungsroman*. In her interpretation Maggie's story is "[. . .] structured by her vain attempts to participate in the genre I attribute to Tom and by her inevitable lapses back into another, something resembling the Gothic; in spite of her aspirations to *Bildung*, Maggie continually returned to a place of terror, reenclosed in a familiar prison" (141). Fraiman also remarks that the rivalry between sibling narratives is at odds with the usual novel of development since "Eliot's *Bildungsheld* is, if not doubled, then at least decentered" (141). In this way, Eliot pushes Tom's story of development out of the centre which implies her intentional refusal to make his story the norm. Instead she presents two parallel stories of development, one of which is masculine and the other which is feminine, but always makes sure to inform the reader that the story she is really interested in is that of Maggie's.

Fraiman differentiates the narrative dynamism of the stories of development of the siblings and emphasises that the genre of the *Bildungsroman* definitely favours a male *Bildungsheld*. Nevertheless, when she describes Tom's development as an upward movement and Maggie's development as its opposite, a downward movement, she regenerates the binary of the male-female/positive-negative. In this way, she posits the male *Bildung* as the norm, a goal which Maggie can never attain.³⁹

Séllei looks at Maggie's otherness in terms of her body, cleverness and witchery which can be interpreted, on the one hand, as destructive demonism, like in Nina Auerbach's views, and, on the other, as self-destruction. Maggie's destructive demonism has only one target—her doll in the attic—other than herself. (Séllei 278-94) This deterministic and fictitious world is too limited for Maggie, however, its widening would imply questioning its basic norms which Maggie does not want to undertake. Rather she forces herself to internalise the norms that drown her by leaving no discursive potentials, no discursive space to move around to test the limits of her familial/r imprisonment. The deterministic social context of St. Ogg's is represented by women, the Dodson sisters primarily, who seem to control their own alternative world, which, actually, does not go further than their own households. Their power is only enough to internalise the rules of a society, which makes them subdued and limits their

³⁹ Séllei claims that Fraiman's view can be interpreted as a kind of return to first-wave feminism ideas, which promoted women's emancipation in patriarchal society. (Séllei 266)

power to china, bonnets and other minimalised spaces of independent existence. Nevertheless, they are the strongest perpetuators of proper femininity and, in due course, their judgement on Maggie's behaviour proves to be the strongest as well. Séllei points out that the final judgement in the novel is articulated by "the world's wife", whose strictness proves the regulating power of patriarchal society over the wives of St. Ogg's. (Séllei 275)

As opposed to the views that relate *The Mill on the Floss* to the various generic versions of the *Bildungsroman*, Rachel Blau DuPlessis interprets the novel along the generic paradigm of the romance. She identifies Maggie's death with the "dysphoric pole" of romances, namely the opposite of marriage, an unsuccessful negotiation of the "heterosexual contract" which, instead of financial and romantic success, portrays "betrayal by male authority and aggression" (4). She claims that Maggie's death is the result of her generalised female passion which makes her unfit to be contained by marriage. (15)

However complex interpretative potentials *The Mill on the Floss* offers, Jane Gray in *The Waterfall* seems to ignore all of them concerning the story of (female) development. Instead, she focuses only on thematic parallels, which gradually reveals that she reads Eliot's text primarily as a romance as DuPlessis does. The one and only instance when she refers to George Eliot's novel is as follows:

But love is nothing new. Even women have suffered from it, in history. It is a classic malady, and commonly requires participants of both sexes. Perhaps I'll [. . .] drown myself in an effort to reclaim renunciations, like Maggie Tulliver. Those fictitious heroines, how they haunt me. Maggie Tulliver had a cousin called Lucy, as I have, and like me she fell in love with her cousin's man. She drifted off down the river with him, abandoning herself to the water, but in the end she lost him. She let him go. Nobly she regained her ruined honour, and ah, we admire her for it: all that super-ego gathered together in a last effort to prove that she loved the brother more than the man. [. . .] Maggie Tulliver never slept with her man: she did all the damage there was to be done, to Lucy, to herself, to the two men who loved her, and then, like a woman of another age, she refrained. In this age, what is to be done? (Drabble 153)

As a matter of fact, it is more than tempting to set up a parallel between the two stories as easily as Jane Gray does: both female protagonists—Maggie Tulliver and Jane Gray—have a cousin called Lucy, and both fall in love with Lucy's man. However, in my opinion, it is not the factual similarities that haunt Jane Gray in Maggie's story.

Jane Gray, right after her sexual redemption and just before hearing about James's plans for a family holiday, has to recognise the fact that their adulterous relationship transgresses basic social norms. Between them much more things have happened than between Maggie and Lucy's man, Stephen Guest. At this moment Jane Gray is unable to refrain from her relationship with James, so Maggie's story of renunciation can haunt her as the voice of conscience. She says, "we admire her for it" (Drabble 153), and in this "we" Jane is included as well. This general "we" echoes "the world's wife's" role as a speaker for public opinion in Eliot's novel, which judges women's behaviour along the norms of patriarchy and rewards them accordingly. This self-sacrificing character is what Jane respects—and to a certain extent envies—in Maggie Tulliver because a few moments later when James explains his plans for the family holiday and a possible shortening of his absence his "offer called out a little of the Maggie Tulliver in me, for with infinite self-sacrifice I protested against such a notion and swore that I would be quite all right and that he was not to worry" (Drabble 154). In this first-person section Jane Gray evaluates her behaviour along the same standards as were applied to decide on Maggie Tulliver's innocence. Jane imposes the same social expectations on her life that proved Maggie guilty either way, like the silly old woman in that enigmatic picture in Maggie's *The History of the Devil*.⁴⁰ "That old woman in the water's a witch; they've put her in to find out whether she's a witch or no, and if she swims she's a witch, and if she's drowned—and killed, you know—she's innocent, and not a witch, but only a poor silly old woman" (Eliot 14). After her half-willed elopement with Stephen, whether Maggie either marries him or goes back to Tom she cannot be judged innocent; after their adultery either Jane breaks up with James or goes on with him she cannot be judged innocent: both lose in the end like the poor silly old woman who dies either way.

In her long reference to Maggie Tulliver Jane remarks that Maggie did harm to her two men who loved her. This applies to her as well since "James and Malcolm [. . .] had, in their respective ways, died for me. I had ruined Malcolm [. . .] and James [. . .]" (Drabble 200). Jane Gray comes to this conclusion on the wet bench near the hospital where James is treated after the accident. "All I am doing here is waiting for James to die," says Jane, but, in the end, the reader is informed that James recovers. During these days of endless waiting Jane reconsiders her life and affair with James and judges herself guilty, and thinks that it would have been fair for her to die as well but, in this way, fate has cheated her by offering a simple explanation of the accident with the banal contingency of a brick and burst tyre (Drabble 192). However, it was Jane who was incapable of renunciation.

⁴⁰ Interestingly enough, as Séllei points out (292), the original title of Defoe's volume is *The Political History of the Devil*, which highlights the fact that accusing a woman of witchery was not a religious but a political act which, like the medicalisation of women, targeted women incapable of social integration.

As opposed to this, Maggie had no other choice but to give up her relation with Stephen and renounce her claims that transgress any social norms. Séllei claims that Maggie's *Bildung* cannot take its own route because of the deterministic social environment whose strict rules are perpetuated in and by the Dodson clan itself (Séllei 267, 269) and Tom, who is "the principal representative of the society that acts with such an oppressively negative force on her" (McSweeney 91). In this way, her attempts at any kind of *Bildung* are doomed to failure since the deterministic worldview of the novel apparently opposes the *Bildungsroman's* primary presupposition that there is a space provided in which the individual can work out their capabilities. (Séllei 267) Finally, Séllei concludes that there is no space for Maggie within this social structure to live in and no role to act out—all in all, no available subject position—so she is forced to transgress. (277)

DuPlessis claims that in Eliot's novel "Tom and Maggie could almost navigate the flood with its currents, but the stuff made by people—the machinery—borne on that instinctual flood drags them under" (18). It is a man-made structure that kills Maggie—like society that was drowning her gradually. The flood turns man-made things upside down—like the family mill, as a basic image of the social code—but this rebellious force rules only momentarily. (DuPlessis 19) The equivalent of Maggie's machinery in Jane Gray's story is the brick on the road that causes the accident, which functions as a judgemental means in the narrative restoring things to their proper places. After the accident Lucy reclaims James, "[t]he price of his restoration was his loss," remarks Jane (Drabble 223).

"But when the waters recede, the landscape has not changed all that much" (DuPlessis 19). The old order is restored after the disruptive currents of the flood. But what is the current that both works eagerly refer to? Catherine Belsey claims that "the movement of classic realist narrative towards closure ensures the reinstatement of order, sometimes a new order, sometimes the old restored, but always intelligible because familiar" (*Critical* 75). To detect the disruptive element in both works, first, it is worth looking at the order which is restored. In Maggie Tulliver's story it is the social code of St Ogg's society which is emblematically embodied in Tom and his expectations of her sister. In *The Waterfall* it is the basic setup of characters, namely that James belongs to Lucy and Jane is alone. This is the *status quo* that precedes and follows the disruption of order.

The flood that carries the brother and sister to their deaths indicates all the capacities that they have repressed in order successfully to become male and female [masculine and feminine?]. The death is also Maggie's passion unrecognised, repressed, roiling up to bear them down; this is her dammed-up

selfhood and her passionate desire for life, which cannot be repressed. [. . .] For a brief moment the flood is the breaker of boundaries, the temporary end of gender scripts, creating the “undivided” embrace of two “daisy-field” children, with allusions to a *liebestod* almost incestuous. [. . .] In short, the flood briefly destroys the oedipal nexus of gender. (DuPlessis 18-9)

Maggie filled with emotions is often “borne along by a wave too strong for her” (Eliot 428), or her love for Lucy “that wider current [. . .] was at its highest force today” (Eliot 447), or when considering the possibility of choosing Stephen she thinks, “[i]f it were not *wrong*—if she were once convinced of that and need no longer beat and struggle against this current, soft and yet strong as the summer stream” (Eliot 460). All in all, it is clear that for Maggie the current is her emotional desire, and “the need of being loved [that] would always subdue her” (Eliot 401).

Maggie and Tom finally embrace each other, or as their tombstone says, “[i]n their deaths they were not divided” (Eliot 535). In their deaths the strong boundary between femininity and masculinity disappears, they are united once again like in the old days “when they clasped their little hands in love and roamed the daisy fields together” (Eliot 534), before “school” parted them to educate them into man and woman as socially expected. Although this idyllic unity disappears when the waters recede, its disruptive force temporarily manages to sweep away the most basic social constructs of femininity and masculinity by creating a temporary and alternative, heterotopic space which lies outside any social constraints, binaries and constructs.

In the case of Jane Gray currents and drowning seem to be a more complex imagery than in Maggie’s case. Jane’s narrative starts with an Emily Dickinson poem about drowning which emphasises the future victim’s passivity and is echoed in the first two lines of the novel: “[i]f I were drowning I couldn’t reach out a hand to save myself, so unwilling am I to set myself up against fate” (Drabble 7). As Jane’s adulterous love affair starts with James and she gradually rediscovers her female body—first through the experience of childbirth then that of sexuality—the images of drowning and currents seemingly change their meaning. Like in the case of Maggie currents and water itself function as the image of desire, the need of being loved, drowning becoming the image of submission to this desire, drowning “in a willing sea” (Drabble 45).

There is a sharp difference between Maggie’s and Jane’s currents, though. While Maggie “let him [Stephen] go” (Drabble 153) Jane claims, “I wanted James so badly that I did not know what to do about it” (Drabble 152). As women of different ages what Maggie

represses Jane articulates. This “I want you” in Jean Wyatt’s view “shatters the position of woman as the passive object of male desire. The language of active female desire thus subverts the gender positions of the traditional romance plot, and indeed of Western narrative discourse, in which man is the active seeker, woman the recipient of love” (136). Drabble revises Eliot’s imagery by giving voice to what she has to repress in Maggie’s character because it—considered transgressive—could not be compatible with the notion of proper femininity of that age. This is the point when *The Waterfall* gives a new understanding to Du Plessis’ view: while she talks about generalised female passion that is uncontainable in marriage and deserves social exclusion, Jane Gray revises it as a socially comprehensible desire, which, however, is still not fully compatible with such a traditional social institution as marriage. Nevertheless, in this age it is possible to articulate such desires. Jane’s open claim of active female desire serves as the source of her new understanding of the romance elements in Eliot’s novel as well. As opposed to this, Brontë and Eliot—Jane Gray’s mentors—repressed sexuality from their heroines’ responses to love on the basis of the plot, however both included it in the “subtext” of their novels generated by gaps, silences and images.

Both managed to represent sexuality while repressing it to meet the demands of the Victorian ideal of female chastity. They accomplished this difficult task by embodying sexuality in a character (Bertha) or a network of images (currents and tides) [. . .]. Jane Gray brings these images back from the underworld of her predecessors’ texts, restoring sexuality to the world of conscious narrative discourse. (Wyatt 134-5)

The transitory situation which is set up by the disrupting force of Jane Gray’s currents elaborates on Maggie and Tom’s death in which the social discourses of gender are momentarily destroyed. In *The Waterfall* Jane and James inhabit a heterotopic space where the socially constructed notions of gender are not applicable terms. Their names also suggest their interchangeability without respect to their gender roles. Even nurturing is not the exclusive role of Jane, James can do it too until the accident puts an end to this socially unintelligible period. In addition, Maggie Tulliver and Tom’s almost incestuous final embrace is echoed in Jane and James’s physical intimacy. As Jane Gray and Lucy function as *alter egos* in the narrative—an aspect I am to elaborate later on—James can be considered Jane’s brother(-in-law). In this way, their relationship is almost incestuous as well. So when Jane and James die “in a willing sea” of sexual intercourse, “[i]n their deaths they were not divided” either.

When referring to Maggie Tulliver Jane Gray finally asks, “[i]n this age, what is to be done?” (Drabble 153). This emphatic inquiry calls attention to the fact that the reader encounters two women of different ages with different notions of femininity. As Séllei points out Maggie’s otherness is written on her body: primarily her hair, skin and built are what make her different from the example of proper femininity, Lucy. (280) Her blond curls, pink and always clean dresses, her obedience and polite, refrained manners make Lucy the emblem of proper femininity, which is an unattainable aim for Maggie. “Maggie always looked twice as dark as usual when she was by the side of Lucy,” says Eliot. (58) And even Maggie sees her otherness as difference from the norm because “[s]he was fond of fancying a world where the people never got any larger than children of her own age, and she made the queen of it just like Lucy, with a little crown on her head and a little sceptre in her hand...only the queen was Maggie herself in Lucy’s form” (Eliot 58). Maggie’s self-respect concerning femininity is further ruined when Tom—the embodiment of social expectations in the family—shouts at her sister, “I like Lucy better than you; I wish Lucy was *my* sister” (Eliot 84). Wherever she turns Maggie has to hear praises of the properly feminine Lucy, which either overtly or covertly means constant enumerations of her own deficiencies. When both young ladies sell their hand-made products in the charity bazaar, Maggie is almost put on the pillory since “[t]here was something rather bold in Miss Tulliver’s direct gaze and something undefinably coarse in the style of her beauty which placed her, in the opinion of all feminine judges, far below her cousin Miss Deane [. . .]” (Eliot 441). In this short judgement, which foreshadows the final judgement of the “world’s wife,” all the characteristics are mentioned that are seen as unfeminine, thus transgressive, in Maggie, which make her an unsuitable romance heroine. By the time she grows up to be a beautiful sensuous woman she formulates overtly what she unconsciously hid in her childhood dream about her adoration of Lucy, “I wish I were like you” (Eliot 381). Maggie’s education in femininity—the only kind of *Bildung* that Jane Gray takes into consideration—opens her eyes to see her own deficiencies: she realises that her female form will never qualify as a feminine figure.

Given this socially constructed norm of femininity it is no surprise that Maggie notices the same discrimination in her readings as well, which reinforces her unsuitability for a successful romance.

I foresaw that the light-complexioned girl would win away all the love from Corinne and make her miserable. I’m determined to read no more books where the blond-haired women carry away all the happiness. [. . .] If you could give me some

story, now, where the dark woman triumphs, it would restore the balance. (Eliot 339)

This complaint foreshadows not only the fact that Lucy will be the one who lives happily ever after but Maggie's failure as well. Maggie with her otherness embodies generalised female passion (DuPlessis 15), which makes her exciting but not marriageable for eligible young men like Stephen, and detestably rebellious for society, even her own kin. Although Stephen finds Maggie attractive for her sensuous beauty, he takes no notice of her other "unfeminine" qualities, such as her cleverness and ability to think metaphorically. She objectifies Maggie for the very same qualities she is exorcised as unfeminine. However, the fact that in Stephen's perspective Maggie is a foreshadowed embodiment of the *femme fatale* or Eve the temptress—certainly not proper, decent and desexualised femininity—shows that the meaning of "femininity" is unstable to a great extent.

Similarly to Maggie's story there is a blond and a dark girl in *The Waterfall* as well. However, this time hair colours and roles are reversed: Lucy has short brown hair and Jane is blond. Nevertheless, Lucy still functions as the example in everything for Jane, "[I] hoped I looked like Lucy" (Drabble 105) or "[s]ometimes I think that I married because Lucy married. I got a house because Lucy had a house. I had a baby because Lucy had a baby. One should not under-estimate the force of example" (Drabble 129). Jane's urge to identify with Lucy openly invites the reader to interpret Lucy as Jane's *alter ego* since even Jane entertains the idea that might come to the reader's mind and shocks even her, "[i]t couldn't be possible that I wanted James because he was hers, because I wanted to be her. It wasn't so, it wasn't so. I am getting tired of all this Freudian family nexus" (Drabble 130). After this insight it is natural that after James' accident Jane registers at the hotel as Lucy Otford and, without any previous agreement, when Lucy phones her in the hotel she introduces herself as Jane Gray. They (ex)change their names and their man.

Naturally, this Lucy embodies another kind of femininity than Lucy Deane in *The Mill on the Floss*. As a Newnham undergraduate Lucy establishes herself as a *femme fatale*, who is "emotionally promiscuous, faithlessly intense, universally sincere" (Drabble 120). Even Jane Gray notices her ways, "[i]t seemed to me that Lucy was behaving badly, wantonly—not so much by sleeping with people as by demanding them, taking them seriously, encouraging them when they had no hope" (Drabble 123). As opposed to her, Jane is much more refrained, avoids physical intimacy—but by no means can she be seen as the 1960s equivalent of Lucy in *The Mill on the Floss*. However, the change of femininity and the change of roles show a clever play on Drabble's side that she knows her literary inheritance and the history of

femininity well. By the end of her novel it is not so unambiguous that the blond or the dark girl triumphs since there is no absolute winner in this narrative.

Maggie's world—as well as her reading—is deterministic as I have proved earlier. But the way she reads is no less decisive concerning her life. Margaret Homans in *Bearing the Word* (1986) claims that Maggie's narrative and life itself cannot succeed because there is a strong “relationship between Maggie's education in feminine reading and her literalising life. Along with her regressive wishes, her reading prefigures, if it does not actually ensure, her death” (130). Maggie's life in its “sweet monotony” of the landscape and the return of the seasons, and her continual return to childhood ties—especially to childhood pains—offers “a seductively beautiful version of the narrative pattern of Maggie's life. [. . .] Maggie's repetitions transform the beautiful ‘sweet monotony’ into something more dangerous, since to repeat, within the terms of the symbolic order, is to regress, and to regress is to die” (Homans 130). This is exactly the same threat that Jane Gray faces in her rereadings and imitations of the nineteenth-century intertexts as romances.

In her reading, as a child Maggie is a creative mind who makes up stories for the horrid pictures of *The History of the Devil* which is “not quite the right book for a little girl” (Eliot 14). When all her books are lost because of the father's bankruptcy Maggie loses this kind of reading ability: her sorrow over the loss of her favourite books makes her idealise the past including the reading strategies she used at that time. “[I]t is Maggie's sorrow over the loss of the book that indirectly leads her to become a more and more literal reader [. . .]” (Homans 14). Her literalising tendencies are initiated by the loss of the edenic past. Her gifts from Bob Jakin include Thomas à Kempis' second-hand volume with marks from the silent hand that turns Maggie's attention towards submission, self-renunciation and literalisation which coincides with the “spiritualised version of traditional female behaviour; Maggie's dedication to its tenets makes her more womanly” (Foster 206). This submissive behaviour, which pleases Mrs. Tulliver because she sees a change in her daughter towards proper femininity, alarms Philip who knows Maggie well and foresees the dangers of this kind of attitude:

[. . .] I foresee it will not end well; you can never carry on this self-torture. [. . .] no one has strength given to do what is unnatural. It is more cowardice to seek safety in negations. [. . .] You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now will assault you like a savage appetite. [. . .] It is less wrong that you should see me than that you should be committing this long suicide. (Eliot 336)

Maggie uses self-renunciation as self-defence, as a guideline of a safe because feminine behaviour which is self-destructive at the same time, or, as Barbara Hardy sees it, as an opiate in succession of her previous childish daydreams and literary fantasies. (177) If she accepted Philip's books and insights into life, "[i]t would make me in love with this world again, as I used to be; it would make me long for a full life," claims Maggie (Eliot 313). She recognises the precarious nature of her situation because she feels well that Thomas à Kempis' teachings can sustain her for a while but by this time they cannot provide "a permanent suppression of her deepest needs and resultant vicissitudes" (McSweeney 94). The temptation of a full life appears in Maggie's life first in the form of Philip, who teaches her the importance of mental enlargement and then in the figure of Stephen, who "teaches her the power of sexual passion, the less ethereal side of her incipient womanhood" (Foster 206). But after a short reclaim of her renunciations Maggie must choose between "womanhood as conformity" and "womanhood as the expression of individual impulses" (Foster 206). Finally, she decides to go home to Tom and choose submissive femininity, face social expectations and finally ruin her life.

Her docile repetitions, first of Stephen's 'Come!' and then of the memorized text of Thomas à Kempis, echo and confirm her desire to repeat her childhood by returning home to Tom and the mill, first after she has left Stephen and finally during the flood, a passive repetition that overdeterminates her death. [. . .] Her reading acts do not themselves cause Maggie's death, but they identify the thematics of return and of love of the literal with rhetorical repetition, and they identify the thematics of death with the lack of one's own word. And as specifically feminine reading acts, they identify learned feminine behaviour with return, literal repetition, death, and silence. (Homans 130-1)

Maggie's self-renunciation caused by this literalising attitude educates her to be properly feminine which, in accordance with Séllei's views, provides Maggie no freedom, no subject position to act on her own will. Though this literalising tendency limits Maggie's excesses that previously made her an unsuitable romance heroine when compared to Lucy, it finally gives her a leading role: her death makes her the heroine of a tragic, unsuccessful romance as DuPlessis claims.

Jane Gray in *The Waterfall* reads Maggie Tulliver's story in a new way: she skips all the elements of the *Bildungsroman* and focuses only on Maggie's attempts at the romance.

She sees Maggie as a romance heroine, though an unsuccessful one, whose major achievement is her self-constraint. Although Jane Gray is hardly able to suppress her transgressive desires towards James, she values Maggie's self-annihilating tendencies the highest, as if Maggie's behaviour functioned as the norm which Jane socially appreciates but personally is unable and unwilling to follow. In this way, Jane Gray's relation to Maggie is double-sided: on the one hand, she respects Maggie's achievement to subdue herself and attain proper femininity, but on the other hand, she sees her as such a perfect example that she can never perfectly imitate due to her selfishness, which, actually, is her unwillingness to renounce her desires. This double attitude can be explained not only with Jane's articulated views but also with his relation to James. If Lucy Deane functions as Maggie's wished-for *alter ego* and Lucy as Jane's wished-for *alter ego*, then who is James? James has two roles in this triangle: he functions as the brother, like Tom, who is the main source of and reason for the female protagonist's regression; and, at the same time, James functions as Stephen, a brother-in-law, whose sexual attraction to the female protagonist makes her commit adultery. As James is the brother and the seducer at the same time, it is no wonder that Jane Gray's attitude towards Maggie has two sides as well. However, Jane either praises Maggie or refuses her role, she reads her figure only in romance contexts without considering the potentials of the story of development.

Margaret Drabble's novel, *The Waterfall* chooses its intertexts from the nineteenth-century female literary tradition. The novels of Austen, Brontë and Eliot are central texts of this tradition which all apply the genres of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*, though in various proportions. Jane Gray, the narrator protagonist in *The Waterfall* knows these novels well and rereads them in the course of her identification process, because in the third-person narratives, which write a romance, she wishfully identifies with romance heroines, however, in the first-person narratives she comments on the viability of these attempts. In the third-person parts Jane Gray focuses only on the romance elements of the nineteenth-century intertexts, thus she rereads Austen's novel of manners and Brontë's and Eliot's *Bildungsromans* exclusively as romances, however, the first-person sections reveal that during this reading process Jane goes through a story of development into a fully formed artist which is clearly marked by her more and more critical comments on her own wished-for romance and more often recurring comments on her own poetry.

Jane Gray's reading strategy echoes Maggie Tulliver's literalising attitudes. Jane unconsciously perceives the same menaces of literalising as Maggie when she talks about proper femininity—whose example is Lucy throughout her narrative—in one of the third-

person sections which almost echo Philip's words in *The Mill on the Floss*, as "[s]he thought that perhaps she was learning to be a proper woman, at last. Though, formulated in that way, the idea did not itself seem safe. It could not, surely, end well, if she became something that she had so much resisted" (Drabble 75). However, it is not Lucy that is the major source of literalisation in Jane Gray's life. Like Maggie Tulliver, Jane literalizes her reading of Austen's, Brontë's and Eliot's texts because—as I have already shown in detail—she eagerly wants to copy the stories of nineteenth-century heroines. The alluring romance of *Jane Eyre*, the submission of Maggie Tulliver function as sources of literalisation which provides another way for these fictitious heroines to haunt Jane. (Drabble 153) Her literalisation is perfect in the sense that she sticks only to the romance elements of the intertexts because that is what she thinks she needs. Jane Gray constantly focuses on the repetition of literary love stories in her life even if their *Bildung* elements carry more relevance to her life.

As Maggie Tulliver finds that there is no other choice for her but to go home again and again because there is no psychosocial space for her to decide her own steps, Jane Gray wishfully finds the same reasons for her deeds. The nineteenth-century narrative paradigms constitute her fate in her deterministic worldview which seemingly offers no other end than death. However, the sublime moment of death, which awaits Maggie, avoids Jane—although it is potentially offered by the accident. "I had been cheated, I thought that death had visited me in person, as an angel, as a presence, and had denied me the final vision, and final revelation," Jane complains (Drabble 186). She thinks that death could have provided a neat ending to her romance with James when she claims, "[h]ad he died, as all true fictional lovers die [. . .] [w]e would, in death, have been forgiven" (Drabble 196).

John Hannay examines the intertextuality of fate⁴¹ in Jane's narrative which he identifies as her ambivalence because "[s]he cannot recast the story of her life wholly in the form of tragic romance, but neither can she reject this model" (17). However intertextual Jane's fate is Hannay does not narrow the scope of intertextuality to any particular literary text. Instead he focuses on Jane's always changing attitude to the paradigm of the romance—which, in my view, is a heterogenic genre with many variants—without specifying any point of reference that Jane refers to as the norm or standard to turn to in her identification process.

As opposed to Hannay's broad interpretation of the intertextuality of fate in *The Waterfall*, I rather see Jane's fate in the frameworks of nineteenth-century intertexts she keeps referring to. As a result of her literalising reading strategies she wants to live her life once as

⁴¹ Though John Hannay coins the term, the intertextuality of fate, to describe Drabble's *The Waterfall*, I consider it relevant to *Possession* as well because the novel's citationality relies on its own intertexts generated by the parallel plot lines without proposing any hierarchy of the plots of the past and the present.

Jane Eyre, then as Maggie Tulliver. She literalises the nineteenth-century heroines in the same way as Barthes describes the process in *A Lover's Discourse* in the case of romance reading:

A long chain of equivalences link all the lovers in the world. In the theory of literature, 'projection' (of the reader into the character) no longer has any currency: yet it is the appropriate tonality of imaginative readings: reading a love story, it is scarcely adequate to say I project myself; I cling to the image of the lover, shut up with this image in the very enclosure of the book [. . .]. (131)

Jane consciously regresses to subject positions that are offered by her literary predecessors but luckily—as the constant oscillations of the first- and third-person sections show—her literalisation is not completely “successful,” therefore it does not end in death. “It had been some ridiculous imitation of a fictitious passion, some shoddy childish mock-up of what for others might have been reality—but for what others?” (Drabble 202). Jane realises that there are no others for whom it could be reality, not even her and James. She has to put an end to her intertextual fate and go on living a life which is not predetermined by literary paradigms. In this sense, she is fated for life.

Jane's stubborn insistence on the romance elements blinds her in the beginning to the fact that what she needs is her own story of development. In the third-person narratives she omits the *Bildung* elements and rereads the nineteenth-century intertexts without paying attention to the generic clashes between the romance and the *Bildungsroman*. But in the long run, when she gradually realises that her own romance story, which imitates the nineteenth-century ones, is impossible to realise, Jane Gray slowly enters a story of development which prevents the problems of the coexisting genres by becoming a female *Künstlerroman*. The evolvment of her romance into a story of development reinforces a possible compromise of the two nineteenth-century genres. The fact that Jane Gray can freely navigate between the romance and *Bildung* elements suggests that Drabble synthesises the two genres by creating a flexible boundary between the two by simultaneously discarding their hierarchy.

Chapter 5: *Possession*: Romance as *Bildungsroman*?

A.S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* openly plays with the notion of the romance and displays this concern even in its subtitle. In my view, Byatt provides a double understanding of the romance in her novel: on the one hand, it is a hardly definable genre with a strong thematic focus on love, but on the other hand, it is a mode of relating to the past. In this way, "the label romance asserts and denies genre at the same time, being a polyhedric multifarious form" (Curti 44), whose generic function is its complexity that belies singular definition. (Fletcher 7) Nevertheless, Byatt gives her understanding of the romance when she attaches Nathaniel Hawthorne's preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) at the beginning of *Possession*, in which he emphasises not the thematic but relational nature of the genre:

When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former—while as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart—it has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation... The point of view in which this tale comes under the Romantic definition lies in the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us. (Byatt without page number)

Gillian Beer calls attention to Hawthorne's "humorous, defensive tone" in the preface which she interprets as a kind of apologetic tone for the romance's low intellectual status in contrast with the novel. (Beer 70-1) Nevertheless, his "definition" of the romance allows Byatt "a certain latitude," artistic freedom, to create any story that conflates the past and the present, which, at the same time, follows the unfolding love stories of Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte, and that of Roland Michell and Maud Bailey.

Similarly to Hawthorne's views, Umberto Eco lists the romance among the modes of narrating the past besides the "swashbuckling tale" and the historical novel. (Hutcheon 113) Eco gives a special insight into the peculiar nature of romances when he reflects on the

citational quality of the basic utterance of romances, “I love you.” (Eco quoted by Fletcher 16) Analysing Eco’s ironic elaboration on this sentence Lisa Fletcher points out:

The utterance “I love you” is not only the key to the plotting of historical romance novels, as it is to romances generally but is also crucial to the link which they strive to draw between the present and the past. [. . .] The principal obstacle to the man’s desire to confess his feelings is his (and his beloved’s) knowledge that “I love you” is always a citation; it can never be owned by any individual speaker. The problem of proving his sincerity is compounded by his speech act’s drive to conflate fiction and reality: “I love you” marks the imposition of romance on history. (15-6)

This citational nature of the romance enables Byatt to use the genre as a synonym for historiographic metafiction, and, at the same time, to direct the thematic focus of her text on the love story of the protagonists.

Due to the hardly definable nature of the romance, this genre is flexible enough to incorporate other genres, which results in the constant interplay of various generic traditions. Describing the postmodern Linda Hutcheon remarks that “[t]he borders between literary genres have become fluid” (9) and lists several literary texts that can be categorised as “borderline” for being on the borders of two literary genres. In all the texts she lists “the conventions of the two genres are played off against each other; there is no simple, unproblematic merging” (Hutcheon 9). In my view, Byatt takes this method one step further in *Possession* as she applies several genres in her text under the subtitle of the romance and plays off their generic and ideological potentials against one another in a very sophisticated way. *Possession* constantly seduces the reader: the subtitle promises a romance whereas readerly expectations are directed by various other genres as well. The novel is a mosaic of poetry and prose, romance and *Bildung*, biography and *Künstlerroman*, campus novel and detective story among others, but out of them the romance seems to provide the governing idea and functions as a very loosely definable genre which can contain all the others and, at the same time, contest them.

As Hutcheon points out in general, the merging of any of the genres mentioned above does not prove to be without problems because genres presuppose and result in certain subject positions, plots and ideologies which clash when genres merge. However, Byatt postpones taking sides too early, she prolongs her judgement as long as possible, and, in the end, when the romance seems to take possession of the story, she posts a postscript which reinserts the

story in a postmodern context where either closure or a fixed value system prove to be illusory, where everything is a textual construct. Although Byatt seems to give the romance priority over the other genres up to the postscript, the textual complexity of *Possession* never ever proposes any kind of hierarchy of genres. “There are no natural hierarchies; there are only those we construct,” claims Hutcheon of the postmodern attitude in general (13), and Byatt is well aware of this assumption. Although she entitles her text a romance, she invites the reader to take part in a literary seduction in which all their expectations are undermined by the constant merging of genres.

This mélange of genres in *Possession* greatly relies on stories that narrate some kind of quest, such as the genre of biography—a quest for the true story of the historical figure and for the identity of the biographer as well—, the detective story—quest for the solution to a mystery—and, quite evidently, the *Bildungsroman*. In my view, the intermingling of these various quest stories results in the discovery of the romance of Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte, and the emergent romance of Roland Michell and Maud Bailey. In my opinion, these various quest stories embody a postmodern yearning for the lost referent which, at the same time can be read as a parody of the Romantic quest for origins. As quests are mainly incorporated by *Bildungsromans* I claim that the various quest plots import *Bildung* elements into the different genres, including the romance, which Byatt applies in the generic mosaic of *Possession*. I also propose that at the same time *Possession* rereads the romance as a generic container of various quests for origins: the origin of meaning, which, after several false and anti-quests, turns out to be the primary driving force of the romance, desire. To prove this, I will investigate the potentials of the romance, the *Bildungsroman*, the biography and the detective story in the first subchapter and read them as various attempts at the quest for origins.

The strong interrelationship between the past and the present requires a parallel analysis of the two plotlines and the similarities in character formation, which I will describe with the concept of citationality, since Byatt applies this method not only to express love, as Eco proved in his reflections on “I love you”, but to create the fictional-historical universe of *Possession* as well. In addition, as there is a meaningful genealogy of female characters in the story, the figure of Melusina synthesises the possibilities of growth and development by the romance and into the romance for female characters in the novel whose stories can be read as a cycle that fuses the romance and the *Bildungsroman*. For this reason after the analysis of citationality in the novel I will devote a separate subchapter to the interpretative potentials of Melusina in *Possession*.

Romance as Quests for Origins

The nineteenth century was much taken with the problem of origins. Not only the origin of religion, but the origin of speech, of species, and of life itself preoccupied modern savants as they struggled to reorient understanding of the world to conform to Enlightenment values, and Darwinian evolutionary models.

Ultimately, the scientific quest for beginnings was not as far removed as one might think from the romanticism that also tinted the Victorian century. For both scholar and poet, the quest for sunrise origins was a form of renewal of the ancient mythical quest for *meaning* in origins, founded on the assumption that if one knows where something came from, one knows what it really is, and therefore what it means. (Elwood 11)

The Romantic quest for origins is one of the central themes of Byatt's *Possession*, which is entitled a romance. Though the genre and the quest for origins seem to be contradictory at first, I claim that *Possession*, which contains various quest plots—false quests, anti-quests, and a real quest—is a romance story on the whole as the origin of meaning which is recovered in the only successful quest is desire, the driving force of the romance itself. As quest plots are most often incorporated into *Bildungsromans* as a means of providing adventures and hardships for the hero to get over to reach his goal, all the quest plots in *Possession* import a *Bildung* element to the various genres that Byatt applies. For this reason I read the genre of the romance, the *Bildungsroman*, the biography and the detective story as quests that offer various elements of the *Bildungsroman*. In my view, the quest plot enables Byatt to offer a synthesis of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* in *Possession*. In this way, Byatt's romance becomes a generic container of quests that all imply a certain sense of the self and its maturation, two basic prerequisites of the *Bildungsroman*. I read most quest plots in the novel as twentieth-century parodies of the Romantic quest for origins, which are primarily fuelled by the limited views of the heroes who want to recover the origin of meaning. Due to their limited views the origin of meaning they find is a reduced, partial origin which cannot serve as the driving force of the fictional universe of *Possession*. Here Byatt offers a critique of various biographical methods and twentieth-century theories that, if taken to an extreme, prove to offer false origins of meaning. Naturally, this theoretical interest of the novel is greatly informed by poststructuralist linguistic theory, which allows the reader to see all these contemporary quests as quests for the lost referent. As opposed to the aborted quests of the biographer figures in *Possession*, it is Maud and Roland whose quest can reach its goal.

Despite their own poststructuralist theoretical training they are the only ones who (re)discover that what words really mean is desire. However, in the light of the postscript, I propose that Byatt reinserts the successful quest of Maud and Roland into the context of the always already lost referent.

As early as 1871 when *Middlemarch* was published, George Eliot herself was interested in the feasibility of the quest for origins. By creating the figure of Edward Casaubon, a country clergyman, who wants to complete the enormous task of writing the *Key to All Mythologies*, Eliot expresses her own scepticism to the possibility of finding any origin. Casaubon's ambition is doomed to failure as he is uncertain about his own abilities whether he is talented enough to carry out such a demanding project and despite the huge amount of source material he is unable to locate the key to all mythologies. Here Eliot articulates a critique of the ambitions of her own age, which implies that Byatt's critical attitude to the recovery of the lost referent might not originate only in her poststructuralist scepticism. In addition, Eliot includes the quest of Tertius Lydgate for the bodily tissue that is the basic building block of life, a kind of primordial germ cell, but she does not elaborate on this quest as much as on Casaubon's.

Though Byatt's novel heavily relies on the impossibility of the quest for origins this interest of *Possession* is hardly visible for the first sight. The subtitle is a good means of misleading the reader,⁴² a trick Byatt willingly plays in her novel, because "individual texts are read with reference to prior generic forms" (Benson 104). The enjoyment of *Possession* lies in a double romance-reading process: not only Maud and Roland read the unfolding romance of the two Victorian poets, but the reader is similarly interested in their slowly proceeding love story as well. Both the contemporary protagonists and the reader are drawn into their respective love romances which "pivot[] and draw[] upon the motor of narrative itself: the desire to know, to uncover, to understand. The curiosity of the reader is analogous with the curiosity of the detective⁴³ [. . . who] follow[s] a path from confusion to enlightenment" (Benson 103). It is the same as what Maud and Roland call narrative curiosity.

The unexpected discovery of the draft love letters in the library sends Roland and Maud on a joint quest which is fuelled by their narrative curiosity. They look for the actual

⁴² Book covers can also be a good means of pre-forming the readers' expectations. The cover of my 1991 Vintage edition depicts a mosaic of a couple almost kissing which reinforces the readerly expectations based on the subtitle. In addition, just as in Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the couple can never fulfill their desire, and art remains a vehicle of expressing the desire for fulfilment.

⁴³ Readers identified as detectives are clearly relevant in the case of *Possession*, as not only Roland and Maud have to reconstruct the romance of the nineteenth-century literary figures but the reader has to decipher the story from the textual bits and pieces as well.

origins of the draft letters first and while doing so their academic research gradually becomes a quest for the nineteenth-century desire of Ash and LaMotte. In my view, the narrative curiosity of the two textual scholars is the twentieth-century theorised version of the desire of the Victorian couple, which results from their training in poststructuralist theories, mainly linguistic ones. Their theoretical knowledge, which armours them for academic research, first prevents them from any unmediated experience of the world, because they posit everything at the crossroads of various discourses. As their quest for the nineteenth-century love story proceeds, their theoretical presuppositions are gradually eroded, which changes their narrative curiosity into a desire on which their own romance can be based.

Byatt plays with the reader's patience and perseverance because she slows down both unfolding romances by intersecting the two. This intersection, however, results in parallel plots which reinforce the sense of cyclicity, a feature which influences not only the plot structure of *Possession* but its character formation, sense of time and space. But while the reader is eagerly looking for the continuation of one of the romances they encounter the relevant piece of action in the other, and a sense of familiarity and difference is shaped during their reading. Although the characters resemble one another in many ways, the parallel love stories counterpoint each other. The contemporary love story is informed by the past, whereas it is in the light of the present that the "ragged modern ending" (Hulbert 59) of the Victorian story comes to light. Commenting on Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* Catherine Belsey remarks what could also be applied to *Possession*:

The love story is the utterance of a single subject, but this subject does not offer to speak from a single place. Lovers speak, and yet in doing so they are spoken by a language that precedes them, that is not at their disposal, under their control; this language is at the same time dispersed among banalities, poetry, the sacred, tragedy. (*Desire* 84)

The citationality of desire is at the core of *Possession*. The contemporary love story in the novel is generated by Roland and Maud's joint quest for the texts of a love between the two Victorian poets, Ash and LaMotte. "Where the desire of Roland and Maud is predominantly silent, suspicious and sceptical, the 'Victorian' texts, copious, verbose, speak on their behalf from a period which believed wholeheartedly in love," claims Belsey (*Desire* 84).

The postmodern lovers, however, have an intellectual suspicion of the very concept of love:

They were the children of a time and culture which mistrusted love, ‘in love’, romantic love, romance *in toto*, and which nevertheless in revenge proliferated sexual language, linguistic sexuality, analysis, dissection, deconstruction, exposure. They were theoretically knowing: they knew about phallocracy and penisneid, punctuation, puncturing and penetration, about polymorphous and polysemous perversity, orality, good and bad breasts, clitoral tumescence, vesicle persecution, the fluids, the solid, the metaphors for these, the systems of desire and damage, infantile greed and oppression and transgression, the iconography of the cervix and the imagery of the expanding and contracting Body, desired, attacked, consumed, feared. (Byatt 423)

The fearful list of the theoretical aspects of desire and sexuality affects the reader badly: it generates shock and alienation. Are these fearful terms related to love or to the romance narrative? The two young researchers use these terms to theorise love, to distance it into the safe territory of the abstract that is defamiliarised. The strange terms seem to take part in a linguistic play as well: most of them are unfamiliar to the reader, which generates a feeling in them that these words are connected to other words in the list and have no relation to the things of the world. Byatt applies the very same linguistic theory Roland has been taught that “language was essentially inadequate, that it could never speak what was there, that it only spoke itself” (Byatt 473), which carries the assumption that love has nothing to do with our contemporary life experience. If desire is always already mediated by language, which speaks itself, what kind of desire is at the disposal of Roland and Maud then?⁴⁴ Certainly not the kind of romantic love which Hegel defines as a relation of two people who cannot be differentiated. In his view, the sense and feeling of this identity is called love. This means being outside myself since my conscience resides in the other and his conscience resides in me. The feeling of this being-outside-myself and identity at the same time is the essence of romantic love. (Ráth-Végh 15)

Besides their aversion that is caused by their theoretical training, Roland and Maud are alienated from love by their own experience as well. “Roland and Maud are more eager to satisfy their narrative curiosity than any libidinous urges because they have a particular fear of romantic entanglement” (Burgass 31). Roland is bound in a gloomy relationship with Val from which he is unable to extricate himself, and Maud has had a irresistible affair with the

⁴⁴ Jane Gray in *The Waterfall* falls victim to the same linguistic phenomenon when she falls in love with Malcolm singing a Champion song. Though Drabble does not theorise the problem in linguistic terms, when Jane Gray remarks that it was later that she realised that these words were not Malcolm’s words, *The Waterfall* supplies an extremely obvious example to the very same post-structuralist linguistic situation. Nevertheless, Byatt’s handling of the issue proves to be more sophisticated and theoretically informed.

glamorous Fergus which still provides her recurrent flashbacks of a rumpled bed like “whipped-up dirty egg white” (Byatt 56), a contrast to Christabel’s riddle about the impenetrable white egg in one of her letters to Ash. The memory of the rumpled bed haunts Maud as if it was her guilty conscience and makes her stick to the other extreme, the lifeless, sterile but perfect and self-contained egg of Christabel.

A paradoxical part of Roland and Maud’s mutual attraction is their shared desire for solitude: its recurrent image is the solitary white bed.⁴⁵ “The couple is highly resistant to any aspect of love, including sexual involvement, which threatens autonomy, hence the tentative progress of their romance” (Burgass 31). Even in Brittany when their trip becomes quite an intimate cooperation and quest they join each other in the bed without violating their autonomy:

They took to silence. They touched each other without comment and without progression. [. . .] It was important to both of them that the touching should not proceed to any kind of fierceness or deliberate embrace. They felt that in some way this stately peacefulness of unacknowledged contact gave back their sense of separate lives inside their separate skins. (Byatt 423-4)

Maud’s efforts to preserve her autonomy are clearly presented in the way she lives and behaves: the pristine neatness of her flat and the confinement of her gorgeous hair suggest her willing aim at self-preservation which, later on, she interprets as a problem, a lack. She senses the same kind of self-preserving instinct in Christabel and more like her Victorian ancestress Maud feels her incompleteness in this resistance, “Why could she do nothing with ease and grace except work alone, inside these walls and curtains, her bright safe box? Christabel, defending Christabel, redefined and alarmed Maud” (Byatt 136-7). Understanding Christabel makes Maud redefine herself and she starts seeing herself in a more clear light. As a result she is alarmed by what she sees: a woman who refuses and flees love and desire. Sensing her uncertainty, Roland, the contemporary hero, wins her because he is reluctant to take possession of Maud. “I wouldn’t threaten your autonomy,” he says on the very last page of their romance (Byatt 507). As opposed to the Hegelian definition of romantic love the twentieth-century desire of Maud and Roland is based on the mutual agreement of two autonomous persons to form a union without threatening each other’s integrity.

⁴⁵ In Yorkshire Roland remarks at one point that “what I really want is—to have nothing. An empty clean bed. I have this image of a clean empty bed in a clean empty room, where nothing is asked or to be asked” (Byatt 267). Maud immediately understands what he means since she has the same image in her head.

Desire even in its modified form is the driving force behind the romance stories in *Possession*, however, these instances are not the only fields for desire in the novel. In my view, all the other quests that are incorporated into the text base their thematic interests on desire as well. The detective story, the biography, and, first of all, the *Bildungsroman* are based on the notion of quest which, basically, is the desire to know or achieve something: the solution to the mystery, the ‘true’ life story as well as authorial identity, social integration and maturity. As quest plots are often incorporated into *Bildungsromans* the various quests in *Possession* import certain *Bildung* elements into the various genres that Byatt incorporates into her novel.

“Literature, especially the novel, offers the complexity of form necessary to represent the interrelationships shaping individual growth. The desire to translate these interrelationships into a coherent narrative has produced a distinctive genre, the *Bildungsroman*” (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 4). The *Bidungsroman*, as it developed at its origins, does not assimilate gender difference, as I have already noted with reference to Gergoe Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, thus it describes human development in exclusively male terms. (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 5-7) Although there have been attempts at the female version of the genre, Byatt’s *Possession* does not provide any gendered variants to Maud and Roland. What they go through is the *Bildungsroman*, without any gendered aspects, which means that they follow the original version of the genre that describes the story of development of the hero. Quest plots often inform the *Bildungsroman* as they are suitable to provide the hero with hardships and adventure that he has to get over to achieve his goals. The original form of the *Bildungsroman* assumes human perfectibility, historical progress, and a belief in the coherent self which go hand in hand with the assumptions of liberal humanism. As it can be expected from Byatt, she not only applies the genre in her romance but revises it at the same time by disrupting these traditional concepts embodied in the classic *Bildungsroman* and she produces her postmodern version of the genre.

Historical progress is a basic assumption of the Victorian age that relies on the concept of linear time. It would be too simple for Byatt to produce her postmodern *Bildungsroman* with a simple disruption of linearity of time and present the reader with bits and pieces of the story regardless of chronology. Byatt makes a greater twist: Ash, the eminent Victorian, views his time in a postmodern way “in its ‘linear exhaustion’ and its lack of a unifying grand narrative” (Lesch 12). In one of his letters to Christabel Ash writes:

The truth is—my dear Miss LaMotte—the we live in an *old* world—a tired world—a world that has gone on piling up speculation and observations until

truths that might have been graspable in the bright dayspring of human morning [. . .] are now obscured by palimpsest on palimpsest, by thick horny growth over that clear vision [. . .]. [. . .] the Scribe of Genesis did well locate the source of all our misery in that greed for knowledge which has also been our greatest spur—in some sense—to good. To good *and* evil. We have more of both those, I must believe, than our primitive parents. (Byatt 164-5)

Ash's view reveals the Victorian moment of fragmentation which marks the end of a unified worldview: Christianity is challenged by the Darwinian evolutionary theory, which makes Ash "divagate without discipline" in his research (Byatt 257). Stability is over, history has ceased to be a grand narrative to locate the individual in time and provide him with a coherent narrative of progress, but at this critical moment Ash is lucky to have an interest in everything including science and humanities which do not cancel out but enrich one another. Ash describes the reasons for the Victorian quest for origins as a "greed for knowledge," which is the driving force of most quest plots as well.

Byatt herself also seems to "divagate without principle" too in time when she interweaves the present and the past to enrich each other: whenever she inserts a text from the past into the plot of the present she disrupts chronology and linearity since all texts from the past seem to be annexes from another age. It results in a fragmented narrative which all in all becomes one with parallel plot lines, and, as it turns out that Maud is the descendant of both Ash and LaMotte, the story of literary investigation in the present eventually emerges as the continuation of the story in the past. In this way, Byatt not only disrupts linearity but introduces cyclicity by establishing the Maud-LaMotte and Roland-Ash similarities.

The sense of cyclical time is further emphasized in the frame-like imagery of *The Garden of Proserpina* at the beginning and Maud and Roland's lovemaking scene at the end.

In the morning, the whole world had a strange new smell. It was the smell of the aftermath, a green smell, a smell of shredded leaves and oozing resin, of crushed wood and splashed sap, a tart smell, which bore some relation to the smell of *bitten apples*. It was the smell of *death and destruction* and it smelled *fresh and lively and hopeful*. (Byatt 507, emphasis added)

Byatt ends the story where she started it: when "the tricky hero Herakles/Came to dispossession and the theft" (Byatt 1), which is reinforced by images of death and regeneration, of an end and a new beginning. Proserpina or Persephone, the mythological

figure in the title of Ash's poem, is the double natured goddess of the underworld in Greek mythology, who spends half of the year in the underworld, in the realm of death, and the other half on earth, in the realm of life, just like corn seeds.

In addition, Byatt reinforces the image of the double-natured Proserpina/Persephone in the postscript as well. Maia, or as she prefers to be called, May, the illegitimate daughter of Ash and LaMotte unwittingly meets her father in a cornfield and forgets to deliver her father's poetic message to her mother, whom she believes to be her aunt. This young embodiment of Persephone in the cornfield represents the starting and ending of Byatt's circle: Persephone⁴⁶ or Koré, as she is often called (meaning "girl" and "seed" at the same time), the daughter of Demeter, the Greek goddess of fertility, in the cornfield is called May in *Possession*. She represents springtime, regeneration, a new generation and bears the name of Maia, the name of the Hindu goddess of illusion. Her preference for the more down-to-earth name May, and her disinterest in Ash's poetic message "ironically represent the shattering of her parents' enchanted world" (Lesch 25), thus her attitude lifts the veil of illusions and points towards the non-fictional world which is fictional itself. In this way, Byatt creates a cycle in which conjunction of past and present creates a complex meaning.

The double natured quality of Persephone is also reinforced by the liminal existence of Ash and Christabel's actual daughter. The séance scene with Ash's infamous interruption is a direct result of the withheld information on Maia. Although she is safe and sound with her step parents in Norfolk (Byatt 500), Ash has no information about her existence. "When I said to you—you have made a murderess of me—I spoke of *poor Blanche*, whose terrible end torments me daily. But I saw you thought I spoke as Gretchen might to Faust," reveals Christabel (Byatt 500).⁴⁷ Christabel's last letter reveals the truth about Maia's existence, though it is too late, the reader can assume in the course of reading. Ash seems to die before he can know anything for sure about the life or death of his child. For him—and the reader as well—Maia always remains a liminal figure up to the point when the reader reaches the postscript in the reading process.

However, as the "Postscript 1868" shows, Ash has met his daughter, but "[t]here are things which happen and leave no discernible trace, are not spoken of or written of" (Byatt 508) like this one. "We cannot know the past except through its texts" (Hutcheon 16),

⁴⁶ Captured by Hades, the god of the underworld, Persephone is deprived of Demeter's, her mother's company, who goes to find her daughter. Till she is away harvests fail, so Zeus has to settle the conflict: Persephone can stay for half a year with her husband in the underworld and the other half with her mother. In this way, Persephone's yearly movement introduces cyclicity and makes her the goddess of death and fertility.

⁴⁷ Christabel's allusion to Gretchen reveals Ash's interpretation of her state. Ash supposes that Christabel has killed their child just as Gretchen killed her baby, whose father, Faust left her for the pursuit of new sources of happiness.

consents Byatt to Hutcheon's view, and she does not let her twentieth-century researchers learn about this meeting, her only confidant is the reader.⁴⁸ The characters of the novel misread the document of this meeting: the lock of hair Ash gets from Maia in return for the crown he makes her from flowers is taken for Christabel's hair by all the characters, only the reader has the true answer. For this reason, facts gain a liminal truth: on the one hand they seem to be true in the light of accessible information, on the other hand, however, they prove to be false because the reader has the clues for completing their knowledge. The partial information that the various characters have about Maia reinforce her double nature—moving from life to death and the other way round—which makes her a modern Persephone, who represents the cyclicity of the year.

The deconstruction of linearity, however, greatly influences the notion of quest for origins as it presupposes the existence of a linear time where the origins can be found at the very beginning. The introduction of cyclicity results either in false quests which have nowhere to go back or “palimpsest on palimpsest,” as Ash writes in his letter to LaMotte (Byatt 164), which means that everything has already been there from the very beginning, the origins have always been in front of our eyes. Nevertheless, it is neither an ultimate origin. This cyclicity, however, problematises the possibility of any singular *Bildung*, which can be solved only by reading life stories as cycles.

Besides the concept of linear time, the other precept of the classic *Bildungsroman* is the possibility of a unified self, another idea that is dramatised in *Possession*. After reading a part from Cropper's *The Great Ventriloquist* Maud starts musing about the phenomenon when “the grammatical subject of a statement differs from the subject, the ‘I’, who is the object discussed by that statement” (Byatt 250). The primacy of language over subjectivity permeates the novel, whose literary critic characters are all well-trained in post-structuralist theory. “Narcissism, the unstable self, the fractured ego, Maud thought, who am I? a matrix for a susurrations of texts and codes? It was both a pleasant and an unpleasant idea, this requirement that she think of herself as intermittent and partial” (Byatt 251). As for the concept of subjectivity, the novel is greatly informed by Lacanian theory often in the form of direct quotations by him. Nevertheless, most post-structuralist ideas can be located among his theories as well even if there are no names mentioned in the novel. Belsey summarises the Lacanian concept of the self as follows:

⁴⁸ This is not the only evidence that the reader has exclusive knowledge of certain events: the postscript clearly shows that these few pages are additional information, not revealed to and by any of the characters. Another instance is when only the reader has access to knowledge of the past because it is not written or documented in any forms is when Ellen Ash remembers her wedding night. By withholding these crucial pieces of information Byatt proves that it is impossible to have complete knowledge of any event.

Lacan's theory of the subject as constructed in language confirms the decentering of the individual's consciousness so that it can no longer be seen as the *origin of meaning, knowledge and action*. [. . .] Subjectivity [. . .] is discursively constructed and displaced across the range of discourses in which the concrete individual participates. (*Desire* 60-1, emphasis added)

The question of decentered subjectivity is at the heart of Byatt's postmodern *Bildungsroman*. First of all, Maud and Roland have to locate Ash and LaMotte's relationship and reveal subject positions that have never been reconstructed by literary critics because the texts and discourses that created them were hidden for decades. When the two young researchers read the poets' letters and all the related diaries they reconstruct the kinds of subjectivities that have never entered academic discourse because of their hidden, unknown or misinterpreted existence. New subject positions enrich the characters of both poets: in the world of facts it comes to the light that neither LaMotte was a lesbian nor Ash a faithful husband; in the realm of personalities Ash's picture is overwhelmed by desire, and LaMotte's by unselfish love and instinctive self-preservation. As the world of *Possession* reads as a palimpsest as a result of its cyclicity/citatoriality the answers to the biographers' questions have always already been at their disposal which they have never attempted to read: Maud's face will give the answer.

The notion of decentered subjectivity is relevant in the contemporary story of Roland and Maud as well. As a means of escape from personal engagement after her brief affair with Fergus Wolff Maud buries herself in work, regulates her hair as a kind of self-punishment and denies desire in her life. Maud feels curiosity,⁴⁹ the desire for knowledge, more fundamental than sex, which is symptomatic of her relation to desire and narrative curiosity. "At the price of her wholeness, unwittingly rendering herself 'null,' Maud only acknowledges the self-obliterating aspect of sexuality and fiercely dissociates her physical attractiveness from her intelligence" (Lesch 19):

[Maud] slipped in her nightdress, long-sleeved and practical, and loosed from her shower-cap all yellow hair. She [. . .] considered her perfectly regular features in the mirror. A beautiful woman, Simone Weil said, seeing herself in the mirror knows 'This is I.' An ugly woman knows, with equal certainty, 'This is not I'. [. . .] The doll-mask she saw had nothing to do with her, nothing. (Byatt 57)

⁴⁹ At one point she remarks in relation of their joint quest, "I feel faint with curiosity" (Byatt 91).

At this point Maud is unable to read her own face as a palimpsest, she sees it as a signifier which is in arbitrary relation with its signified, herself. Nevertheless, her uncertainties—both professional and emotional—are slowly eroded as she gets more and more involved in this literary investigation. (Hulbert 57) What makes her go on revealing the unknown aspect of the Victorian poets' lives is narrative curiosity on the one hand, and her gradually developing desire, on the other. In the end it turns out who she really is: descendant of both Ash and LaMotte. Her features and strange-coloured bright hair are the proof of it. The post-structuralist scholar is confronted with the fact that it is possible to know her origins, but to maintain that "she must consent to a mutual possession in which her past and present assert equal claims to each other, as do she and Roland" (Lesch 22).

Like Maud, Roland enters the *Bildungsroman* armoured with a theoretical training that is similar to Maud's. However, Roland is less the theoretical type than Maud, he rather does things than theorises about them. Although he seems to be a man of action his sense of identity is as much unstable as Maud's.

Roland learned to see himself theoretically, as a crossing-place for a number of systems, all loosely connected. He had been trained to see his idea of 'self' as an illusion, to be replaced by a discontinuous machinery and electrical message-networks of various desires, ideological beliefs and responses, language-forms and hormones and pheromones. Mostly he liked this. He had no desire for any Romantic self-assertion. Nor did he desire to know *who* Maud essentially was. (Byatt 424)

From the social aspect Roland does not prove to be a success either: although he is twenty-nine he has had no great academic career, he is a part-time researcher in the Ash Factory, he has a "claustrophobic and moribund relationship with the droopy and sullen Val" (Burgass 31), and lives in a basement flat that smells cat piss, with a forbidden entrance to the garden. In addition, Maud knew "Roland was not in her class" (Byatt 141), and Roland was aware of the fact that "Maud was a beautiful woman such as he had no claim to possess. She had a secure job and an international reputation" (Byatt 424). All this is too much for such an anti-hero as Roland. However, the *Bildungsroman* assumes "the possibility of individual achievement and social integration" (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 5). What Roland does—the investigation of Ash's relationship with LaMotte—he does for the sake of curiosity, neither for financial nor professional profit. He enjoys his quest and excludes other factors: while he eagerly follows the trails of Ash and LaMotte Val leaves him for the livelier Euan MacIntyre,

he risks his employment with his strange disappearance, as well as the loss of his flat. However, Roland goes on his quest and his compelling desire to know more turns him into a biographer and a proper hero of a successful quest plot.

Although he has taken possession of the draft letters because he “wanted them to be a secret. Private. And to do the work” (Byatt 50), these letters finally result in three good university posts which Roland hesitates to take. “I can’t decide,” he says to Blackadder, “I’m not even sure I want to stay in academic life” (Byatt 486). What has happened? What are his reasons not to take any of the three full-time jobs?

On a gloomy evening he starts reading his Ash, when the narrator or Roland himself starts thinking about the nature of reading and words, which reinforces the palimpsest-like nature of the origin he looks for in his quest:

Now and then there are readings which make the hairs on the neck, the non-existent spelt, stand on end and tremble, [. . .] readings when the knowledge that we *shall know* the writing differently or better or satisfactorily, runs ahead of any capacity to say what we know or how. In these readings, a sense that the text has appeared to be wholly new, never before seen, almost immediately, by the sense that it was *always there*, that we the readers, knew it was always there, and have *always known* it was as it was, though we have for the first time recognised, become fully cognisant of, our knowledge. (Byatt 471-2)

Roland’s or the narrator’s observations echo the first line of *The Garden of Proserpina*—“These things are there” (Byatt 1)—which suggests that things have really been there from the very beginning, but till this moment of revelation Roland could not understand meaning in this way. “What Ash said to him [. . .] was that the lists were the important thing, the words that named things, the language of poetry” (Byatt 473). By now Roland is dispossessed of his original post-structuralist view of language, his reading experience makes him so interested in words and things in the world, like Ash, that “[t]onight, he began to think of words, words came from some well in him, lists of words that arranged themselves into poems [. . .]. [. . .] an hour ago there had been no poems, and now they came like rain and were real” (Byatt 475). Roland’s quest is completed: he wins Maud, finds out the truth about Ash and LaMotte, has good job prospects, and becomes a poet. He turns his *Bildungsroman* into a *Künstlerroman*, finds a genuine way of self-expression that, unlike criticism, is not at all parasitic. Who could wish for more? Both Roland and Maud go along the trails of the *Bildungsroman*, which, although in a postmodern manner disrupts many of the elements and

presuppositions of the traditional genre, guarantees the most important goal that a hero can have: maturity.

Besides the joint quest of Maud and Roland, which can be read as their separate *Bildungsromans* Byatt incorporates other generic variants of the quest plot in *Possession*, which also rely on desire and carry *Bildung* elements. The most emphatic of these generic variants is biography which enables the author to include false quests and anti-quests in her novel as well as one successful quest. These quest plots can be read as parodies of the Victorian quest for origins or ironic postmodern yearnings for the lost referent as the biographers' limited views and extremist theories result in the discovery of false or partial origins, which, at the same time, ridicules the shortcomings of the academia. Despite their failure all these quests are fuelled by desire—now for knowledge—, which is the basic driving force of romances as well.

At the beginning of *Possession* in the much fictionalised Reading Room of the London Library, while perusing R.H. Ash's annotated book, Vico's *Principj di Scienza Nuova*, Roland Michell comes across two draft letters in Ash's handwriting to an unnamed lady, which might suggest that the eminent Victorian poet, husband of Ellen Ash, possibly had an illicit relationship with a lady, who turns out to be Christabel LaMotte, author of some minor poems—with the exception of *The Fairy Melusine*—and fairy tales for children. Motivated by this accidental find the two young researchers, Maud, late descendant of LaMotte, and Roland set out to rewrite the life stories of the two Victorian poets since in their biographies there are no hints at their possible love relation. What is at stake is the biography of the two poets that represents their life as it really was. But who knows best? How can one reconstruct the lives of the poets? By acquiring all their personal belongings? By checking all the places they once went to? Or by rereading their poetry to get the resonance of their language? The quest for the 'true' life stories of the two Victorian poets is set into motion.

All these methods are tried in the course of the novel which focuses the reader's attention on the genre of biography among others. Showing biographical methods in great variety Byatt relativises the genre of biography as an account of one's life. She presents many ways of acquiring the life story of the two Victorian poets, but most of these attempts prove to be a failure. Nevertheless, the multiple points of view of the biographers in the novel highlight the fact that biographies in general cannot be seen as true and/or factual accounts of a person's life.⁵⁰ In addition, the possibility of having a true and/or factual account of one's life is further complicated in the novel by the fictionality of the two Victorian poets whose

⁵⁰ Drabble's Jane Gray struggles with a similar problem concerning her own autobiographical writing. How can she tell the truth of her life and what truth can she tell? The question is even more complicated by the fact that she wants to model her life story on fictional examples, which further distorts the truth value of her writing.

lives and characters, however, resemble some real poets' lives and characters, but are nevertheless fictional creations of Byatt's artistic imagination.

The origins of biography are no doubt to be found in Classic Greek and Roman literature: Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (1st c. AD) established the tradition of giving account of the lives of particular men. He himself paired twenty-three Greeks and Romans, which proves to be one of the earliest attempts of presenting people's lives parallel.⁵¹ Biography flourished for centuries when, in the mid-Victorian period, "a certain prudishness and gentility pervaded biographical work for the worse. The truth was glozed by the need for 'respectability' and reticence candied over anything scandalous or disagreeable" (Cuddon 91). In academic circles "[b]iography itself has long been regarded as a faintly populist and disreputable form of scholarship," which culminated in the twentieth-century critical attitude that neglects the life of the author as something irrelevant to the work itself. (Burgass 37) However, most academic characters in the novel are deeply involved in the writing, rewriting or editing the life story of either Ash or LaMotte. Editing either Ellen Ash's journal, Ash' poetry or Sabine Kercoz's "Journal Intime" is also a form biographical work though not writing a biography in the proper sense of the word. However, edition is always a kind of interfering with the source material which will bear the "fingerprint" of the editor from that point on. Most of the biographer characters seem to be subject, in one way or other, to possession. On the one hand the biographer can desire to possess his or her subject through an exhaustive knowledge of his or her life, or, on the other hand, this obsession with the subject may possess the biographer making him or her identify completely with his or her subject, which reinforces the quest for the identity of either the subject of the biography or that of the author, which implies a certain kind of *Bildung*. The desire for knowledge, which is the common driving force of these quests, results in a double knowledge, as it reveals the identity of the biographer and the subject of the biography by locating the same origin of meaning for both.

The relationship of the biographer and his or her subject can be a complicated one as Byatt depicts it in its various forms in *Possession*. Referring to an interview with Byatt Michelle Green claims that

Byatt took her inspiration from a Coleridge scholar she had seen haunting the British Museum Library. "She had spent the whole of her life thinking somebody else's thoughts, and I thought, 'In a sense she is possessed by Coleridge.'" She says. "I also thought she possesses him in the physical sense, since everything we

⁵¹ Naturally, Plutarch's parallel biographies do not intersect as the Victorian and contemporary story lines do in *Possession*.

read of him is mediated by her. And I thought if you have two poets, you have two scholars, and then I had my plot.” (5)

However, Byatt as an academic biographer herself admits:

I do not wish to spend most of my life on somebody else’s life—not one other person’s life.

The words came to me long before the plot of the novel, *Possession*, and it was to do with being taken over—or alternatively, taking somebody over, depending on whether you are a sympathiser or a hunter. (quoted by Burgass 35)

These two terms can easily be applied to the literary critics in the novel and identify their relation towards their biographical subjects, Ash and LaMotte. The “hunters” are, first of all, Mortimer Cropper, the predatory Fergus Wolff, and the exaggerated feminist, Leonora Stern; the “sympathizers” are Roland, Maud, Blackadder, and the motherly, soft figure of Beatrice Nest. (Burgass 35) Though Burgass clearly classifies the biographer figures into the two categories that Byatt suggests, I apply a different logic in my investigation. I interpret the various biographical approaches and the related biographers as various quests for the origins of meaning with their respective heroes. I claim that the biographer figures can be seen in binaries, which enables Byatt to show both sides of the coin: how is the origin of meaning distorted if a theory is taken to an extreme or reduced to its minimum. For this reason I set up binaries of false quests and anti-quests, in which I consider both types of quest unsuccessful.

The first binary of biographers is constituted by the American Mortimer Cropper and his British colleague, Blackadder. The impersonality and aridity of modern academic work is presented in Blackadder’s figure, his working method as well as the description of his workplace, the “Ash factory.” “The Ash factory was a hot place of metal cabinets and glass cells containing the clatter of typewriters, gloomily lit by neon tubes. Micro-readers glowed green in its gloom. It smelled occasionally sulphurous, when the photocopiers short-circuited” (Byatt 27). The characteristics of the Ash factory resemble the picture of hell itself,⁵² which evokes the figure of Mortimer Cropper. Is Blackadder similar to him? Which of the two is more deathly? Are there any links between the two characters? The answer is ambiguous.

As Cropper is fascinated by black, grey becomes Blackadder:

⁵² A page earlier Byatt describes the place as “hatched in the bowels of the building”, “the Inferno” (26).

Blackadder was a grey man, with a grey skin and iron grey hair, which he wore rather long, because he was proud that it was still so thick. His clothes, tweed jacket, cord trousers, were respectable, well-worn and dusty, like everything down there. He had a good ironic smile when he smiled, which was very infrequently. (Byatt 29-30)

All the images that Byatt uses to describe him signify desolation and desiccation. Nevertheless, Blackadder is much less daemonic than Cropper; he retains human emotions which rarely come to light because he is so much devoted to his research area, R.H. Ash.

Blackadder's devotion to Ash started in his childhood, similarly to Cropper's, when his grandfather recited him Ash's poems on firelight evenings. But his fate was decided on a dating seminar when his don, F.R. Leavis handed out quotations to date, and Blackadder immediately saw that they were all by Ash who, as a real ventriloquist, imitated all kinds of poetic forms and tones. Leavis's presence in the fictional reality of *Possession* is not surprising at all, since his influence could not be prevented at his time: he influenced his students for a lifetime either by setting unquestionable norms, or by frightening them away from any monolithic view of literature and raising a "suspicion of dogmatic intellectual authority" (Burgass 16). This double effect is obvious in the case of Byatt and her sister, Drabble as well: while Drabble still advocates Leavis's ideas, Byatt's suspicion started from the very beginning, but Leavis's influence is, nevertheless, powerful in both cases either as an attractive or restrictive example. Leavis's inhibiting authority put an end to Blackadder's poetic career even before it started: "The young Blackadder wrote poems, imagined Dr Leavis's comments on them, and burned them" (Byatt 27). After the dating seminar when Blackadder betrayed Ash by pretending not to recognise his poems, he compensated for his act of cowardice: he wrote his PhD on him and he was talked into editing the *Complete Poems and Plays*. His early aborted poetic attempts amount to the image of an owl-gut, which pleased him so much that he considered writing a poem about it. "Then he discovered Ash had been beforehand with him" (Byatt 29), and there was no point in writing another poem on Ash's theme. In this way, Blackadder is "a poet manqué, whose creative impulses have been stifled" (Burgass 40).

Blackadder's character resembles Cropper's not only from the aspect of poetic ambitions. His enthusiasm for his subject recalls his American colleague's obsession with Ash, however, Blackadder's interest in the Victorian poet is less daemonic.

There were times when Blackadder allowed himself to see clearly that he would end his working life, that was to say his conscious thinking life, in this task, that all his thoughts would have been another man's thoughts, all his work another man's work and then it did not perhaps matter so greatly. He did after all find Ash fascinating, even after all these years. It was a pleasant subordination, *if he was a subordinate*. He believed Mortimer Cropper thought himself the lord and owner of Ash, but he, Blackadder, knew his place better. (Byatt 29, emphasis added)

In my view, the basic difference between Cropper's and Blackadder's relation to Ash is that while the former dispossesses Ash for his own unhealthy ambitions, the latter respects his subject and realises that literature is not for the sake of criticism⁵³ but the other way round.

Nevertheless, the parasitic nature of Blackadder's work becomes apparently visible when Byatt describes his working method which I claim to be the reason for his failed quest for meaning. "The footnotes engulfed and swallowed the text. They were ugly and ungainly, but necessary, Blackadder thought, as they sprang up like the heads of the Hydra, two to solve in the place of one solved" (Byatt 28). While Cropper wants to make himself the simulacrum of Ash, Blackadder's attraction to Ash feeds on the poet's texts, though produces proliferating waste material. As opposed to Cropper he minimalises his authorial/editorial presence in his work: "[t]hese superfluous adjectives were the traces of his own views, and therefore unnecessary" (Byatt 300). For these two reasons "[m]uch of his writing met his fate. It was set down, depersonalised, and then erased. Much of his time was spent deciding whether or not to erase things. He usually did" (Byatt 300). Byatt is very careful in wording these sentences: only the act of cognition is in the active voice, the other activities are depersonalised, cut from their agent, Blackadder, which is emphasised by the unusually exclusive use of passive structures.

Blackadder's method in his quest to situate the origin of meaning in Ash's poetry relies on negating the presence of the author, himself, in the text, which is characterised by his depersonalising, erasing practices. Though he edits the *Complete Poems and Plays* of Ash Blackadder minimalises his editorial presence, which results in losing his (subject) position in this textual construct from which he could articulate any message. For him, just as for Barthes's modern scriptor, writing becomes an enunciative act, not "an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction'" ("Death" 1468). His anti-quest to locate the origins of meaning results in his own annihilation and, just as Barthes remarks in the general sense, he "traces a field without origin—or which, at least, has no other origin than language

⁵³ Here I call all forms of academic scholarship criticism including the work of biographers as well.

itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins” (Barthes, “Death” 1468). In addition, the language, the only thing at his disposal is not his own but Ash’s.

Blackadder’s working method is revealing of his personality as well: his constant erasing and depersonalising attitude shows that he, unlike Cropper, does not push his personality to the front, his constant erasing in his writing is a metaphor for his constant personal withdrawal into his private, academic intimacy with Ash. This process shows an anti-quest, as the hero—or rather anti-hero in Blackadder’s case—does everything to erase the location of any origins, any authorial subject position, he turns inward and rejects the perishing attractions of the world.

As opposed to him Mortimer Cropper is the genuine figure of the obsessed biographer who not only wants to possess the subject of his biographical interests but who is possessed by his subject too. We first encounter Cropper when he purloins a letter—a scene that parallels Roland’s discovery of the draft letters, but what a strong contrast—on the lavatory seat in a suburban bathroom. He purloins a letter, or rather a copy of it, but his intentions and methods are quite different from those of Roland. He Xeroxes the letter with a portable Xerox machine designed for this purpose: it comes clear from the scene that his methods are carefully calculated and well practised. Nevertheless, if money is needed to reach his goals, Cropper can throw any amount of money after the desired item. For him the end justifies the means. Cropper not only desires to own all the things Ash owned; if he could, he would be happy to own the man himself. He locates the origins of meaning in himself which he tries to make as much identical with Ash as possible. “It is my aim to know as far as possible everything he did—everyone who mattered to him—every little preoccupation he had,” he claims (Byatt 96). It is obvious that his preoccupation with his subject is unhealthy, although he always reasons with “the global perspective” to which his new acquisitions “add lustre, they add detail, they bring the whole man just that little bit more back to life” (Byatt 96-7).

However, if Mortimer Cropper’s name is considered, he is the least probable to bring Ash back to life. His first name, Mortimer, alludes to the name of death. The name “Cropper” incorporates “crop”, the maw of a bird and “could also connote reaper/raiper” (Burgass 36). Even his everyday manners are deathly: he loves wearing black clothes, in his black silk robe he is quite a sinister figure, he drives a “swift funeral car”, a huge Mercedes, and has turned the Stant Collection into a kind of mausoleum for Ash instead of making it into a lively research centre. He is obsessed with a dead man to the extent of violating his grave in order to get the secret contents of the metal box into his possession.

Cropper’s ironically titled biography, *The Great Ventriloquist*, betrays the author more than his subject. Instead of presenting his subject in a distanced voice without pushing himself

to the front—as a true ventriloquist does—he obtrudes himself before Ash himself: he becomes the subject of his work, his freak ego plays the main role in the text, which also betrays the false origin he proposes to find in his quest, himself. “Like many biographies, she [Maud] judged, this was as much about its author as its subject, and she did not find Mortimer Cropper’s company pleasant” (Byatt 246). As opposed to Blackadder’s impersonal writing that erases any sense of the author, Cropper falls victim to the other extreme. In *The Great Ventriloquist* the reader is exposed to the utter intrusion of the author which eclipses the very subject of the work, Ash. Having read a part of *The Great Ventriloquist* Maud has the impression that Cropper “had a peculiarly vicious version of reverse hagiography; the desire to cut his subject down to size. [. . .] Was Ash subject to Cropper’s methods and laws of thought? Whose subjectivity was being studied?” (Byatt 250) The question is relevant since Cropper’s self-identity is highly questionable: “He tended his body, the outward man, with a fastidiousness that he would have bestowed on the inner man too, if he had known who he was” (Byatt 99). Due to his exhibitionist attitude Cropper turns his biographical writing on Ash into his own appraisal as the origin of meaning, as it documents his own quest for self, which highlights the falsity of his quest. Byatt, naturally aware of this focal shift, describes Cropper in a highly ironic tone:

Now and then Mortimer Cropper toyed with the idea of writing an autobiography. He had also considered writing a family history. History, writing, infect after a time a man’s sense of himself, and Mortimer Cropper, fluently documenting every last item of the days of Randolph Henry Ash, his goings-out and comings-in, his dinner engagements, his walking-tours, his excessive sympathy with servants, his impatience with lionising, had naturally perhaps felt his own identity at times, at the very best times, as insubstantial, leached into this matter-of-writing, stuff-of-record. He was an important man. He wielded power: power of appointment, power of disappointment, power of the cheque book, power of Thot and the Mercurial access to the Arcana of the Stant Collection. (Byatt 99)

Cropper has the power of copying, but unlike Thot,⁵⁴ the scribe of Egyptian gods, his power sometimes fails when the Xerox machine refuses to work. He has Mercurial access to the mystical secrets of the Stant Collection, like Hermes or his Roman equivalent, Mercurius, the trickster god of thieves, but unlike Cropper, the god steals things without ill intentions.

⁵⁴ Although Thot is not primarily associated with the underworld today, he retains some of Cropper’s deathly characteristics because he is the one who judges the deeds of the deceased person. (Cotterell 168)

Cropper gives away his desire for identification when he reveals his attachment to Ash's watch: "[. . .] he believed the watch had come to him, that it had been meant to come to him, that he had and held something of R.H. Ash. It ticked near his heart. He would have liked to be a poet" (Byatt 387). These last two sentences, not grammatically connected, reveal Cropper's ultimate desire: to identify with his subject, to be his subject. This would be the ultimate form of possession. As opposed to him, Blackadder has given up his poetic inspirations when he realised that it is impossible to produce such good poetry as Ash did. Cropper unintentionally gives away his ill interests in Ash when in his intended biography he thinks about the effects of touching Ash's letter as a child: "[. . .] he sometimes brushed the thought, as though he had no existence, no separate existence of his own after that first contact with the paper's electric rustle and the ink's energetic black looping" (Byatt 105). Although Cropper romanticises his first encounter with the letter, the consequences he draws are quite symptomatic of his identity crisis which constantly surfaces not only in his imagined biography but also in his academic writing.

The unsuccessful quests of Blackadder and Cropper show two extreme attitudes to the concept of the author: Blackadder erases this position from his work while Cropper pushes it into the front as the only origin of meaning. In my view, Byatt dramatises her own dilemmas as an author in the Blackadder-Cropper binary when she draws Blackadder's anti-quest, which negates the existence of any authorial origin of meaning, and Cropper's false quest of authorial exhibitionism.

In a series of interviews and reviews Byatt problematises the notion and position of the author. In Pereira's opinion, "we can detect a tension between the idea that art has nothing to do with self-expression, is impersonal, and an understandable concern to assert herself as the author of her own work" (152). If one takes into consideration only the intertextual, fragmented form of the novel it would be easy to jump to the conclusion that it "signals Byatt's ready subscription to the tenets of impersonality as proposed by Roland Barthes in 'The Death of the Author', or by Julia Kristeva in her theorisation on intertextuality" (Pereira 152). However, in many instances, "Byatt is perhaps closer to the idea of 'influence', as propounded by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), in the sense that she seems to abide by the idea of individual creativity, as opposed to the anonymity that Kristeva and Barthes's theories assert" (Pereira 153-4). In her essay Pereira compares influence and intertextuality, and arrives at the conclusion that theories of influence rely on the existence of a fixed canon which comes quite close to A.S. Byatt's idea of literature. (154) By creating such individual poet figures as Ash and Christabel, Byatt seems to "be asserting the necessity to restore the author back to the text, so as to save him/her from the risk of total annihilation,

together with the idea of the canon” (Pereira 155). In *Possession* she argues for a sense of self and the construction of identity, all of which go against her fragmented style and postmodern contesting attitude.

I, who was much beguiled by [T.S.] Eliot’s idea of the impersonality of the artist, much beguiled by the idea that art was not self-expression but looking out and seeing other things which you were not, have had to bring back into my own thinking an idea that, if you have no self, there are certain things you simply cannot say. (Byatt quoted by Pereira 155)

As opposed to Pereira’s opinion, I see Byatt’s position less defined. In my view, Byatt’s reflection reveals her own dilemma: if you have no self, there is no subject position from which you can articulate anything you want to share, so it is vital to retain a sense of self to have a position from which she can communicate as an author. Nevertheless, the possibility of having a subject position is always already problematised by language. *Possession* displays the very same dilemma on the level of character formation, especially in the binary of Blackadder and Cropper.

Byatt displays so many forms of the biographic approach that one cannot only distinguish the “hunters” from the “sympathisers”, but can contrast contemporary biography—including other academic activity—with Victorian biography. Although it may seem for the first sight that contemporary biographers are more violent, their Victorian colleagues are no better sometimes. Beatrice Nest refers to Ellen Ash’s “sharp comments [. . .] about contemporary biographical habits—rummaging Dickens’s desk before he was fairly buried and that sort of thing—the usual Victorian comments. [Ellen Ash] knew [R.H. Ash] was a great poet and she must have known they would come—the scavengers—sooner or later [. . .]” (Byatt 219). It is clear that they came later: Cropper first of all, who does not let his desired object, R.H. Ash, rest in peace. Having the scavengers in mind, Ellen Ash produces a journal which contains the “carefully edited, the carefully *strained* [. . .] truth [. . .]” (Byatt 461-2). Due to this there are some events that are not revealed even to the most meticulous biographers but to the reader only.⁵⁵

The real difference between contemporary and Victorian biographers lies in the fact that the latter lived before Freud while the former cannot evade his influence: twentieth-century biographers take an unabashed interest in their subject’s sex life, which, actually, is a

⁵⁵ One of these hidden details is Ellen Ash’s frigidity, and the other is the “Postscript 1868”. I will elaborate on both in detail later.

rather limited view of Freudianism. However, this limited view allows Byatt to create another binary of quests with Leonora Stern and Beatrice Nest as pretenders for the hero's position. Leonora Stern is the most interested in the sexuality of her subject, Christabel LaMotte. She takes Christabel's alleged lesbianism as the most important factor in her poetry. Leonora fuelled both by Freudianism and feminism to the extreme is the target of Byatt's irony: in her essay on *The Fairy Melusine* Leonora reads each image as a symbol of female sexuality as if nothing else existed that might have influenced the poet. "Melusine's fountain has a *female* wetness, trickling out from its pool rather than rising confidently, thus mirroring those female secretions which are not inscribed in our daily use of language (*langue*, tongue)—the sputum, mucus, milk and bodily fluids of women who are silent for dryness" (Byatt 245). After Roland has read Leonora's unattractive essay, he has a similar impression that Maud had previously: the point of view of the critic distorts both the author and the text and locates a false origin of meaning, here, female sexuality. Roland observes that "it all reduced like boiling jam to—human sexuality. Just as Leonora Stern makes the whole earth read as the female body—and language—all language. And all vegetation is pubic hair" (Byatt 253). Leonora's whole field of interest is motivated by and focussed on lesbian sexuality and "it transpires, [it] is based on at least a partial misapprehension regarding Christabel's sexuality, which in turn is the product of her own sexual predilections" (Burgass 42). She makes her field of research, Christabel, a site for communicating her own interests, just as Cropper does and, in this way she and her sexual interests become the focus of her own writing and research. Her distorted views lead to a false quest which locates the origin of meaning exclusively in female sexuality. It is not surprising that Leonora's extreme interest in female sexuality is part of her personal life: having worked her way through a series of husbands and female lovers she makes a wholly unwanted proposal to Maud in her flat, which completely violates her self-possession and visceral protest. Maud is almost victimised by Leonora's acquisitive passion as she was previously by Fergus Wolff's predatory desire.

As opposed to Leonora's exaggerated Freudian interests in female sexuality Beatrice Nest tries to eliminate female sexuality as a possible origin of meaning. She has been engaged in the "Promethean task" of editing Ellen Ash's journals for twenty-five years (Burgass 41). "Beatrice represents a professionally marginalized generation of women, pushed into a specialization thought to be suitable to her sex by the male-dominated institution of the time, but against her inclinations" (Burgass 41). Beatrice's attitude to her subject resembles Blackadder's: she also respects the person whose life is in her hands. Beatrice edits the

already edited journal⁵⁶ of Ash's wife, though her edition is not an intrusive act of posterity. Her sympathy for Ellen Ash prevents her from delving deep into these journals, however, her reading reveals more hidden aspects of Ellen's life than the more inquisitive, and violent method of others.

Beatrice's intuitive reading is correct; she is professionally unsuccessful partly because of a sympathy for her subject and sensitivity to Ellen's unstated intention in her journal, an unwillingness to pry into what is not written, though unwittingly nearer the truth than those who have no compunction about intruding into the Victorians' private lives. (Burgass 41)

Beatrice cannot read between the lines: she does not sense that Ellen's omissions mask something about her sex life, which is so obvious to Leonora Stern, though I wonder if she could suggest any other hidden aspects of a woman's life. Beatrice's anti-quest to hide, or rather not to reveal the origin of meaning in Ellen Ash's journals makes her a respectable character and an unsuccessful quest hero. However, her anti-quest proves to be successful as posterity is never informed about Ellen Ash's sexual life, or the lack of it, which makes Beatrice a proper anti-hero to carry out this anti-quest. When Maud wants to Xerox two letters, Beatrice is afraid that "This—what you're so excited about—it won't—it won't expose her to ridicule—or—or misapprehension? I've become very concerned that she shouldn't be—exposed is the best word I suppose—*exposed*" (Byatt 235). Her personal concern makes her look naïve in academic circles, but her personal feeling for Ellen as a fellow woman makes Maud think "of Leonora's ferocity, of Fergus's playfulness, of the whole tenor and endeavour of twentieth-century scholarship" (Byatt 221-2). Maud feels ashamed for the rudeness and narrow-mindedness of contemporary theory, "[t]he whole of our scholarship—the whole of our thought—we question everything except the centrality of sexuality. Unfortunately feminism can hardly avoid privileging such matters. I sometimes wish I had embarked on geology myself" (Byatt 222).

In my view, it is Maud who is closest to Byatt's own views. Her mistrust of feminism is clearly visible in her relation to female literary tradition, as I have pointed out in Chapter 2, which suggests to me that Byatt seems to favour an *aurea mediocritas* somewhere between the false quest of Leonora and the anti-quest of Beatrice.

Fergus Wolff is no better than Leonora: he really belongs to the hunters with his "voracious smile" and "long mouth terribly full of strong white teeth" (Byatt 32). He has

⁵⁶ Any autobiographic writing is already edited by the authorial intention that brings it to light.

taken Roland's job and mercilessly pursued Maud till he won her. Fergus threatens Maud to give a paper on Christabel's unconscious. What is absurd in this proposition is that Fergus thinks he has something to say about the unconscious of a Victorian woman poet, and not the metaphors she uses. He forgets what his favourite quotation by Lacan says in *Écrits* about the figurations of ego formation in the shape of castles and fortresses, "the formation of the ego is symbolised in dreams by a fortress or stadium [. . .]—surrounded by marshes and rubbish tips—dividing it into two opposite fields of contest where the subject flounders in quest of the lofty, remote inner castle whose form symbolises the id in a quite startling way" (quoted by Byatt 138). Fergus forgets the fact that it is impossible to have direct access to the "inner castle," which gives him the courage to judge people in an off-hand manner—Christabel, Maud and Roland—without deep consideration. Though Fergus has the same postmodern theoretical background as Roland and Maud he fails to realise how misleading his quest is. He posits the Lacanian unconscious as the origin of meaning but forgets that it is impossible to have direct access to it as it surfaces in metaphors and images which, as he investigates Christabel's poetry, are articulated in language, thus doubly coded. Fergus does not consider that it is impossible to fully recover the unconscious which he assumes the exclusive origin of meaning.

As it seems all the hunters are subject to a limited view of their subjects, their narrow-mindedness prevents them from understanding the subject they investigate, and locate the origin of meaning. Either acquisition, or extreme lesbian sexuality, not to mention Lacanian misreading limits the critics/biographers' point of view and they fail to see the person as a whole, some significant details always remain undiscovered. They see only distorted figures, whose distortion cannot be recognised by those who distort them. "It is notable [. . .] that all those engaged in more orthodox scholarly activity prove [. . .] less well equipped to get the truth and in this incompetence lies both the campus comedy and a serious attack on the shortcomings of modern academia" (Burgass 40). Byatt seems to expose her professional fellowmen to criticism to reveal the theory-driven limitations of her own kind.

Besides Beatrice, the contemporary protagonists, Maud and Roland enjoy the reader's sympathy although both are trained in the post-structuralist deconstruction of the subject like Byatt herself. As they face the literary jargon and limited view of their colleagues, both British and American, and realise the hollowness of their own semiotic chatter, they start having a "serious doubt [. . .] about the literary orthodoxy they officially endorse" (Hulbert 56). Byatt sends them off on a literary investigation, a quest actually, during which they are confronted with the Victorian poets' hidden passion, which is missing from and theorised, as well as distilled into narrative curiosity in their own lives, to challenge their academic

methods. Like the reader, they are exposed to the critical misreadings of other biographers and express their—and Byatt’s—scepticism of high-flown theory and reductive approaches. They read the merciless satires of literary analysis: *The Great Venriquoist* and *Motif and Matrix in the Poems of LaMotte*, which make the young researchers notice the restricted viewpoints of Cropper’s pompous biography of Ash, and Leonora Stern’s rude speculations about female autoerotism. “Byatt’s aim is to show that Maud and Roland are guided to their discovery by a much more imaginative sense of what words can mean that either of the Americans begins to grasp. The key to the young scholars’ sympathetic comprehension of the poets is the opposite of sophistication” (Hulbert 58). “It’s something more primitive” that seizes them during their quest, “narrative curiosity” (Byatt 238). And something else, equally primitive, which their educated minds cannot recognise first: desire. These drives, especially the latter, enable Maud and Roland to successfully realise their quest for the origin of meaning, which ends as a romance.

“Desire is the effect of the lost needs: loss returns and presents itself as desire,” claims Belsey in *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (57). Actually, Byatt’s text speaks about desire on multiple levels: on the thematic level as part of the love story and as part of the quest for the origin of meaning, and on the textual level as well. Belsey analyses desire as part of the romance love story and interprets the goal of the genre as “a search for the elusive character of desire-as-possession” (*Desire* 85). She claims that *Possession* is a Lacanian novel, not only in its direct invocation of Lacan’s texts but in its concept of desire. Desire is heroic to the extent that it cannot be fulfilled; desire is inevitable—Christabel calls it “necessity” twice—and at the same time dangerous—“beyond the pleasure principle, destructive, angry”, a “wrecker,” as Maud puts it (Belsey, *Desire* 87, Byatt 507).

The imperative of male desire, in Belsey’s views, is to take possession. “Don’t fight me,” Ash says making love to Christabel. “I *must*,” she answers with intent (Byatt 284). The Victorian romance culminates in love-hate on Christabel’s side and loss—loss of love, loss of their child, loss of parental relations, loss of emotional and intellectual partnership among others—is the share of both lovers. As opposed to this, Roland is able to prevent this loss: Maud—like her ancestress, Christabel—fights him and love itself, however, Roland does not want to exercise the “imperative of male desire” (Belsey, *Desire* 87), he does not want to take possession of her. By not taking her can he take her.

Besides the desire as possession of the other, desire is present in *Possession* as desire for knowledge which fuels the various quests for the origin of meaning. However, all that the researchers have access to is mediated by language which results in the loss of facts and the loss of the real, the referent in the process of signification. “Language erases even as it

creates. The signifier replaces the object it identifies as a separate entity; the linguistic symbol supplants what it names and differentiates, relegating it into a limbo, where it becomes inaccessible, lost; and in consequence ‘the being of language is the non-being of objects’” (Belsey, *Desire* 55). As a result of this, to know really what happened between Ash and LaMotte, which could guarantee meaning to the scholarship of the various researchers in the novel, the goal of the various quests cannot be reached, the referent cannot be recovered, it is lost forever. Driven by narrative curiosity Roland and Maud cannot completely refuse the mediating presence of the signifier—of texts and language—although the two textual scholars become more and more interested in facts by the end. However, experience is always already mediated by language; what they have at their disposal is written language—letters, poems, diaries—by which they try to reconstruct the events of the past. However, they desire the origin of meaning as well in the contemporary world of uncertainties: “[i]f *Possession* is critical of postmodern scepticism, it is by no means nostalgic for Victorian metaphysics” (*Desire* 84). The origin of meaning seems to be lost forever, it never reveals itself, nevertheless, is present elusively, evasively, differentially in the never ending game of signification.

The quest for knowledge evokes another genre in *Possession*, which can also be interpreted as a quest plot. Ann Hulbert mentions detective story as well among the genres that surface in the novel. It is obvious that the detectives in this novel are Roland and Maud whose methods incorporate both textual investigation—since they both claim to be textual critics—and the intuitive revisiting of Ash and LaMotte’s favourite places. Here the final mystery to be solved is not the identity of the murderer as usual but what the contents of the buried metal box reveal: what has happened to Ash and LaMotte’s child? The identity to be revealed finally is Maud’s identity: she is the descendant of Ash and LaMotte. Their daughter was Maud’s great-great-great-grandmother. (Byatt 503) Looking at the picture of Maia Bailey Maud remarks to Roland:

‘She looks like Christabel’ [. . .]. ‘You can see it.’

‘She looks like you,’ said Roland. He added, ‘She looks like Randolph Ash, too. The width of the brow. The width of the mouth. The end of the eyebrows, there.’

‘So I look like Randolph Henry Ash.’

Roland touched her face. ‘I would never have seen it. But yes. The same things. Here, at the corner of the eyebrow. There, at the edge of the mouth. Now I have seen it, I shall always see it.’ (Byatt 504-5)

In the moment of recognition Roland reads Maud's face as a palimpsest of Ash and Christabel, as a text that simultaneously reads the past and the present with its multiple layers of meaning. It is like Ash's view of their contemporary world in which "truths that might have been graspable in the bright dayspring of human morning [. . .] are now obscured by palimpsest on palimpsest" (Byatt 164). This reading of Maud's features is exactly like the one that makes Roland understand that words correspond to the things of the world:

Now and then there are readings which make the hairs on the neck, the non-existent spelt, stand on end and tremble, [. . .] readings when the knowledge that we *shall know* the writing differently or better or satisfactorily, runs ahead of any capacity to say what we know or how. In these readings, a sense that the text has appeared to be wholly new, never before seen, almost immediately, by the sense that it was *always there*, that we the readers, knew it was always there, and have *always known* it was as it was, though we have for the first time recognised, become fully cognisant of, our knowledge. (Byatt 471-2)

This new reading, when Roland finally understands what signified corresponds to the signifier of Maud's face is the end of their quest, the only successful one in *Possession*. The narrative curiosity of the two twentieth-century scholars, which urged them to keep on reading first the written documents then the facts of the world, translates the palimpsest of Maud's face into the imprint of the desire of their (literary) nineteenth-century ancestors. The quest for the origin of meaning is completed, as the origin of meaning proves to be desire itself, which is the primal driving force of any romance.

Besides these two interpretative potentials of desire—as love and as the quest for this knowledge—desire is present in *Possession* on the textual level as well. When talking about Lacan's concept of desire and the nature of his writing Belsey remarks at one point, "[t]he writing doubles back on itself, never reaching the promised goal, but offering another in its place. The process of displacement and substitution mimics, we might argue, the ways of desire, and makes of the text an object of desire for the reader" (*Desire* 54). In my view, Byatt's novel works in the same way. Despite the double romance story and its subtitle the novel will never qualify as a proper romance, instead it offers something else self-consciously cheating the reader. The narrator points out this narrative shift from Roland's point of view:

All that was the plot of the Romance. He was in a Romance, a vulgar and a high Romance simultaneously, a Romance was one of the systems that controlled

him, as the expectations of Romance control almost everyone in the Western world, for better or worse, at some point or another.

He supposed the Romance must give way to social realism, even if the aesthetic temper of the time was against it.

In any case, since Blackadder and Leonora and Cropper had come, it had changed from Quest, a good romantic form, into Chase and Race, two equally valid ones. (Byatt 425)

Possession never fully reaches its promised goal: Ash and LaMotte's romance is never completely recovered, nor is Roland and Maud's mutual attraction developed into maturity. Instead the text becomes a *mélange* of genres, a cleverly arranged array of fictitious texts that are profoundly allusive and citational themselves—like differential signifiers of the lost meaning. The desire—either physical or textual—of neither couple is satisfied; desire, including the reader's, like LaMotte's Thirsty Fountain in *The Fairy Melusine*, remains unquenchable. However, "it subsists in the novel [. . .] explicitly as textual performance, as writing" (*Desire* 88).

Byatt summarises this unquenchable desire of the text from the aspect of it being a romance that is attempting "to connect the bygone time with the very present" (Hawthorne quoted by Byatt, without page number):

Somewhere in the locked-away letters, Ash had referred to the plot or fate which seemed to hold or drive the dead lovers. Roland thought, partly with precise postmodernist pleasure, and partly with a real element of superstitious dread, that he and Maud were being driven by a plot or fate that seemed, at least possibly, to be not their plot or fate but that of others. And it is probable that there is an element of superstitious dread in any self-referring, self-reflexive, intuned postmodernist mirror-game or plot-coil that recognises that it has got out of hand, that connections proliferate apparently at random, [. . .], with equal verisimilitude, apparently in response to some ferocious ordering principle, not controlled by conscious intention, which would of course, being a good postmodernist intention, *require* the aleatory or the multivalent or the 'free', but structuring, but controlling, but driving, to some—to what?—end.⁵⁷[. . .] Coherence and closure

⁵⁷ Byatt weaves the key words into an intricate pattern. Right at the beginning of their literary quest Maud and Roland talk about the beginnings of the two mysterious letters and the only thing they want to discover is the end of the story. (Byatt 56) These two "unlocked" letters put the plot of the romance or "falling in love" as Roland calls it into first gear. The question is the same in the case of the letters and the plot: What is the end?

are deep human desires that are presently unfashionable. 'Falling in love', characteristically, combs the appearances of the world, and of a particular lover's history, out of a random tangle and into a coherent plot. Roland was troubled by the idea that the opposite might be true. (Byatt 421-2)

In my view, Roland's personal fears stem from the same source as the author's artistic ones: both are caught in the multivalent, self-reflexive, postmodern textual complexity of our contemporary experience, which is clearly embodied in the novel. *Possession* is full of proliferating meaning, self-referring mirror-games, however, both the text and its characters strive for some kind of closure of either love, or resolution of the text, all in all, coherence. Byatt seems to guarantee the coherence by paying homage to the Romantic period by creating the figures of Ash and Christabel, who do not compartmentalise but have a complex view of the world, and by closing her novel as if it was combed "out of a random tangle and into a coherent plot", with its culmination in love. The desire for coherence⁵⁸ is present in the characters' various quest stories as well, which all come under the heading of the romance as a mode of relating the present to the past. However, Byatt cannot deny the postmodern influence: she posts a postscript at the end of the novel, which contests the reader's sense of closure, because, in spite of Ash and May's meeting, the message is lost, which Ash sends to Christabel. This message cannot be deciphered. By this last turn, Byatt contests our desire for coherence because it is only partly fulfilled by the postscript: though daughter and father meet, the message to the mother is lost. Although the origin of meaning is found in desire, the quest for closure and coherence is undermined.

Though Byatt restores the concept of coherence concerning the self and its story by locating the origin of meaning in desire she withdraws this very same recovery by the postscript which is on the border of being a textual construct or not. Though it is recorded in the novel it has no textual traces for any of the scholars. The textual liminality of the postscript reinforces the power of language which erases all origins by its self-reflexive quality. This, however, implies that all the other recoveries of *Possession*, primarily the sense of a coherent self, become ambiguous. What is the self, does it exist at all if it is shaped in and by language? What notion of language allows the self to be shaped at all? In my opinion, Byatt plays out these questions against each other without giving definite answers because the fragmented textuality of the novel reinforces the poststructuralist views, whereas the story supports the Romantic opinion. This double attitude marks Byatt's own hesitation to take

⁵⁸ The desire for coherence is emphatically present in *The Waterfall* as well which seems to be guaranteed by the nineteenth-century intertexts and the accident as a possible neat ending. However, coherence cannot be attained fully in Drabble's novel either, which might be symptomatic of the contemporary experience.

sides: despite the enjoyment of the postmodern intellectual game she plays in *Possession* she is unwilling to negate the existence of the coherent self. She restores this old-fashioned concept into the fragmented postmodern world of *Possession*, which is the basic condition of any *Bildung* and, in this way, any quest for origins.

Romance as Citationality

As an innocent reader I learned to listen, again and again, to texts until they had revealed their whole shape, their articulation, the rhythms of their ideas and feelings. [. . .] As a writer I know very well that a text is all the words that are in it, and not only those words, but the other words that precede it, haunt it, and are echoed in it. (Byatt quoted by Fletcher 146)

As Fletcher notes, the intertextuality that Byatt describes and is excited about is not exactly the kind of postmodern intertextuality that Hutcheon discusses in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. Her intertextuality with which she relates the past to the present lacks any sense of parody or irony.⁵⁹ “Rather than to seek to critique nineteenth-century ideas of the author and the text through ‘parody,’ Byatt aims to renew them through ‘ventriloquism’” (Fletcher 146). Her ventriloquism with which she resuscitates the past is naturally based on citationality, which also characterises the genre she chooses to tell the parallel love stories: the romance. Both the epigraph by Hawthorne at the beginning of *Possession* and Eco’s analysis of the sentence “I love you” call attention to the citational nature of the romance, which, in this way, makes it a perfect genre to relate the past and the present. Byatt is well aware of the iterative and citational nature of “I love you,” which Fletcher calls a “persistently heterosexualized formula of romance” (34). Byatt’s ventriloquism with which she reanimates the love stories in *Possession* heavily relies on her literary erudition, which makes the parallel plotlines and character formation very complicated to decipher. Here I investigate the citational nature of *Possession: A Romance* and point out the various instances when plotlines intersect and the past reinterprets the present and the other way round, as well as the possible sources and models Byatt uses to form the characters in the novel. I claim that citationality concerning both plots and character formation does away with the binary of original/copy,

⁵⁹ Nevertheless, it is important to note that Byatt’s *Possession* makes extensive use of parody and irony when it presents the various biographer figures. However, parody and irony are exclusively applied to describe twentieth-century critic-biographer characters and their extreme views. Byatt never relates to the nineteenth-century poet figures in *Possession* with parody.

which also modifies the original understanding of the romance as a mode of relating to the past.

Byatt creates the very intertext she resuscitates by providing two story lines: the past is to be reread by the present and the present is to be created by the past. A sense of the past is created in a textualised form which is cited by the contemporary plot in the present. “We cannot know the past except through its texts,” asserts Hutcheon (16), which, without ever being mentioned this way, is central to the understanding of *Possession*, which heavily relies on its own textuality and cites texts from outside and inside of this textual mosaic.

“So the Text: it can be it only in its difference [. . .], its reading is semalfactive⁶⁰ [. . .] and nevertheless woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages [. . .], antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony,” claims Barthes when he describes the Text in general as opposed to the Work (“From Work” 1473). This description could fit *Possession* as well because “[i]n *Possession*, message is reinforced by method so that as well as conveying its meaning directly through intrusive narration, the novel reveals its truth through dramatization” (Burgass 47). Hawthorne says in the paragraph Byatt cites as her epigraph that the aim of the romance is to establish a relation between the present and the past. Byatt does the same in her novel when she draws parallels through the particular way she plots the novel, and gives the reader a special sense of the past: the past reads as if it was the present. The contemporary love story of the two twentieth-century protagonists, Maud and Roland is set into motion by past events to the extent that the characters feel haunted by the past, the Victorian love story of Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte. Not only does the reader feel this parallel structuring—a certain kind of citationality—but the characters themselves start to have the strange feeling of being driven by a plot from the past. It is no wonder that citationality inaugurates the contemporary love plot: the draft of a letter—a text to be copied—starts the machinery of citational romances. As Maud and Roland discover the romance of Ash and LaMotte step by step—or rather line by line—their mutual attraction develops into a shy, slowly proceeding romance as well. “Finding themselves in a plot,” Roland goes on thinking, “they might suppose it appropriate to behave as though it was that sort of plot” (Byatt 422). The tentative formulation of this sentence characterises the gradual revelation of the existence of any kind of plot, any governing structure with a possible ending, which goes against Roland’s postmodern expectations. Finding themselves in a plot is a new experience for both contemporary scholars, which can provide them with a sense of coherence they have lacked so far.

⁶⁰ “A neologism—*sema* (Greek) = sign; *semi* (Latin) = half; *factio* (Latin) = making—suggesting that the reading of ‘text’ is largely sign production” (“From Work” 1473).

In the course of the reading process the citationality of the plot—or the presence of parallel plots, as Burgass calls it—gradually unfolds, but the reader, like the characters themselves, is late to recognise the similarities. It is always after encountering the second half of the parallel that the reader retrospectively assigns importance to certain elements. I propose, that in this way, citationality of the plot moves back and forth in time: it gives pattern to the present, and repossesses certain past events of importance and meaning. This back and forth movement of citationality evokes the willing oscillation of Drabble’s female protagonist between her wished-for romance that is modelled on nineteenth-century romances and her actual contemporary experience of the very same love relation. Similarly, in *Possession*, according to Burgass “[t]he point where the plot lines converge and the lives of the protagonists mimic each other most closely is in the middle of the novel (Chapters 13, 14, 15), where the past abuts and intrudes the present” (48).

There is an emphatic parallel between Roland and Maud’s Yorkshire trip and Ash and LaMotte’s visit there:⁶¹ the Viking woman who serves both couples their dishes, the picture of rich vegetation, and even sentences echo, which resembles the quotational quality of Eco’s “I love you.” “They paced well together, though they didn’t notice that; both were energetic striders,” says the narrator about Maud and Roland (Byatt 251). The Victorian couple walked quickly too. ““We walk well together,’ he [Ash] told her [Christabel]. ‘Our paces suit’” (Byatt 280). When Roland and Maud want to spend their time doing something that is unconnected with Ash and LaMotte, “to look at something, with interest, and without layers of meaning”⁶² (Byatt 268), they visit Boggle Hole:

They walked down through flowering lanes. The high hedges were thick with dog-roses, mostly a clear pink, sometimes white, with yellow-gold centres dusty with yellow pollen. The roses were intricately and thickly entwined with rampant honeysuckle, trailing and weaving creamy flowers among the pink and gold. Neither of them had ever seen or smelled such extravagance of wildflowers in so small a place. (Byatt 268)

We are given a detailed description of the place which, for the first sight, seems to carry no relevant meaning, but the last sentence might highlight the speciality of the place: it is different from the ordinary. What makes it special comes a few pages later: the two Victorian

⁶¹ Burgass investigates the three chapters in detail and points out the parallel scenes and sentences with great accuracy. (47-9)

⁶² Maud and Roland’s intention proves to be a naive one as in the citational world of *Possession* there is nothing that is “without layers of meaning.” In addition the parallel Yorkshire trips are the parts in the novel which are citational to the greatest extent with the utmost extreme of analepsis in Chapter 15.

poets have also visited the place. The description of the vegetation here is a reminiscent of the previous description: “They had come across summer meadows and down narrow lanes between tall hedges thick with dog-roses, intricately entwined with creamy honeysuckle [. . .]” (Byatt 286).

While Ash and Christabel are on their intended “honeymoon” Roland and Maud’s trip takes on a honeymooning aspect, which provides a special atmosphere for both trips. Both couples are cautious: the former to pretend to have a legal relationship, Christabel brings even a ring to pretend to be married; the latter to deny even the illusion of any kind of emotional entanglement.

Another instance of seducing the reader is found in Chapter 15 which begins with an analepsis, a narrative movement back in time narrated as present and not motivated by memory. “The man and the woman sat opposite each other in the railway carriage,” says the observer and completely confuses the reader, who is unaware of the narrative shift (273). Who is the man? Who is the woman? When is the scene set? I decidedly use the term observer instead of narrator to name the person who supplies information about the two travellers on a Yorkshire train in 1859 because it is not clear who is talking. The text creates the illusion as if a fellow traveller was describing the couple who has no knowledge of their past and future. This lack of information makes me differentiate the speaker as “observer” because he/she does not have the kind of omniscience as the narrator assumes in some other parts of the novel. As the description of the the man and the woman proceeds the carefully positioned details gradually reveal the identity of the couple: they are Ash and Christabel. Byatt comments on this narrative shift as follows:

Fowles said that the nineteenth-century narrator was assuming the omniscience of a god. I think rather the opposite is the case—this kind of fictive narration can creep closer to the feelings and inner life of characters—as well as providing a Greek chorus—than any first person mimicry. In *Possession* I used this kind of narrator deliberately three times in the historical narrative⁶³—always to tell what the historians and biographers of my fiction never discovered, always to heighten the reader’s imaginative entry into the world of the text. (quoted by Fletcher 145)

Significantly, Byatt uses analepsis to present scenes that are accessible to the reader only and lie out of reach of any of the biographer characters in the novel, a method that has more

⁶³ Besides Chapter 15, Byatt uses this kind of narration when she presents the reader with Ellen Ash’s honeymoon experience, and in the Postscript 1868.

theoretical relevance than it seems for the first sight. By the use of this narrative technique Byatt proposes that fiction can provide the reader with a kind of imaginative truth that offers more than the fact-based one.

Analepsis is a good method to make the past come alive, which is a major characteristic of the genre of the romance in Byatt's understanding. The reader is presented with the same impression as Roland and Maud during their literary investigation: they feel haunted by the past as if it gained new vigour in their own lives; and the reader reads the past as the fictional present of these chapters. Time shifts blur the linearity of chronology: the present becomes the reflection of the past, but the narrative technique makes these distinctions—binaries, perhaps—invalid categories through analepsis.⁶⁴ In this way, analepsis takes the citationality of plots to the extreme, to an extent that it is no longer clear what the original and what the copy is and subverts any hierarchy of the two. This very nature of citational plots is further emphasised by the fact that Roland and Maud's Yorkshire trip is presented before that of Ash and Christabel, and the reader is confused by the order of relevant details: although the description of the past event follows the description of the present it should be read the other way round to reconstruct chronology. However, the progression of time—the myth of history—is another illusion that Byatt highlights here, one of the major tenets of the *Bildungsroman* as well that she contests. In this way, temporal cyclicity, citationality, the loss of linearity and chronological order reinforce the postmodern experience and give a new insight into the generic presuppositions as well. (Van Brunt 2-3)

As opposed to Drabble's *The Waterfall*, where citationality does not extend over the limits of the plot, Byatt applies citationality in character formation besides the interwoven plot lines. In Drabble's text though the female protagonist claims to be haunted by the fictitious heroines of the nineteenth-century intertexts, the fictional foremothers influence only the formation of the plot, especially that of the wished-for romance. The identity of the two Victorian poets in *Possession*, however,—Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte—is a clear example of this artistic method. In the course of reading the obvious question occurs to the—either uninitiated or professional—reader: who are these poets? Are they real ones under false names? Are they fictitious ones? The answer is yes to both questions. Most critics agree on the fact that both poet characters must have been modelled on Victorian poets. Belsey hints at Tennyson and Browning as possible models for Ash, and “Christabel LaMotte is obviously modelled on Christina Rossetti—except that she barely resembles her in any significant way” (*Desire* 85). The second half of Belsey's sentence is the key to Byatt's way of

⁶⁴ Though *The Waterfall* heavily relies on a textualised sense of the past it never applies the technique of analepsis, and, for this reason, Drabble's novel retains the hierarchy of the original and the copy.

characterisation: she draws her characters in a way that they both resemble and differ from any real life models. At this point the critics' task starts to resemble the fictional biographer figures' unsuccessful quests because just as they are unable to locate the origin of meaning so are contemporary literary critics at a loss to find the lost referent of these textualised poet figures.

The only thing for sure is that Christabel LaMotte gets her name from Coleridge's poem "Christabel," which primarily reinforces the romantic features of the character. It is Ash who first suggests the obvious link between the two Christabels: "was it [Christabel LaMotte's father] who named you and was that for Coleridge's heroine of his unfinished poem?" (Byatt 175). LaMotte knows no more about her own naming than Ash himself except that Coleridge, the poet commented on the inheritance of the name Christabel.

I believe he said 'It is a beautiful name and will I trust not be a name of ill omen.' Now this is all the Clue I have to the end of the poem *Christabel*—that its heroine was destined for tribulation—which is not hard to see—though how she might obtain Happiness thereafter is harder, if not Impossible. (Byatt 179)⁶⁵

According to Katherine Lesch's interpretation

[i]n Coleridge's poem, Christabel is possessed of the spirit of Geraldine, who symbolises the destructive and regenerative power of knowledge [. . .] and momentarily erases Christabel's utterance. Geraldine's presence usurps Christabel's narrative space. At the same time, Coleridge portrays Geraldine as a nurturing presence [. . .]. After the moment of self-obliteration has passed, Christabel finds that she has acquired the knowledge of wholeness. (18)

Similarly, Byatt's Christabel is possessed by Ash, who destroys Christabel's self-preservation and, at the same time, regenerates her knowledge of the world through his own multiple interests and their sexual intercourse, and awakens Christabel to a sense of wholeness, which naturally carries the inheritance of pain.

Apart from this, though, there are no clear parallel points between the two stories, a strange fact which makes this textual relationship look more like a riddle. The heroine of Coleridge's *Christabel* (1801) is a "lovely lady [. . .]/ whom her father loves so well" (23-4)

⁶⁵ At the end of her relationship with Ash LaMotte refers to Coleridge's poem in her undelivered letter which reinforces the citational nature of her name and evokes the unknown end of Coleridge's heroine as well. (Byatt 501)

goes to the wood late at night and finds Lady Geraldine in distress. She takes the lady home and shares her coach with her for the night to introduce her to her father, Sir Leoline in the morning. Lady Geraldine turns out to be the daughter of the father's long forgotten friend. Lady Geraldine, although "drest in a silken robe of white" (59) is under no condition that naïve maid she appears for the first sight as the bard's dream foreshadows:

For in my sleep I saw that dove,
That gentle bird, whom thou dost love,
And call'st by thy daughter's name – [. . .]
And in my dream methought I went
To search out what might there be found;
And what the sweet bird's trouble meant,
That thus lay fluttering on the ground. [. . .]
When lo! I saw a bright green snake
Coiled around its wings and neck. (531-33, 541-4, 549-50)

As the story proceeds it becomes more and more obvious that Christabel is the dove and Lady Geraldine is the snake, but as the poem is unfinished—it consists of only two parts—its ending and Christabel's almost impossible but predicted happiness remains in complete uncertainty.

However obvious it is to link Christabel's figure to Coleridge's poem, her character remains one of the most complex riddles in the novel, and in my view, even to critics since most of them fail to point out any textual origin of the figure of Christabel. They even avoid references to Coleridge's poem although even the fictional characters mention it as a point of origin. As a kind of suppletory interpretation in "I am my own riddle"—A.S. Byatt's *Christabel LaMotte: Emily Dickinson and Melusina* Nancy Chinn gives a detailed analysis of Christabel's figure. Her thesis is that the most possible model for Christabel must have been Emily Dickinson, the American female poet, however, she herself admits that a most obvious match would be Christina Rossetti or even Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

The last suggestion is based on the widely held assumption that Ash is modelled on Browning. But Browning's wife could not serve as a model for Christabel⁶⁶ since "neither her life nor her poetics resembles Elizabeth Barrett's" (Chinn 1). According to Nancy Chinn, Christina Rossetti served as the original model for LaMotte in the beginning. After reading

⁶⁶ However, Chinn claims, Byatt confuses her readers by giving Christabel some characteristics in common with Barrett Browning like her hair. (Chinn 13)

Ash's draft letters Roland is puzzled: he cannot identify either "the grand Fairy Topic" or the figure of the "illustrious Father" (Byatt 6), not to mention the identity of the unknown lady. Roland's first idea is Christina Rossetti. Although "[h]e was not sure that Miss Rossetti would have approved of Ash's theology, or of his sexual psychology" (Byatt 7), it is possible to identify "the grand Fairy Topic" with "Goblin Market" and the "illustrious Father" with the poet and professor Gabriele Rossetti. Like Christabel's tales Rossetti's *Poems for Children* have "sinister and morbid qualities," and primarily are not suitable for children. (Burgass 52) In addition, "Christabel, as she is described in the faded photograph examined by Roland and Maud, also has something of the look favoured by the Pre-Raphaelites" (Burgass 52). In an interview to *New York Times* Byatt admitted that she began writing the novel with idea of basing LaMotte on Christina Rossetti, "[b]ut [she] was too Christian, too self-destructive [. . .] I wanted someone tougher. So I ended up with what I think is the greatest woman poet ever, Emily Dickinson. Her sounds, her words, the rhythm of her language" (quoted by Chinn 1).

Chinn claims that not only their looks prove that Dickinson was the model for LaMotte (3), but their poetic languages are very closely related too. Byatt includes twenty-one lyric poems "by" LaMotte in *Possession* which constitutes the greatest insight to her character.

Seeing a LaMotte poem out of the context of *Possession*, many students of literature would probably identify Dickinson as its author. [. . .] LaMotte, like Dickinson, does not give [her poems] titles. The poem ["The Thicket is Thorny" (Byatt 35)] reflects Dickinson's frequent use of quatrains as well as her unnecessary capitals. These characteristics [. . .] occur throughout Christabel LaMotte's lyrics. Also the meter of most of LaMotte's lyrics, like Dickinson's, is derived from English hymns, usually iambic or trochaic. Dickinson's characteristic dash does not appear until the ninth selection, "All day snow fell" [(Byatt 128)], but recurs throughout the remaining eleven selections and dominates the punctuation of the letters between LaMotte and Ash. (Chinn 3)

All these proofs and several related lines identified by Chinn (4) verify that the most possible model for Christabel LaMotte was Emily Dickinson. In addition, both poets—the real and the fictional—eagerly apply riddles. LaMotte's poem "Who are you?" (Byatt 54) echoes Dickinson's "I'm Nobody, who are you?" (288) in Chinn's view. Given her unstable sense of self, it is not by chance that this is the first poem by LaMotte that Maud learns by heart as a child. When Maud tells Roland about the beginning of her academic career right after he has

read this poem she mentions Emily Dickinson's "voluntary confinement" (Byatt 54); this is the only time the American poet's name appears in the novel.

However, Christabel is not a simple copy of Emily Dickinson: her character is more complex and intricately interwoven with subtle literary allusions. In one of his letters Randolph Henry Ash asks Christabel: "Could the Lady of Shalott have written *Melusina* in her barred and moated Tower?" (Byatt 188) If the reader gets to the end of the novel where Christabel in her undelivered letter calls herself "an old witch in a turret" (Byatt 500), s/he would possibly say yes to Ash's question. By the end of the story Christabel becomes an old Lady of Shalott. Previously—before knowing Ash—she was a true Lady of Shalott in her confinement, weaving her "magic web" (38), and knowing the world only from its reflections, like Tennyson's lady in his suggestive, atmospheric poem. Actually, it is Christabel who first offers the link between the Lady of Shalott and her own way of life in one of her first letters to Ash:

I have chosen a Way – dear Friend – I must hold to it. Think of me if you will as the Lady of Shalott – with a Narrower Wisdom – who chooses not the Gulp of outside Air and the chilly river-journey deathwards – but who chooses to watch diligently the bright colours of her Web – to ply an industrious shuttle – to make – something – to close the Shutters and the Peephole too – (Byatt 187)

The lady is cursed to stay in confinement, but when she looked at Sir Lancelot and "left the web, she left the room" (109), her mirror "crack'd from side to side" (115). Right at the moment of getting to know the world her web flies out and floats wide, like Christabel's *Melusina* and Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, which mark the end of both female poets' literary creativity. Being a female artist brings about difficulties: isolation as a necessary(?) condition of creativity, the destructive(?) effect of entry into the world outside the tower—Christabel's life at Bethany—and its successive end in artistic silence. Choosing life brings about the death of her art, and sometimes the death of the poet is inevitable as well. "The Lady of Shalott" suggests a medieval metaphor for all these problems of the female artist, and, at the same time, provides another citational link between Christabel LaMotte and other female writers who lived a secluded life.⁶⁷ However, Christabel LaMotte differs from Emily Dickinson in

⁶⁷ When visiting Seal Court—LaMotte's final living place—the scenery reminds Roland of "The Lady of Shalott." "The worlds of Lincolnshire are a small surprise. Tennyson grew up in one of their tight twisting valleys. From them he made the cornfields of immortal Camelot.

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye
That clothe the world and meet the sky.

one important aspect: she is a mother while the American poet was not. Motherhood connects LaMotte with the protagonist of her great epic, *Melusina*, a symbolic figure to whom I will devote a longer analysis in the following.

The other Victorian poet in *Possession*, Randolph Henry Ash is no less simple a character than Christabel. Critics agree that Ash bears resemblance mostly to Browning (Belsey, *Desire* 85; Chinn 1; Burgass 52), which is most apparently proved by his poetry. Browning is best known for his dramatic monologues and his “customary subject matter was typically Victorian: faith and doubt, good and evil, the function of the artist” (Burgass 52). However, there is also something of Tennyson in Ash, “as Tennyson’s studies of geological, astronomical and biological literature fed into his poetic treatment of contemporary topics” (Burgass 52).

Here I am focusing on the Browning-Ash resemblance that I propose to be the major source of Ash’s citationality and intend to prove its validity by examining Ash’s poetry in detail. In his volume on contemporary mask lyrics and dramatic monologues István Rác highlights three basic characteristics of the dramatic monologue, a genre made popular by Browning. Firstly, the speaker of the poem assumes a distinct fictional identity, secondly, the genre expects the reader not to mistake the world presented in the poem for the objective outside world, and finally, the genre can derive its topic from anywhere. (Rác 7) Neither the speaker, nor the setting is symbolic in dramatic monologues, and the reader gradually unravels the aims of the speaker as the poem proceeds. The speaker never addresses the reader directly, but talks to another fictional character whose words cannot be heard or read. In this way the dramatic monologue can be understood as one half of a dialogue. (Rác 17) As opposed to mask lyrics, syntax and grammar are not violated in dramatic monologues, ideas are articulated in correct grammatical sentences by a speaker whose personality does not change in the course of the poem. (Rác 18) Besides dramatic qualities the genre has epic features as well: there is a fragmented narrative line in the background whose gaps heighten the lyrical intensity of the text, a feature, according to Rác, which has become especially important since Browning. (37) In this way, the kind of ventriloquism that characterises Ash’s poetry—assuming various identities poem by poem—can find its most genuine realisation in the genre of the dramatic monologue.

Byatt’s most clear dramatic monologue in *Possession*, naturally “written by” Ash himself, is *Swammerdam*, and is about the ideas of a seventeenth-century microscopist who “muses on the relation between God and nature” (Burgass 44). Ash’s poem is inspired by his own interest in his marine specimens confined in pudding bowls, and is informed by the

Roland saw immediately that the word ‘meet’ was precise and surprising, not vague” (Byatt 68).

emerging debate between Christianity and Darwin's theory of evolution and clearly exemplifies the Victorian quest for origins, which is parodied by the various false quests of the several contemporary biographer figures in the novel. The poem grasps this critical moment of fragmentation, and presents the arguments of the old and a new world view.

Swammerdam, a German born scientist is just completing his last will at the age of forty-three in March, 1680 and provides a conclusion-like summary of his views. He "shall be hatched tonight" (7), and the nearness of death makes him consider his life: he disposes "The types of Nature's Bible, ranged in ranks / To show the secrets of her cunning hand" (24-5). The very expression—paradoxical in itself—Ash-Byatt uses, "Nature's Bible" highlights the critical moment in human culture condensing it into this oxymoron-like metaphor. On the one hand, Swammerdam investigates the wonders of nature, "Well-nigh three thousand winged or creeping things" (21), but on the other hand, puts his life in the hand of God and "[. . .] trusting [. . .] Him, I turn my face / To the bare wall, and leave this world of things/For the No-thing [. . .]" (45-7). God is the "No-thing" that exists only in the negative in the age of the Enlightenment, however his being a "No-thing" with a capital N describes him as powerful and almighty as in the positive. Swammerdam can read "Nature's Bible" in its minute details:

That glass of water you hold to my lips,
Had I my lenses, would reveal to us
Not limpid clarity as we suppose—
Pure water—but a seething, striving horde
Of animalcules lashing dragon-tails
Propelled by springs and coils and hairlike fronds
Like whales athwart the oceans of the globe. (196-203)

As a man of the Enlightenment period Swammerdam thinks that it was God who gave him his skills to analyse nature and provide a taxonomy of its creatures (176-85), however, by the time he completes his last will he realises man's—and, naturally, his own—limits:

It was one step, I say, to displace Man
From the just centre of the sum of things—
But quite another step to strike at God
Who made us as we are, so fearfully
And wonderfully made our intellects,
Our tireless quest to *know*, but also made

Our finitude, within His Mystery,
His soft, dark, infinite space, wherein we rest
When all our questions finish and our brain
Dies into weeping, as my own taxed mind
Died in dissecting the Ephemera. (281-91)

Swammerdam realises that science, the understanding of evolution does not mean mastery over life, thus God cannot be eliminated from the workings of nature however tempting it seems. Here, Ash dramatises his own uncertainties for which purpose he applies Browning's favourite genre, a feature which makes him resemble the nineteenth-century poet to such an extent that it results in his own citationality. In addition, the genre of the dramatic monologue enables Ash to textualise his own citationality and shape it in an enunciative situation, as one half of a dialogue, which strongly tints his poetic activity with poststructuralist linguistic theory.

Citationality determines the characters of the contemporary protagonists of *Possession* as well. Both Belsey and Burgass suggest that Maud Bailey is "Tennyson's Maud" (*Desire* 85; Burgass 27), which is made even more obvious by the fact that she works at the top of Tennyson Tower. What do Maud Bailey and Tennyson's Maud have in common? In Tennyson's favourite monodrama the reader confronts the thoughts of the unnamed speaker of the poem who suffers from hereditary madness, who is restored to life by the love of Maud.

It was love, but not love in itself alone, as an emotion, an inward experience, a selfish possession, that he was revealing. It was love as a vital force, love as part of life, love as an influence,—nay, the influence which rescues the soul from the prison, or the madhouse, of self, and leads to the larger, saner existence. This was the theme of 'Maud'. (Robson 165)

This vital force of love reminds the reader of *Possession* more of LaMotte and Ash's relationship than to Maud and Roland's. However, Maud's figure owes many of its characteristics to Tennyson's heroine. "[T]he singular beauty of Maud" (67) is presented only through the perceptions of the speaker, we never encounter Maud: "she has neither savor nor salt/But a cold clear-cut face" (78-9), she is "[p]erfectly beautiful" (80) and "[f]aultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null" (82). She is "[p]ale with the golden beam of an eyelash dead on her cheek" (90) and her "smile [is] as sunny as cold" (213). Maud Bailey has "perfectly regular features" (Byatt 57) she is "a beautiful woman" (Byatt 424) even in

Roland's opinion, who first finds her arrogant and sometimes patronising. Maud herself quotes Tennyson's line: "Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null" (Byatt 506) and while Tennyson's Maud is proud of her beauty (117-8), Maud Bailey tries to hide it as a visible proof of her femininity.

Like Tennyson's hero and heroine, Roland and Maud are not of the same social standing either:

[. . .] in some outdated English social system of class, which he [Roland] did not believe in, but felt obscurely working and gripping him, Maud was Country, and he was urban lower-middle-class, in some places more, in some places less acceptable than Maud, but in almost all incompatible. (Byatt 424-5)

Nevertheless, Tennyson's characters are destined to each other by the agreement of their fathers:

That Maud's dark father and mine
Had bound us one to the other,
Betrothed us over their wine,
On the day when Maud was born;
Seal'd her mine from her first sweet breath!
Mine, mine by a right, from birth till death!
Mine, mine—our fathers have sworn! (720-6)

As if their bond were independent of their own will, as if they were driven towards each other by some unknown force, as Maud Bailey and Roland are drawn to each other by the love story of the Romantic poets; a force that Roland calls a plot, their intertextualised fate.

The two Mauds have something else in common: their homes. When Roland first enters Maud Bailey's home he feels "wakeful and misplaced, as if he was in an art gallery or a surgeon's waiting-room" (Byatt 51):

Maud's living room was not what might have been expected of a Victorian scholar. It was bright white, paint, lamps and dining-table; the carpet was Berber off-white. The things in this room were brilliantly coloured in every colour, peacock, crimson, sunflower, deep rose, nothing pale or pastel. Alcoves beside the

fireplace held a collection of spotlight glass, bottles, flasks, paperweights. (Byatt 51)⁶⁸

Her strange-looking and artistically lit room evokes Tennyson's Maud's room:

Maud's own little oak room—
Which Maud, like a precious stone
Set in the heart of all carven gloom,
Lights with herself, when alone
She sits by her music and books [. . .] (497-501)

Tennyson's Maud in her room is like one precious piece in Maud Bailey's collection, like a spotlight colourful stone.

With all these similarities, however, one should be conscious of the fact that Byatt plays against the readers expectations several times in her novel. If the reader expects more emphatic similarities between the two female characters, s/he is mistaken: the two plots do not go hand in hand, which is not a surprise even if one considers Maud Bailey's impression that she is taken for her literary namesake. Nevertheless, she resembles her in many aspects even if she fights against this misconception.

Maud Bailey willingly hides her beauty although she has as perfect looks as Tennyson's Maud: she consciously hides her most precious attribute, her wonderful hair in strange looking "too-rich head-gear" (Byatt 39). When observing her "perfectly regular features" (Byatt 57) in the mirror she recalls Fergus quoting Yeats⁶⁹ to her:

Never shall a young man
Thrown into despair
By those great honey-coloured
Ramparts at your ear
Love you for yourself alone
And not your yellow hair. (Byatt 57)

⁶⁸ Felicity Rose suggests that Maud's room resembles Christabel's egg with its whiteness and clear-cut clarity. (21)

⁶⁹ Since Yeats is quoted in the novel with reference to Maud the figure of Maud Gonne is also evoked by these references as Belsey suggests. (*Desire* 85)

Fergus dares Maud to grow her strange coloured hair till their affair lasts, and afterwards Maud hides it as a proof of her femininity which was provoked into existence by Fergus and which now she is ashamed of, because Maud still believes in what the consecutive lines of Yeats's poem "For Anne Gregory" says:

'But I can get a hair-dye
And set such colour there,
Brown, or black, or carrot,
That young men in despair
May love me for myself alone
And not my yellow hair.' (7-12)

The bad spell is broken when as their romance invisibly proceeds Roland asks Maud once to untie her hair, "I'm not making a pass. You know that. I just wanted to see it let out once. I know you will know I'm telling the truth" (Byatt 272). When her hair flows freely in the air Maud regains her femininity and shares this intimate moment with Roland:

She began slowly to undo, with unweaving fingers, the long thick braids. Roland watched, intently. There was a final moment when six thick strands, twice three, lay still and formed over her shoulders. And then she put down her head and shook it from side to side, and the heavy hair flew up, and the air got into it. Her long neck bowed, she shook her head faster and faster, and Roland saw the light rush towards it and glitter on it, the whirling mass, and Maud inside it saw a moving sea of gold lines, waving, and closed her eyes and saw scarlet blood. (Byatt 272)

Maud's vision of the waving sea of her golden hair and that of scarlet blood recalls traditional images of femininity and female sexual pleasure, just as in *The Waterfall*, which reinforces the reader's first impression that Maud's attitude towards her own magnificent hair has to do with her self-image as a woman.

As it is expected not only Maud is based on literary antecedents but Roland, her contemporary researcher hero as well. Although most critics seem to be unwilling to elaborate on his literary antecedents in detail,⁷⁰ and his character seems to be the most neglected one in

⁷⁰ Both Belsey and Burgass devote only a short list to Roland's probable literary antecedents and fail to give any detailed reference. "Roland is the heir to Browning's questing Childe Roland, himself a descendant of the fairy-tale hero who rescues his sister from the Dark Tower of Elfland, but also, perhaps, to the medieval hero who had a *Chanson* written for him" (Belsey, *Desire* 85). "The name Roland renders back to the medieval French

all the essays, it is generally accepted that his name is telling of his function in the story: Roland has been the name of the prototypical hero since the Middle Ages. (Burgass 28, Belsey, *Desire* 85) *La Chanson de Roland* has made this name laden with heroism since the 11th century Oxford Manuscript of the French epic that tells the story of Charlemagne's favourite knight whose death marks the king's glorious victory over the Saracens. Although the battle is actually fought between the French and the Saracens it is finally portrayed as a spiritual battle between Good and Evil—Christians and Heathens—with some apocalyptic qualities. The hero of the medieval *chanson de geste* proves to be Charlemagne's most perfect knight, who is betrothed to Aude—homophonic with Maud. (Burgass 28) Roland is loyal to the king till his last breath, and his death is brought about only by treason. In the last crucial moment he blows his horn—the Oliphant—to call Charlemagne, then perseveres till the very end and his death is worthy of a perfect knight: he lies down under a great pine tree facing the enemy and prays for forgiveness when the angels take his soul to heaven. The unknown author saves Roland from an unworthy death from the enemy: he dies as a result of his gigantic blow of his horn.

In *Possession*, though Roland is the potential hero, he tends to behave in a different way: he hardly ever shows heroic qualities in the true sense of the word, however, finally he manages to win the hand of his beloved lady. His willingly unheroic behaviour makes him a modern hero, in addition, his task is no longer fighting a battle but something radically different: his quest for knowledge and love requires other qualities than heroism, and by the end Roland seems to win both “battles.” However, with his literary antecedent in the background Roland Michell is always seen from two different angles: on the one hand, he is considered the hero in his own right, but on the other hand, he is presented as the twentieth-century distorted image of his medieval forefather. In this double light Roland's actions cast a double shadow on the story: from the very beginning his citationality is taken for granted.

In addition, Roland's name carries another literary allusion: in Browning's “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” Childe Roland is the questing hero, “a descendant to of the fairy-tale hero who rescues his sister from the Dark Tower of Elfland” (Belsey, *Desire* 85). At the end of his demanding journey through a desolate plain he catches sight of “The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart, / Built of brown stone, without counterpart / In the whole world” (182-4). When he sees his peers, the other lost adventurers, “Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set, / And blew. ‘Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came’” (203-4). Childe

Chanson de Roland, whose hero is betrothed to the homophonic Aude and to Browning's “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came”, and hence linked to the “Childe” in Christabel's story “The Threshold”, claims Burgass (28). Neither critic deepens their insights into any of the possible literary sources, which makes Roland the most dubious character in the novel besides Ash himself, whose critical introduction seems as uncertain as that of Roland.

Roland's quest leads through an unknown place, as Roland Michell ventures out on a "mission" to reach a goal he has never attempted before: to have something personal in his academic and emotional life—Ash's letter and Maud and the knowledge related to both.

As both Belsey and Burgass point out, Roland must have part of his literary origins in Christabel LaMotte's tale "The Threshold." At first sight, the tale has nothing to do either with Roland Michell or Childe Roland since the main story line seemingly does not fit into the plot of *Possession*. However, the minute, and seemingly superfluous, details reveal its connections to the novel. The Childe in Christabel's tale is sent on a quest by his father who told him "to keep boldly along the track, deviating neither to right nor left, though creatures might call and beckon him enticingly, and wonderful lights might be seen from time to time, for this was an enchanted country" (Byatt 150). Obeying his father's guidance the Childe carries out his mission without being distracted from his goal for a minute. Just like Roland who, following the clues provided by Randolph Henry Ash, his literary (fore)father, never loses sight of his goal: to find out what Ash wants him to discover. Just as the Childe Roland "was charged by his father with a mission, which he might not reveal in that place" (Byatt 152) Roland refuses to reveal his quest to any of the people in his environment but keeps following the route he has been initiated into.

The Childe meets three beautiful ladies after reaching "a building, or structure, with huge gateposts and heavy roofing stone and a stone to mark a threshold" (Byatt 151). He is attracted to both the golden and the silver ladies who offer him either the sun or the moon respectively, but he chooses the third one, who is "dull behind these two" (Byatt 152), because she offers the Herb of Rest.

And then the heart of the Childe was wrung indeed, for it was the Herb of rest which his father so desired him to bring home, to, as only that might, his long agony. And the Childe's heart rebelled a little, for he was loath to abandon the rich brightness of the golden dame, or the lovely clarity of the silver one, for the softness and quiet and downcast eyes of this half-invisible third. (Byatt 154-5)

When he reveals his decision the third lady looks at him with her beautiful eyes, which LaMotte is hardly capable to describe,⁷¹ the Childe is lost in these eyes⁷² forever. The lady

⁷¹ "What can I say of her eyes, save that he looked into them and was lost and no more saw the heath, nor the other two bright creatures turning and turning in their cages of light, nor yet his own trusty steed who had come with him prancing and saddle-sore to the known world's end? If I were to attempt this description—but no, I cannot—yet I must for I am your chronicler, bound to recount to you what?" (155)

⁷² The lady's magnificent eyes and her enchanting powers evoke Keats's poem, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," in which the lady puts the knight under a magic spell with her wild eyes and lulling singing. Keats's poem is

draws him “over and under the threshold of the standing stones” (Byatt 155) and takes him to a beautiful country which, although not stated, seems to be an enchanted land with unusual but beautiful lights.

Crossing the threshold undoubtedly marks the beginning of an initiation process where the hero is led by a lady who reveals her beauty after being chosen. This notably foreshadows Roland and Maud’s story, who enter an unknown phase of life with the possible promise of a happy ending, just as in romances, when they finally claim each other. In the tale the hero cannot get the Herb of Rest for his father alone; just as Roland cannot find the goal pointed out by Ash without Maud’s help. It is them together who can guarantee his peace: Ash’s Herb of Rest is the clarification of the unknown aspect of his life, his relation to LaMotte, and the last discovery of their descendant, Maud. By their discovery Ash can rest in peace: his greatest uncertainty in life is settled after his death, which provides his final rest in peace, and a happy ending for his descendants, Maud in the legal sense, and Roland, in the artistic sense, as well.

There is another important element in this tale that is relevant to the whole novel: a strong sense of plot. Although the Childe has inclination to choose either the first or the second lady, he chooses the third one because, as the narrator remarks, “[a]nd you know, and I know, do we not dear children, that he must always choose this last, and the laden casket, for wisdom in all tales tells us this, and the last sister is always the true choice, is she not?” (Byatt 155) And further on the narrator comments, “[a]nd one day we will write it otherwise, that he would not come, that he stayed, or chose the sparkling ones, or went out again onto the moors to live free of fate, if such can be. But you must know now, that it turned out as it must turn out, must you not? Such is the power of necessity in tales” (Byatt 155). LaMotte/Byatt creates and foreshadows the inevitable nature of action in the novel: story is caught in a plot, life follows a course of prearranged fate, citationality brings about events of a past relived in the present for characters whose identity is based on citationality as well. This characteristic establishes a peculiar sense of the past, a feeling that it is reanimated in the present, a mode of relating the past and the present, which besides its thematic focus on love makes *Possession* into a romance.

referred to at the end of the novel, when Ash meets his daughter and calls Christabel the “Belle Dame Sans Merci” in his message to her (Byatt 510). This frame-like reference to Keats’s poem may constitute another citational relation between a literary text from the Romantic period, Ash and Roland. In addition, Alban relates “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” with the figure of Melusina in her pitiless form, who “tends to seduce men and steal them away from this world into the other world”, which makes this thematic network even stronger. (Alban 8, 11)

Melusina's Story as Citational Romance and *Bildungsroman*

Melusina is the central female figure in *Possession*: her narrativised life story is a genuine example of citationality as its elements surface both in Christabel's and Maud's lives. She is a creative female figure who experiences love, motherhood and loss in her life, all of them resonating in the parallel life stories of Christabel and Maud. Her romantic entanglement allows the reader to interpret her story as a romance, though a tragic one, and, at the same time, see it as a female *Bildungsroman*. In this analysis I intend to point out the romance and *Bildung* elements in the Melusina story and highlight her citational importance that all make her the most powerful and meaningful female figure in *Possession*. I also claim that by positioning Melusina as the central female figure in her novel, Byatt brings the questions of female artistic creativity to the front and allows the reader to read *Possession* as a possible female *Künstlerroman*. In this way, this generic quality can add an important factor to the literary sisterhood of *Possession* and *The Waterfall* as both novels can be read as female *Künstlerromans*. To highlight the citational nature of Melusina I trace a complex network of allusions that establish a strong relationship between Melusina, Christabel and Maud by their recurrent attributes, and I claim that this citationality of the female characters compose a cyclical story of a powerful female figure first dispossessed then repossessed, which Byatt completes in the Melusina-Christabel-Maud cycle. I investigate the generic potentials of the romance, the *Bildungsroman* and the female *Künstlerroman* in this cycle as well, and claim that this citational, cyclical female story starts with the romance, turns into a female *Künstlerroman* and a *Bildungsroman*, and finally ends with the romance, thus the cycle is completed concerning not only citationality but genres as well. As a result of this Byatt proposes another possible synthesis of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*.

Byatt builds her imaginative world on this mythic and legendary tradition, and with her insights into Melusine and her hints at a preceding goddess, she creates liberated female characters. Although the goddess has been dispossessed, Byatt actually creates a circle of repossession by telling this tale in her aptly named novel *Possession*. [. . .] She thus utilizes the self-sufficient serpent-dragon Melusine in her novel as offering a liberating role for women, and as no less than the latest expression of the great goddess who was once widely worshipped, but who is shown as monstrous and terrifying on losing her dominion. (Alban 8)

Citatoriality is definitely present in Christabel LaMotte's epic, *The Fairy Melusina*, which functions both as her greatest artistic achievement and self-image throughout the novel. LaMotte bases her poem on the medieval legendary figure well-known not only in France, but also in present-day Germany and Luxemburg. The Melusina stories vary from one geographical area to another but what all versions have in common is that Melusina is a fairy who regularly transforms into either a snake or a mermaid. In Germany her legend is either related to Baden or the Harz area and she is considered not only a water fairy but a mountain and forest sprite as well. In Luxemburg she is said to have been the wife of Count Sigfried, the founder of Luxemburg, and today her memory is cherished by an annual spectacular Melusina show and a number of restaurants, coffee bars and even discos bear her name as Melusina, Melusine or Meluxina.

However widespread these two versions are Christabel/Byatt bases her epic on the French version of the legend that belonged to the oral tradition of western France. (Chinn 6) In her elaborate essay Chinn explores the origins of the Melusina story and claims that the "name of Melusina may have come from the cult of the goddess Lucina or a Mater Luciana" for whom Duke the Berry's castle, Lucignan, was named. (6) The duke was the brother of Charles V and in 1392 he commissioned Jean d'Arras to write the history of both Lusignan and Melusina, who founded the lineage of the former. Between 1387-93 D'Arras's was the first to write the story in Latin prose, which was soon followed by the French version in verse. (Chinn 6; Alban 16) On the basis of these two medieval versions Chinn summarises Melusina's story which I complete with some details relevant to LaMotte's epic along Thomas Keightley's accounts.

Elinas, the King of Albania goes hunting to divert his feelings for her late first wife. One day he goes to a fountain to quench his thirst where he finds a beautiful woman, Presine or Pressina, singing. Instantly enchanted both by her beauty and singing he asks her to marry him. Presine consents provided that he never visits her at the time of her labour. She bears three daughters: Melusina, Melior and Palatina or Palestine. Elinas' son from his first marriage hastens to inform his father about the birth of the sisters, and the king rushes to the chamber of the queen, and, thus, breaks his promise. Presine responds by taking her daughters to the Lost Isle, Avalon.

Later on she tells her daughters about their father's sin, and at the age of fifteen the sisters conceive a plot against their father to take revenge on their mother's behalf. They lock their father in a big mountain, but Presine, who is still in love with Elinas, punishes her daughters, and Melusina, the most responsible one, gets enchanted. She must turn into a serpent from the waist downwards every Saturday till she should meet a man who would

marry her under the condition of never seeing her on Saturdays and not breaking his promise. By this marriage she would become mortal, but if her husband ever sees her in a serpent form her enchantment will be renewed.

Melusina finds her potential liberator in Raimondin or Raymond, who is the nephew of the Count of Poitiers, whom he has accidentally killed during a boar hunt. In the forest of Colombiers Raimondin arrives at the Fountain of Thirst or Fountain of Fays to quench his thirst and finds Melusina there. Her beauty and her manners quickly win his love and they get married soon. Melusina gets his oath that he will never see her on Saturdays and promises him great wealth. Melusina builds the Castle of Lucignan not far from the fountain where they first met, and also erects the castle of LaRoche and several other places. Melusina supports her husband in everything from land clearance to castle building and bears him ten sons. “She builds and creates, establishing the Lusignan dynasty and founding her religious and civic works, as well as enriching all with her agricultural bounty, her infrastructures, and her endless resources. A powerful and civilising life force, many victories are won under her auspices” (Alban 281). All of her sons have disfiguring marks on their faces—“each with a stamp of otherworldliness, like the children of mother earth, powerful and uncontrollable forces. Their blemishes connect them to forces both divine and diabolical, showing the potential of this forceful deity to achieve her will” (Alban 281).

Raimondin’s brother passes along ugly rumours according to which Melusina hides every Saturday either to visit her lover or because she is a fairy. Raimondin makes a peephole in the cellar where Melusina bathes: he sees his wife as a mermaid. However, he pretends to know nothing, and Melusina does so too. But when their son, Geoffroy burns his brother, Freimund in the Abbey of Maillers with the abbot and hundred monks Raimondin cannot hide his anger and calls his wife a serpent. Right after his outburst Melusina takes the form of a winged serpent and flies away. She returns only at night to the castle to nurse her two youngest sons, Remonnet and Thierry, and only her mournful howls signal her secret visits. (Keightley 480-2; Chinn 6-7)

Byatt reveals Christabel LaMotte’s Melusina story piece by piece, like a puzzle, which the reader must put together. She does not provide the complete version of the poem, only parts of it, as well as criticism on it either written or spoken. “Pieces of the puzzle appear in conversations among the contemporary scholars (Roland Michell and Fergus Woolf [*sic*], for example), references to scholarship in the form of titles or excerpts, in the correspondence between Ash and LaMotte, in Ellen Ash’s journal, and in excerpts from the poem itself” (Chinn 7). Byatt commented on the idea of creating this many-layered puzzle in one her lectures:

I heard a feminist critic, Luce Irigaray, give a paper on the Fairy Melusine, half snake, half woman, as one of the few mythic versions of female power not maiden, nor mother, thought to myself, there should be have been a Victorian epic on that subject by a woman, [I] wrote a modern feminist critique of such an epic's imagery, sexually overcharged to the nth degree, and then wrote the corresponding section of the epic, which both upheld and exceeded the interpretation. (quoted by Chinn 14)

Byatt includes a few excerpts of the epic in *Possession*: the Proem (Byatt 289-93), Book I (Byatt 293-8), a 24-line-long part identified as “the beginning” (Byatt 266), two quatrains that describe Melusina bathing when her husband first sees her, a single quatrain (Byatt 237) that Maud identifies as the one that “Raimondin says to Melusine after he is told she knows he has looked at her in her marble bath and broken the prohibition” (Byatt 237), which turns out to contain a line identical⁷³ to the one in Ash's *Ask to Embla*, and the 325th line from Book XII (Byatt 71) typed by Leonora Stern on the card that she put on Christabel's grave.

It is Fergus Wolff who first summarises the story of the fairy Melusina and comments on Christabel's epic in a way that the reader does not really pay too much attention to his words:

Christabel LaMotte wrote this long and very convoluted poem about Melusina's story in the 1860s and it was published at the beginning of the 1870s. It's an odd affair—tragedy and romance and symbolism rampant all over it, a kind of dream-world full of strange beasts and hidden meanings and a really weird sexuality or sensuality. The feminists are crazy about it. They say it expresses women's impotent desire. [. . .] Virginia Woolf knew it, she adduced it as an image of the essential androgyny of the creative mind—but the new feminists see Melusina in her bath as a symbol of self-sufficient female sexuality needing no poor males. I like it, it's disturbing. It keeps changing focus. From very precise description of the scaly tail to cosmic battles. (Byatt 33-4)

Later on Fergus refers to Melusina's castle building activities in the title of his proposed conference paper: “The Queen of the Castle: What is kept in the Keep?” (Byatt 138) But as

⁷³ The identical line in both poems—“[. . .] And shall those founts / Which freely flowed to meet our thirsts, be sealed” (237)—obviously refer to Ash and LaMotte's relationship itself.

Fergus seems to be an unattractive character from the very beginning, the reader tends not to take his references too seriously.

Despite Fergus's not too convincing critical comments Roland shows great interest in the epic, first only because of Ash, later on because of both poets. "His college library had provided two books. One was very slim and ladylike, written in 1947 and entitled *White Linen* after one of Christabel's lyrics. The other was a fat collection of feminist essays, mostly American, published in 1977: *Herself Herself Involve, LaMotte's Strategies of Evasion*" (Byatt 36). *White Linen* includes a brief biography of LaMotte—the first biography of hers that Roland comes across—and some critical comments on her work of art itself, which comes down to the remark, "[i]t is now deservedly forgotten" (Byatt 37).

The other volume, published thirty years later, presents Christabel as "distraught and enraged" (Byatt 37). The list of contents sounds purposefully ridiculous: the titles of these feminist readings⁷⁴ question not primarily the value of LaMotte's epic poem but, due to their extremism, their own academic credibility as well. The only essay in the collection whose title seems to be much more promising than that of the others is Maud Bailey's "Melusina, Builder of Cities: a Subversive Female Cosmogony" (Byatt 38), which makes Roland "inhibited by its formidable length and density" (Byatt 38).

Another interpretation of Christabel's epic is provided by Ellen Ash in her journal:

It is truly original [. . .]. Here is no swooning sentiment, no timid purity, no softly gloved lady-like patting of the reader's sensibility, but lively imagination, but force and vigour. It is like a huge, intricately embroidered tapestry in a shadowed stone hall, on which all sorts of strange birds and beasts and elves and demons creep in and out of thickets of thorny trees and occasional blossoming glades. Fine patches of gold stand out in the gloom, sunlight and starlight, the sparkle of jewels or human hair or serpents' scales. Firelight flickers, fountains catch light. All the elements are in perpetual motion, fire consuming, water running, air alive and the earth turning. (Byatt 121)

Ellen Ash raises the reader's interest by her plastic description and powerful language that is not at all typical of a nineteenth-century poet's wife. Her enthusiasm, which, in my view, is

⁷⁴ The titles include "Ariachne's Broken Woof: Art as Discarded Spinning in the Poems of LaMotte," which probably reads Christabel's art as a way out—seeing her as Ariadne—and as a subversive act—reading her figure as Arachne, which, despite the inherent irony of the titles would be a suitable metaphor to interpret Christabel's art. The volume also includes "Melusina and the Daemonic Double: Good Mother, Bad Serpent," or "A Docile Rage: Christabel LaMotte's Ambivalent Domesticity," or, for example, "White Gloves: Blanche Glover: occluded Lesbian sexuality in LaMotte" (Byatt 37).

another instance of Byatt's stylistic game in the mask of Ellen's comments, makes her seem the most reliable critic so far but ruins this illusion immediately when she prudishly comments on the scene when Raimondin peeps at his serpent-wife:

And what shall I say of the scene in which the husband, a man of insufficient faith, bores his peephole and observes his *Siren-spouse* at play in her vat of waters? I should have said, if I was asked, that this scene was best left to the imagination as Coleridge left Geraldine [in "Christabel"]—"a sight to dream of, not to tell." But Miss LaMotte tells abundantly, though her description might be a little *strong* for some stomachs, especially maidenly English ones, who will be looking for fairy winsomeness. (Byatt 121)

Ellen's final remark calls attention to the attitude of the reader to the literary work which is judged on the basis of its author's gender. First Ellen seems to evaluate Christabel's epic with equal measure as if it was written by a male author, however, her final remark reveals her critical stance, which is greatly influenced by what Elaine Showalter calls double critical standard. This standard means that literary works produced by female authors were judged on the basis of their compliance with femininity. (Showalter 73-100) Starting off from Christabel's gender Ellen expects the epic suitable for "maidenly English" stomachs, but when it turns out to use a more radical voice, which contests this readerly attitude, Ellen's critical views turn to the opposite and she stops praising Christabel's epic.

Byatt's tendency to provide educated but unreliable critics of *The Fairy Melusina* suggests that one can expect her to fool the reader in a very academic way again and again. She keeps referring to fictitious critics of a fictional epic, but there is an exception, which the reader might take as another one of the imaginary literary critics: Jacques Le Goff. It is Fergus, one of the most unsympathetic characters in the novel, who refers to his critical writing which he calls "Melusine Défricheuse" (Byatt 138). It is originally entitled in French "Melusine: Maternelle et Défricheuse" and is translated into English as "Melusina: Mother and Pioneer" in *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages* (1982). Chinn also refers to this essay and relies on Le Goff's summary of the early versions of the legend and related legends in other cultures:

In all of these accounts the basic structure remains constant: a supernatural being and a human fall in love; the supernatural being promises prosperity to the human but imposes a prohibition; the human breaks the prohibition and learns of the

mate's supernatural status; the supernatural being disappears but returns to die.
(Chinn 8)

Heavily relying on Le Goff's ideas Chinn continues that Melusina and her mother, Presine, are exceptions to this pattern because they are females. And although Raimondin, Melusina's husband is supposed to be the hero of the story—reinforced by contemporary faith, that all creatures in the form of a serpent or dragon must be evil—by the end of the tale Melusina appears to be the victim betrayed by her husband. In this way, she becomes “a pretender to the place of the hero” (Chinn 9), which is another means of synthesising the early generic versions of her romance and *Bildungsroman*.

Alban suggests in *Melusine the Serpent Goddess in A.S. Byatt's Possession and in Mythology* (2003) that Byatt's Melusina is the refiguration of an ancient goddess whose worship can be traced back to gylanic⁷⁵ cultures. (3-5) The cultural changes that naturally went hand in hand with economic changes had the result that in the Middle Ages Melusina was seen as a daemonic supernatural figure, whose only chance to have a normal life is to marry a mortal. She develops gradually in this new role which is clearly marked by the gradually disappearing deformity of her children; the last two of them—the ones she visits and nurses secretly—show no sign of their supernatural origin. In her new life her nature unfolds through her actions: she brings prosperity. “[S]he appears as the medieval avatar of a mother-goddess, as a fertility fairy” (Le Goff 218). Le Goff defines three areas of this fertility: first of all she is a pioneer in the sense that she transforms forests into fields and erects castles and cities, secondly, “Melusina is the fairy of medieval economic growth” (218-9), and, finally, she is a mother of ten children. Melusina brings prosperity not only to her husband but all the nobles and knights, which prevents her from being seen as a daemonic figure, instead, she is a positive incarnation of social development. Since Melusina has become a positive figure her fall and tragic exile is due to enchantment and misfortune. In Alban's view, *Possession* is the story of Melusina's repossession which restores the ancient goddess to her place. “This is the tale of the dispossession of the female, and the restoration of her force through knowledge of her ancient dignity. By learning of her natural supremacy, we may restore to her the power that caused her to be worshipped for millennia, thus seeing her today as mistress of the world once again” (Alban 10).

⁷⁵ When describing these ancient cultures that are often categorised as matriarchal, Alban claims that “[t]he term ‘gylanic’ seems more exact and preferable in that it is non-hierarchical and non-exclusive of the male sex, incorporating the cooperative and partnership element [. . .], allowing both genders full expression of their potential, with neither attempting to dominate the other” (3-4).

She is partly human, partly animal, thus daemonic; partly an angelic mother, partly a monster. She embodies the liminal existence of women just as they were made to imagine themselves in the nineteenth century. As the central metaphor of the novel her presence permeates the text and emphasises the gendered nature of all the other images in *Possession*. Her recurrent figure holds the various textual layers together and provides them with an always multiplying and very complex meaning of the feminine experience. Her figure is like a complete picture that is made up of tiny jigsaws, a puzzle to be solved and completed piece by piece. Just like Christabel LaMotte: her unusual way of living makes her an unnatural figure in society, but when she finds her mate she proves to be creative both artistically and physically. She becomes a mother and a grandmother but her secret forces her into exile and it is in rare moments that she can express her love of her progeny freely. Her pains and sufferings are rewarded when Maud Bailey proves to be her descendant.

Christabel LaMotte's Melusina epic is a revision of the medieval story, and shifts the emphasis from Raimondin, the suffering husband who is let down by his daemonic wife, to the powerful figure of Melusina. She makes this half-mortal half-supernatural woman the protagonist of her epic and presents the events from Melusina's point of view. Naturally, this focal shift results in an intended shift of meaning as well: Christabel's Melusina is an articulation of the female experience that has been long silenced in the original version, which, at the same time, can give a radically new understanding to the traditional gendered genres it incorporates.

Christabel's self-description evokes the self-sufficiency of the powerful Melusina which Alban terms as virginity that should not be confused with chastity. On the basis of the words' etymology and related myths Alban suggests that "[w]hen goddesses were independent but sexually fully active women, their virginity were not in their chastity, but rather their independence of any man. These women united conjugally with the male for their own pleasure, but retained their own integrity" (20). Christabel describes her integrity as follows:

An Egg, Sir, is the answer, as you perspicuously read from the beginning, an Egg, a perfect, O, a living Stone, doorless and windowless, whose life may slumber on till she be Waked—or find she has Wings to spread—which is not so here—oh no—

An Egg is my answer: What is the Riddle?

I am my own riddle. (137)

Christabel-Byatt's description is very clever: it condenses all the allusions to Christabel that are scattered in the text. The perfect O⁷⁶ in its self-contained completeness does not need much explanation, however, its doorless and windowless nature goes a step further: it evokes the Lady of Shalott who never looked out of her window or never crossed her threshold until her final move, an allusion Ash applies to describe her. (Byatt 188) This lady of the Egg sleeps until she is awakened like the Princess in her glass case in *The Glass Coffin*, Christabel's tale, or she has wings to spread like the serpent-like Melusina when she secretly visits and nurtures her offsprings after her secret is revealed. But it "is not so here," says Christabel, and she is right since the end of the novel is a few hundred pages away as well as her repossession of her powers as Melusina.

In this egg, there is a gold cushion, "whose gloss you may only paradoxically imagine with your eyes closed tight," writes Christabel to Ash (Byatt 137). Her self—the gold cushion—is not exposed to Ash's gaze, it can be imagined at this stage of their relationship. "And this gold cushion is enclosed in its own crystalline casket, a casket translucent and endless in its circularity, for there are no sharp corners to it, no protrusions, only a milky moonstone clarity that deceives" (Byatt 137). The outer moonstone directly holds the self with no space between. Its translucency is deceptive: it seems to show the self but gives no access to it.

However, this egg is lifeless in itself despite the fact that it holds the germs of life: although Christabel calls its inner content "white and Gold with life", later on she describes its outer container as a "funerary Urn—only with no inscription, for there are as yet no Ashes." (Byatt 137) Its lifeless quality is further emphasised by a pun on Ash's name which implies a hint at Christabel and Ash's possible further acquaintance. Right after this pun Christabel tells the way how ashes can be found in this urn, "[t]here may come a day when you may lift the lid with impunity—or rather, when it may be lifted from within—for *that* way, life may come—whereas your way—you will discover—only Congealing and Mortality" (Byatt 137). Christabel gives the clue for their not yet started love relation: if Ash intrudes into her world, it will end in misery, if she lets him in, it can generate life.

Christabel explicitly rejects any possibility of going out of her egg or letting anyone in, but the imagery she uses in her riddle is more than exciting and inviting. Her imagery gives away her self that she is eager to save for herself: she reveals a move, which she does not dare to admit herself, namely, she wants life. Her self-sustaining power needs the

⁷⁶ Though a perfect O seems to be a genuine expression of self-contained virginity, it cannot be neglected that *The Story of O* by Pauline Réage is the best-known pornographic novel of the Victorian age. Seen from this angle this perfect O recalls Alban's view on the self-sufficient sexuality of the ancient goddess. However, this idea is twisted again by the fact that Christabel's virginity means chastity till her sexual intercourse with Ash.

generating force of Ash, which, at the same time, restores the dispossessed powers of the ancient goddess, Melusina as well.

The figure of Melusina is heavily gendered from other aspects too. At one point Christabel describes Melusina as the prefiguration of what Gilbert and Gubar call the “monster, a magical creature of the lower world who is a kind of antithetical mirror image of an angel” (Gilbert and Gubar 28). Christabel is interested in “[. . .] the fairy Melusine—who has two aspects—an Unnatural Monster—and a most proud and loving and *handy* woman” (Byatt 174). Later on, when she talks with her cousin, Sabine de Kercoz, Christabel interprets Melusina’s double nature as a characteristic of women in general, “men saw women as double beings, enchantresses and demons or innocent angels. [. . .] I said all men see women as double” (Byatt 373). Significantly, Christabel remarks at this point that „Romance is a proper form for women. [. . .] Romance is a land where women can be free to express their true natures [. . .]. [. . .] [I]n Romance, women’s two natures can be reconciled” (Byatt 373). Among others, this is one of the aims of *Possession*, significantly subtitled *A Romance*. Although it is men who see women as double, Christabel tends to interpret her own experience in terms of the Melusina story. Christabel seems to dramatise her own impulses in the figure of Melusina, her double nature is Christabel’s double nature too. “[B]y projecting their rebellious impulses into [. . .] monstrous women [. . .], female authors dramatise their own self-division, their desire both to accept the strictures of patriarchal society and to reject them” (Gilbert and Gubar 78). By creating the two-faced—angelic and monstrous—figure of Melusina Christabel both identifies with and revises the self-definition that patriarchal culture has imposed upon her. The figure of Melusina is especially suitable to dramatise this double attitude as Melusina is a once worshipped powerful goddess, whose integrity was complete without her reliance on men, and, at the same time, a monstrous woman who is defined as a threatening, destructive figure by her own husband. Byatt’s aim to dramatise the double-natured representation of women gives another insight into her understanding of the romance, which, up to this point, has really been applied as a multifarious genre in *Possession*.

Not only their fates and double aspects constitute an obvious link between Melusina and Christabel, but their physical attributes as well. Although Christabel is never described as a beautiful woman she definitely resembles Melusina. What is striking about Christabel’s appearance is her paleness, which is mentioned in most of her descriptions. Mortimer Cropper describes her as “[v]ery pale. Not sure if it was the effect of near-albinism or a defect in the painting. Probably the latter” (Byatt 120). Ellen Ash quotes two quatrains of the epic in her journal describing Melusina:

How lovely-white her skin her Lord well knew,
The tracery of blue veins across the snow...
But could not see the beauty in the sheen
Of argent scale and slate-blue coiling fin... (121)

The third person narrator describes “the lady,” Christabel in Chapter 15 as follows:

She was very fair, pale-skinned, with eyes, not unduly large, of a strange green colour which transmuted itself as the light varied. She was not exactly beautiful—her face was too long for perfection, and not in the first flush of youth, though the bones were well-cut and the mouth an elegant curve, no pouting rosebud. (Byatt 274)

Her peculiar colour—green—already appears in this description: her eyes are green and she wears a “gleaming pair of laced boots in emerald green leather” (Byatt 274). As the references become more and more frequent the colour green gradually permeates her descriptions, as her young cousin, Sabine De Kercoz describes her when she stays at their home secretly expecting her baby:

She came down to dinner that first time in a dark-checked woollen dress, black and grey, with a voluminous fringed shawl, very handsome, in dark green with a black trim. She is not elegant, but studiously neat and carefully dressed, with a jet cross on a silk rope around her neck, and elegant green boots. She wears a lace cap. I do not know her age. Maybe thirty-five. Her hair is a strange colour, silvery-fair, almost metallic in its sheen [. . .]. [. . .] Her little face is white and pointed. I have never seen anyone so white [. . .]. Even the inner curl of the nostril, even the pinched little lips were white, or faintly touched with ivory. Her eyes are a strange pale green [. . .]. (Byatt 343)

Sabine is curious about Christabel, but the guest’s reserved distance puzzles her and makes her misinterpret Christabel’s relationship with her father. Sabine thinks they have a sexual relationship and even when she finds out that Christabel is pregnant her hatred does not fade. “And *she* changes in my sight. I hate her smooth pale head and her greeny eyes and her shiny green feet beneath her skirts, as though she was some sort of serpent, hissing quietly like the pot in the hearth, but ready to strike when warm with generosity” (Byatt 366). Sabine

gradually visualises Christabel as a daemonic snake, an embodiment of Melusina's monstrosity, who ruins their lives with her negative power.

However negative Christabel may seem at this point she becomes a positive figure in the long run, a victim of her fate, who provides fertility for the future. Nevertheless, only Ash can see the promise of future in her appearance:

[. . .] the pale loops of hair on her temples. Their sleek silver-gold seemed [. . .] to have in it a tinge, a hint of greenness, not the copper-green of decay, but a pale sap-green of vegetable life, streaked into the hair like the silvery bark of young trees, or green shadows in green tresses of young hay. And her eyes were green, glass green, malachite green, the cloudy green of seawater perturbed and carrying a weight of sand. The lashes over them silver, but thick enough to be visibly present. (Byatt 277)

Her great-great-great-granddaughter, Maud, loves the colour green as well: she wears a “a long pine-green tunic over a pine-green skirt, a white silk shirt inside the tunic and long softly white stockings inside shining green shoes” (Byatt 38) when she first meets Roland. In the jet shop she wears a green scarf over her hair pinned with an old jet brooch, probably Christabel's, made by Isaac Greenberg. (Byatt 259)

Roland looked at Maud. The pale, pale hair in fine braids was wound round and round her head, startling white in this light [. . .]. She looked almost shockingly naked, like a denuded window-doll, he at first thought, and then she turned her supercilious face to him and he saw it changed, simply fragile and even vulnerable. (Byatt 259)

At certain points Maud not only resembles Christabel but carries the imprint of Melusina too. But the pathos and the tragic quality of the old story turn to their opposite and produce lovely, hilarious scenes which generate love between the two contemporary characters. Both scenes take place at the Baileys'. First Maud examines the frozen pool if there are any fish—late reminiscences of Melusina—when Roland discovers her and wants to save her from falling although she was not overbalancing. After their parallel exclamations and her first shock they agree that “[a]ll you can see is imperfections and reflections” (Byatt 142) just like they are imperfections in the light of Christabel and Ash. The same evening their situation echoes the Melusina story again, which is another instance of citationality, one

of the major characteristics of the romance. Since they have to share the bathroom Roland must decide if the bathroom is taken or not.

He was then seized with doubt as to whether the bathroom was in fact empty—how could any sound penetrate the solid oak? [. . .] he went down on one knee on the putative drugget and put his eye to the huge keyhole which glinted at him and disconcertingly vanished as the door swung back and he smelled wet, freshness, steam in cold air. She nearly fell over him there; she put out a hand to steady herself on his shoulder and he threw up a hand and clasped a narrow haunch under the silk kimono. [. . .] Her hands were pink and slightly damp; the fringes of the pale hair were damp too. It was down, he saw, the hair, running all over her shoulders and neck [. . .]. (Byatt 147)

The scene is reminiscent of Raimondin when he peeps through the keyhole to discover Melusina's secret. That act results in tragic events and unhappiness, whereas this bathroom scene generates attraction because "[t]here it was, what Randolph Henry Ash called the *kick galvanic*, the stunning blow [. . .]" (Byatt 147). Both characters experience this kick galvanic that day: Maud at the fish pond—" [. . .] a hand touched her arm with a huge banging, an unexpected electric shock" (Byatt 142)—and Roland in the bathroom door.

The Melusina atmosphere is further emphasised to the reader since Byatt finishes the scene with Maud leaving and Roland going into the bathroom and "[b]ehind him, the long Chinese dragon [on Maud's bathrobe] wavered palely away, on its aquamarine ground, along the shifting carpets, and the pale hair gleamed coldly above it" (Byatt 148). The scene exemplifies not only citationality but Byatt's parodic attitudes as well, which surfaces in *Possession* again and again: the powerful female figure of Melusina has become a Chinese dragon on a simple bathrobe, which is, nevertheless, symptomatic of the author's value judgement concerning the two time layers of her book.

These citational links that permeate the figures and stories of Melusina, Christabel and Maud create a network of allusions that hold *Possession* together by making the Melusina story complete. Melusina is dispossessed of her powers, of her integrity, but the partial repossession of Christabel and the complete repossession of Maud make this cycle complete, Melusina's story is completed in Maud's story. In this way, citationality serves as a means of creating a sense of cyclicity in *Possession* concerning the female protagonists, which reinforces the cyclicity of time.

The two nineteenth-century genres, the romance and the *Bildungsroman* can also be traced in this cyclical interpretation of the Melusina story. We encounter Melusina at the Fountain of Thirst as a mature female character, as she has power of her own and enjoys her integrity. She is a fully developed character when she initiates a romance with a mortal as an archetypal seductress, in which she assumes the active part: she sets the conditions of the marriage and provides power and wealth for her husband. In my view, in this phase the traditional gender roles of the romance are reversed, which is due to Melusina's powerful image. However, patriarchal reactions soon deprive Melusina of this peculiar possession. When Raimondin, her husband addresses her as a serpent, the patriarchal presuppositions of Christianity come into operation. "The snake in the garden, which Western tradition unites to vilify and demonize, seeing the devil in the serpent who extends the apple to Eve, is no less than the previously powerful female deity who was widely worshipped in prehistoric gylanic cultures [. . .]" (Alban 2). Melusina becomes the source of evil, a monster, and loses her power as a female deity. This dispossession is unavoidable, in my view, because a powerful female figure cannot be successfully contained either by a romance or a medieval version of an ancient myth as both interpretations rely on patriarchal structures.

However, *Possession* provides a different ending to the ancient myth. The novel reworks Melusina's figure in Christabel and turns the ancient tragic romance into a female *Künstlerroman*. Christabel's self-sufficient life in the beginning seemingly equals Melusina's state of virginity, but as I have shown it in the analysis of Christabel's riddle of the egg, this self-sufficiency is lifeless without a romance. It is her love with Ash that makes Christabel complete and transforms her into a powerful Melusina figure whose fate, the loss of her love and her child echoes the story of the ancient goddess. This love affair functions not only as a romance, a story of love in Christabel's life, but a story of development as well. It changes her, makes her a mother and an artist at the same time. The production of her child and her epic marks the maturity of Christabel. Christabel's romance turns into a female *Künstlerroman*, which assumes a reversal of the traditional order of romance and *Bildung* elements.

The cyclical relationship of female characters in *Possession* is completed by the figure of Maud. The sterility of her life at the beginning of the novel is the extreme opposite of Melusina's self-sufficiency even in the sexual sense. However, Maud's pure theoretical interests and her gradual knowledge of both the Melusina story and Christabel's life initiates a story of development, in the course of which Maud is confronted with the lifeless, shocking sterility of her own life. When she leaves her pure theoretical interests behind and ventures out into the world of experience, for example to Yorkshire, she starts to repossess Melusina's

lost power with the help of Roland, and her *Bildungsroman* ends in a romance with him. In this way, Melusina's story is completed: we see the loss and restoration of a self-sufficient female character. The image of the snake, her tail wrapped around the world marks that the end is the very same as the beginning. Melusina's story is completed.

Serpents are contradictory figures, in mythology they have both male and female attributes. In addition, their meaning is as ambivalent as their sex: in the Middle Ages serpents are considered daemonic, the incarnation of the devil, which primarily results from their Biblical function, however, they still retain some of their classical heritage, since they symbolise wisdom, cyclicity. Chinn suggests that "Melusina as serpent/mermaid/dragon appears androgynous" (10). Byatt establishes the same viewpoint when she credits it by a reference to Virginia Woolf, "Virginia Woolf knew it [the epic], she adduced it as an image of the essential androgyny of the creative mind" (Byatt 34). However, there is no evidence that Woolf ever commented on the legend of Melusina, but Byatt makes us believe in Melusina's androgyny since it is "proved" by Woolf herself. Nevertheless, Woolf could even have commented on Melusina concerning her (his/its?) androgyny as she touches on the question in the last chapter in *A Room of One's Own*.

Byatt plans her academic game carefully as she gradually reveals all the bits and pieces concerning this thematic focus, in which, in my view, she includes a theoretical twist. When Christabel plans writing her *Melusina* her correspondence with Ash takes the reader along a cleverly planned route towards the actual production of the epic which marks the evolution of this work of art of the supposedly androgynous mind of Christabel/Melusina and her unfolding female *Künstlerroman*. First it is Ash who ponders on a radically new topic in one of his letters to Christabel:

It would be a brave poet indeed who would undertake a true description of the Queen Bee—or Wasp—or Ant—as we now know them to be—having for centuries supposed these centres of communal worship and activity to be Male Rulers—I somehow imagine you do not share your Sex's revulsion at such life-forms—or what I imagine to be a common revulsion—(Byatt 157-8)⁷⁷

Christabel answers his suggestion with two poems in her letter. "I send two more Poems. They form part of a series on Psyche—in modern form—that poor doubting Girl—who took

⁷⁷ Byatt actually elaborates on the topic in one of the novellas in *Angels and Insects* (1992) entitled "Morpho Eugenia."

heavenly Love for a Serpent” (Byatt 161). The story of Cupid and Psyche⁷⁸ in classic mythology bears resemblance to the Melusina story in many ways—a union between a mortal and a supernatural figure, a god, in which the mortal is forbidden to see the god. However, the genders are reversed: the mortal is a woman, and the god is a man. Psyche awakens Cupid when a drop of oil falls on him from the lamp at night when she secretly peeps at his beauty. Abandoned by the god, Psyche suffers hardships, but is finally rewarded for her faithfulness by Venus, who gives her immortality. Finally, the lovers can reunite. Their story follows the action in the Melusina-story, however, the endings are reversed. (Chinn 10; Cotterell 230) Christabel’s proposed “series on Psyche” (Byatt 161) shows that the romance of a human and a god inherently carries the possibility of reversal, revision without the change of the genre.

Again, Ash encourages Christabel when she considers writing *The Fairy Melusina*. “I have it in my head to write an epic—or if not an epic, still a Saga or Lay or great mythical Poem—and how can a poor breathless woman with no *staying-power* and only a Lunar learning confess such an ambition to the author of the *Ragnarök*?” (Byatt 161) Christabel produces symptoms of what Gilbert and Gubar define as the anxiety of authorship—“a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a ‘precursor’ the act of writing will isolate or destroy her” (49). Christabel’s fears are crucial to her artistic development, which gradually turns her romance into a female *Künstlerroman* well before the production of her fairy epic. She needs encouragement to get over her fears concerning the legitimization of her rebellious endeavours. But Ash does not see any ban on women to write an epic poem:

You are a Poet and in the end must care only for your own views—why not an Epic? Why not a mythic drama in twelve books? I can see no reason in Nature why a woman might not write such a poem as well as a man—if she but set her mind to it. (Byatt 165)

“Like Woolf, Ash suggests that there is an androgynous mind,” claims Chinn (11). In the last chapter in *A Room of One’s Own* Woolf proposes that it is unnatural to think of the two sexes as separate, which directly leads her to speculate that “just as there are two sexes in the natural world, there must be two sexes in the mind,” as Mary Gordon summarises Woolf’s views in the foreword (xii). “If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant

⁷⁸ The story of Cupid and Psyche appears in *The Waterfall* as well—gendered in a reversed manner—when James secretly watches the sleeping Jane at night.

this when he said that a great mind is androgynous” (*A Room* 98). A few lines later Woolf elaborates on what Coleridge could have meant by the concept of androgyny:

Coleridge certainly did not mean [. . .] that it is a mind that has any special sympathy with women [. . .]. Perhaps the androgynous mind is less apt to make these distinctions than the single-sexed mind. He meant, perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotions without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided” (*A Room* 98).

In addition, the work of an androgynous mind is not shadowed by the very assertive, self-confident “I” like in the work of a Mr. A. whose great new novel Woolf finds boring to read because of the dominance of this “I.” “There seemed to be some obstacle, some impediment of Mr. A’s mind which blocked the fountain⁷⁹ of creative energy and shored it within narrow limits” (*A Room* 100).

Although Chinn bases her claims on Woolf when she interprets Christabel’s fears and Ash’s encouragement, she seems to neglect the relevance of the anxiety of authorship. As opposed to Chinn’s views, I propose that in these sections Christabel struggles with her impression that artistic creation is exclusively a prerogative of the masculine and, as there is no such tradition to prove the opposite, women are excluded from it. Here, in my view, Byatt dramatises her own anxiety as well concerning the existence of a female literary tradition. Though she emphatically insists on the existence of the literary canon as opposed to various canons, the fact that she centres her novel on a powerful woman figure, Melusina, and her nineteenth- and twentieth-century refigurations implies her acknowledgement of the female literary tradition. Ash seems to be not completely aware of Christabel’s anxiety as he reasons only with nature without considering the social constraints. Christabel’s self-description in one of her early letters proves to be even more intriguing, which, in my view, sheds light on the very same problem:

[. . .] I have no graces, and as for the wit you may have perceived in me when we met, you saw, you must have seen, only the glimmerings and glister of your own

⁷⁹ The recurrent image of the fountain appears both in Woolf’s and Byatt’s texts in reference to creativity. Byatt incorporates it into Christabel’s great epic as the Fountain of Thirst which stands for Christabel’s desire: on the one hand, for Ash, in the form of sexual desire, on the other hand, as desire for expression as an artist. Fountains and wells are sources of the fertilising powers of Mother Earth, which made this metaphor an image of femininity. In addition, water imagery has earned a strongly feminine connotation in the French feminist literary theory, which also informs the present reader’s interpretative (androgynous or heavily sexed?) mind.

brilliance refracted the lumpen surface of a dead Moon. I am a creature of my Pen, Mr Ash, my Pen is the best of me, and I enclose a Poem, in earnest goodwill towards you. (Byatt 87)

Here Christabel denies having any feminine qualities, such as graces, and defines her wit as the reflection of Ash's masculine genius. In this way, she seems to have positive and negative attitudes towards her own femininity and towards the concept of femininity as shaped by the Victorian public opinion. As she goes on, she compares herself to a dead moon, which is also an ambiguous metaphor since it implies lifeless femininity. Finally, on top of this, she declares that her pen is the best of her.

Is a pen a metaphorical penis? [. . .] Male sexuality [. . .] is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power. The poet's pen is in some sense (even more than figuratively) a penis. [It is] a concept central to [. . .] Victorian culture [. . .]. But of course the patriarchal notion that the writer "fathers" his text just as God fathered the world is and has been all-pervasive in Western literary civilisation [. . .]. (Gilbert and Gubar 3-4)

Considering what Gilbert and Gubar say on the metaphor of the pen in Victorian literature Christabel LaMotte seems to be anxious about her own artistic—thus unfeminine—qualities, which Ash vitalises with his persuasion. Her argument with Ash shows her artistic maturation step by step, which results in her final development into an artist.

Finally, as a (re)solution to her romance and *Bildungsroman* Christabel produces *The Fairy Melusina*, an epic, which focuses on a self-sufficient, powerful female figure, who is capable to enjoy life without her reliance on men. Melusina is a mythological figure with gylanic cultural origins, which means that she used to be a goddess of a society in which women exercised power without the exclusion or subjugation of men. Thus Melusina carries the potential of deconstructing the binary of male/female and gives a new understanding of genders, which are not seen as opposing entities but complementary ones. In my view, if the question of androgyny is relevant anywhere in the novel, it is the figure of Melusina and her cultural heritage that can be associated with the term and not Christabel's creative mind.

Either way, Christabel LaMotte is very conscious of the unique quality of her literary endeavour. She is the first female poet to tell the Melusina story and write an epic—two pioneering acts, like the ones Le Goff attributes to Melusina, worthy of a new tradition. Knowing all this, Christabel addresses Mnemosyne (Memory) in the invocation of her epic

instead of Calliope, the muse of epic poetry. Addressing Memory has a strong importance in the case of a woman author since it can sound as a kind of symbolic protest against any mental disability⁸⁰ that would make her unsuitable for producing an epic, a very prestigious genre. Nevertheless, the invocation to Memory presents Christabel not only as a founder of a new tradition but as a woman artist who rediscovers, excavates a tradition that is buried by forgetfulness. In this way, Christabel's epic is not only her personal artistic achievement but the repossession of the powers and tradition of Melusina, the once powerful goddess.

Christabel's development into a pioneering female artist, who is presented as the founder/excavator of a new/old tradition, makes her story into a genuine female *Künstlerroman*, in which the daughter elaborates the foremother's talents by her artistic and physical creativity, which support each other and result in the emergence of a fairy epic and a daughter. Both "products" are singularly feminine but result from great pains, which puts an end to Christabel's creativity both as a mother and an artist.

Similarly to the major concerns of the whole novel, the figure of Melusina condenses the phenomena of citationality and the coexistence of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*. Melusina proves to be the most emblematic citational figure in *Possession* whose characteristics recur in both Christabel's and Maud's figures, which makes the latter two a nineteenth- and twentieth-century refiguration of the ancient goddess. The stories of these two female characters can be traced back to the myth of Melusina, which establishes a cyclical relationship among Melusina, Christabel and Maud. The three stories go along a path of possession-dispossession-repossession, and constitute a cyclical story with a powerful, self-sufficient woman figure at its centre. Similarly, the genres of the romance and *Bildungsroman* can be detected in this cyclical relationship and not only in the separate life stories of the three women figures. The romance-*Künstlerroman*/*Bildungsroman*-romance cycle is another instance of cyclicity which is "caused" by Melusina, which is not surprising if one considers her uniting, reuniting powers which come from the knowledge that "in our end is our beginning" (Alban 288).

Byatt's *Possession* reworks the relationship of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* from many aspects. Byatt's special understanding of the genre of the romance allows her to write a romance which is a mosaic of genres while heavily relying on citationality. Byatt widens the scope of the romance since she applies it not only as a genre that tells a story of love but as a mode of relating to the past as well. In my view, this wider understanding of the

⁸⁰ Gilbert and Gubar call attention that many social restrictions on women have developed diseases, for example "aphasia and amnesia—two illnesses which symbolically represent (and parody) the sort of intellectual incapacity patriarchal culture has traditionally required of women" (58).

romance is quite similar to the concept of historiographic metafiction. Byatt incorporates the genre of biography into her romance which gives a chance of development for the various biographer figures, and, at the same time, reworks the classical presuppositions of the traditional *Bildungsroman* concerning subjectivity and time. In the various *Bildungsromans* and biographies *Possession* centres upon the quest plot which becomes a uniting force even in the contemporary romance plot of Maud and Roland by importing *Bildung* elements to the generic mosaic of *Possession*. By making Melusina the most meaningful female character in her novel Byatt establishes a cyclical relationship of the three female characters, Melusina, Christabel and Maud, which enables the reader to detect the romance and the *Bildungsroman* not only in their separate stories but in their cycle as well. In this way Byatt creates a unique sense of the two genres which can be interpreted as overarching mediums of women's life stories which contain the cyclical story of possession-dispossession-repossession. In my view, this cyclicity gives a new understanding to these genres as they are made suitable for containing not only single life stories but cultural changes as well. For Byatt the question is not the same as for Drabble concerning the romance and the *Bildungsroman*. While Drabble is interested in the personal relevance of the two genres—which is more suitable to contain the life story of Jane Gray—Byatt does not seem to take sides in this argument. Instead, she applies these genres not only on the personal level but with a widened interest in our cultural heritage.

Finally, it is important to answer the question if *Possession* is a romance or not. Definitely it is if one understands the concept of the romance as a special mode of relating to the past. Is *Possession* a romance or a *Bildungsroman* concerning its thematic focus? Both at the same time. Byatt intertwines the two genres without giving thematic priority to either of them, which results in the emergence of a flexible generic mixture of the two. Instead of highlighting their incompatibilities she emphasises the attunability of the two just as it can be expected of the creator of Christabel's fictional Melusina.

Chapter 6: Subtexts of Space

The elements that define any story are primarily its plot and the space and time it is positioned in. Due to their common genre, historiographic metafiction, time is a defining element both in *The Waterfall* and *Possession*. In terms of time, the two novels display various patterns, including cyclicity, iteration and lack of linearity and teleology. Similarly, space can have several forms too as it can vary from concrete to abstract, from image to concept, a feature that both novels make a good use of. Having investigated the relevant plots and the related concepts of time in *The Waterfall* and *Possession* that contribute to the emergent synthesis of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*, now I turn to the analysis of space. To avoid the inherent risks of applying such a broad term as space I will limit my investigation to two forms of it which reinforce the romance-*Bildungsroman* argument.

First, I will interpret space on the level of spatial imagery, as it is a powerful means of articulating the female experience in the nineteenth-century female literary tradition. I propose that one of the most popular types of spatial imagery is constituted by the images of enclosure which highlight the containment of women both physically and discursively, which I consider as much a promoter of patriarchal discourses as the genre of the romance. I claim that *The Waterfall* offers the very same solution to this containment as *Jane Eyre* by providing a way out of women's representation as houses. *Possession*, however, does not engage in working out a possible solution, it points out the arbitrariness of women's representation by images of enclosure by turning the whole tradition upside-down. As a result both novels propose the possibility of revising traditional romance patterns by reworking the traditional images of the female experience.

Secondly, I will investigate a particular concept of space that provides the appropriate conditions for the subversive potentials of the new generic mixture of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*: heterotopia. This Foucauldian concept of space allows Charlotte Brontë, Drabble and Byatt as well to create alternative spaces where the traditional genres of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* can sidestep and subvert their generic presuppositions. Drabble along with Brontë apply heterotopia to create a new—asocial—setting for their respective romances, while Byatt opens up the concept of space to time and structures her novel along heterotopias and heterochronies. Byatt's method reinforces her view of the romance as it makes possible to relate the past and the present not only in terms of time but space as well.

Spatial imagery and the concept of heterotopia play such an important role in the synthesis of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* in both twentieth-century novels, as well as

their common intertext, *Jane Eyre*, that I claim that the meaning they confer on this generic synthesis cannot be neglected. Though their function is not as striking as that of the various plots, I propose that the intentional handling of space—both as imagery and as heterotopia—results in the emergence of a subtext in *The Waterfall* as well as *Possession*.

Spatial Imagery: Images of Enclosure

The connection between women and houses has been established for centuries and has had its long tradition in the representation of women. In his essay, “The Housing of Women,” Mark Wigley thoroughly examines the history of housing women from as early as the Middle Ages, and concludes that “[j]ust as the house is a mechanism for the domestication of women, it is itself understood as a domesticated woman” (353). Since women have been relegated to a subordinated position in patriarchal Western culture it is no wonder that several mechanisms have been developed to contain women symbolically and physically as well. Housing has proved seemingly the most innocent but one of the most pervasive means of enclosure for women, as houses perform a very practical purpose, namely housing human beings. But as human beings are gendered, housing has different meanings for different genders.

“Place is not simply a mechanism for controlling sexuality. Rather, it is the control of sexuality by systems of representation that produces place,” claims Wigley and adds that “[t]he source of her dignity is his law, the beauty he desires is his own” (350, 353). Representing houses as women that mirror man’s order echoes the claim of Teresa de Lauretis, namely that “in the phallic order of patriarchal culture and in its history, woman is unrepresentable except as representation” (20). Once given the unrepresentability of women what place can they have of their own? Do they have a place of their own at all? In my proposed answer I am connecting Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (1969) with the ideas of Wigley, while keeping in mind what Gilbert and Gubar say in *The Madwoman in the Attic* about women imagined as houses. Although this theoretical basis seems to be eclectic I find them talking about the same topic: spatiality and women, though sometimes their neutralised view of gender must be modified.

When Bachelard starts talking about the house in general he soon arrives at one of his basic claims that “our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word” (4). He calls the house the original shell (4) the phenomenologist first has to find, and often refers to its cosmic qualities. He highlights the anthropocosmic ties of individuals and houses that adults no longer remember, and points

out the ancient and—not at all derogatively—primitive qualities of these anthropocosmic ties. (Bachelard 4) The first setting in Margaret Drabble’s novel evokes the atmosphere of a place like this in which the room is a closed but a cosmic place at the same time. Right after childbirth Jane Gray is seated in her bed and contemplates the world—her room—around.

Everything was soft and still: the whole night, and Jane’s nature with it, seemed to be subdued in a vast warm lull, an expectancy, a hesitation, a suspension and remission of trial. The snow fell outside the uncurtained window, and she could feel the blood flowing from her into the white and moist sheets. There was newspaper under the sheets, but it too was warm from the heat of her body: warm and sodden, having lost the dry hard edges and cracking noises that it had made at first, as she moved and stirred in labour. The bedroom had dark blue walls, like the night sky itself, and the bars of the fire were red and glowing. Heaps of white towels and baby clothes lay upon the chest of drawers, and on the table in front of the fire stood a large pale yellow pudding bowl, in which the midwife had bathed the baby. The colours of the scene affected Jane profoundly: they were the violent colours of birth, but they were resolved into silence, into a kind of harmony. (Drabble 9-10)

The most original shell in human life is the maternal womb, which can be the ultimate and original cosmic universe in one’s life. Jane’s bedroom strongly resembles the maternal womb as it is characterised by warmth, moist, softness and stillness. All the images are based on proximity, there is no distance, no sign of distancing through vision, which is gendered and culturally determined as one’s own. The warm harmony of the womb-like bedroom protects the I from the non-I of the outside world—the snowy and cold London streets. Jane’s room embodies the anthropocosmic ties as water, fire, home/shelter are all present in this image of the original shell, the maternal womb. The dark blue walls that are “like the night sky itself” (Drabble 9) open up the place into a cosmic space as if the room ended somewhere among the stars.

Jane Gray has given birth to her daughter, Bianca in this bedroom. Before her birth, in her mother’s womb Bianca was protected in and by the original shell, while the bedroom is also imagined as the womb by her mother. In Bianca’s case, Bachelard’s sentence is doubly true, “[l]ife is value. Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house” (7). But being in the room, Jane herself is enclosed in the protective warmth of a womb too. In this sense, the mother and the daughter are in a similar position: for Bianca it is

the first and original experience, for Jane it is a result of regression. Jane requires as much nurturing as Bianca does, but in her case the nurturer figure is James, her brother-in-law and lover. The mothering process goes parallel in both cases: as Jane mothers the little girl, she is remothered as well, and, in the course of the novel, they start venturing out from the womb-like bedroom to the outside world together. But there is a vital difference between the two processes since Jane Gray makes a detour on purpose: unlike Bianca, whose natural state is to enjoy the prolonged protection of the original shell from the outside world for a while—provided by the nurturing process—Jane willingly regresses and maintains this alternative position by making the room function as a heterotopic space, which I will investigate in the second half of this chapter.

Besides the original shell, which stands for the maternal womb there is another powerful spatial image in *The Waterfall* that Drabble borrows from the nineteenth-century female literary tradition. When talking about the garret and the cellar Bachelard perpetuates a gender-coded binary, which, in my view, is another image of the abundant and well-elaborated masculine/feminine poles. Inferring this binary as natural in his interpretation, the vertical polarity of houses is embodied in the cellar and attic. “Indeed, it is possible, *almost without commentary*, to oppose the rationality of the roof to the irrationality of the cellar” (Bachelard 17-8, emphasis added). If the attic is the place of (masculine) rationality, then how is it possible that the female literary tradition is full of women enclosed in the attic? The enigmatic figures of Bertha Mason and several other characters of the female literary tradition suggest just the opposite: the attic is a place of madness and irrationality. Seemingly, there is a strong discrepancy, but it is not the women figures who declare themselves mad or monstrous. It is a question of masculine authority to treat women as monsters and contain them in the attic.

[T]he monster-woman, threatening to replace her angelic sister, embodies intransigent female autonomy and thus represents both the author’s power to allay “his” anxieties by calling their source bad names (witch, bitch, fiend, monster) and, simultaneously, the mysterious power of the character who refuses to stay in her textually ordained ‘place’ and thus generates a story that “gets away” from its author. (Gilbert and Gubar 28)

In this sense, transgressive women figures who threaten the authority of men are called mad and are “rationalised” in the attic, as an early form of medicalisation of women. For this reason Bachelard’s views on the metaphoric meaning of attics needs to be modified and made

conscious of gender differences. The gendered version of Bachelard's claim is that the attic is the place of masculine rationality, of the rationalisation of fears of women by men. Resulting from this, the attic functions as a container of transgressive female energy which is contained within patriarchal culture.

The potentials for madness are definitely there in Drabble's novel, which is hardly surprising if one considers its literary predecessor, *Jane Eyre*. Bertha Mason, Rochester's secretly imprisoned wife, functions as Jane Eyre's "truest and darkest double" in the Thornfield part of the novel (Gilbert and Gubar 360), who "not only acts *for* Jane, she also acts *like* Jane" (Gilbert and Gubar 361). Since Jane experiences a frightening series of separations within the self—that Gilbert and Gubar list in detail (359)—it is no wonder that the very bodily and threatening apparition of Bertha is the incarnation of Jane's self—or rather part of self—she has been trying to repress since she left Gateshead as part of her education into femininity. Sally Shuttleworth claims that Thornfield is not the only place in the novel to regulate female energies. She suggests that there are two forms of "asylum" for controlling these disruptive forces: Lowood and the third floor of Thornfield. "In depicting events at Lowood, Brontë explores the consequences of restraining female energy" because at Lowood "[d]iscipline is achieved both by mortification of the flesh, and constant inspection and surveillance" (Shuttleworth 160). As opposed to this, Bertha's case is different:

The system at Thornfield represents the vestiges of a prior era, when the "animal" insane were kept hidden and mechanically restrained (as Bertha is after each outbreak) and no attempt was made at cure or recuperation. "Nature" was given free rein, but the inmates were in consequence cast out from the ranks of humanity. (Shuttleworth 160)

The juxtaposition of the characters of Jane and Bertha—one representing the socially acceptable, the other externalising the often transgressive, uninhibited self—shows two possible ends of stories of female development as well as the strong definitive force of the powerful nature/culture binary.

The readers are hardly informed about the nature of Bertha's madness, the only details that are revealed are given by Rochester. His accounts combine two reasons: inheritance from her Creole mother and personal responsibility. However, the imagery makes it clear that Bertha has her fits when the moon is red, thus she is plagued by the generic functions of the female body, the menstrual flow, which was commonly taken for a source of female insanity. For this reason Shuttleworth claims that Bertha's description does not stem from the Gothic

tradition but is completely compatible with the contemporary scientific and medical views on female insanity. (167)

Despite Rochester's repulsion, Jane Eyre never shares his disgust and still sees Bertha as an upper-class lady, just like Blanche Ingram, the former being Rochester's previous and the latter being his proposed wife. At one point, after her disastrous wedding with Rochester, Jane remarks, "Sir, [. . .] you are inexorable for that unfortunate lady; you speak of her with hate—with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel—she cannot help being mad" (298). A few pages later Rochester claims that

I never loved, never esteemed, I did not even know her. [. . .] I had marked neither modesty nor benevolence, nor candour, nor refinement in her mind or manners. [. . .] I found her nature wholly alien to mine, her tastes obnoxious to me, her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher, expanded to anything larger. (Brontë 303)

It seems that Bertha is the absolute opposite of what Rochester considers himself to be, and of what he expects a lady to be like. Rochester imagined Bertha to serve his narcissistic attitude by enlarging his self image by her own tastes, interests and manners and her beauty. "[. . .] Miss Mason was the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty: and this was no lie. I found her a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram: tall, dark, and majestic" (Brontë 302). But Rochester's hopes sink when Bertha refuses to mirror his grandeur by her own ladylike—feminine—character and turns out to be his negative reflection, a complete negation of the concept of femininity, all in all, mad. (Felman 150-3) Rochester never sheds light onto the process of her going mad, nor does it become clear how he related to Bertha before she "went mad". He mentions only her "violent and *unreasonable* temper", her "*contradictory*" orders (Brontë 303, emphasis added), and the fact that "since the medical men had pronounced her mad, she had, *of course*, been shut up" (Brontë 305, emphasis added). But was Bertha Mason really mad? Or she was just *unreasonable* to Rochester because she was *contradictory* to his character? And, *of course*, was she shut up because patriarchy declared her mad?

Bertha is only spoken about, but she never speaks. She makes sounds but these are not words in the sense that Rochester could make head or tail of them. Her speech is unreasonable to Rochester and Jane as well, but she can communicate with Jane through her actions. In addition, she is described as an animal, crawling on all fours, roaring, without any human traits, however, she is a human being.

In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal; but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (Brontë 291)

Bertha is faceless because she is made faceless, non-existent because she refused to function as the metaphoric measure of Rochester's narcissism. She is represented as a monstrous, dehumanised creature, who is rationalised—and contained—in the attic of her husband's house. Bertha could never be reduced to Mrs. Rochester, but Rochester does not give up: now he tries to do the same with Jane by first taking her name, then taking her face by the gorgeous veil and reducing her to an eager reflection of his own perfectness.⁸¹ In this way, Bertha's madness is created by Rochester, and on a larger scale by patriarchy, and provides a deep insight into the mechanisms that define, contain women and femininity in a patriarchal society before the era when medicalisation of women's madness really started.

Similarly, the potentiality of madness lurks in the background in the story of Drabble's protagonist as well, however, Jane Gray seems to take no notice of the deeper meaning of madness and enclosure, and thinks that her own confinement⁸² refers to her own case only, and does not carry a wider meaning. If Jane's possible madness is interpreted in a nineteenth-century medical context it is no wonder that she is presented in confinement and right before childbirth. The nineteenth-century psychologist's, J.E.D. Esquirol's⁸³ case studies reveal much about this context, "[t]he number of women who become insane after confinement, and during and after lactation, is much more considerable than is commonly supposed. In fact, at the Salpêtrière, almost one twelfth of the women received have become insane under these circumstances" (126). Jane Gray introduces herself up in her bedroom, which—like a madhouse—is a heterotopic space in the Foucauldian sense of the term. However, Jane is happy to be confined there, and unlike Bertha, she does not want to escape. Instead, she

⁸¹ A veil is not only an instrument of defacing the other but of concealment as well. Bertha's insanity stems from her inability to veil or conceal her true self and mask herself as a proper lady in a patriarchal upper-class English environment. By tearing Jane's bridal veil Bertha saves Jane from the need of concealment and lets her return to Rochester when she is veiled from his sight which can no longer deface her. (Shuttleworth 165)

⁸² Confinement has a double meaning, both of which are relevant in Jane Gray's case. On the one hand, it means imprisonment, confinement, on the other hand, childbirth and staying home after it.

⁸³ The French psychologist, J.E.D. Esquirol devoted himself to the study of insanity and set up a *maison de santé* in 1801-2 which functioned as a private asylum. His major work, *Des maladies mentales, considérées sous les rapports médical, hygiénique, et médico-légal* (1838) founded the field of clinical psychology. He coined the term hallucination, and in his *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity* (1845) he explores the nature of insanity, hallucinations and illusions, fury, mental alienation, epilepsy and melancholia besides including several case studies. (Esquirol vii-xv) He claimed that certain mental illnesses are caused by emotional disturbances and not by any physical deficiencies of the brain. (Britannica 174)

dreads the outside world because she suffers from agoraphobia and depression: she has gradually withdrawn from her college friends because her husband, Malcolm did not like them, finds little interest in human relationships because they could have disturbed Malcolm practising and finally she can “hardly force herself to walk along a street or ask a grocer for a pound of sprouts” (Drabble 107). As a result she retreats to her attic bedroom and imposes self-confinement upon herself, which she finds so natural that she hardly ever desires any change. In a nineteenth-century context agoraphobia simply carries “patriarchal definitions of ‘femininity’ to absurd extremes, and thus function[s] as [an] essential or at least inescapable parody of social prescription” (Gilbert and Gubar 54). However, Jane in her twentieth-century story does not become properly feminine at all as a result of her agoraphobia, rather she is seen as almost mad, or at least weird, even by her own mother, although the mother does not have an insight into the wider implications of Jane’s state because both she and Malcolm intend to hide it from her without any previous agreement on it.

As in Bertha’s case, Jane’s “madness” is induced by her husband, Malcolm. While Rochester considers Antoinette Mason too bodily and transgressive and turns her into the mad Bertha,⁸⁴ Malcolm finds Jane too asexual, frigid. He misses what Rochester—in another age—considered an excess, which highlights the fact that Bertha and Jane are madwomen of different ages, and, at the same time, demonstrates the arbitrariness of norms defining normality and madness. Similarly, the embodiments of the norm, Lucy Deane in *The Mill on the Floss* and Lucy in *The Waterfall* show the other end of the scale by presenting an angelic and a promiscuous woman as “proper women” of two different ages. In *The Waterfall* the “abnormal” Jane Gray takes advantage of Malcolm’s charges as a refuge and carries them to the extreme “by closing up against him, by wearing ragged old cardigans and laddered stockings [. . .]” (Drabble 111). Malcolm addresses his anxieties at the seven months pregnant Jane:

[. . .] he took hold of me by the shoulders and shoved me back against the wall, and started to beat my head against the wall, and I started to struggle and kick. He was shouting at me, about how I’d taken everything from him, and ruined his life,

⁸⁴ The story of making Antoinette into Bertha is finely written in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), in which Jean Rhys creates the background story of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. “Antoinette finds a threatening double in her mother, constituting for her the shadow of madness, and alternatively, in her black nurse Christophine, with her wisdom; in this case there is no simple juxtaposition as the doubles are all refractions of the other: Bertha/Anette/Antoinette/Christophine/Tia” (Curti 118). Here doubles function differently since they no longer seem to be an evil force to get rid of, rather their relationship is much more complex and is “intertwined with sameness” (Curti 118).

and been unfaithful to him, and I knew at that instant, at the sound of that extraneous word unfaithful, that he had been unfaithful to me. (Drabble 111-2)

Malcolm makes Jane the source of his own anxieties without realising that it was he who has made Jane “mad”, agoraphobic and depressed, which all result in her naturalised enclosure in the attic bedroom.

Everything changes with the appearance of James. First, he tries to make Jane happy in her solitude by nurturing her, then he takes her out from the house with great care, like an invalid. James seems to rescue Jane from the threat of madness. However, his behaviour is no less better than that of Malcolm. He does what Rochester did in Thornfield with Jane Eyre after their engagement: both men reduce the two Janes to passivity, to being objects rather than subjects, and both infantilise their beloveds, which is another level of containment. Having secured Jane Eyre’s love, Rochester starts treating Jane as “Mrs Rochester—Fairfax Rochester’s girl-bride” (Brontë 257) who can be dressed and decorated with jewellery as he wishes.⁸⁵ “As surely as Rochester clothes Jane in silks and gossamer veils, he just as insidiously masters⁸⁶ her spirit by fulfilling her internalised fantasy in which a beast turns dazzling prince” (Rowe 81). Rochester reduces Jane to fairy tale clichés which can be prevented from coming true only by Jane’s sudden departure. Similarly, James erases any attempts of self-assertion on Jane Gray’s side by reducing her to romance clichés: he makes her wait for him without end, reduces her to eternal passivity and perpetuates her self-image as an invalid by making her rely on him concerning everything. When James leaves for Italy on a family holiday, Jane remarks that “[. . .] I think he was glad to see that I would suffer, so I had to present him with an all too genuine assurance of my suffering” (Drabble 155). James acts quite like Rochester in Thornfield: they deny self-assertion of both Janes, and their behaviour makes necessary for both female protagonists to develop into mature and more autonomous subjects without them: Jane Eyre in the company of Mary and Diana, Jane Gray after the accident alone. They both must escape enclosure—physical and representational—to develop without their men’s help and intervention.

Although women can try potential ways out of their many enclosures none of them proves to be as finite an escape from this representational trap as owning one of the most

⁸⁵ However gently he thinks he is treating Jane Eyre, Rochester does not realise what he does and how it affects Jane’s self-esteem. Jane thinks, “It would, indeed be a relief [. . .] if I had ever so small an independency; I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr Rochester, or sitting like a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily round me” (Brontë 267).

⁸⁶ Rochester’s generosity with which he clothes Jane stems not only his fulfilment of fairy tale patterns. As Joyce Zonana investigates in “The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structures of *Jane Eyre*,” Rochester’s intentions are fuelled by Oriental despotism as well which is characterised by the “enslavement” of female autonomy by reducing women into speaking jewels.

pervasive representations of enclosure—the house itself. In *The Waterfall*, as well as its nineteenth-century intertext, *Jane Eyre*, owning the house is of central importance for the female protagonists. In the changed power structure and asocial environment in Ferndean Jane Eyre replies to the unbelieving Rochester that if she wishes, “I can build a house of my own close up to your door [. . .]” (Brontë 429). Her sentence is not only about her financial independence, it carries a most profound meaning: Jane feels no longer trapped by patriarchal representations of women enclosed in houses since she could have her own house—could own her own body and have her spiritual and corporeal integrity—if she wished. Now Jane has gained maturity to decide about herself and not to fall victim of patriarchal representations of women. She can no longer be contained in Rochester’s house as he planned to do in Thornfield. In my view, Jane’s sentence is the metaphoric magic spell against the representational trap facing women who have been imagined as houses and been imprisoned in these very same houses. However, one should never forget that Jane utters this sentence in an asocial setting which might be as idyllic as to be free from the heavy burden of representations.

Similarly, owning the house is a crucial question for Jane Gray in *The Waterfall*, too. Jane starts her love relationship with James where Jane Eyre and Rochester end it: in an asocial context. Their love relation is confined to a single house, or more exactly to a single room of that horrid two-storey house, which means the absolute exclusion of society. However, when Jane talks about possessing the house her statement has clear social implications: it is all about property, money, and who is paying for whom. “I don’t think I could have slept with James if the house I did it in hadn’t been technically mine,” she claims (Drabble 130).

Since *Jane Eyre* is one of the most central intertexts of *The Waterfall*, its meanings—denotative or connotative they may be—are surely imported into Jane Gray’s story. I have already highlighted the importance of owning a house in *Jane Eyre*, so, in my opinion, the meanings previously revealed are also relevant here to a greater or lesser extent. In this way, it is not only the house that is at Jane Gray’s disposal, but her body and integrity as well. Jane Gray thinks herself to be able to say Jane Eyre’s sentence—“I am an independent woman now” (Brontë 429)—however, she is far from being independent in the real sense of the word, especially that Malcolm monthly pays a certain sum. Jane is attracted to the romantic clichés in *Jane Eyre*—now I am referring to her self-deceptive tendencies I have already elaborated on when talking about the romance—and does not realise that sharing her house and body with James does not result in, or, rather, is not a sign of her fully independent existence.

Again, Jane deceives herself when she thinks that financial and sexual independence equals maturity.

The last sign of her false romantic ideals becomes visible when Jane and James want to leave for Norway: Malcolm revisits the house and sees Jane and James sleeping in the marital bed and when leaving, he angrily smashes the big first floor window.

Malcolm had broken the big window that fronted on to the street. There was glass all over the place, all over the floor, all over the steps outside. I could not think what to do with it, so I went and got back into bed with James and warmed my cold feet on him. As so often, I couldn't tell if I was shocked beyond reaction, numb with alarm, or simply indifferent. I fell asleep almost immediately. (Drabble 182)

The broken window is like a sign of oncoming disillusionment, like a warning by an intruder from reality and social context, Malcolm. It is his last claim on her: by ruining her house Malcolm displaces his anger on the building instead of violating Jane's bodily integrity for the last time. Jane does not realise that the house became the target of violence instead of her. Malcolm ruined the representation instead of what is represented. Jane does not pay attention to it and without thinking she falls back into self-deception—dream and sleep—as if nothing has happened. However, the tiny broken pieces of glass that cover her house used to be a whole, not fragmented, not broken, like her romantic illusion.

The time for Jane's real maturity arrives when her story really synthesises the romance and the *Bildungsroman* at the end of the novel. Her self-deception is over: she realises that the harmony she longs for is not based on romantic clichés but rather on the maturity of the self. Jane starts building this mature self after the accident on their way to Norway when James balances on the razor-edge between life and death in the hospital and Jane re-evaluates her life. At the end of the novel things change:

When James got back [from the rehabilitation centre] he came to see me instantly and started to complain about the way I'd cleaned my house up. He said that all the shining paintwork and well swept floors made him feel uncomfortable, so I let it lapse a little. He didn't much approve of my plans to acquire a girl to look after the children for me, either, and was really highly critical of my new-found desires to see my poems in print. (Drabble 232)

Jane cleans up her house, which is a meaningful act: it has both a literal and a metaphoric message. James understands only the first one, whereas the second carries a more profound meaning when considering the long-established tradition of representing women as houses. Or perhaps James understands the metaphorical message too well, that is why he resists the cleaned-up house. Jane owns her house, so she is definitely not contained by it, or if she is enclosed in it, it is her decision to be so. Jane's newly cleaned house is the metaphorical representation of her new selfhood, of her genuine independence which no longer relies on romantic illusions. It is the metaphor for Jane's new self that is unfamiliar to James, who can understand women only along romantic clichés and can do nothing with the new Jane who is actively taking hold of her life and by the ownership of her house finds her way out of the representational trap of women imagined as houses.

As it can be expected, Byatt's erudite novel, *Possession*, heavily relies on the tradition of spatial imagery. The author is well aware of the importance of this tradition and applies the spatial images of the nineteenth-century female literary tradition with mastery with a contesting intention without neglecting the gendered nature of these images. *Possession* is abundant in enclosed spaces which are portrayed as exclusively feminine spaces. Similarly to nonfictional authors, Christabel LaMotte is deeply concerned with representations of women, and her general experience of enclosure is shaped nicely in her following poem:

What is a House? So strong—so square
Making Warmth inside the Winds
We walk with lowered eyelids there
And silent go—behind the blinds

Yet hearts may tap like loaded bombs
Yet brains may shrill in carpet-hush
And windows fly from silent rooms
And walls break outwards—with a rush—
Christabel LaMotte (Byatt 210)

Paradoxically, to escape the risks of metaphorical and actual enclosures the nineteenth-century female protagonist, Christabel lives in Bethany with her friend Blanche Glover and hardly leaves her home, her space of self-imposed enclosure. They enjoy a certain kind of freedom since they are relatively independent and self-sufficient.

We formed a Project—my dear Companion [Blanche] and myself—to make ourselves a Bethany where the work of *all kinds* was carried on in the Spirit of Love and His Laws. [. . .] we were to renounce the outside World—and the usual female Hopes (and with them the usual female Fears) in exchange for—dare I say Art—a daily duty of crafting—from exquisite curtains to Mystical Paintings, from biscuits with sugar roses to the Epic of Melusina. It was a Sealed Pact [. . .]. It was a chosen way of life—in which, you must believe, I have been wondrously happy—and not alone in being so. (Byatt 187)

Her self-contained happiness in her home, which she displays in the riddle of the egg, is echoed in Maud's pristine, white apartment, and her office at the top of Tennyson Tower. At one point, Maud is shocked by the similarity of her ways and Christabel's and takes it as a warning not to commit the same mistakes as her nineteenth-century foremother did.

Christabel's love for Ash makes her leave her well-defined whereabouts and allows her to withdraw only into her body which was also defined in spatial terms in the nineteenth-century literary tradition. When she accompanies Ash to Yorkshire she has no place to stick to: she enjoys rambling the dunes, exploring the country with Ash; the only closed/enclosed space she owns is her body. That first night, when Ash takes possession of her, she waits for him “under a stiff white crocheted bedspread and a patchwork quilt” in a “high-necked white lawn nightdress, covered at the neck and wrists with intricate goffering and pin-tucks and lacy edges, buttoned with a row of minute linen buttons” (Byatt 283). She fights him in bed, but consents to give him her last holds: her body. Next morning, when Ash is confronted with the obvious signs of her virginity, he concludes that “she must have bundled away the tell-tale white nightdress, too, in her luggage, for he never saw it again” (Byatt 285). Christabel lets Ash inside her “*motte-and-bailey*⁸⁷ defences” (Byatt 502) and allows him to take hold of everything she has.

In fact, most women in *Possession*—Val, Beatrice Nest, Ellen Ash, Lady Bailey—are confined to enclosed spaces and can be identified with one or two definite places. Val, Roland's sullen girlfriend, is confined to their *basement* apartment which opens onto a forbidden garden, which is “visible between the railings in the upper third of their window” (Byatt 17, emphasis added). They are forbidden to enter the garden as the first couple of man and woman was forbidden to enter the Garden of Eden. “The garden was long, thin, bowery, with sunny spots of grass, surrounded by little box hedges, its air full of roses, swarthy

⁸⁷ A reference to Christabel LaMotte's and Maud Bailey's names, which also echoes Fergus Wolff quoting Lacan about the formation of the ego.

damask, thick ivory, floating pink, its borders restraining fantastic striped and spotted lilies, curling bronze and gold, bold, and hot and rich. And forbidden” (Byatt 17).

Val’s dressing is also telling of her exclusion into enclosure:

There were now two Vals. One sat silently at home in old jeans and unevenly hanging long crêpey shirts, splashed with murky black and purple flowers. This one had lustreless brown hair, very straight, hanging about a pale, underground face. Just sometimes, this one had crimson nails, left over from the other, who wore a tight black shirt and was carefully made up with pink and brown eyeshadow, brushed blusher along the cheekbone and plummy lips. This mournfully bright menial⁸⁸ Val wore high heels and a black beret. (Byatt 14)

Val, the housewife, who is confined to the basement flat and her household, hides herself in shabby clothes, while Val, the breadwinner, an equal of men, the modern woman dresses up to emphasise her feminine looks as if her problematic attitude towards her body was reflected in her clothing. When Roland disappears with Maud to do their research secretly, Val starts going out with Euan MacIntyre, the solicitor. In her new relationship she opens up since she decides she could be happy. (Byatt 433) Her looks show the way she has changed, so when she meets Roland again, her former boyfriend is taken aback by her sight:

Roland stared at sleek Val, who had the shine of really expensive and well-made clothes, and more important and unmistakable, the glistening self-pleasure of sexual happiness. She had had her hair done in a new way—short, soft, shaped, rising when she tossed her head and setting back to perfection. She was all muted violets and shot-silk dove-colours, all balanced and pretty, stockings, high shoes, padded shoulders, painted mouth. He said instinctively,
‘You look *happy*, Val.’
‘I decided I could be.’ (Byatt 432-3)

With her decision Val rebels against her lot, her confinement to the basement flat which smells cat piss and her function as a frugal housewife. As a result of her decision Val finds happiness, even if the reader is not informed about the end of her new relationship, because

⁸⁸ Val’s description, especially the unusual use of these adjectives condenses the discrepancy of her roles into this last sentence, which combines opposing characteristics.

she manages to leave behind a burdeon which limited her and reduced her into a household servant and to develop into a lovable, attractive woman.

What Cristabel LaMotte writes in the quote at the beginning of Chapter Seven,

In no Rush of Action
This is *our* doom
To Drag a Long Life out
In a Dark Room. (Byatt 112)

is remarkably true of Beatrice Nest, another woman figure whose enclosure is one of her most prominent features. Whereas her external existence captures people's imagination, neither her emotional life nor her academic achievements call for greater attention.

She was indisputably solid, and nevertheless amorphous, a woman of wide and abundant flesh, sedentary swelling hips, a mass of bosom, above which spread a cheerful-shaped face, crowned by a kind of angora hat, or thick wool-skein of white hair, woven and tucked into a roll from which lost strands trailed and wandered in all directions. (Byatt 112)

Men who know her always endow her with a metaphoric identity which is always based on her outward appearance: Cropper thinks of her "in terms of Carroll's obtrusive white sheep" and Blackadder visualises her as a "puffed white spider" (Byatt 112). Even feminists provide her a metaphoric identity, they see her "as some kind of guardian octopus" (Byatt 112). Although these views on her might sound ironic and ridiculous to some point, even Beatrice Nest thinks that it is her body that defines her.

In fact, her thoughts about her own sexuality were dominated entirely by her sense of the massive, unacceptable bulk of her breasts. Another woman might have flaunted them, might have carried them proudly [. . .]. In bed at night she felt them fall heavily sideways over the broad case of her ribs. [. . .] She imagined herself grotesquely swollen, looked modestly down and met no one's eye. (Byatt 116-7)

Her body is first read as motherly, then, as time passes, lesbian, and as she grows older, threatening and repressive. (Byatt 116) The discomfort caused by her own body makes Beatrice feel inferior, which results in avoiding eye contact with others. However, her name

highlights two of her positive characteristics: she is pure in her soul like Dante's Beatrice, and loving in a motherly way as her family name, Nest, suggests. Nevertheless, nobody understands her, so she finds a close companion in Ellen Ash, whose journal she has been editing for decades. In this way, her body and her editorial work are the major sources of her confinement.

"My life, she thought, has been built round a lie, a house to hold a lie" (Byatt 457), summarises Ellen Ash her life when she finds an unfinished letter of the dying Ash to Christabel. The shocking revelation shatters the image of Ellen Ash, who seems not only to live in a perfect marriage with the great poet of the age, Randolph Henry Ash, but also to be a perfect housewife. Her only visible deficiency is that her marriage is childless. While editing Ellen's journal Beatrice Nest's impression of her life gradually changes: first "she saw that Ellen Ash was rambling and dull" (Byatt 115), later on she "became aware of the mystery of privacy, which Ellen, for all her expansive ordinary eloquence, was protecting" (Byatt 115). Beatrice feels that Ellen hides something even in such a personal piece of writing as her diary. She is right about it, but only the reader is allowed to have access to the information that Ellen is so busy to cancel out in her writing, though Leonora Stern, the American feminist, is so eager to expose it.

Just like Beatrice, Ellen Ash is a kind of prisoner of her own body, which is revealed in her memories of her honeymoon with Ash. In *Possession* there are three honeymoon episodes: Ash and Christabel's, Maud and Roland's and Ellen and Ash's, each with a detailed description of the wedding night, which, in Ellen's case, stands in sharp contrast with the other two honeymoon episodes. There are no written traces of the event that posterity can devour, thus the information is shared with the reader only, not even the young researchers, Maud and Roland have access to it. Ellen's memories of her own honeymoon and, especially, her wedding night with Randolph prove to be more painful after reading her husband's letter full of emotions to Christabel. "She did not remember it in words. There were no words attached to it, that was part of the horror. She had never spoken of it to anyone, not even to Randolph, precisely not to Randolph" (Byatt 458).

The details of her wedding night bear a strong resemblance to that of Christabel and Ash, but the outcome and the emotional context is completely the opposite.

She remembered it in images. [. . .] The nightdress embroidered for these nights, white cambric, all spattered with lovers' knots and forget-me-nots and roses, white on white.

A thin white animal, herself, trembling.

A complex thing, the naked male, curly hairs and shining wet, at once bovine and dolphin-like, its scent feral and overwhelming.

A large hand, held out in kindness, not once, but many times, slapped away, pushed away, slapped away.

A running creature, crouching and cowering in the corner of the room, its teeth chattering, its veins clamped in spasms, its breath shallow and fluttering. Herself. [. . .]

An attempt. A hand not pushed away. Tendons like steel, teeth in pain, clenched, clenched.

The approach, the locked gateway, the panic, the whimpering flight.

Not once, but over and over and over. (Byatt 458-9)

The spasmodic style evokes the horror, the tense opposition of Ellen's body and soul to the sexual approach of Randolph. Ellen is incapable to do it. She has no conceptualised memory of the event, only images but they are verbalised, like small mosaic pieces, from which one can reconstruct what happened. The detailed description of her nightdress evokes Christabel's very similar nightdress which she wore on her wedding night with Ash. The lovers' knots, the forget-me-nots and the roses, all embroidered in white, are special ornaments for the special event, Ellen's deflowering. Christabel was de-flowered/deflowered, and she tucks away the nightdress, while Ellen's flowers remain intact even if she possibly gets rid of the nightdress. Ellen sees both Ash and herself in terms of animals, which implies that she finds sexuality a beastly embodiment of carnality.⁸⁹ She describes herself as the prey of Ash, completely in terror. She distances the image of the naked Ash by calling it a "thing" though she retains his animal traits, such as "bovine," and "feral" (Byatt 458). However, despite his repulsive nature, Ash is still attractive or, at least, overwhelming. Ellen fears passion, the overwhelming emotion that would help her lend herself to bodily pleasure. Though she calls Ash a "complex thing" (Byatt 458), her memories of him are made up of parts of his body, mainly his hand. Not only Ellen's style but her memories prove to be spasmodic, they are based on metonymies as she cannot comprehend the whole experience, she substitutes *pars pro toto*. Ellen is unable to let Ash possess her body, the "gateway" is locked. Her house holds a lie, not only literally but metaphorically as well. Ellen is incapable to let Ash in into her metaphoric house, her body, and from this point on her life, her actual household and her

⁸⁹ Ellen's view evokes the fight of Rochester and Bertha which, in a psychoanalytic sense, can be interpreted as parental coupling that terrifies Jane Eyre. (Rowe 83)

marriage are built on a lie. Ellen Ash is a prisoner of her body, its frigidity, its incapability to love.

She makes up for this side of their marriage with “a thousand of small comforts, cakes and titbits. She became his slave. Quivering at every word. *He had accepted her love*. She had loved him for it” (Byatt 459). Without any self-deception she concludes that “[t]hat other woman [Christabel] was in one sense his true wife. Mother, at least briefly, of his child, it seemed” (Byatt 460).

There is another woman enclosed in space, Lady Bailey, whose enclosure is obvious to everyone: she is enclosed in her wheelchair, she is denied free movement, and is lost without the help of her husband. Her position in space symbolises women’s position in a patriarchal world: to have access to anything in space she is dependent on her husband, she cannot take a step on her own. Her situation is a special one: she is not only enclosed in her wheelchair, but is a “prisoner” of her husband’s house, Seal Court. Seal Court’s name suggests a double enclosure: seal, as a “lock” on letters—maybe on Christabel’s—and court, the enclosure of her husband’s house. When her husband, Sir George Bailey, learns about the value of the letters the two young scholars have found in their residence, he does not want to give away the manuscripts because he wants to buy a new wheelchair for his wife. Although this seems a kind and loving gesture towards his wife, it is a means of making her enclosure feel more comfortable, more natural.

The name of Seal Court is related to Ash and Christabel as well, as it echoes the name Ash called Christabel on their wedding night, “My selkie” (Byatt 283). Previously, when they walk by the sea they talk about the possibility of seeing a seal there, and end up discussing “many legends, of seal-wives, seal-women, on the Northumberland coast, and in Scotland. Women from the sea, who come for a time, and then must leave” (Byatt 280). Ash concludes his line of thought unspoken, “[h]e could not say to her, you will not leave me, like the seal-wives. Because she could and must” (Byatt 280).

Even the fictional women characters in *Possession* are enclosed in space: all the women characters in poetry that Maud and Roland discuss, the recurrent figures of the drowned city of Is, and the many princess figures in the novel. When Maud tells Roland about her reasons to start researching Christabel LaMotte, she recites a little poem about the Cumean Sybil she had learnt by heart in early childhood. Though the poem, which is from a volume entitled *Ghosts and Other Weird Creatures*, puts four questions to the Sybil about her identity, the only characteristics of the Sybil that is revealed is that she is closed

Here on a high shelf

In a webbed flask [. . .]. (Byatt 54)

Enclosure seems to be the only feature defining her identity, which has a long-lasting effect on Maud. She comments on the influence of this poem on her academic life as follows:

I wrote a paper on Victorian women's imagination of space. *Marginal Beings and Liminal Poetry*. About agoraphobia and claustrophobia and the paradoxical desire to be let out into unconfined space, the wild moorland, the open ground, and at the same time to be closed into tighter and tighter impenetrable small spaces—like Emily Dickinson's voluntary confinement, like the Sybil's jar. (Byatt 54)

However, there is evidence of female confinement not only in women's poetry but in Ash's poems as well, as Roland points out, "[I]ike Ash's Sorceress in her *In-Pace*" (Byatt 54). Nevertheless, images of enclosure in LaMotte's and Ash's poetry work in different ways: the confinement of female characters is natural for LaMotte, but as Maud remarks, Ash "is punishing her [the Sorceress] for her beauty and what he thought of as her wickedness" (Byatt 55). She points out something like Gilbert and Gubar do when they write about the monstrosity of women and their consequent enclosure. (28)

The drowned city of Is is another image of the enclosure of women. "It's a Breton legend. It was drowned in the sea for its wickedness. It was ruled by Queen Dahud, the sorceress, daughter of King Gardlond. The women there were transparent, according to some versions. Christabel wrote a poem" (Byatt 133). In Leonora Stern's volume there is a prefatory note in which Leonora points out that the "women's world of the underwater city is the obverse of the male-dominated technological-industrial world of Paris or Par-is, as the Bretons have it. They say that Is will come to the surface when Paris is drowned for its sins" (Byatt 134). Leonora's term "obverse" is a clever one because it implies that the city of Is is both the opposite and the other of the city of men. The name of Paris is a pun in French, which also suggests this binary symbiosis of the two cities. Par-Is exists By-Is/by Is not by itself. This name reinforces the story of the two cities neither of which can surface without the sinking of the other, as well as the well-know binary of Man and the Other. Just as Man cannot be the centre without the marginality of the Other, Par-Is cannot come into being without Is.

As their names suggest, the fate of the two cities is interlocked since neither can surface without the loss of the other. The city of Is was drowned because of the power of its empress, Dahud, and her transgressive sexuality. The punishment is the drowning of the city:

it sinks under water, which is a strongly feminine image. The city's inhabitants are transparent, namely invisible or nonexistent to vision, which also reinforces women's invisibility and non-existence by a masculine measure, vision, in a patriarchal world. Women's confinement to a separate world, an invisible, nonexistent one, is clearly symptomatic of women's self-image in the nineteenth century.

Christabel in her poem writes:

For their excessive wickedness
In days of old, was this distress
Come on them, of transparency
And openness to every eye. (Byatt 134)

The women of the city of Is are transparent in a way that everything they have in their bodies is visible:

The red blood runs beneath their skin
And feels its way and flows within,
And men can see, as through a glass
Each twisty turn, each crossing pass
Of threaded vein and artery
From heart to throat, from mouth to eye. (Byatt 134)

What LaMotte suggests here is that there is nothing hidden in these women to the eyes of men: no room of their own, no privacy even in their bodies. Even though this shocking description is dressed in perfect rhymes and disciplined iambic lines, thus guaranteed the transcendence of order, the content is definitely about female experience. The women of Is are regulated into proper femininity by representing them as transparent and, at the same time, invisible to the eyes of men.

There is another recurrent woman figure in the novel, who is enclosed in transparency. The reader encounters her first in LaMotte's tale, "The Glass Coffin". The princess who is enclosed in the coffin by magic for not consenting to marriage resembles both Christabel and Maud in her beauty (Byatt 63), and is evoked by Blanche Glover when she calls Christabel princess. This sleeping beauty is confined to her glass coffin as a form of punishment not for her beauty like Ash's sorceress but for her wickedness like Christabel's Dahud. Although it is Christabel who is most often called princess in the novel there is another woman who is once

called “A princess” (Byatt 460): Ellen Ash. “She remembered from the days of the Close, seeing herself once, naked, in a cheval glass. She must have been barely eighteen. Little high breasts, with warm brown circles. A skin like live ivory and long hair like silk. A princess” (Byatt 460). Ellen is in her blossoming youth, well before hoping that the prince once will arrive and kiss her to life. At this point she has pleasure in the beauty of her body, which body, later, becomes her “coffin”, her house to hold a lie, a kind of confinement she can neither escape nor take pleasure in. As opposed to her, Christabel lets her prince, Ash, kiss her to life and rescue her from her self-confined existence, her glass coffin, which she describes in her riddle as an egg. Significantly, although always aware of Byatt’s intellectual game, the princess’s glass coffin in the tale is a “smooth box, which had no visible cleft or split, but was whole like a green ice⁹⁰ egg” (Byatt 63). Not only the paraphernalia of transparency and enclosure match the logic of the drowned city of Is but the minute details as well. Besides the glass coffin there is a glass dome which “contained a whole castle, set in a beautiful park, with trees and terraces and gardens and fishpools and climbing roses [. . .]” (Byatt 62) A few lines earlier the glass dome is described as a “magic cover” and as a “crystal ball containing a tiny house which you can shake to produce a brilliant snowstorm” (Byatt 62). The drowned city’s detailed description ends similarly:

As though the world of roofs and rocks
Were stored inside a glassy box. (Byatt 135)

These images of enclosure show that women and women’s world are continuously depicted as closed, transparent, separate and a result of punishment. The application of these spatial images highlights the fact that Byatt consciously continues this part of the nineteenth-century female literary tradition and promotes patriarchal discourses. Nevertheless, due to her contesting attitudes the reader can never be with Byatt on the safe side.

As it can be expected, there are two notable exceptions to the imagery of enclosure as a feminine attribute: Leonora Stern, the feminist scholar, and James Blackadder. Leonora seems to be the most assertive of all women characters in the novel: it is made apparent in her dressing and open bisexuality. Leonora is famous for her majestic dressing style which is aggressively colourful and unique. Her looks do not contradict her German family name⁹¹ as she is resplendent like a shiny star. “Leonora was resplendent and barbaric in a scarlet silk shirt and trousers, faintly Oriental, faintly Peruvian, with woven rainbow-coloured borders.

⁹⁰ Green is Christabel’s colour, and Maud’s features are icily regular.

⁹¹ Leonora’s family name means “star” in German.

Her black hair flowed on her shoulders, her wrists and ears and visible bosom were hung with suns and stars of gold” (Byatt 401), or later “Leonora was resplendent in a purple hooded woollen cape, fringed with black silk braid, which covered a kind of scarlet Russian tunic, in heavy silk, over wide black Chinese trousers” (Byatt 478), not to mention the striking colours⁹² she asks for in Make-Up right before the TV chat with Shushila.

Highlighted by the “manslaying scarlet” of her lipstick (Byatt 403) Leonora’s open sexuality unsettles both men and women. When she stays in Maud’s apartment she sexually approaches Maud under the pretence of a good-night kiss and is not even offended by Maud’s refusal (Byatt 316-7). Similarly, Blackadder feels threatened in Leonora’s company: his shabbiness compared to Leonora’s peacock colours equals nothingness, but as their relationship develops his feelings start to change gradually:

Her perfume filled the car, which was a hired Renault. It was a perfume of musk and sandalwood and something sharp which affected Blackadder in contradictory ways. He believed he found it suffocating. Underneath he sensed something else, a promise of darkness, thickness, flesh. [. . .] Her skin, close up, had very fine wrinkles [. . .]. He found these moving. (Byatt 426)

No wonder that Leonora and Blackadder’s relationship is of unusual nature. While Leonora is as assertive as a masculine character and is free of any dependence or enclosure, Blackadder is quite her opposite. He can mostly be associated with enclosure in the Ash factory, and fear of space. In the TV studio when he is asked by Ms Patel to summarise “what’s important about Randolph Henry Ash” (Byatt 400), he “looked rather wildly about his dimly-lit, porridge-coloured box. He was getting claustrophobia” (Byatt 401). Claustrophobia is symptomatic of women’s social confinement, their psychosocial position in a patriarchal society. “Claustrophobia, for instance, agoraphobia’s parallel and complementary opposite, is a disturbance we shall encounter again and again in women’s writing throughout the nineteenth century,” claim Gilbert and Gubar (58). Besides his other characteristics, Blackadder’s claustrophobic impression influences the reader’s interpretation of his character as feminine. A few pages later, when Leonora proposes a sexual encounter, he withdraws shyly without saying a genuine excuse but a clumsy “It’s nice of you, but no thank you” (Byatt 429). With Leonora as a female aggressor he plays a passive role though he is the man.

⁹² „I like a lot of colour at the edge of the lids there—load it on, I can take it, I’ve got huge features and striking colouring, I can carry it off OK [. . .] how about some of that thundery dark pink under the brow here—and I’d like a manslaying scarlet lipstick [. . .] have you got any of those metallic spangles you can dust on here and there, ma’am” (Byatt 403).

In this way, Byatt reverses the typical gender relations by presenting this odd couple. In my view, this is Byatt's greatest trick: she pretends to continue faithfully the imagery of the nineteenth-century female literary tradition, while she turns the whole tradition upside down just in time to wake the reader up from the convenience of familiar patterns and prove the arbitrariness of women's association with enclosed spaces.

Images of enclosure have a long-established tradition in women's literature. They articulate the female experience, the containment of women in and by patriarchy. Houses prove to be the most obvious sites for female enclosure as patriarchal discourses relegate women to the house, actually to the houses of their father's and husbands as their daughters and wives. The tradition of representing women as houses has probably been paralysing for the female reading public but provided a site for rebellion for several female authors. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, one of the earliest and best-known literary examples of female self-assertion, provides a way out of this representational trap by enabling Jane Eyre to own a house of her own, which signals the ownership of her own body as well, which is inevitable to the completion of her *Bildungsroman*. Jane Gray, the protagonist of *The Waterfall*, finds the same solution. Although she eagerly imitates the story of Jane Eyre she seems to take no notice of the implications of owning a house and arrives at the same conclusion on her own, though with the same effects on her *Bildung* story. Byatt seemingly continues the nineteenth-century tradition by presenting a series of women characters who are enclosed in space, be it either a concrete place or their bodies. By creating the women of the drowned city of Is she introduces the unrepresentability of women in quite an obvious way to *Possession*. This apparent reinforcement of the classic images of enclosure implies women's traditional access to the genres of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* as the reinforcement of traditional spatial images creates no alternative representational positions for women. However, the reader does not have to wait for long for the relativising twist. The odd couple of Blackadder and Leonora highlights Byatt's critical approach to the tradition of female spatial imagery. The carnivalesque reversal of gender roles highlights the ironic self-reflexive method of Byatt's text, which questions and inscribes the classic spatial imagery of the female literary tradition by the gesture of rewriting and re-writing it at the same time with the result of cyclicity. The carnivalesque quality of the Blackadder-Leonora couple is reinforced by Leonora's splendid costumes and Blackadder's intentional grey outfit. The carnivalesque functions similarly to heterotopias due to its subversive qualities. The reversed gender roles of the couple require a reversed application of spatial images, which calls attention to the arbitrariness of representations and, at the same time, implies the very same characteristics of the discourse that creates them, which, in the long run, provides a possibility of creating alternative

representational positions for women as well as men who, in this way, can have new access to the gendered plots of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*.

Concept of Space: Heterotopia

The Foucauldian concept of heterotopia greatly informs both *The Waterfall* and *Possession* as well as their common intertext, *Jane Eyre*. I have already referred to heterotopias in the various chapters but now I will point out the functional role of heterotopias not only in the two twentieth-century novels but in the nineteenth-century one as well. I find it important to include Brontë's novel in this analysis because, as we have already seen in several cases, Drabble relies so heavily on the Brontë intertext that she tends to borrow most of its devices as well.

I claim that a heterotopic context is needed to contain the radical ending of the romance of Jane Eyre and Rochester as well as the radically transgressive romance of Jane Gray and James. What is common in Brontë's and Drabble's heterotopias is that both contexts are asocial where patriarchal discourses prove to be inapplicable. Byatt, however, applies the concept of heterotopia not only in relation to space but to time as well, thus her heterotopias in *Possession* always function as heterochronies, in my opinion. She posits three heterotopias and -chronies in her novel, which provides a suitable context for intersecting the present and the past not only in time but in space as well. These three instances organise the structure of the novel as they are positioned at the beginning, at the end as well as exactly in the middle of *Possession*. I propose that the heterotopias and -chronies reinforce Byatt's understanding of the romance as a mode of relating the past to the present because they provide a genuine context for temporal and spatial intersection of the two plot lines.

In *Jane Eyre* the concluding section is set in the almost Edenic, heterotopic locale of Ferndean. It is a place where romantic clichés no longer distort the relation of Jane and Rochester, where social constraints do not influence their behaviour. The asocial context of this heterotopia makes it possible to revise the patriarchal power structure of man and woman and create an alternative space⁹³ where Jane and Rochester can realise their radical romance which is based on the union of true minds. The heterotopia of Ferndean functions as the inverse of Thornfield: all the distortions and discourses—romantic clichés and their

⁹³ "Ferndean is notably stripped and asocial, so that the physical isolation of the lovers suggests their spiritual isolation in a world where such egalitarian marriages as theirs are rare, if not impossible," claim Gilbert and Gubar (369) and point out that the heterotopic site of Ferndean can provide a suitable setting exclusively for the romance of Jane and Rochester but cannot function as an alternative world for lovers in general.

exaggerations, the loss of integrity, and patriarchal objectifying intentions—that almost result in Jane and Rochester’s marriage are missing and, naturally, their lack enables Rochester and Jane to have a successful romance which is not based on the traditional binaries of patriarchal discourses.

In *The Waterfall* Jane’s heterotopic attic bedroom functions as the spatial centre of the plot. Though first it evokes the heterotopic nature of a madhouse, it becomes the site of Jane’s unfolding romance with James. As I have pointed out in the section on Jane Gray’s intended romance, all the social constraints of gender are inapplicable in the heterotopic site of Jane’s bedroom. For this reason either the question of incest or adultery are irrelevant to describe Jane and James’ affair, which legally qualifies as adultery and metaphorically as incest. Jane is so eager to imitate the nineteenth-century romance of Jane Eyre and Rochester that she fails to realise that her romantic entanglement with James evokes medieval romances which originally depicted adulterous love relations. This heterotopic room functions as the exclusive site for Jane’s wished-for romance, the only place that can contain this transgressive love relation. But even Jane realises that this situation cannot be maintained for long. Whenever Jane and James enter society they have to create socially acceptable categories to contain their affair, which otherwise requires no such categories in the heterotopic room. In *The Waterfall* Jane’s heterotopic room functions as an alternative place to which the rules of socially defined spaces cannot be applied. However, Jane realises that, in the long run, such an alternative place helps only to maintain romantic illusions with no regard to her real needs.

Jane’s romantic addiction is shattered by the accident on her way to Norway with James when she is forcefully made to realise her self-deception. The second instance of heterotopia in *The Waterfall* reverses the role of the first one: it is the mirror in the car which both Jane and James look into right before the almost fatal accident, which erases the asocial implications of Jane’s bedroom and restores gendered discourses to their original position. In this way, the heterotopia of the mirror subverts the relations that have previously been inaugurated by the first heterotopia and makes Jane realise that her relationship with James in the social vacuum of her attic bedroom cannot be maintained for long.

By the end of *The Waterfall* Jane cleans up her house including the bedroom and, by this, she declares that she does not need heterotopic places to achieve and maintain her maturity. Her need for a heterotopic site like her bedroom marks her addiction to romantic illusions, while her intention to get rid of the place shows her gradual involvement in her own *Bildungsroman*.

When Foucault introduces the notion of heterotopia, he emphatically points out that “it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space” (Foucault 22). Similarly,

in *Possession* it is impossible to talk about space without positing it on the time scale at the same time, for one of the main thematic concerns of the novel is the intersection of the past and the present. Roland and Maud are the two main characters who primarily approach the past from the direction of the present and manage to experience the overlapping and influence of both times, especially during their Yorkshire trip. The overlapping and intersection of past and present are so central in the novel that it is impossible to neglect Foucault's ideas on heterotopia and heterochrony. The novel is structured along these two concepts: it starts in the London Library, the middle chapters are set in Yorkshire, and its climax is set in the graveyard, where Ash is buried. All three places are examples of the intersection of time and space and function as theoretical pillars which suspend the whole text, and, at the same time, reinforce Byatt's understanding of the romance as a mode of relating the past to the present.

In the first scene the reader encounters Roland Michell, a textual scholar, in a library, which is not a surprising locale as he is studying a manuscript. Foucault calls libraries "heterotopias of infinitely accumulating time" (26), and adds:

[T]he idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea⁹⁴ belongs to our modernity. (Foucault 26)

The first scene of the novel takes place in the Reading Room of the London Library, which is Roland's favourite place. The scene is set in detail in space and time—"it was ten in the morning, one day in September 1986" and "Roland had the small single reading table he liked best, behind a square pillar, with the clock over the fireplace nevertheless in full view" (Byatt 1)—all the coordinates are given to situate the scene in the present of the story. However, the forthcoming description of the Reading Room displays all the characteristics that are required to qualify it as a heterotopia and heterochrony *par excellence*.

It was shabby but civilised, alive with history but inhabited also by living poets and thinkers [. . .]. Here Carlyle had come, here George Eliot had progressed through the book shelves. Roland saw her black silk skirts, her velvet trains,

⁹⁴ Its cause is given by Baudrillard, "We require a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin, which reassures us about our end" (10).

sweeping compressed between the Fathers of the Church, and heard her firm foot ring on metal among the German poets. Here Randolph Henry Ash had come, cramming his elastic mind and memory with unconsidered trifles from History and Topography, from the felicitous alphabetical conjunctions of Science and Miscellaneous—Dancing, Deaf and Dumb, Death, Dentistry, Devil and Demonology, Distribution, Dogs, Domestic Servants, Dreams. (Byatt 2)

The great figures of the past are alive in the present in this Reading Room, in addition, the alphabetical headings give a hint at the endless amount of accumulated time in this library. It is in this room that the unfinished draft letters start to revive in the present and introduce a double time structure to the novel. The primary conflict of the novel, namely, Roland's unselfish theft of Ash's letters, takes place in this heterotopic and heterochronic environment. As a result of this, all the major events are set under similar conditions.

The second one in the series of major events, which take place under heterotopic and -chronic conditions, is the honeymoon trip to Yorkshire which is placed right in the middle of the book, in Chapters 13, 14 and 15. The time structure of this part of the novel proves to be quite intricate: in Chapters 13 and 14 Maud and Roland recover the past on the basis of what they see and experience on the Yorkshire coast, so the present is imbued with the past which is reconstituted from the poems of both nineteenth-century poets. In both chapters a letter to Ellen is incorporated to give further clues to the young researchers and the reader as well. In Chapter 15 the epigraph contains Ash's famous expression of love, "*kick galvanic*" (Byatt 273)⁹⁵ to imply the climactic function of this chapter in the series that describe the Yorkshire trip. After the epigraph the reader is puzzled by the storyteller since the identity of the man and woman mentioned in the first sentence is not revealed for long. This analeptic narration is a clear example of the intersection of past and present which permeates the whole novel, but is carried to its greatest extreme at this point.

What follows, no matter how emotional and romantic it is, comes under the heading of crisis heterotopia. Although they are not married, Christabel and Randolph are on their "honeymoon," with the same goal that Foucault mentions:

For girls, there was, until the middle of the twentieth century, a tradition called the "honeymoon trip" which was an ancestral theme. The young woman's deflowering

⁹⁵ The rhyming expression is more than revealing, "Ash volcanic" (Byatt273) about the emotional intensity of the scene to come.

could take place “nowhere” and, at the moment of its occurrence the train⁹⁶ or honeymoon hotel was indeed the place of this nowhere, this heterotopia without geographical markers. (Foucault 24-5).

Similarly, nobody knows where Maud and Roland have gone when they are in Yorkshire, and their trip also takes on a honeymooning aspect. Although they realise line by line that they trod the same paths as Ash and Christabel did, they do not recognise that they follow the same emotional path too, even if they do not consummate their love in Yorkshire.

It has to be here. Where do people think it is? It's full of local words from here, gill and riggs and ling. The air is from here. Like in his letter. She talks about the air like summer colts playing on the moors. That's a Yorkshire saying. [. . .]

Do you think she was here?

Oh, yes. I feel certain. But I've no proof that will stand up. The Hob. The Yorkshire words. Perhaps my brooch. (Byatt 264)

Though Roland and Maud have no proof that Ash and LaMotte visited Yorkshire together they feel so. As if they could sense the intersection of the past and the present, though the words, the Yorkshire expressions and Maud's brooch, probably bought by Ash to Christabel, will never count as scientific proof.

The third heterotopic point is placed at the end of *Possession* right before the postscript: the graveyard where Cropper's daemonic performance of grave robbery takes place. Foucault enumerates the cemetery as a site of accumulating time, a place where the past is present in the present. In addition, “for the individual, the cemetery begins with this strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which her permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance” (Foucault 26). Cropper places himself over time and space to get the metal box without considering that the dead should rest in peace till eternity. As a manic collector of Ash relics he is not afraid to commit grave robbery, on top of that, he enjoys being amoral in the graveyard, and places himself above any moral claims or laws. The scene has all the necessary paraphernalia to look hellish: it is late at night, a huge white owl circles in the moonlight, there are ghostly noises in the heavy rain and stormy wind, and the whole scene is set in a graveyard. It is no wonder that Cropper's violent act is set in a heterotopic site: as an intruder he violates the normal temporal relation of the past and the

⁹⁶ The train is another form of heterotopia: it is a place moving in space between two places. Its place can be fixed only in time and space. Ash and Christabel go by train to the site of their honeymooning trip, so they go by a heterotopic means of transport to a heterotopic scene of their love.

present as he wants to intersect the two by opening Ash's grave. Although Cropper disagrees with Hildebrand Ash's suggestion that they should "[l]eave a trail of false clues so it looked as if we were Satanists, practising a black mass or something" (Byatt 489), his behaviour resembles that of a cultic leader who takes no notice of the elements, of his fellow, but goes on digging as if⁹⁷ he was possessed by some fanatic idea. His uncanny⁹⁸ behaviour fills the reader with terror and curiosity at the same time, which liminalises the reader's experience. In this climactic, gravedigging scene not only humans—all the major characters in the novel—want to stop him but natural forces try to prevent his intrusion into the order of life and death as well. "A kind of dull howling and whistling began, and then a chorus of groans, and creaking sighs, the trees, protesting. [. . .] The wind moved in the graveyard like a creature from another dimension, trapped and screaming. The branches of the yew and cedar gesticulated desperately" (Byatt 494). The emblematic "figure" of this fight is the yew tree which guards the grave of Ash, and which tries to stop Cropper with its roots and branches embracing and disarming him.

As he came to the knoll and turned his storm lantern on it, he saw the yew tree throw up its arms and a huge gaping white mouth appear briefly in the reddish trunk, close to the thick base of the tree, which leaned giddily over, and went on cracking slowly, slowly, descending in a burst of needle-leaves, and finally snapping and shuddering to rest across the grave, obscuring it utterly. (Byatt 495)

The personalised yew tree functions as a gigantic opponent of the devilish Cropper that finally manages to stop him by sacrificing itself. Nature has stopped Cropper from turning the scene into the extreme heterotopia in the story by his intentionally turning it into a heterochrony. It would have been the only instance of temporal intersection which had been caused by human intervention.

It is only right before the outburst of the storm that "Cropper thought, as he had not precisely thought so far, that at the bottom of the pit he was excavating, lay Randolph Henry Ash and his wife Ellen, or what was left of them" (Byatt 493). Up to this point Cropper seems

⁹⁷ All in all, Cropper is presented in the novel in a way that he looks not *as if* he was possessed by a manic idea, but that he *is* possessed by his idea to possess everything Ash possessed. He would like to possess Ash himself if he could. His description also suggests that he is being possessed by his mania during the whole scene: "[he] felt the rain on his back with pleasure, and his own sweat trickling between his shoulder blades and down his breast, with joy" (Byatt 493), and "[t]he wind took his hair and turned it in mad spirals round his head" (Byatt 494).

⁹⁸ "The uncanny is ghostly. It is concerned with the strange, weird and mysterious, with a flickering sense [. . .] of something supernatural. The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced" (Royle 1). In addition, the uncanny creates cognitive dissonance by being familiar and strange at the same time, which results in simultaneous attraction and repulsion.

to control the whole situation, but when he realises that he has disturbed the natural rules of this heterotopic and -chronic site he loses control and nature takes over. It seems that man cannot render himself independent of time and space. From this point on, Cropper's struggle to obtain the box becomes ironic, and his character ridiculous with its "daemoniac" powers reduced to human weakness. When nature stops Cropper, human curiosity takes over: Roland, Maud, Val, Euan, Beatrice, Leonora and Blackadder escort him back to the Rowan Tree Inn and persuade each other that the box which Cropper finally found in the grave must be opened to make the story complete with its ending. This final scene in the Rowan Inn has carnivalesque traits, which reinforces the heterotopic nature of the graveyard scene. The crossdressing of the women characters evokes the oddity of the "crossdressed" couple of Leonora and Blackadder:

The women, all three clothed in pyjamas—Maud in Cropper's black silk, Leonora in his scarlet cotton, and Beatrice in peppermint and white stripes belonging to Hildebrand, sat side by side on the bed. Val and Euan had their own clothes and represented normality. Blackadder wore a sweater and cotton trousers of Hildebrand's. (Byatt 497)

This carnivalesque crossdressing when nobody looks like himself or herself and even genders are crossdressed prove to be a genuine and hilarious continuation of the subversive heterotopia of the graveyard scene.

In *Possession* the plot starts in a heterotopic site, the Reading Room of the London Library, and ends in a heterotopic environment as well. Heterotopic places are given functional and structural priority in the text, which are "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 24) to provide a postmodern sense of space, time and our position in both. The temporal and spatial intersections reinforce the notion of the romance as a mode of relating the past to the present, which is crucial to Byatt's generic synthesis.

Space can influence the meaning of plots either as images or in their conceptualised forms. Though the meaning conveyed by spatial images and various concepts of space may not be as obvious as that of any plots it informs the story to a great extent. For this reason I have investigated spatial imagery, especially images of enclosure, and the function of heterotopia in *The Waterfall* and *Possession*, as well as in *Jane Eyre*. I investigate these two particular forms of space as I conceive their roles crucial in the romance-*Bildungsroman*

argument, as they either subvert and inscribe the classic generic features or create a unique spatial-temporal context for the generic synthesis.

Spatial imagery constitutes a significant portion of images in the nineteenth-century female literary tradition. Both Drabble and Byatt are well aware of its importance in conveying meaning between the lines which cannot be communicated overtly in the plot. Nineteenth-century stories of women, either romances or *Bildungsromans*, often express the unexpressable on the level of images.

One of the most popular of spatial images is the body/house equation, the representation of women as houses, which are symptomatic of their experience of enclosure. Both Drabble and Byatt, as well as Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*, one of the common intertexts of the two contemporary novels, make an extensive use of this image by presenting women characters who are defined by houses and also contained by them, which is often expressive of their assumed madness as well. Drabble offers a solution to this representational trap of the house along Brontë's example: it is possible to get rid of this kind of containment by either a literal or metaphorical ownership of the house. When a female character owns the house she, metaforically, owns her body and allows no mastery over either of them. Both *Jane Eyre* and *Jane Gray* resort to this solution, which puzzles their male partners but provides the female protagonist with new discursive position that contributes to the generic synthesis of their various romances and the *Bildungsromans*. Byatt, however, seemingly adheres to the traditional imagery of female confinement by creating several female characters who are confined to their homes/houses/bodies. Nevertheless, she contests this tradition by introducing an odd couple—Blackadder and Leonora Stern—in which the roles are reversed. In this way, Byatt highlights the arbitrariness of the traditional image of the house as a representation of women's experience and provides the possibility of alternative representational positions of women, which modifies their traditional access to the genres of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*. If women are not necessarily entrapped in and by the image of the house they can resist the traditional role of the romance heroine or assume the role of the hero in a *Bildungsroman* as well. This is exactly what *Jane Eyre* and *Jane Gray* do, which is another proof of the literary sisterhood of Drabble's and Byatt's novels which connects them to the female literary tradition.

Besides the image of the house Byatt investigates another representational trap that threatens women: confinement into invisibility, into transparency which is depicted in the female figures of the city of Is and in the princess in the glass coffin. These women figures are confined into transparency as a form of punishment by a masculine power. In this way, these

women figures are reduced into the extreme perfectness of femininity: they become ethereal, invisible and dependent on masculine power.

The sisters, Drabble and Byatt, understand the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia in a different way. Drabble relates her understanding of heterotopia to space following Brontë's example, while Byatt opens it up towards heterochrony as well. In *The Waterfall* Jane Gray's bedroom functions as a heterotopic site which offers an alternative world to the lovers as opposed to the discursively constructed world of society. It is the only condition under which their transgressive relationship can be interpreted as a great romantic attachment. Byatt posits three heterotopic and -chronic sites in her novel, which structurally support the text: the first and the last scene, as well as three chapters in the middle, which all present the overlapping of the present and the past. Byatt displays these instances as moments of temporal and spatial intersections, which reinforces her understanding of the romance. Due to the well-positioned heterotopic and -chronic elements the structure of *Possession* echoes its author's understanding of the genre: the concept of space that Byatt applies supports the particular mode of relating the past to the present in her romance.

In my opinion, both Drabble and Byatt continue and contest the spatial imagery of the nineteenth-century female literary tradition which relates their novels not only to this tradition respectively but to each other as well. In this way, *The Waterfall* and *Possession* function as sister narratives as parts of the female literary tradition. In addition, their handling of heterotopia contributes to the generic synthesis of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*, which both twentieth-century novels offer in their own distinct ways.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: *Bildungsromance*?

The two contemporary novels, Margaret Drabble's *The Waterfall* and A.S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance*, which I have been labelling as sister narratives have not been interpreted by critics to have so much in common to earn this name immediately. Nor do their authors seem to share their artistic interests to such an extent that their works need to be comparatively analysed, though it is often the case as a result of their family relationship. However, I have been claiming that *The Waterfall*, a unique novel in Drabble's oeuvre, and *Possession*, which made Byatt famous, have so many common characteristics that they can be read as sister narratives as they establish a literary sisterhood not only with each other but with the nineteenth-century female literary tradition as well.

To prove this point Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* has provided a common ground by the introduction of a typical postmodern genre, historiographic metafiction. Its name itself suggests the re-historicising attitude of postmodernism and, at the same time, highlights the self-reflexive quality of postmodern literature, two aspects that has brought about "a questioning of the assumptions beneath both modernist aesthetic autonomy and unproblematic realist reference" (Hutcheon 224-5). This interrogating, contesting attitude enacts a postmodern paradox, however, as it means being both complicitious with, and at the same time critical of, the very same tradition, here, the nineteenth-century female literary tradition.

The authors of *The Waterfall* and *Possession* are well aware of this paradox, in my opinion, when they produce their novels, in which they try to offer a synthesis of two typical genres of the nineteenth-century female literary tradition, the romance and the *Bildungsroman*. The combination and containment of the two genres proved to be problematic for several nineteenth-century women writers as the intervention of the socially expected romance ending forced the female protagonist to give up her hopes for her own story of development, or, if she proved to be too transgressive to be contained by the romance, she was let have a female *Bildungsroman*, which frequently ended with a tragic loss—often of the female protagonist's life. The incompatibility of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* made many women writers of the period come forward with a possible solution and revise the traditional relation of the two genres. As a result several novels were written in which different plotlines tried to reach a compromise between the romance and the *Bildungsroman*. One of these revisionary novels, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* serves as a common intertext in both *The Waterfall* and *Possession*, and, for its exemplary function, *Jane Eyre*'s story often becomes the third focus in this study besides the two contemporary novels.

Given the two authors' different artistic methods and interests and their different relation to the female literary tradition it is not surprising that *The Waterfall* and *Possession* offer different means of synthesising the romance and the *Bildungsroman*. The two novels have different focuses: *The Waterfall*'s singular focus is Jane Gray, the female protagonist, while Byatt's novel dramatises various postmodern assumptions from the lost referent through the lack of a coherent self to the citationality of desire, which makes her novel a mosaic of texts, genres and theories with a dispersed focus. Despite these strong dissimilarities, there is a primary textual layer of romances and *Bildungsromans* in both *The Waterfall* and *Possession*, the various tales, fairy or folk tales, which are incorporated into the texts as archetypal gendered plots. As *Jane Eyre*, a common intertext for both contemporary novels, heavily relies on tales as well, I focus on all three texts with reference to the function of tales. I have been proposing that these tales function as primary gendered plots, which are suitable for educating both genders and internalising familiar patterns that help us in creating meaning and comprehending events. The various tales offer different versions of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* and their exemplary value is often imported into the main bodies of the novels.

The three authors choose different handling of tales in their novels. Brontë applies fairy tales in the form of allusions to educate Jane Eyre in the romance and equip her with romantic clichés, which, in the end, are discarded by Jane. Though in the beginning Jane is attracted to not only romantic tales, she leaves behind her heroic aspirations with these stories in order to be fully feminised along romantic clichés. In Thornfield, after a very promising romantic initiative, Jane Eyre realises that her romantic hopes which are informed by internalised fairy tale patterns—mainly those of *Beauty and the Beast*—mislead her, and almost result in her loss of autonomy as Rochester's child bride. The other important tale—*The Blue Beard*—helps the reader interpret Rochester's character and behaviour especially towards Bertha, but it also explains his threatening intentions towards Jane. Brontë applies well-known classic tales in *Jane Eyre*, which were adapted by the brothers Grimm. She never includes the texts of these tales but the familiarity of the stories guide both Jane and the reader in comprehending the events. By the end of the novel all the tales are discredited and Jane and Rochester build their new union in Ferndean on such grounds that are not foreshadowed by the romantic clichés of any fairy tales.

Despite *Jane Eyre*'s heavy reliance on fairy tales and Jane Gray's fascination with the story *The Waterfall* applies relatively few tales. Though the female protagonist eagerly imports the romantic characteristics of *Jane Eyre* into her own story she, somehow, fails to take over the importance of fairy tales in shaping her romantic expectations. While Jane and James

enjoy their union in the heterotopic world of Jane's bedroom only *Sleeping Beauty* is referred to by James because he is at least as willing to introduce romantic clichés into this affair as Jane. The tale which creates a prototype of female passivity is reinforced by James's expectations of Jane with the latter happily assisting. It is after the almost fatal car accident that two other fairy tales are introduced in the novel, which both help Jane to evaluate her adulterous love affair with James. The first tale echoes Jane's attitudes towards the seriously injured James, who is in hospital balancing between life and death, the second one discredits Jane's romantic attachment to James by reducing it into self-deception. Drabble applies a classic and two less-known tales in *The Waterfall*—the latter two are partly included in the novel—and, similarly to Brontë, discredits them along with other romantic clichés.

Byatt's contesting attitudes work in another way: in *Possession* subversion does not come with the interpretation of the tales but in the tales themselves as Byatt rewrites the "original" romantic patterns. The most genuine example of this technique is "The Glass Coffin," a tale "written by" Christabel LaMotte, in which the strong and self-reflexive narrative voice and the constant subversion of the original story results in a parodic effect. The tale sidesteps in many cases: the hero turns out to be an unremarkable tailor, who qualifies as a perfect "housewife," the beautiful princess does not want to get married, and the "happily ever after" is based on the agreement of the princess and the little tailor on living together but respecting the autonomy of the other. The romantic clichés are discredited in the tale itself, which gives the story a sense of lovely clumsiness that results from the fact that not only the reader, but the implied author as well as the characters know that the story should have gone in another direction but as it is more convenient for everybody some changes are implemented.

"The Threshold," Christabel's other tale tells the beginning of a quest in a *Bildungsroman* which does not get further than the initiation. Though the tale seems to be independent of the main plotline, especially at that early point when it is presented in the text, it gains meaning at the end of the novel. This *Bildungsroman* tells the initiation of the hero into love which is paralleled by the end of the novel when Roland, who takes after the Childe, the hero of the tale in many respects, enters a relationship with Maud.

The third tale in *Possession* is a Breton folk tale that is called as Gode's tale in the novel. Just as in the case of the other two tales, its text is included in the novel. It tells the female *Bildungsroman* of the miller's daughter, who falls in love despite her pride, gets pregnant and finally kills her child while her lover marries another woman. The ghost of the dead child, a little imp haunts the mother, who dies, and ruins the strength of the father as well, who follows his beloveds into the realm of death. The story of sexual transgression and

its ensuing punishment is an intended warning to Christabel who is expecting Ash's child at the time. It presents an example that should divert Christabel's intention from killing her own baby, which, actually, nobody knows if she has ever planned to do or not.

Byatt's tales in *Possession* function as examples either to follow or to avoid. She writes her own tales and includes the texts as well. As opposed to *Jane Eyre* and *The Waterfall* the tales in *Possession* are addressed not to a single protagonist but to several characters at the same time: "The Glass Coffin" is relevant to Roland and Maud as well as "The Threshold," while Gode's tale primarily is aimed at Christabel but is symptomatic of Ash's feelings when he has no information about his child. All the tales that are either alluded to or retold in the novels exemplify various versions of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* and by their intertextual function they contribute to settling the incompatibility of the two genres.

Besides the use of tales as intertexts the plots of the two contemporary novels offer a synthesis of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* that are informed by several other intertexts. Drabble's protagonist, Jane Gray, intends to imitate nineteenth-century romance stories in her third-person narrative, whereas she realises the impossibility of this wish in the self-reflexive first-person parts. To achieve her aim of becoming a romance heroine she relies on three nineteenth-century intertexts, Jane Austen's *Emma*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. Without regarding the relevance of any other genres Jane Gray reads all three intertexts exclusively as romances, even Eliot's novel, which is hardly ever categorised as a romance. She leaves especially the *Bildungsroman* elements unheeded in the nineteenth-century intertexts, which are crucial to the development of Emma, Jane and Maggie. However, her stubborn, one-sided reading results in a shocking revelation: her lover, James does not die as fictional lovers do, but survives the accident, which calls Jane's attention to the fact that life cannot be patterned along romances. From this point on, although Jane's addiction to romances still prevails in the third-person narrative, she gradually discards romantic clichés in the first-person parts. This oscillation results in her gradual development into a woman who no longer wants to live her life along romantic patterns, and, though romances remain alluring for her, she discredits them as possible intertexts for her life. While Jane Gray argues with the nineteenth-century intertexts on love, she is initiated into a story of development by the unusual outcome of the accident, and by the end of her story she goes through a *Bildungsroman*. However, her *Bildungsroman* is a feminine one as it becomes a female *Künstlerroman*: Jane Gray is a poet whose poetry matures in the course of her own development. For her physical creativity—giving birth to her daughter—marks her initiation into womanhood, and artistic creativity—her changing poetry—shows her maturity. As Jane's

aborted romance wishes serve as a means of her maturation, in my view, *The Waterfall* can be genuinely read as a parallel romance and *Bildungsroman*, which is finally contained by the genre of the female *Künstlerroman*.

Byatt's *Possession*, a novel with strong postmodern traits, offers a different means of compromising the two typical nineteenth-century genres. As the story focuses not only on a single female protagonist, as in *The Waterfall*, but two couples as well as a mythological woman figure stand in the centre of the plot, it is obvious that Byatt has the possibility of providing various versions of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*. The presence of male and female characters allows her to show the gendered versions of the genres and point out the differences which, at the same time, are contested as well. The novel is often called a textual mosaic by critics, and in my view, also qualifies as a generic mosaic as well. Byatt incorporates several genres besides the romance and the *Bildungsroman*, all of which can be read as various quest stories. The quests are all modelled on the Victorian quest for origins, though in a parodic sense as a postmodern yearning for the lost referent. The several biographies are depicted as quests for the origin of meaning, but result in the discovery of false origins: extreme female sexuality and the exhibitionist intrusion of the author into the text as well as the recovery of the unconscious. There are anti-quests as well to locate the origin of meaning which take these extremes to the minimum, which results in the elimination of female sexuality and the presence of the author as possible origins of meaning. However, the only successful quest is driven by "narrative curiosity" (Byatt 238)—the theorised version of nineteenth-century desire—which urges the researcher protagonists, Maud and Roland, to discover the love relationship of Ash and LaMotte, as well as the reader to go on reading this extraordinary novel. What Maud and Roland find at the end of their quest is desire, the driving force of the romance of the nineteenth-century poets. The characters could have identified the lost referent, desire, in Maud's features which, as a palimpsest, reveals and hides at the same time the desire of her ancestors, Ash and LaMotte. Despite the recovery of the referent at the end of the story Byatt creates a postmodern context in the postscript which relativises the finality and coherence of the discovery.

Though most (life) stories qualify as quests in *Possession*, which is a central motif of stories of development, the subtitle of the novel raises the reader's expectancy for a romance. In my view, *Possession* can be interpreted as a romance for two reasons. Its plot focuses on two love stories: the affair of Christabel LaMotte, poet and author of mystery tales, and Randolph Henry Ash, the eminent Victorian poet, husband of Ellen Ash; and Maud Bailey, descendant and researcher of LaMotte and Roland Michell, a young textual scholar who is doing his PhD on Ash. The unfolding nineteenth- and twentieth-century love stories satisfy

the reader's romantic expectations, but calling *Possession* a romance only for this reason would narrow down the meaning of the term.

The two love stories, the contemporary and the Victorian one, are presented parallel in the novel. They seem to follow each other step by step in such a way that it is no longer sure which affects the other. In other words, it is no longer obvious if the present is modelled on the past or the other way round. Scenes, sentences and feelings are echoed, which results from the other understanding of the concept of the romance. As Fletcher claims love stories are always already citational, they always already rely on the already-said. (15-6) In this way, the romance functions not only as a possible genre of *Possession* but as the mode with which the text relates the present to the past. Byatt reinforces this potential of the romance in the epigraph to her novel from Hawthorne's preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*. To extend the meaning of the romance I have been investigating the citational nature of *Possession* with emphasis on the citational formation of the plot, the characters and even space, as well as the figure of Melusina, the novel's emblematic female goddess.

Both the plot and the characters are founded on a special relationship of the past and the present, which displays the novel's contesting attitude again. The plot, especially the analeptic chapters, and the similarity of the characters reinforce a strong sense of cyclicity instead of our traditional sense of linear time, which is further emphasised by the construction of the figure of Melusina. Melusina is the most powerful figure in *Possession*. The reason for this lies not in the fact that in ancient times she was worshipped as a goddess, but that her emblematic figure functions as a source of a rich network of images and allusions in the novel. She is the prefiguration, a kind of foremother of both Christabel and Maud and her life story is completed by Christabel's and Maud's lives. The life stories of these three women figures constitute another example of cyclicity: possession-dispossession-repossession, which, resulting from the title of the novel is a central theme of the text. We first encounter Melusina in complete possession of her powers, which is followed by a tragic dispossession by her husband. Christabel experiences complete possession during her affair with Ash which results in dispossession and, in quick succession, in the emergence of her motherly and artistic creativity, the birth of her daughter and the epic of the fairy Melusina, which marks the beginning of repossessing Melusina's powers and a rediscovery of an ancient female (literary) tradition. Maud's story begins where Christabel's starts, in a self-contained, lifeless existence. Her gradual research on both Christabel and Melusina and her growing knowledge of her foremothers lead her to repossess her womanly powers and bodily integrity. It is in this state, which echoes the beginning of Melusina's life, that she decides to start a relationship with Roland.

The notion of cyclicity has allowed me to interpret the genres of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* not only in relation to the single life stories of the female protagonists but in the cyclical sense as well. Melusina's story starts with a romance that is followed by a tragic story of development; Christabel secures an existence without romance in the beginning that focuses only on her own maturation, but with Ash romance intervenes. After this short romance Christabel is confined to a tragic story of development which gradually turns into a female *Künstlerroman*. Christabel becomes an artist figure whose creativity, both physical and artistic, is brought about by a romance and is blocked by the pain of the very same romance. Maud's willing dissent of the romance destines her to a *Bildungsroman*—resembling that of a hero—however, her final union with Roland introduces the romance into her story as well and, at the same time, arrives exactly where the story of Melusina started, a woman entering a romance of her own decision.

Byatt uses different methods to investigate the relation of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* but the answer she offers is, in my view, similar to Drabble's. Though Drabble proposes the female *Künstlerroman* as a possible form of containing the two genres, Byatt applies it as a variant of a female story of development which is successful for the artist but tragic for the mother. Nevertheless, the basic solution is the same in both novels: the answer lies not in the succession of the *Bildungsroman* and the romance but their parallel application, which allows the protagonists to navigate freely between the different aims of the genres and achieve both, namely, love based on maturity and vice versa.

Stories are constituted by their plots as well as the place/space they are set in. Space, either in the form of spatial imagery or as a concept, is symptomatic of the discursive construction of the fictional universe of the various romances and *Bildungsromans* that Byatt and Drabble incorporate in these two novels. For this reason, I have investigated spatial imagery, especially images of enclosure, and the application of the concept of heterotopia as they both contribute to the proposed synthesis of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*.

Several images of the female literary tradition, which have been thoroughly investigated by Gilbert and Gubar, recur in both *The Waterfall* and *Possession* as well. Gilbert and Gubar include a concise list of the images they have encountered in their studies:

Images of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves, metaphors of physical discomfort manifested in frozen landscapes and fiery interiors—such patterns recurred throughout this tradition, along with obsessive depictions of diseases like anorexia, agoraphobia, and claustrophobia. (xi)

Naturally, not all of these images are present in Drabble's and Byatt's two novels, however, spatial imagery, especially of enclosure, permeates both texts. I have been curious to see if the novels' already obvious contesting attitudes are extended to the field of imagery or not. The answer is obvious: images of enclosure are emphatically present in both novels.

The Waterfall provides a way out of women's representation as houses by proposing that the metaphorical ownership of the house restores women to the ownership of their bodies just as Brontë does in *Jane Eyre*. *Possession* is also concerned with this representational trap, however, instead of pointing out a possible solution it proves the arbitrariness of this very same image. As *Possession* shows houses are suitable images not only for representing women but men as well, which highlights the socially constructed and thus arbitrary nature of the image, which, at the same time, points at the self-reflexive nature of Byatt's novel. By questioning the classic images of the female literary tradition Byatt inscribes them as well, which displays a constant game of rewriting and re-writing. The imagery that *The Waterfall* and *Possession* apply contests and continues the imagery of the nineteenth-century female literary tradition at the same time, and, as a result, create alternative discursive positions for their female protagonist who have a new access of the traditional genres of the romance and the *Bildungsroman* for the very same reason. "And, of course, the very act of questioning is one of inscribing (and then contesting) that which is being queried" (Hutcheon 224). This double attitude characterises both Drabble's and Byatt's handling of images.

The Foucauldian concept of heterotopia has great potentials in the generic syntheses offered by *The Waterfall* as *Possession*. Drabble applies heterotopia when she creates Jane Gray's bedroom as an alternative to any socially constructed places as the only suitable site to contain the transgressive romance of Jane and James. Later on it is the heterotopia of the mirror that reintroduces the new-old order of patriarchal discourses into this relationship that has previously been inverted by the heterotopia of the room. As opposed to Drabble Byatt does not use heterotopias to create sites for suspending and reintroducing patriarchal discourses, instead, she makes use of the concept by relating it to heterochrony, which allows her to create three structural pillars of her novel with spatial and temporal intersections. These intersections reinforce Byatt's understanding of the romance as a mode of relating the past to the present, and, in this way, the concept of heterotopia functions as the embodiment of Byatt's generic assumptions.

Instead of investigating all the factors in the romance-*Bildungsroman* problematics in the female literary tradition, this study has tried to interrogate its relevance in Margaret Drabble's *The Waterfall* and A.S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance*. Though these are

seemingly very different texts by two very different authors, the novels' contesting attitudes point towards a common solution. Both *The Waterfall* and *Possession* come up with the idea that it is possible to read a story as a romance and a *Bildungsroman* at the same time because the social constraints of both genres prove to be arbitrary. This parallel reading potential enables the characters to navigate freely among the romance and *Bildung* elements and achieve the goals of both of the genres, love and maturation at the same time. It is for this reason that I coined a pun on the names of the two genres in the title of this concluding chapter. Though the name, *Bildungsromance* might sound too direct, it neatly summarises the characteristics of the genre *The Waterfall* and *Possession* work out, because it synthesises the connotations of a romantic story of development as well as a story of development into romance.

Though it was the nineteenth-century female literary tradition that started negotiating the problematics of the romance and the *Bildungsroman*, these two twentieth-century novels provide a possible solution following this tradition, and do not produce a strikingly new idea to synthesise the two genres. Despite their constant questioning and contesting attitudes *The Waterfall* and *Possession* cannot and do not want to leave the nineteenth-century female literary tradition behind, but they cannot even do so. "One of the lessons of the doubleness of postmodernism is that you cannot step outside that which you contest, that you are always implicated in the value, you *choose* to challenge," claims Hutcheon (223). This double attitude characterises Drabble's and Byatt's two novels, which, due to this attitude, have a lot in common. This double attitude, however, relates the two novels not only to each other but to the very tradition they intend to rework, the female literary tradition. Thus *The Waterfall* and *Possession* become sister narratives in the literary sisterhood of the female literary tradition.

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