Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích
Pedagogická fakulta
Katedra anglistiky

Diplomová práce

Crafting Identity: Exploring Cultural Reflections through Art in A.S. Byatt´s *The Children´s Book*

Autor: Jana Fialová, 2. ročník NMgr. KAJ-KNJ
Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Renata Janktová, M.A., Ph.D.

České Budějovice 2025

I declare that I worked on my thesis on my own using only the sources listed in the Bibliography and Internet sources.

Prohlašuji, že jsem svou diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a internetových zdrojů.

.....

Jana Fialová

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Mgr. Renata Janktová, M.A., Ph.D., for supplying materials and for her consistent support, patience, and guidance during the thesis writing process.

I extend my gratitude to my family and husband for their continual support.

1 ABSTRACT

Fialová, Jana. Crafting Identity: Exploring Cultural Reflections through Art in A.S. Byatt´s *The Children´s Book.* Diploma Thesis. České Budějovice: University of South Bohemia: Faculty of Education, Department of English Studies and Literature, 2025. 95 pp. Supervisor: Mgr. Renata Janktová, M.A., Ph.D.

Keywords: A.S. Byatt, *The Children´s Book*, identity, art, freedom, gender equality, feminism, women rights, social status

2 ANOTACE

Fialová, Jana Crafting Identity: Exploring Cultural Reflections through Art in A.S. Byatt´s *The Children´s Book.* Diplomová práce. České Budějovice: Jihočeská Universita: Pedagogická fakulta 2025. 95 stran. Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Renata Janktová, M.A., Ph.D.

Klíčová slova: A.S. Byatt, *The Children´s Book*, identita, umění, svoboda, rovnoprávnost, feminismus, ženská práva, společenské postavení

3 TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 INTRODUCTION

Based on the recommendation of my supervisor, I acquainted myself with some works by A.S. Byatt. Her writing style and themes appealed to me enough to choose her work *The Children´s Book* as the subject of my diploma thesis. The work has satisfied my desire to learn more about the life and thinking of people in the Victorian and Edwardian eras without excessive romanticization.

The story of this novel intertwines questions of art created by women, freedom of thought, and the associated search for identity, as well as the overall position of women in society, along with their rights. All of this within the context of Victorian and Edwardian England.

My thesis consists of two parts - theoretical and practical. The theoretical section introduces the concept of identity, its formation on both personal and societal levels, the problem of self-perception, and the perception of one´s identity. Then I focus on the author herself, A.S. Byatt, her work, and the context in which she created her works. Furthermore, I introduce the novel *The Children´s Book* including information about its creation from the author´s perspective, critics´ responses, and a comparison with other works by A.S. Byatt. I also explore its historical, cultural, and social context. The main focus is on questions concerning women, art created by women, their position in contemporary society, feminist movements, and the struggle for women´s rights.

The practical part consists of an analysis of the novel *The Children´s Book* with the main focus on its female characters in terms of their social status and rights as well as their positions in families. It examines the role of art as a means of self-realisation and the quest for identity for women against the backdrop of feminist movements advocating for women´s rights.

I believe that the themes of this book are still relevant, especially in recent years as the term „identity“ and its exploration are frequently articulated. I consider this book quality source material for seeking answers to questions such as Who am I and who can I become? How do societal norms, expectations, cultural values, or external pressures shape or influence our personal choices?

5 METHODOLOGY& THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

5.1 Personal Identity

The definition of the term "identity" is less straightforward than it may seem. It belongs to the field of personality psychology where terminology may differ depending on particular approaches used.

According to the online APA Dictionary of Psychology, "identity," or also "personal identity" is:

> *an individual´s sense of self defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles." Identity involves a sense of continuity, or the feeling that one is the same person today that one was yesterday or last year (despite physical or other changes). Such a sense is derived from one´s body sensations; one´s body image; and the feeling that one´s memories, goals, values, expectations, and beliefs belong to the self.*[1]

The term "identity" is sometimes interchanged with the term "personality" or, more often, replaced with terms such as I, Self, or Self-concept, Self-assessment and Self-esteem.

Jung developed a theory of personality that recognises four personality segments, namely the self, personal unconscious, collective unconscious, psychological attitudes of introversion and extraversion, and cognitive functions, that is thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition.

Self is the conscious part of the personality, and which expresses the continuity and identity of an individual. The status of this part changes throughout life and has different importance. This segment of Jung´s personality corresponds the closest to the definition of identity above.

The personal unconscious consists of individual, repressed, and subconscious memories. These memories are imparted to the Self and affect current decisions. One part of the personal unconscious is formed by complexes that influence individual experiences, evaluations, and social behaviour.

The collective unconscious serves as the evolutionary foundation for all psychological processes of the personality, encompassing both potential and actual aspects. It is formed by innate archetypes manifesting repeatedly through human history in art, religion, symbols, dreams, or rituals. The most recognised archetypes include Persona, Anima, Animus, and Shadow.

Another component of Jung's theory are the psychological attitudes of introversion and extraversion. They represent two opposing poles of personality. The introverted attitude prefers individual experiences and downplays interest in the external environment. Extraversion is the exact opposite. Both attitudes are interdependent, and therefore it is important to recognise and develop even the inferior attitude.

[1] 'Identity', APA Dictionary of Psychology, accessed 23 November 2024, https://dictionary.apa.org/.

Cognitive functions encompass both rational and irrational cognitive processes. Thinking and emotions belong to rational functions, whereas sensation and intuition are categorised as the irrational cognitive processes. Thinking and feeling culminate in judgment. Logical categories of truth and untruth come from thinking. Value categories of good and evil emerge from feeling. Irrational functions, sensation and intuition, contribute to the development of assumptions in forming ideas and values. [2]

Identity Formation

The process of identity formation is influenced by internal and external factors. Internal factors, as defined by Raymond Cattel, include hereditary, innate, congenital, and constitutional influences. [3] Hereditary influences are the genes and predispositions passed from parents to children. Innate influences are specific developmental features, or gene mutations. Congenital factors influence the unborn offspring in the mother´s womb. Finally, constitutional influences include physiological and physical features gained after birth. Besides, many additional psychological factors such as ideation processes, current needs, memory and experience, morality, and others, play a significant role in identity formation.

The development of personality constitutes a perpetual process that consistently transpires within the framework of human circumstances. Besides the aforementioned factors, the individual´s activity in working on and influencing their own identity remains an indispensable factor.

The external factors include the physical environment, society, and culture. The physical environment encompasses an extensive range of geographic, climatic, and civilizational factors. Society and culture are the primary sources and intermediates in the process of identity formation. Bronfenbrenner recognises their complimentary interconnection and functional effect as a macrosystem.[4] The primary importance of culture and society is encapsulated by the concept of the socialization source. Culture and society shape the structure and substance of socialization, including a particular system of knowledge, social positions, roles, values, and conventions. The person assimilates these external shapes and contents via upbringing and education. Compared to society, culture is a more stable and enduring system. [5]

Socialization occurs through various factors simultaneously. These factors include primary and secondary family, educational institutions, peers, friends, colleagues, and media, among others. They shape identity development throughout an individual´s entire life. Numerous studies have examined the ratio of internal to external effects on identity formation. Environmental factors minimally affect

[2] Panajotis Cakirpaloglu, *Úvod do psychologie osobnosti* (Praha: Grada, 2012), 34–35.
[3] Cakirpaloglu, *Úvod do psychologie osobnosti,* 53.
[4] Cakirpaloglu, *Úvod do psychologie osobnosti,* 55.
[5] Cakirpaloglu, *Úvod do psychologie osobnosti,* 52–57.

physical appearance, temperament, and IQ, according to the psychologists. On the other hand, the environment significantly shapes character, morals, religion, and other factors.[6]

Determination can be discussed in terms of internal and external variables, or self-determination, which includes the processes of self-regulation and self-reflection.[7]

[6] Cakirpaloglu, *Úvod do psychologie osobnosti,* 55.
[7] Cakirpaloglu, *Úvod do psychologie osobnosti,* 57–59.

5.2 Culture & Cultural Identity

Culture is a complex theoretical concept, and its definitions vary based on particular conceptualisation approaches and (cultural) contexts. Allison DiBianca Fasoli´s interpretation of culture, for example, emphasizes the significance of historically rooted beliefs, values, and practices that are actively created and disseminated among individuals within communities. She observes the transmission of culture in parent-child dialogues, which maintains *„sociomoral order"* within communities.[8]

Culture integrates the concepts of social and cultural identity. *„Cultural identity is, by definition, both an aspect of self and a referent for a group to which one belongs."*[9] Cultural identity emphasizes cultural beliefs and practices, the perception of one´s ethnic or cultural affiliations, and the relative importance assigned to the individual compared to the community. Cultural identity answers the question *„who am I as a member of my group, and in relation to other groups?"*[10] Personal values are expected to align with cultural norms. Cultural identity is a specific type of social identity. Social identity is constructed by the values linked to the social groups to which a person is a member, such as religious organizations or clubs.

Distinct (sub)cultures may be identified within the mainstream culture. Microculture is a particular culture shared by a small community, often rooted in geographical location or organizational affiliation.[11] In the context of my thesis, it will be used for a culture formed within the close-knit environment of artistic and intellectual circles. Macroculture refers to the prevailing culture within a society. The term is used for a community that shares certain traditions, ideas, beliefs, and values[12] within a given period, location, and socioeconomic class. It is a collection of microcultures.[13]

The substantial influence of culture on human behaviour, thinking, and values is termed cultural determination. Certain aspects of personal identity, such as ethnicity, faith, and socioeconomic status, are profoundly interconnected with cultural influences.[14] Sociocultural determination refers to the interaction between cultural and social factors on an individual´s personal identity.

---

[8] Catherine Raeff et al., 'The Concept of Culture: Introduction to Spotlight Series on Conceptualizing Culture', *Applied Developmental Science* 24, no. 4 (1 October 2020): 297–98, https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2020.1789344.

[9] Seth J. Schwartz, Byron L. Zamboanga, and Robert S. Weisskirch, 'Broadening the Study of the Self: Integrating the Study of Personal Identity and Cultural Identity', *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2, no. 2 (March 2008): 637, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2008.00077.x.

[10] Schwartz, Zamboanga, and Weisskirch, 636.

[11] Kenton Bell, 'Microculture Definition | Open Education Sociology Dictionary', 23 January 2014, https://sociologydictionary.org/microculture/.

[12] Stella Ting-Toomey and Tenzin Dorjee, *Communicating across Cultures*, Second edition (New York London: The Guilford Press, 2019), 20.

[13] 'Macroculture', in *Wiktionary, the Free Dictionary*, 19 August 2024, https://en.wiktionary.org/w/index.php?title=macroculture&oldid=81267081.

[14] 'Cultural Determinism - Definition and Explanation', *The Oxford Review - OR Briefings* (blog), accessed 26 November 2024, https://oxford-review.com/the-oxford-review-dei-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dictionary/cultural-determinism-definition-and-explanation/.

Jan Assman refutes Jung´s hypothesis of archetypes as a mechanism for preserving unique traits across generations due to phylogenetic evolution. According to Assman, it is rather a consequence of „*socialization and custom"* and *„[t]he 'survival of the type' […] is a function of the cultural memory"*.[15] While animals are genetically programmed to survive as a species, human have cultural memory. Based on Nietzsche, Assman defines cultural memory as

> *a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation.*[16]

Cultural memory is defined in contrast to communicative, or everyday memory, which is generated by everyday interactions and produces oral history. Each individual constructs a memory that is socially influenced and pertains to a collective. Each personal memory is formed by interaction with a group of individuals who see their unity and difference via shared representation of their history. This represents a sort of collective memory spanning eighty to one hundred years, equivalent to three or four generations. Temporality is thus a significant aspect of communicative memory.

In contrast, cultural memory is distanced from, or transcends, the everyday and its roots in the past, that is major events featuring as *„figures of memory"*, do not change with time. [17] Cultural memory involves three poles: memory (contemporized past), culture and the group (society).

The relation between cultural memory and cultural identity stems from the fact that

> *[c]ultural memory preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity. […] The supply of knowledge in the cultural memory is characterized by sharp distinctions made between those who belong and those who do not. […] Access to and transmission of this knowledge are […] controlled by a "need for identity".*[18]

Collectively shared knowledge is eventually turned into a *„culturally institutionalized heritage of society."*[19] The connection *„to a normative self-image"*[20] establishes a distinct system of values and preferences that that create a pool of cultural knowledge and symbols.[21] Cultural heritage acts as the source and medium of cultural identity.

[15] Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125, https://doi.org/10.2307/488538.
[16] Assmann and Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', 126.
[17] Assmann and Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', 129.
[18] Assmann and Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', 130.
[19] Assmann and Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', 130.
[20] Assmann and Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', 131.
[21] Assmann and Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', 131.

5.3 A.S. Byatt

5.3.1 Personal Life

Antonia Susan Byatt was born Antonia Susan Drabble on 24 August 1936 in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, England.[22] Her father, John Frederick Drabble, was a barrister, a county court judge, and a novelist. During World War II, he went abroad as a member of the RAF.[23] He wrote two novels, *Death´s Second Self* in 1971 and *Scawsby* in 1977. The first one is described as *„a thriller by a man best placed to observe crime and the law in action"*[24] and the second novel contains the subjects of multicultural adoption, under-age sex and honour killing.[25] Her mother was Kathleen Marie Bloor, in her daughter´s eyes a scholar of Browning *„trapped as a housewife."*[26] From today´s perspective, both parents´ intellectual interests influenced Byatt´s life.

A. S. Byatt was the oldest of four children. Her younger sister, Margaret Drabble, born in 1939, is also a famous literary author. Her most popular works include the novel *The Millstone* (1965) and *Jerusalem the Golden* (1967). Their other two siblings are Richard Drabble, who works as a barrister as his father did, and Helen Langdon, who became a distinguished art historian and worked for the education department at the National Gallery, British Museum and National Portrait Gallery.[27] The whole Drabble family could be considered very intellectually oriented and successful in that regard.

The childhood of A.S. Byatt was unfortunately marked by severe asthma but lying in bed also gave her first opportunities to get used to reading and thinking about stories and storytelling itself. She remembered, for instance three colouring books *The Pied Piper*, *The Lady of Shalott*, and *Morte d´Arthur* with poetry that she quickly learnt by heart and that brought her pleasure in imagining things. It resulted in her fascination with myths, folktales, legends, and fairy stories, which had a significant impact on her later work. It was her mother who made such an extraordinary contribution to her daughter´s literary career as she brought a rich variety of books into the family and exposed all of her children to the process of reading.[28] A. S. Byatt mentions her excitement about language at that time, adding insightful details: *„I spend a lot of my time wondering why human beings ever invented metaphor, and then I spend time trying to think why they bother to make works of art. You know, why don´t they*

[22] Alexa Alfer and Amy J. Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt: Critical Storytelling*, Contemporary British Novelists (Manchester (GB): Manchester university press, 2010), xii.
[23] Margaret Drabble, '"He Spoke, It Seemed to Me, with the Wisdom of Solomon"', *The Observer*, 14 June 2008, sec. Books, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jun/15/biography.features5.
[24] John Frederick Drabble, *Death's Second Self* (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1971), http://archive.org/details/deathssecondself0000drab.
[25] Drabble, '"He Spoke, It Seemed to Me, with the Wisdom of Solomon"'.
[26] Sam Leith, 'Writing in Terms of Pleasure', *The Guardian*, 24 April 2009, sec. Books, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/apr/25/as-byatt-interview.
[27] 'Langdon-Helen', RCW Literary Agency, accessed 31 January 2024, https://www.rcwlitagency.com/authors/langdon-helen/.
[28] Harriet Harvey Wood, 'AS Byatt Obituary', *The Guardian*, 17 November 2023, sec. Books, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/nov/17/as-byatt-dame-antonia-byatt-obituary.

just get on with their lives? I think the answers to both questions are involved with each other. We get a kind of physiological excitement when two threads of the mind cross."[29] Such an attitude shows very vivid and unpretentious interest in a young girl.

Not only language seemed appealing to Antonia. She was also continually discovering some favourite topics to think about. The first impulse to think and later write about Victorians and the Victorian era came from the books by Robert Browning given to her by her mother. She appreciated the thinking of Victorians. She admired their open thinking. All elements were interconnected: science, religion, philosophy, women, and literature. Furthermore, she loved the inventing and the inventions, art of that time.[30] Victorian inspiration will be discussed in more detail later.

After spending some years at home reading and educating herself independently, her formal education started at Sheffield High School and then continued at a Quaker boarding school, The Mount School in York. Although she was sent to a Quaker school, she never shared the religious ideas of Christianity; she considered herself an agnostic [31] and later added: *„I am not a Quaker, of course, because I´m anti-Christian and the Quakers are a form of Christianity, but their religion is wonderful - you simply sat in silence and listened to the nature of things."*[32] (The motif of questioning the religious belief is present in some of her books, for instance in *The Game*. (1967) Her memories of her school age were not very pleasant. She experienced anxiety over the external world and was unwilling to speak to other people before she was 16. That was partly caused by seeing her mother at home, not living a life matching her intelligence, passions and desires.[33] Later, she continued her education first at the Newnham College, Cambridge, then Bryn Mawn College, Pennsylvania, and finished her studies at Somerville College, Oxford University.[34]

At Cambridge, she studied 17th-century religious allegory and Neoplatonism in English literature at the all-female Newnham College. Her talent begun to reveal itself when she earned a first-class degree for her work on Spenser and Milton.[35]

At the same time, she was taught by Frank Raymond Leavis, some of whose opinions on literature and writing she shared while largely refuting others.[36] F. R. Leavis was then a 62-year-old academic and literary critic, whose opinions on literature almost literally decided what would be taught and read, and what would be excluded entirely from the canon. His circle of critics included I. A. Richards, William

[29] A. S. Byatt, An Interview with A. S. Byatt by Jenny Newman & James Friel, 2004, Contemporary British and Irish Novelists: an Introduction through Interviews, http://www.cercles.com/interviews/byatt.html.
[30] Mira Stout, 'What Possessed A.S. Byatt?', The New York Times, 5 1991, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/99/06/13/specials/byatt-possessed.html?_.
[31] Byatt, An Interview with A. S. Byatt by Jenny Newman & James Friel.
[32] Leith, 'Writing in Terms of Pleasure'.
[33] Stout, 'What Possessed A.S. Byatt?'
[34] Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, Twayne's English Authors Series 529 (New York: Twayne Publ. [u.a.], 1996).
[35] Stout, 'What Possessed A.S. Byatt?'
[36] Byatt, An Interview with A. S. Byatt by Jenny Newman & James Friel.

Empson or Leavis´s wife Q. D. Leavis. After World War I, when he commenced his studies at Cambridge, literary education meant to study classic texts in Greek and Latin, and great English authors such as Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Dryden, Wordsworth and others under the heading of philology. Leavis and his companions opposed the social and political conventions of the post-Victorian age.[37] He believed that the English department should be the centre of study. They agreed with a motto of T. S. Eliot: *„Our literature is a substitute for religion, and so is our religion."*[38] Byatt´s opinion on that was that one should have more interests than only reading and writing.[39]

Moreover, Byatt refused resolutely the method of close reading when a text should be read without any knowledge of the historical and cultural background and valued entirely for the used language. In her novel *Possession: A Romance* (1990), she says: *„Leavis did to Blackadder what he did to serious students: he showed him the terrible, the magnificent importance and urgency of English literature and simultaneously deprived him of any confidence in his own capacity to contribute to or change it."*.[40] She was also unsatisfied with his strict rules regarding the literary interests of his students. This kind of thinking seemed to her terribly „*narrow*"[41] and she considered it literally *„blockage"*.[42]

During the last years of her study at Cambridge, she focused more on her interest in being a writer rather than an academic. However, her attitude to writing was ambivalent. She felt she lacked the experience to write anything meaningful, yet her only response on reading was to write. Despite that feeling, she started her second novel *The Game* and put away an incomplete manuscript of *Shadow of a Sun* in her postgraduate studies in America. She published it later in 1964 (it was reprinted under the originally intended title *The Shadow of the Sun* in 1991). She looks back at her Cambridge studies and her first real attempts of writing a novel as follows: *„I think I was lucky at Cambridge. A university English degree stops most people wanting to write. And it slowed me down and embarrassed me a great deal about wanting to write, but, at the same time, it intensely increased my desire to write."*[43] When she went to Oxford, she occupied herself with her novel *The Game,* which was published three years later.[44]

In 1959, she married her first husband Ian Byatt, an economist, whom she met during her studies at Bryn Mawr, and whose surname she used as a writer during all her career. Her grant was taken away (in the

[37] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 4–5.
[38] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 3. enlarged ed., repr (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), 44.
[39] Tanya Harrod and Glenn Adamson, 'Interview with A.S. Byatt', *The Journal of Modern Craft* 4, no. 1 (1 March 2011): 65–82, https://doi.org/10.2752/174967811X12949160068857. p.??
[40] A. S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance*, 1st American ed (New York: Random House, 1990), 27–28.
[41] Harrod and Adamson, 'Interview with A.S. Byatt'.p. ??
[42] Byatt, A.S. 'The Art of Fiction No. 168', 2001, https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/481/the-art-of-fiction-no-168-a-s-byatt. use proper citation for interview
[43] 'The Art of Fiction No. 168'.
[44] 'The Art of Fiction No. 168'.

case of a man, it would have been increased) due to her marriage and it ironically resolved her aspiration to become a writer. This encounter shaped her perspective on gender roles and their distinction.[45]

Soon after her marriage, A.S. Byatt became a mother of two little children, Antonia, born in 1960, and Charles, born in 1961, in her home in Durham. While bringing up her children, she slowly finished *The Game*. She became a staff member in Department of Extramural Studies at London University in 1962 and a part-time lecturer in the Department of Liberal Studies at Central School of Art and Design in 1965. Ian Byatt and A.S. Byatt divorced amicably in 1969, and she married Peter John Duffy, an investment analyst, in the same year. Her third child was born in 1970, a daughter called Isabel. Two years later her eleven-year-old son Charles was killed on his way home by a drunk driver.[46] At that time Byatt was already pregnant with her last child Miranda. In 1972, she started full-time lecturing in English and American Literature at University College London.[47]

Afterwards, besides teaching, she wrote a critique of Iris Murdoch´s fiction (1976), published her next novel *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) and edited George Eliot´s *The Mill on the Floss* (1979). She also started to broadcast, and sat on many committees of language and literature. Nevertheless, this period was very difficult in terms of coping with her son´s death. She said*: „It took me eleven years to recover at all"*[48] *„[…] until Miranda´s 11th birthday to think that she would live."*[49] Her next novel *Still Life* (1985) was her first great success, awarded the Maxmilian Silver Pen Award a year later. Her next publication was a collection of short stories *Sugar and Other Stories* (1987). By this time, she viewed herself as a proper full-time writer, enjoying her writing[50] after overcoming her bereavement. Her next novel, *Possession* gained wide circulation, and she won the Booker Prize for it that same year.

Her novels *The Virgin in the Garden* and *Still Life* became parts of the so-called Frederica Quartet, together with *Babel Tower* (1996) and *A Whistling Woman* (2002), introducing the main character Frederica Potter, whose life has some similarities with the author. Other notable works are *The Biographer´s Tale* (2000), *The Children´s Book* (2009), *Ragnarök: The End of the Gods* (2011) and a number of short-story collections, essays, literary criticism and many others. She worked as lecturer for the British Council in Spain, Germany, Australia, China, Korea and India. She was appointed Commander of the Order of British Empire in 1990 and promoted to Dame for services to Literature in 1999. She received many honorary doctorates and in 2017, she was elected a Fellow of the British Academy.

---

[45] A. S. Byatt, The Drexel´s InterView, Episode 102 with A. S. Byatt, 12 2010, The Drexel University, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkcLdrUkKWc&ab_channel=TheDrexelInterView-Archives.
[46] Stout, 'What Possessed A.S. Byatt?'
[47] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 8–10.
[48] Kate Kellaway, 'Self-portrait of a Victorian Polymath' - Search - Newspapers.com™, 16 September 1990, London Observer, https://www.newspapers.com/search/results/?keyword=%22Self-portrait+of+a+Victorian+Polymath%22&publication-ids=1000.
[49] Stout, 'What Possessed A.S. Byatt?'
[50] A. S. Byatt, Women´s Writing is More than That, 5 April 1987, London Sunday Times.

In her professional life, she always presented herself only by her initials as A.S. Byatt. She commented upon it during an interview for the Drexel University hosted by Paula Marantz Cohen: „*It seemed to me natural at the time people are always asking [about the usage of only my initials] there was T. S. Eliot. And there was D. H. Lawrence and there was H. G. Wells […]. It didn´t strike me as very odd and I rather like it sort of the idea of the impersonality of the artist which is a T. S. Eliot´s idea.*“[51]

Her books content many different themes, reflecting her admiration for the *„big"* thinking of the Victorians.[52] She admired handmaking of any kind, and commented: *„I began to see that the crafts were as important as Racine".*[53] Crafting and making things will be discussed later since they play an important part in *The Children´s Book*. From the beginning of her writing career in the 1960s she faced criticism for being *„an elitist or overly intellectual literary figure."*[54] However, the past 30 years have witnessed a pronounced resurgence in the enjoyment of sophisticated narrative in general public. Byatt was also a distinct public figure, a frequent participant in television and radio debates, literary discussions, and a prolific contributor to the arts and culture sections of numerous publications globally. [55] A. S. Byatt died at her home in Putney on 16 November 2023 at the age of 87.

[51] Byatt, The Drexel´s InterView, Episode 102 with A. S. Byatt.
[52] Stout, 'What Possessed A.S. Byatt?'
[53] Harrod and Adamson, 'Interview with A.S. Byatt'.
[54] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 9.
[55] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 8–10.

5.3.2 Thematic Threads in A.S. Byatt´s Major Works

Who did he think I was? A supervisor? […] A walking text? A source?[56]

A.S. Byatt had diverse interests, and that is evident in her long-life opus. Her critiques of her own writings and introspection are equally well-known. This could demonstrate both her writings and her complexity of her thought and creative approach.

Social roles and gender equality

One of her first recurring topics is gender roles and gender equality. She notes that during the 1960s and 1970s, women were *„expected to fit into roles fixed by gender rather than by ability and inclination.“*[57] She could see mothers and daughters who studied and then gave everything up for marriage. It was common for women to become stay-at-home mothers who sacrificed themselves for their families. Her novels *The Shadow of the Sun or Still Life* (where a female character symptomatically dies in the kitchen), and short stories such as 'Rose-Coloured Teacups,' and ´'Art Work' portray female characters struggling with gendered domesticity expectations.

Byatt did not, however, limit her gender critique to women only; she also portrays men faced with a similar pattern of limits. She illustrates how a man can experience similar inappropriacy in gender-defined positions or places. An example is William Adamson working on women´s ideas that are focused on breeding (like ants or bees) in her novellas 'Morpho Eugenia' and 'The Conjugial Angel,' which were published under the name *Angels & Insects* (1992). Furthermore, Kelly summarises that „*in a culture that enforces rigid gender roles and does not permit men to reveal their feelings, the cost of male friendship is always high.”*[58]

Another gender-related theme concerns social roles of aging women, addressed in Byatt´s short stories 'Art Work' and 'The Dried Witch'. In the latter, an old woman possesses the art of theological or medical knowledge but, on the other hand, she has lost her female powers of bearing children and being loved. Similarly, the themes of aging and changing appearance are especially prevalent in the short stories 'In the Air' and 'Medusa´s Ankles'.

Because A. S. Byatt repeatedly conveys the need to hear female voices in her works, her female characters have desires to succeed outside families, in the arts, sciences, or literature. The problem of putting their career ahead of their biological clock is never absent. An example is Jacqueline in the novel *A Whistling Woman*, who rejects the role of mother in order to devote herself to research in biology.

[56] A. S. Byatt, 'Reading, Writing, Studying: Some Questions about Changing Conditions for Writers and Readers.', *Critical Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (1993): 3–7, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8705.1993.tb00496.x.
[57] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 38.
[58] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 112.

Speaking of biology, A. S. Byatt targets the gynaecological and obstetrical practices of the 1950´s in her book *Still Life.*

Gender equality and feminism are very prominent in *The Virgin in the Garden, Still Life, Babel Tower, A Whistling Woman, Possession, The Matisse Stories* (1993) and her collection of essays *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings* (1991).

Myths and Fairy Tales

Byatt´s well-known fascination by myths and fairy tales is reflected in many aspects of her writings. As an example, Byatt frequently employs the metaphor of the mirror in a fairy tale context, associating it with the exploration of women´s identity, the possibility of metamorphosis.[59] Kelly polemises about the mystic and fairy-tale creatures behind the names of Byatt´s characters. In *Possession,* Val and Roland´s flat and style of living are associated with the gingerbread house in the 'Hansel and Gretel' tale. Another example is multiple characters described in green colour of various shades typical for mythic female characters (e.g. Melusine in *Possession*).[60]

In *Possession*, two modern scholars fall in love in the same settings as two fictitious Victorian poets whose poetry contains references to mythology (such as the Queen of the Castle Melusine). Similarly, in *Ragnarök: The End of the Gods*, published in 2011, Byatt draws a comparison between World War II and the Norse epic of Ragnarök, narrating the story from the viewpoint of a young girl who witnesses all the mayhem and destruction similar to the demise of the gods in the original myth.

The virgin goddess Astraea, originating from ancient Greek religion, features in *The Virgin in the Garden* and subsequently in *Still Life* as a symbol of purity, justice and renewal. Queen Elizabeth I, as the personification of Astraea, is represented as an archetypal persona that is unattainable to replicate. The title of another Byatt´s work, 'Medusa´s Ankles,' is inspired by a different mythological figure, Medusa, who is traditionally seen as repugnant woman and contrasts with the feminine, delicate Astraea. However, in the eyes of the feminist critic Hélene Cixous, she is turned into a beautiful and laughing figure. In Byatt´s story, the horrifying appearance is united with her laugh.[61]

Fictionalised history

In her critiques *Passions of the Mind* Byatt quotes Robert Browning´s words: *„I only make men and women speak"* and admires *„his prolific writing"* which is *„more complex, wise and fierce, calculating and inspired, passionate and intelligent, exactly and sharply judging and endlessly, charitably, imaginatively curious about all sorts of small and obscene, trivial and terrible human desires and self-*

[59] Armelle Parey, Isabelle Roblin, and Emilie Walezak, eds., *Special Issue: A.S. Byatt*, Journal of the Short Story in English, no. 76 (2021). Special issue (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2021), 110.
[60] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 83.
[61] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 56.

deceptions."[62] Browning is appreciated for perceiving women as complicated thinking entities with their *„desires [and] hopes for dialogues."*

Byatt inspiration for writing fictionalised history comes from Browning´s portrait of Victorians preoccupied with their complex 19th -century problems, in Byatt´s words *„the problems of the relation of time to history, of science to religion, of fact in science or history to religion, of fact in science of history fiction, or lies, in both, and of art to all these."* [63] A recurring topic is the rejection of Christianity as a religious system in favour of science, reflecting an overall trend in British literature of the 1990s. The *„crisis of faith and the belief in science"* is present both in her novels set in the 20th century and Victorian era.[64]

Byatt frequently incorporates real historical figures among her characters in her narratives. In her short story 'Precipice-Encurled,' the protagonist is Katherine Kay Bronson, who encountered Robert Browning in 1880 and remained his friend until his death. Another historical person referenced is Browning´s sister, Sarianna Browning.[65] In this narrative, Byatt conveys her own insatiable need for reading through Browning, in whom writing awakened a *„joy in greed."* [66] Another real historical personality in her fiction is Oscar Wilde, who appears in *The Children´s Book*. Nonetheless, his thoughts remain undisclosed to the readers. In an interview for the Booker Prize organization, Byatt stated that she made considerable efforts to avoid incorporating real living individuals into her narratives.[67]

In *Angels & Insects*, Byatt synthesizes her understanding of the Victorian era with contemporary philosophy, creating the phrase "*postmodern Victorian*" to depict a meticulously structured community where every individual,[68] from *„the reverend to the kitchen maid,"* occupies a designated role akin to that of an *„anthill or beehive."*[69]

In his article on biofiction, Max Saunders asks: *„what happens to historiographic metafiction when the history being fictionalised is personal history: life writing: biography or autobiography?"*[70] In Byatt´s case the fictionalised history is complemented with many *„archival documents, testimony of witnesses*

[62] A. S. Byatt, *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings*, 1st Vintage International ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 40.
[63] Byatt, *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings*, 40–41.
[64] Jennifer Anne Johnson, 'Beyond Belief : The Crisis of Faith in A.S. Byatt's Fiction', *Journal of English Studies* 10 (29 May 2012): 83–84, https://doi.org/10.18172/jes.182.
[65] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 43.
[66] A. S. Byatt, *Sugar and Other Stories* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 192.
[67] Alison Flood, 'Byatt Attacks Novelists Who Use Real-Life Characters', *The Guardian*, 13 August 2009, sec. Books, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/aug/13/byatt-novelists-real-life-characters.
[68] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 99.
[69] A. S. Byatt, *Angels & Insects: Two Novellas*, 1st Vintage international ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 61.
[70] Max Saunders, 'Byatt, Fiction and Biofiction', *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 7, no. 1 (2 November 2019): 90, https://doi.org/10.18352/hcm.543.

[…] letters, diaries, journals, memoirs, interviews, [and] autobiographies." There is a historical framework in the background, while „*the subjects of biographies"* occupy the foreground.

The Children´s Book exemplifies fictionalised history well. The historical context envelops the individuals and influences their existence, yet the primary emphasis is on their fictitious storylines. The topic of biographies engages with the historical context by observing actual personalities such as Oscar Wilde, E. Nesbit, and H. G. Wells, or by getting involved in the Arts and Crafts movements. Byatt emulates the stylistic characteristics of that era and employs artwork, ceramics, and museum artifacts to construct a comprehensive representation of history.

Visual Art

Visuality and visual arts are very important parts of Byatt´s creativity which connects her novels with particular imaginary colour structures. She employs them as representations of narrative threads, the integrity of her characters and the whole structures of the novels themselves. In her interview with Natasha Mitchell, she compares them to Gillian Ayres abstract paintings.[71] According to Kelly, *„Byatt makes a metaphor for her own writing."*[72]

The author´s love and passion for art are expressed in many of her works. Moreover, she uses painters like Monet, Matisse, Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Velázquez[73] and their techniques as well as their paintings as inspiration for her own "painting" with words. Monet´s painting *Vétheuil in the Fog* is used in her short story 'Precipice-Encurled' and described as *„not the thing seen, but the act of seeing."*[74] Similarly, she thinks about John Ruskin´s clarity of vision as showing *„the essence of truth, virtue, and good art."* In another short story called 'The Chinese Lobster,' she analyses Matisse´s attitude towards women and his exploitation of female family members, his portrayal of women in his artwork, and the interpretation of his works from both a female and male viewpoint in his work.[75]

The last essay called *Van Gogh, Death and Summer* in *Passions of the Mind* is devoted to Van Gogh´s life, work and artistic achievement. She explores his personality and grasp of life, his beliefs and the reflection of all these in his paintings. Van Gogh´s life tribulations serve as inspiration for Byatt´s novel *Still Life* and occasionally a parallel narrative to Alexander Weddeburn´s journey as an artist, preoccupied with the *„dramatization of the dispute, in the Yellow House, between Paul Gauguin and Vincent Van Gogh."*[76] Byatt often incorporates visual arts into her writing and extensively utilizes

[71] Natasha Mitchell, 'AS Byatt: Woman of Letters and ...Science! - ABC Listen', accessed 17 October 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/allinthemind/as-byatt-woman-of-letters-and-science/3021714.
[72] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 45.
[73] Rui Manuel G. de Carvalho Homem and Maria de Fátima Lambert, eds., *Writing and Seeing: Essays on Word and Image*, Internationale Forschungen Zur Allgemeinen Und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft 95 (Amsterdam New York, NY: Rodopi, 2006), 219.
[74] Byatt, *Sugar and Other Stories*, 206, 210.
[75] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 59.
[76] A S Byatt, *Still Life* (London: Vintage Digital, 2021), 82.

ekphrasis.[77] One of the paintings depicted through ekphrasis in a prologue of *Still Life* is Van Gogh´s *Olive Pickers*. This painting was created during Van Gogh´s last and most prolific years, which were devoted to the still life genre.[78]

Additionally, Byatt concurs with the incompleteness of both art and reality, as articulated by Iris Murdoch in her polemic essay *Against Dryness* (1961).[79] The conclusion of *Possession* serves as one such example. When all appears to conclude reassuringly for the reader, the Victorian poets and lovers do not have their endings, as shown by the phrase: *„she forgot the message, which was never delivered."*[80]

Intellectual Plays

Byatt appears to enjoy the writing process, in addition to her fascination with life itself. Evidence of that can be found across all her work. Her life, her experiences, and the literature she managed to absorb are all woven together in her texts. She engages in an intellectual play which blurs the boundaries between her own life and thoughts and the lives of her characters. Her works contain autobiographical and semi-autobiographical features shaping the lives and thoughts of her major characters.

For instance, Byatt remembered on multiple occasions her unhappy school days, [81] most prominently in her stories 'The Boiler-Room' and 'The Changeling' describe her fear and isolation in the boarding school and her *„writing out of fear."*[82]

The motifs of a mother who loses all her dreams and aspirations after becoming a housewife are also depicted *The Game, The Virgin in the Garden,* and *Still Life*. In the autobiographical story 'Sugar,' she says that *„[her mother] was not a truthful woman,"*[83] because she concealed odd, embarrassing or painful memories with making up alternative ones. Through long use and retelling, she added layers and their own logic to maintain peace and harmony. Moreover, the story 'Precipice-Encurled' is full of possibilities that will never be fulfilled: „*The vanishing between instants of all warmth and intelligence and aspiration."*[84]

---

[77] Asya Sakine Uçar, ´Looking At „Still Life" And Ekphrasis Through Van Gogh´s Speaking Pictures In A.S. Byatt´s Still Life´, *Looking At ´Still Life´ And Ekphrasis Through Van Gogh´s Speaking Pictures In A.S. Byatt´s Still Life*, 1 January 2019, https://www.academia.edu/41634323/Looking_At_Still_Life_And_Ekphrasis_Through_Van_Gogh_s_Speaking_Pictures_In_A_S_Byatt_s_Still_Life.
[78] Elizabeth Hicks, *The Still Life in the Fiction of A .S. Byatt* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge scholars, 2010).
[79] A. S. Byatt, 'A.S. Byatt on Iris Murdoch's The Bell', *Literary Hub* (blog), 15 July 2019, https://lithub.com/a-s-byatt-on-iris-murdochs-the-bell/.
[80] Byatt, *Possession*, 511.
[81] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 46.
[82] Byatt, *Sugar and Other Stories*, 150.
[83] Byatt, *Sugar and Other Stories*, 215.
[84] Byatt, *Sugar and Other Stories*, 195.

Other autobiographical features used in her fiction include a fatherly figure who is a judge, Yorkshireman, Quaker, a socialist turned democrat, and similar family relationships, in particular two intellectual sisters and their complicated relationship. Describing a place that is strikingly similar to her birthplace in *Sugar*, Byatt comments on the autobiographical content that *„beside this fabrication are the long black shadows of the things left unsaid, because I don´t want to say them, or dare not, or do not remember, or misunderstood, forgot, or never knew."*[85]

Similarities exist between Byatt and the protagonist Frederica in the Frederica Quartet (*The Virgin in the Garden, Still Life, Babel Tower, A Whistling Woman*). Byatt and her protagonist Frederica both exhibit intellectual desire and curiosity across several disciplines, including the arts, literature, philosophy, and history. Byatt employs intertextuality, as does Frederica in *Babel Tower*, when she disassembles a letter from Guy Tiger and reorganizes its fragments into a new structure.[86] The themes of feminism, conventional cultural conventions, and the balance between her academic pursuits and motherhood are recurrent in all four works and reflect Byatt´s personal experiences as well.

Vision

Singlemindedness and vision are shared by numerous characters in Byatt´s texts. Visionary characters include in particular Henry (*The Shadow of the Sun*), Marcus (*The Virgin in the Garden*), Cassandra (*The Game*), Roland (*Possession*), and Tennyson (*The Conjugial Angel*).[87] In the introduction to *The Shadow of the Sun* Byatt talks about Henry as her *„secret self," „someone who saw everything too bright, too fierce, too much,"* adding that *„this vision of too much makes the visionary want to write – in my case."*[88]

She compares two general attitudes to visionaries: *„Female visionaries are poor mad exploited sibyls and pythonesses. Male ones are prophets and poets."*[89] Ultimately, *„clarity of vision was the essence of truth, virtue, and good art."*[90] She named it *„the problem of female vision, female art and thought."* Using the metaphors and the mythological imagination of the Sun as a male symbol and Earth or Moon as a female symbol. The Coleridge´s perception of *„the human intellect as a light like the moon, reflecting the light of the primary consciousness, the Sun"*[91] is central feature of Cassandra (*The Game*) and Anna (*The Shadow of the Sun*). They became "helpless visionaries." However, Byatt employed metaphors and comparisons for male characters (Bill Potter in *The Virgin in the Garden*) as well.

[85] Byatt, *Sugar and Other Stories*, 238.
[86] A. S. Byatt, *Babel Tower* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012), 454.
[87] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 18.
[88] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 18.
[89] A. S. Byatt, *The Shadow of the Sun*, 1st Harvest ed, A Harvest Book (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1993), x.
[90] Byatt, *Sugar and Other Stories*, 206.
[91] Byatt, *The Shadow of the Sun*, xi–xii.

Intertextuality

The probably most prominent recurrent aspects of Byatt´s oeuvre are intertextuality, intratextuality and transtextuality. A good example is her revival of Victorian poetic tradition in *Possession* where she pays *„tribute to the poetry and poets of the past"*.[92] Whether her characters work with an allegedly historic text, anthology or encyclopaedia, she imitates the samples with precision of a linguist as in her novella *Angels and Insect*. She commented that *„I shall have some sense of what words meant in the past, and how they related to other words in the past, and be able to use them in a modern text so that they do not lose their relations to other words in the interconnected web of their own vocabulary."*[93]

Similarly, *Babel Tower* contains experimental elements including *„numerous passages of pastiche and quotation, inlaid narratives and stories within stories."*[94] Kelly observes Byatts precise choice of her words to describe *„the relations between truth, lies and fiction."*[95] Byatt comments upon it in her *Passions of the Mind*, in her view, *„words denote things"*[96] and language is an *„instrument with which we shape and limit our purposes and our apprehensions."*[97] Byatt observes that identifying a perfect tool to precisely articulate what is needed, is impossible, everything has an additional connotation or a story behind it.[98] In *Babel Tower*, Byatt includes thoughts about meanings of words and adequacy of language through Frederica´s thinking about legal language used to define social roles: *„These legal words carry with them the whole history of a society in which a woman was a man´s property, and also a part of his flesh, not to be contaminated. And behind continence and incontinence is the alien, ancient, and powerful history of Christian morals."*[99]

Curiosity and Fascination with Life and World

Byatt´s oeuvre is replete with instances reflecting her fascination with life, artistic methods, cultural contexts, and mediums. This sub-chapter cannot encapsulate all the concepts. Nevertheless, it can outline the most important ones. Byatt´s writing style is often criticized by reviewers for her „*overambitious intellectuality"* of her works.[100]

The fascination with various areas of life and knowledge is reflected in her often very detailed information from diverse fields, ranking from mathematics, genetics, and neurosciences in her Frederica

[92] Regina Rudaitytė, '(De)Construction of the Postmodern in A. S. Byatt's Novel Possession', *Literatūra* 49, no. 5 (1 January 2007): 120, https://doi.org/10.15388/Litera.2007.5.7941.
[93] A. S. Byatt, *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays*, 1. Harvard Univ. Press paperback ed., 3. printing (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002), 93.
[94] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 65.
[95] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 54.
[96] Byatt, *Passions of the Mind*, 4.
[97] Byatt, *Babel Tower*, 560.
[98] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 76–77.
[99] Byatt, *Babel Tower*, 382.
[100] Louisa Hadley, *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Quartet, across natural history and geology in *The Game* and *Possession*, entomology in *Angels and Insects*, taxonomy in *The Biographer´s Tale*, to geology and gynaecology in *Little Black Book of Stories* or *Still Life*.[101] Byatt writes *„about scientists because they do not spend their time deconstructing the world, or quibbling theologically about abstract terms of value."*[102] Her writing is not based only on her own research, but also on discussions with neuropsychologists, biologists and philosophers. Byatt, for instance, discussed neuroscience with Steve Jones for help on her novel *The Whistling Woman.* However, the treatment of science in her novels has been criticised by Raymond Tallis, a professor of medicine for *„giving a reductionist perspective on literature through neurophysiology"*. [103]

Byatt´s approach to the distinction between the body and the consciousness connects science with thinking, thinking with language and language with beliefs and identity. This will be further examined later since it plays an important role in Byatt´s views on women and women´s roles.

Death

Byatt´s life and literary output were influenced by the tragic death of Byatt´s son Charles in 1972[104] and her survival of an accidental domestic electrocution in the early 1960s.[105] Unlike Byatt´s narratives based on myths, her depictions of dying (and birth as well) are stripped *„of its attendant myths, superstitions, and conventions as much as possible."*[106] Deaths, rather a range of deaths, *„represent, variously, a conviction that death holds meaning and resolution (either potential or actual), and an ironic modem or postmodern refutation of this."*

The depiction of accidental death is that of Stephanie Potter´s electrocution. She is a mother and a homemaker who is unsatisfied with her inability to use and develop her academic capabilities. One could ask whether she died at the moment of electrocution or years earlier due to the suppression of her intellectual capacities. She confronted her mortality directly as she uttered, *„this is it."*[107] Despite her living for others (and her last thoughts about others), she was abandoned in her death.

Seeing a ghost, fear of transcending that fear to children are recurrent themes in 'The July Ghost' or in 'The Changeling.'[108] Seeing and hearing parents after their death features in 'The Next Room' where death holds no resolution for the survivors. 'The Dried Witch' draws a picture of suffering to death at the end, accepting the role the woman character is to play.

---

[101] Emilie Walezak, 'A. S. Byatt, Science, and the Mind/Body Dilemma', *Journal of Literature and Science* 11, no. 1 (2018): 106–19, https://www.literatureandscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/WALEZAK-final.pdf.
[102] Byatt, *On Histories and Stories*, 79.
[103] Mitchell, 'AS Byatt: Woman of Letters and ...Science! - ABC Listen'.
[104] Hadley, *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, 1.
[105] A. S. Byatt, City Arts of Sun Francisco Interview with Robert Hass, 8 November 1993, Pacific Vista Productions.
[106] Sue Sorensen, 'Death in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 43, no. 2 (1 January 2002): 117, https://doi.org/10.1080/00111610209602175.
[107] Byatt, *Still Life*, 360.
[108] Byatt, *Sugar and Other Stories*.

Suicidal death is a motif present in several texts, such as 'The Chinese Lobster' and 'Crocodile Tears' where suicide is considered as *„a vital option"* or *„an escape from pain."*[109] In *Possession* or in *The Game* suicides are motivated by retaining dignity. Despite Byatt´s agnostic perspective and her view of God as *„an omni-present absentee,"*[110] mysticism, spiritualism and mediums contacting the world beyond play important roles in *Possession* and 'The Conjugial Angel.' Beliefs and spiritualism are described as *„the religion of a materialist age."*[111]

Sexuality is the last recurring theme I chose to mention. The motifs of bisexuality and lesbianism, as well as the apprehension around sexual intercourse, feature in *Possession*. In *Still Life*, Byatt addresses contemporary questions concerning virginity, highlighting the prevalent societal norms that expect men to possess heterosexual experience whereas women are expected to have no experience at all. Furthermore, in *Angels and Insects*, the motif of incest is present, and one of the novellas contains excerpts from Tennyson´s *In Memoriam* addressed to Arthur Hallam that are considered homoerotic.[112]

[109] Sorensen, ´Death in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt´.
[110] Byatt, *Passions of the Mind*, 5.
[111] Byatt, *Angels & Insects*, 79–80.
[112] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 111.

5.3.3 Literary Style

> *If I have defended realism, or what I call „self-conscious realism," it is not because I believe that it has any privileged relationship to truth, social or psychological, but because it leaves space for thinking minds as well as feeling bodies.*[113]

This section of my thesis focuses on Byatt´s literary style. I choose to draw on the examples from the Frederica Quartet: *The Virgin in the Garden, Still Life, Babel Tower,* and *A Whistling Woman*. In reference to *The Virgin in the Garden* and *Still Life*, Kelly observes that *„realism is Byatt´s preferred mode, though it is always a realism shaped by postmodern notion about slipperiness and language."* [114] Byatt employs postmodern techniques similar to those of Umberto Eco, John Fowles, or David Lodge, incorporating present and past writings (journals, letters, poetry, biography, scholarly articles) into the narrative. According to MacFarlane, she employs pastiche to inspire her readers to experience the past. [115] Byatt explains that she writes novels with large character casts and hopes *„that the reader can move and inhabit different consciousness as the writer does."*[116]

Lexical choices and sentence structure

Byatt´s longstanding preoccupation with *„the problems of the „real" in fiction, and the adequacy of words to describe it"* and her experimenting with language and form are clearly visible in the Frederica Quartet. In *Passions of the Mind*, Byatt writes about her plan to write *Still Life* as a *„very bare, very down-to-earth, attempt to give the „thing itself."* [117] She explains that she *„wanted to write about birth, about death, plainly and exactly,"* mentioning *„ideological reasons"* and her urge to move *„from an undissociated paradise to our modern dissociated world."* She also explains that she is *„afraid of, and fascinated b, theories of language as a self-referring system of signs, which doesn´t touch the world."* Byatt admits her *„failure"* to accomplish her plan of using only non-metaphorical language.

Despite the overall *„failure,"* Byatt succeeded in delivering straightforward depictions of birth and death, in plain, non-metaphorical language as intentioned. Childbirth is presented as follows:

> *They timed contractions, said she was doing ´fine´ and administered the enema. Stephanie then felt local inflammation and irritation almost everywhere, and also panic fear. Obedient and dripping, she swung herself off the high couch and plodded to the bathroom where the water was running and the lavatory waited. She wondered how, why, if she could not be allowed to go on foot along corridors, she could be left alone helpless in lavatory and bathroom.*[118]

[113] Byatt, *Passions of the Mind*, 16.
[114] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 66.
[115] Robert MacFarlane, 'A Very Bad Case of Birds on the Brain', *The Observer*, 15 September 2002, sec. Books, 17, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/sep/15/fiction.shopping.
[116] Mitchell, ´AS Byatt: Woman of Letters and ...Science! - ABC Listen´.
[117] Byatt, *Passions of the Mind*, 16, 20.
[118] Byatt, *Still Life*, 93.

Byatt uses the same non-metaphorical language with a minimum of nouns, adjectives, and verbs to describe death in a similar way as birth:

> *And then the refrigerator struck. She thought, as the pain ran through her, as her arm, fused to the metal, burned and banged, as her head filled, ´This is it´ and then, with a flashing vision of heads on pillows, ´Oh, what will happen to the children?´ And the word, altruism, and surprise at it. And then dark pain, and more pain.*[119]

On the contrary, other parts of the narrative are delivered in sophisticated language, encompassing an extensive variety of nouns, adjectives, and verbs that depict both physical and psychological states:

> *The shock produced in him not weakness but the opposite, a kind of access of mental clarity and physical energy, pumped adrenalin, as in a man about to begin a long race, which he knew, in a sense, he was. For one long moment he felt all his gathered strength, like the seventh wave ready to break against the harbour wall, and had the foresight to see that his strength would be the source of his hurt, that it would take him a long time to know this and to suffer it, that he would think, and remember, and imagine, and that there would be no way of shortening this.*[120]

Byatt´s characters usually possess the ability to articulate their emotions, ideas, and attitudes using a diverse and nuanced vocabulary as the example above shows. However, Byatt was aware of the fact, that some people may struggle to articulate their internal ideas or exterior experiences and use simple language.[121] Some feelings, sensations, or emotional states may seldom be articulated verbally. Consequently, the characters may struggle to express their emotions.

Multi-layered Narrative

The publication of *„a complex, multi-layered narrative that allows the provocative and feverishly experimental atmosphere"* in 1996 – *Babel Tower* – describes a new world of *„the semi-mythical Swinging Sixties, the decade of sexual and social revolutions."*[122] *Babel Tower* marks a new chapter in Byatt´s work; the postmodern form is her response to the calls for a *„new novel"*[123] and an effort to examine and critique *„the legacy of literary experimentation"* within the medium of fiction.

As suggested by Richard Todd and Michael Noble, the novel offers the reader three alternative openings thar make the reader concentrate on *„seemingly chaotic proliferations of story-lines"*[124] complemented with *„formal experiments and polyvocal narrative textures"*[125] and many *„passages of pastiche and quotation, inlaid narratives and stories within stories."*[126] Byatt refers to the technique employed by William Burroughs in the late 1960´s, while describing her character Frederica´s literary efforts:

---

[119] Byatt, *Still Life,* 360.
[120] Byatt, *Still Life,* 362.
[121] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 68.
[122] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 64.
[123] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 66.
[124] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 6.
[125] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 64.
[126] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 65.

> *Frederica feels wild and oppressed. She takes the sharp shears and slices Guy Tiger´s letter in two, vertically, and then again horizontally, and then again, until she has a handful of rectangular segments. This will not get rid of it, she reflects gloomily. More copies can endlessly be quartered, like the heads of the hydra. She picks up the pieces and lays them out on the desk. „A happy child living in Brock´s School." The art students are excited by William Burroughs and his cut-ups. Frederica rearranges Tiger´s letter into a kind of consequential structure.*[127]

Byatt narrates the story in the present tense, establishing *„a documentary effect"*[128] and situating the plot against the backdrop of actual historical events. Certain passages of dialogue appear shaped by Iris Murdoch´s prose,[129] indicating Byatt´s active involvement with 1960´s literature. Main themes of the novel include *„breakdown and fragmentation of language,"*[130] attributed by Byatt to *„sociological and political languages, the riddles of death of god theology and Laingian psychiatry, the closed group worlds of the hip and the cool, the interest in silence and the impossibility of speech – Zen Buddhism, Waiting for Godot and Endgame."*[131] The novel examines the theoretical issues of vision, *„language, truth, fiction, and narrative"* [132] that have engaged Byatt throughout her career.

Postmodern sense of identity

As previously said, Byatt´s characters have multifaceted characteristics, and their personalities may develop thanks to their experiences. *Babel Tower* illustrates the postmodern disintegration of families alongside Frederica´s *„multiple or fragmented"*[133] identities. She is characterized as a composite of many women – *„a mother, a wife, a lover, a watcher."*[134] *In Babel Tower,* Frederica asks herself *„Who is it that can tell me who I am?,"*[135] and the same question is repeated in *A Whistling Women*. The postmodern response is evident in both texts – there is no straightforward answer. Frederica occupies multiple roles, and her own emotions do not always align with cultural conventions.

[127] Byatt, *Babel Tower*, 454.
[128] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 66.
[129] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 68.
[130] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 6.
[131] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 67.
[132] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 68.
[133] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 69.
[134] Byatt, *Babel Tower*, 462.
[135] Byatt, 520; A. S. Byatt, *A Whistling Woman*, 1. Vintage intern. ed (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 330.

5.3.4 Critical Reception

A.S. Byatt has received various awards, resulting in an extensive list of honours. Consequently, I will include only a selection of her achievements.

Byatt was made Commander of the Order of the British Empire in the 1990´s and subsequently elevated to Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her contributions to literature in the 1999 Birthday Honours of Elizabeth II.

She received numerous honorary Doctor of Literature degrees from institutions such as Durham University, the University of Liverpool, the University of London, the University of Cambridge, among others. In 2008, *The Times* included her in their compilation of the 50 greatest British writers since 1945.[136] In 2017, Byatt was named a Fellow of the British Academy.[137]

She received the Booker Prize in 1990 for *Possession* and again in 2009 for *The Children´s Book*. She received several international honours, including the Erasmus Prize in the Netherlands, the Park Kyong-ni Prize in South Korea, and the Hans Christian Andersen Literature Award in Denmark.

In 1984–1988 she was a member of Management Committee, Society of Authors. She was a member of Kingman Committee of Inquiry into the Teaching of English Language in 1987–1988, and Literature Advisory Panel of British Council in 1993–1998. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences named her a foreign honorary member in 2014.

Critical responses to Byatt´s oeuvre evolved over the years in relation to her published works. One of the first critiques of *The Game* mentioned in *The Fiction of A.S. Byatt* by Louisa Hadley is Mary-Kay Wilmers´s argument that Byatt´s main characters lack sufficient depth to support *„their philosophical load“* and that *„the novel suffers from suffocating design.“* [138] Malcolm Bradbury provided a predominantly favourable assessment, acknowledging only a few shortcomings. He implicitly categorized the work as a *„women´s novel“*[139] by asserting that the domestic-familial sphere constituted the foundational experience, with character studies centring on the adolescent fears of women. Creighton recognized the dichotomy between a woman as an artist and her roles as wife and mother, as well as the tension between the intellectual and the physical self. This note is reiterated multiple times throughout Byatt´s works.[140]

[136] 'The 50 Greatest British Writers since 1945', 5 January 2008, https://www.thetimes.com/article/the-50-greatest-british-writers-since-1945-ws3g69xrf90.
[137] 'Elections to the British Academy Celebrate the Diversity of UK Research', The British Academy, accessed 26 October 2024, https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/news/elections-british-academy-celebrate-diversity-uk-research/.
[138] Mary-Kay Wilmers, quoted in Hadley, *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, 10.
[139] Malcolm Bradbury, quoted in Hadley, *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, 11.
[140] Hadley, *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, 12.

The Virgin in the Garden drew further criticism on the extraordinary intelligence of Byatt´s characters, attributed to Byatt´s own high intellect. According to Irwin, quoted by Louisa Hadley as well, *The Virgin in the Garden* only avoids this flaw in the depiction of Marcus, who is *„mercifully inarticulate.“*[141] Nevertheless, her work is assumed to be for a limited readership.[142] Byatt´s work was generally criticised for providing literary lessons rather than communicating the genuine emotions of her characters. [143] Alexa Alfer claims that Michael Westlake´s literary criticism sustains the concept of a conflict between realism and experimentation. Doris Lessing, Angus Wilson, Julian Barnes, and Graham Swift are associated with Byatt as authors who also challenged traditional realism and contemporary experimentation in their writings.[144]

The publication of *Possession* undoubtedly provided a novel perspective to the critique of the Victorian era and its representation. Richard Jenkyns, for example, praised Byatt´s Victorian figures over the twentieth-century ones, expressing a particular admiration for their emotional lives while advocating for the restoration of the Victorians to their rightful honour.[145] Danny Karlin, conversely, criticized Byatt´s characters for fulfilling her intellectual purposes, particularly LaMotte for embodying *„too many kinds of writer.”*[146]

Many critics contend that Byatt's writing cannot be simply classified as postmodernist, particularly because she oscillates between facts and fiction, as noted by Marilyn Butler in her review of *Angels and Insects.* She proposed the term *„ficticism“*[147] for Byatt´s style of writing. Heidi Hansson questions the interpretation of postmodern fictions that directly reveal their connection to earlier works.[148] They are referred to as hybrids that blend traditional and postmodern narrative techniques, so undermining the interpretations of both canonical and contemporary texts. Levenson characterizes Byatt as a *„postmodern Victorian”*[149] and Butler as *„a Victorianist Iris Murdoch.”* [150]

Critics highlighted the association with the historical and social-problem novel in *The Virgin in the Garden* and *Still Life*, whereas the more recent part of the project aligns more closely with postmodern tendencies.[151] Tom Adair´s critique of *Babel Tower* contends that the emphasis on language supersedes

[141] Irwin, quoted in Hadley, *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, 23.
[142] Hadley, *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, 2.
[143] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 68.
[144] Alexa Alfer, Michael J. Noble, and A. S. Byatt, eds., *Essays on the Fiction of A. S. Byatt: Imagining the Real*, 1. publ, Contributions to the Study of World Literature 110 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001), 47.
[145] Richard Jenkyns, 'Disinterring Buried Lives', *The Times Literary Supplement*, March 1990, 214.
[146] Karlin, quoted in Hadley, *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, 50.
[147] Butler, quoted in Hadley, *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*,78.
[148] Heidi Hansson, 'The Double Voice of Metaphor: A. S. Byatt's "Morpho Eugenia"', *Twentieth Century Literature* 45, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 452, https://www.jstor.org/stable/441947.
[149] Michael Levenson, '"The Religion of Fiction." Rev. of Angels and Insects by A. S. Byat', *New Republic*, 2 August 1993, 41.
[150] Butler, quoted in Hadley, *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, 78.
[151] Hadley, *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*,90.

character development, resulting in the reader´s diminished concern for their destinies.[152] Additionally, Miranda Seymour states that the intellectual objectives are excessively ambitious for the *„multi-threaded"* [153] story to encompass. Finally, according to Hulbert, Byatt integrates a post-modern self-awareness but adopts *„the old-fashioned moralizing form."*[154]

The final section of the Frederica Quartet, *A Whistling Woman*, frequently elicits critical responses to the recurring motifs present in the preceding three parts. A considerable emphasis was placed on Byatt´s critique of the gender politics of the 1960´s. For instance, Steve Davies observed that all four novels of the Quartet respond to it, [155] while Pamela Norris identified *A Whistling Woman* as a narrative centred on the tension *„between biological imperatives"*[156] and career ambition.

Byatt´s short stories published between 1987 and 2021, together with their reviews, consistently focus on their narrative themes. Their primary focus includes art, mythology, folklore, the interplay between past and present, domesticity, and gender issues. Byatt occasionally created an independent short story from a text included in her previous work, such as 'The Glass Coffin' and 'Gode´s Story' tales included in *Possession*, and later published in *The Djinn in the Nightingale´s Eye*. Conversely, Byatt´s short stories are rarely condemned for their excessive intellectualism or the repression of her characters.[157]

[152] Hadley, 91–92.
[153] Seymour, quoted in Hadley, 92.
[154] Hulbert, quoted in Hadley, 95.
[155] Hadley, 102–3.
[156] Pamela Norris, quoted in Hadley, 103.
[157] Hadley, 136.

5.3.5 Attitude to Feminism and Gender Equality

Beginning in the 1960´s and extending into the 1980´s, the second wave of feminism amplified demands for equality and equivalent rights for men and women. Anglo-American feminism critiqued the political, social, and cultural frameworks of patriarchal society and their effects on the construction of female identity. At the same time, French post-structuralist feminist criticism concentrated on linguistic and psychological concerns, addressing the representation of the feminine in opposition to what they perceived as *„a male logocentrism."* [158] Byatt acknowledged and valued the improvements made to enhance women´s lives. Yet, she disapproved of feminist literary theory and gender-based criticism. In 2011, Byatt argued in the Drexel interview that the feminist extensive theory had transformed writing into a systematic process. [159]

Byatt addresses the programmed writing in her novel *Possession*. A feminist critic in the novel asks:

> […] *what surfaces of the earth do we women choose to celebrate, who have appeared typically in phallocentric texts as a penetrable hole, inviting or abhorrent, surrounded by, fringed with—something? Women writers and painters are seen to have created their own significantly evasive landscapes, with features which deceive or elude the penetrating gaze, tactile landscapes which do not privilege the dominant stare.*[160]

The critic refrains from seeing the world via a phallocentric lens; instead, she subconsciously shifts her perspective to that of women. Byatt tends to eschew such distinctions of perspective.

Later, she articulated her apprehensions over literature being politicized instead of preserving its integrity as art in her essays *On Histories and Stories* (2000):

> *Novels are taught if they appear to have something to contribute to the debate about ´women´s writing´ or ´feminism´ or ´post-colonial studies´ or ´postmodernism´. All this is lively and stimulating and interesting. But, as George Steiner wisely pointed out, making syllabuses, which is a political activity, is different from making a canon. A canon (which is not immutable) is (I think) what other writers have wanted to keep alive, to go on reading, over time. There is always a fear that good books may slip through the net of syllabuses, or disappear when political priorities change. Or never get noticed at all.*[161]

Besides that, Byatt persisted in conveying her apprehensions with regard to the distortion of literary texts in contemporary criticism:

> *Modern criticism is powerful and imposes its own narratives and priorities on the writings it uses as raw material, source, or jumping-off point. It may be interested in feminist, or Lacanian, or marxist, or post-colonial narratives and vocabularies. Or it may play forcefully with the words of the writer, interjecting its own punning meanings.*[162]

---

[158] Renata Janktová, *"An Ambivalent Beast" The Literary Relationship Between A.S. Byatt and D.H. Lawrence* (Thesis submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy, Norwich, University of East Anglia School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing, 2020), 48.
[159] Byatt, The Drexel´s InterView, Episode 102 with A. S. Byatt.
[160] Byatt, *Possession*, 269.
[161] Byatt, *On Histories and Stories*, 2.
[162] Byatt, *On Histories and Stories,* 45.

She maintained her belief that misinterpretations stemmed from a deficiency of genuine reading and expertise in the particular field. In *On Histories and Stories*, Byatt scrutinizes, among others, the validity of Mary Jacobus´s literary study of Wordsworth and criticises her for inscribing constructed (feminist) meanings into Wordsworth´s texts.[163]

Another lament on feminist inclinations to emphasize certain topics while neglecting others is present in *Possession*:

> *There are all sorts of symbolic and mythological and psychoanalytic interpretations [of Christabel LaMotte´s poem about Melusina]. […] 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. […] but the new feminists see Melusina in her bath as a symbol of self-sufficient female sexuality needing no poor males.*[164]

> *[W]e question everything except the centrality of sexuality—Unfortunately feminism can hardly avoid privileging such matters.*[165]

Byatt criticises the stereotypical perception of men and women and is particularly troubled by the distinction that associates *„men with mind"* and *„women with flesh and matter."*[166]

As previously noted, Byatt´s recurring theme is the connection, or rather disconnection, of the body and mind of an individual, which, in her view, affects women more than men, mainly due to their biological function of childbearing. Women throughout pregnancy and labour are characterized as feeling alienated from their bodies or lacking control over them. The novel *Still Life* illustrates the notion of existence as only a physical being with biological functions, most evident in Byatt´s depiction of Stephanie´s labour:

> *She was a woman who had thought about the ambivalence of female imagining of internal spaces. […] The womb, imagined, can appear to be a tiny crumpled purse to hold half-a-crown, or silent underground caverns, receding endlessly, corrugated, velvet, blood-dark, gentian dark. […] And the vagina […] how can that narrow sheath take a furious blunt block which appears to the perception of inner spaces to be larger than the body itself, to be breaking out as it expands and can no longer be contained?*[167]

Stephanie considers her own body as an instrument for childbirth. However, Stephanie´s perception of her own body and the child changes during the childbirth:

> *What had been swimming and floating and turning was now tightly packed and bone-grinding, occasionally lurching round with independent force, pushing at the now almost inelastic walls of her body with an urgency that left her gasping for breath and dizzy. Now she was not sailing, she was weighted, and trod splayfooted and with difficulty. Living*

[163] Byatt, *On Histories and Stories,* 100.
[164] Byatt, *Possession*, 39.
[165] Byatt, *On Histories and Stories*, 245.
[166] Byatt, *On Histories and Stories*, 111.
[167] Byatt, *Still Life*, 106–7.

> *became absorbed in waiting and she was not waiting patiently. She had lost her autonomy. Something was living her life; she was not living.*[168]

> *There was her body, quiet, used, resting: there was her mind, free, clear, shining: there was the boy and his eyes, seeing what? And ecstasy.*[169]

A recurring feminist theme in Byatt´s work is the distinction between a woman´s role of mother and her intellectual aspirations. As understood by Mary Eagleton, Byatt is one of female novelists *„who depict an anxious battle between 'feminine' and intellectual identities."*[170] Stephanie´s experience of childbirth can be interpreted as a moment of transition, causing a conflict between being a mother and a career woman.[171] Moreover, Janktová adds that Byatt also questioned D.H. Lawrence´s interpretation of sexual experience *„as a spiritual union"*[172] that transcends the body-mind dichotomy. In her novel *Babel Tower*, she employs Frederica, who is unable to manage her experiences in that manner.

[168] Byatt, *Still Life*, 99.
[169] Byatt, *Still Life,* 108.
[170] Janktová, *"An Ambivalent Beast*", 22.
[171] Hadley, *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, 45.
[172] Janktová, *"An Ambivalent Beast"*, 258.

5.4 The Children´s Book

5.4.1 Critical Reception

A.S. Byatt´s novel *The Children´s Book* won acclaim from both reviewers and the general public. Byatt acknowledged the frequent critique of her work as educational materials for the public and expressed her sincere interest in the subjects she wished to convey. [173] The novel was nominated for the Booker Prize and won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 2009.

Alfer and Edwards de Campos highlight the fairytale elements of the story, making the children´s book author, Olive Wellwood, crucial to their examination. The character of Olive Wellwood was inspired by E. Nesbit, with whom she shares a *„fertile imagination"* and *„unconventional lifestyle."* [174] Olive´s narratives, like those of Nesbit, intertwine romantic elements of magic and adventure with reality, while not shying away from terrible experiences, an aspect also reflected in A.S. Byatt´s own work. As Alfer and Edwards de Campos accurately note, Olive´s fairy tales include *„demonic"* characters or possess a *„sinister and sly."*[175] narrative. The novel contains a comparison with the portrayal of Brothers Grimm´s *Aschenputtel*, first published in 1812, classified as a fairytale; nevertheless, from today's children´s perspective, they may be seen as horror stories. Olive sometimes approaches this line to varying degrees.

The story intertwines reality with fairy tales, with a narrative well situated in the "Golden Age" of children's literature. The novel contains numerous children´s books published during the Late Victorian or Edwardian Era, including Kenneth Grahame´s *The Golden Age* (1895), Andrew Lang´s *Blue Fairy Book* (1889), J.M. Barrie´s *Peter Pan, The Boy Who Wouldn´t Grow Up* (first published in 1904 as a play and later in 1911 as a novel), E. Nesbit´s *The Railway Children* (1905), and Rudyard Kipling´s *Puck of Pook´s Hill* (1906). All of them are mentioned as *„[t]ales for children [which] suddenly included real magic, myths, invented worlds and creatures."*[176]

Alfer and Edwards de Campos examine the Kent Wellwoods´ personalities via the lens of their connections to conventional fairytale figures. In their view, Olive serves as both *„mother and stepmother"* [177] to her children, embodying the weary "Mother Goose" and the malevolent witch. Her husband is described as *„a pied piper enchanter"* while their eldest son Tom embodies Peter Pan, a perpetual child living in his own enchanted world. Regrettably, this assertion applies to several young men who, having failed to mature, had their lives abruptly ended by the war.

[173] Harrod and Adamson, 'Interview with A.S. Byatt'.
[174] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 118.
[175] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, 119; A. S. Byatt, *The Children's Book* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 301.
[176] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 34.
[177] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 119.

Alfer and Edwards de Campos also emphasize Byatt´s remarks on creative writing in her works, which *„is always so dangerous,"*[178] and compare Olive´s writing to Julia Corbett´s novel in *The Game*. Olive's son Tom and Julia's sister Cassandra both take their own lives.

Elizabeth Hicks´s essay 'Public and Private Collections in A. S. Byatt´s *The Children´s Book*' examines Byatt´s connection with museums and details several collections of artifacts in her work. [179] Byatt is also reported to serve as a contributor to museum publications and catalogues while also using museums and collections within her novels. Byatt´s novels *The Virgin in the Garden*, *The Biographer´s Tale*, *Possession* and *The Children´s Book* feature collections of objects that, as Daniel Miller notes, build *„a bridge, not only between the mental and physical worlds, but also, more unexpectedly, between consciousness and the unconscious."* [180]

Byatt conveys her sympathy for persons who create real things, as exemplified by Philip in her story. She draws a link with another heroine from her story, Dorothy, who chooses to become a surgeon. Byatt asserts that these individuals are aware of their desires *„[a]nd they don't want to change anybody else."*[181] Hicks also draws attention to Philip Warren´s intention to *„make something. A real pot."*[182] Hicks notes that Byatt illustrated two distinct realms inside the museum. The private space where Philip hides himself and rests, and the other space, public with the display objects. Both spaces were visited and observed by Byatt.

Furthermore, Hicks notes Byatt´s portrayal of *„high and low art,"* [183] as she categorizes collections of art in *„glass cases"* and refers to craft as *„art in society,"* including ceramics, furniture, textiles, wallpapers, and garments. The locations of high culture are the South Kensington Museum and the 1900 Paris Exposition, which are shown in great detail, allowing the reader to primarily understand the exposition via Philip´s viewpoint, that of a genuine potter and artist. Byatt´s low art items *„deepen the novel, shifting its forms of storytelling from the merely verbal to the material, thus more richly presenting life,"* as Helen Wilkinson, mentioned in Hicks, posits. Fludd´s family exemplifies a fusion of high and low art, since the embellished vessels serve as utilitarian ceramics for serving food.

Yasemin Yilmaz Yüksek examines the relationship between Olive´s roles as a reader and a writer in the context of female identity formation. She characterizes Olive´s writing condition as *„being sunken"*[184]

---

[178] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, 121.
[179] Elizabeth Hicks, 'Public and Private Collections in A. S. Byatt's "The Children's Book"', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 44, no. 2 (June 2011): 171–85.
[180] Daniel Miller quoted in Hicks, 172.
[181] Byatt, quoted in Harrod and Adamson, 'Interview with A.S. Byatt'.
[182] Hicks, 'Public and Private Collections', 173; Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 63.
[183] Hicks, 'Public and Private Collections', 176.
[184] Yasemin Yilmaz Yüksek, 'A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, *The Children's Book*: The Woman Reader/Writer's Revising Female Identity' (Istanbul, University of Istanbul, 2016), 71, https://www.academia.edu/29811762/A_S_Byatts_Possession_The_Djinn_in_the_Nightingales_Eye_The_Childrens_Book_The_Woman_Reader_Writers_Revising_Female_Identity?.

in her narratives or absorbed in introspection. Yilmaz Yüksek observes that the representations of the underground may be likened to a womb, described as *„a dark deep cave."* Olive´s work might be seen as a continuation of the literary tradition exemplified by the narratives recounted by her father and by Gothic literature. Her narratives are seen as frightening tales for children or for a child in herself.

Yilmaz Yüksek perceives a yellow canary in the cage inside her father´s narrative as a representation of the female writer who is limited in her ability to write. Olive, in her residence at Todefright, often feels like a bird confined inside a cage, particularly during challenging periods. Her only escape is inventing narratives that provide her with *„a sense of completeness."*[185] Yilmaz Yüksek notes that Olive´s womanhood is characterized by her occupation as a housemaid from a young age and further shaped by the masculine literary heritage she reveres, which is conveyed via her male companions. The development of her identity as a woman is shaped by male figures and the political and social changes of the age.

Furthermore, Yilmaz Yüksek posits that Olive´s desire to compose a narrative inspired by her reading of Christina Rossetti´s poetry 'The Goblin Market' embodies both her rebellious aspirations to liberate her intellect and her sexuality. Olive engages in extramarital affairs with many men, including Anselm Stern, Dorothy´s father, and Herbert Methley, a supporter of the New Woman movement. Nevertheless, liberated sexuality reintroduces the apprehension around childbirth and parenting that she always seeks to evade via her work. [186]

The novel, *The Children´s Book*, was influenced by Byatt´s youthful engagement with myths, folktales, folklore, and fairy tales, as well as her enduring interest with the Victorian era. Furthermore, the work encapsulates her fascination with artistic and intellectual ambitions as seen through the perspectives of her female protagonists, but not neglecting the challenges of reality.

[185] Yilmaz Yüksek, 'A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, *The Children's Book*: The Woman Reader/Writer's Revising Female Identity', 73.
[186] Yilmaz Yüksek, 'A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, *The Children's Book*: The Woman Reader/Writer's Revising Female Identity', 77–80.

5.4.2 Plot

The Children´s Book is a complex work that encompasses the late Victorian age, the Edwardian era, and the World War I period. The characters comprise *„socialists, anarchists, Quakers, Fabians, artists, editors, freethinkers and writers"*[187] from both the middle and working classes. The historical, social, and cultural context establishes the backdrop for the characters´ typical lives. The main narrative conveys the lives of four families, encompassing their relationships, professions, attitudes to art, education, politics, and sexuality. Numerous additional characters in the narrative are interconnected with those mentioned; they establish diverse relationships, contribute to the educational framework, or serve as embodiments of specific ideologies within the story.

The first family is that of Olive Wellwood, an acclaimed author of children´s literature. Olive, her husband Humphry, their children Tom, Dorothy, Phyllis, Hedda, Florian, Robin, and Henry, who are born continuously throughout the narrative, reside in their Kent house alongside Olive´s sister Violet. Philip Warren, a remarkably talented boy from the working class, is discovered sketching ornaments in the South Kensington Museum by the Wellwood children, and is offered a better place to stay and later to practice pottery art.

The second family comprises banker Basil Wellwood (Humphry´s brother), his wife Katherina, and their children, Charles and Griselda. The next family comprises Benedict Fludd, a remarkably skilled and exceptionally volatile potter, along with his wife Seraphita and their children Imogen, Pomona, and Geraint. Philip Warren resides with them and acquires the skill of pottery. The last family consists of Prosper Cain, the procurator of the South Kensington Museum, and his children, Julian and Florence.

The characters´ lives evolve with time; children are born, pursue their careers through school and art, forge friendships, find love, and some participate in movements advocating free love, equitable education, and universal suffrage. Organisations such as the Fabian society, the New Woman movement, and both moderate and militant suffragists recruit their members from the main characters. Art profoundly influences the lives of the characters; some, like Benedict Fludd, Philip Warren, and Olive Wellwood, are creators of various art forms, while others are patrons or consumers. The Arts and Crafts movement, alongside Morris´s work, is prominently featured and establishes the backdrop of the entire narrative.

Some of the characters are real life personalities of that era. As mentioned earlier, the whole story is set in the world of Morris´s aesthetics and his philosophy is widely supported. There are references to objects such as *„Arts and Crafts homes"*[188] or *„Morris´s pink and gold honeysuckle"*[189] or „*the Morris & Co. fabrics"*[190] however, William Morris himself is not present as a character. Similarly, Edward

[187] Byatt, *The Children's Book,* 29.
[188] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 23.
[189] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 68.
[190] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 277.

Carpenter, Graham Wallas, Beatrice Webb, Annie Besant, or Madame Blavatsky are mentioned many times as constituents of the historical, social and cultural context and in the narrative itself. On the other hand, Rupert Brooke, G.B. Shaw, J.M. Barrie, Emma Goldman or Oscar Wilde are depicted as minor characters.

Byatt examines the diverse trajectories of life, along with their possibilities and limitations, through the female characters. Olive epitomizes a middle-class woman, an artist who achieves renown and financial autonomy while leading comfortable peaceful domestic life. Dorothy, her daughter, exemplifies the professional woman in medicine, eschewing the conventional societal roles of wife and mother. Hedda Wellwood pursues her trajectory via active engagement in the struggle for women´s rights. Elsie Warren, a working-class woman, alters her social status, which ceases to be a fixed and immutable characteristic.

Byatt also depicts sexuality and various forms of sexual behaviour in relation to the sexual norms of the age through countless infidelities, adulterous sexual encounters, unwanted pregnancies, and experiences in brothels. Their influences manifest themselves later in the children´s lives and profoundly alter their self-perception.

Parent-child relationships constitute significant dynamic elements in the narrative. The children characters´ identities are undermined by unveiled truths, such as the identities of their biological parents, or unintentional harm caused by publishing a private story of a child. Olive romanticizes her children with the enchanting tales she composes for them.

The entirety of the world´s perception is altered by the consequences of World War One. Only a handful of men return from the war, even fewer unwounded, and none with a clear mind or peaceful nights without horrible memories. Concurrently, women begin to engage in occupations that are no longer solely male-dominated.

5.4.3 Structure, Literary Style and Themes

As previously stated, *The Children´s Book* exemplifies fictionalised history. Byatt employs a specific historical, social, and cultural framework as the backdrop for her fictional narrative. She integrates actual historical individuals as side characters, engages her characters in the Arts and Crafts movements, or allows them to participate in the Suffragist marches. Furthermore, Byatt constructs an intricate universe utilizing artwork, pottery, embellished furniture, Aesthetic garments, and museum artifacts. The novel mostly unfolds inside a specific social environment—a microculture of rather bohemian artists and intellectuals. Moreover, Byatt uses puppet symbolism and *„terrors and delights of the fairytale […] to an unprecedented degree."*[191] The act of storytelling is a prominent theme interwoven throughout the narrative from Olive´s perspective and that of other characters.

The novel consists of four sections and fifty-five chapters. Three sections of the novel are called according to historical periods: Late Victorian Era, Edwardian Era, and World War One. The narrative commences with the section titled "Beginning," in which Byatt establishes the foundation of the entire tale by introducing the families, their initial relationships, professions, artistic inclinations, and a boy hiding in the South Kensington Museum, who ultimately emerges as one of the most gifted artists in the narrative and serves as the starting point for the novel. Byatt outlines the historical, social, and cultural environment of the latter half of the 19th century, which influenced the whole country and the destinies of the characters.

The second section of the work is titled "The Golden Age," commencing with Chapter 10. Byatt characterizes the era as a period *„when no humans interfered with anything."*[192] The narrative begins to intricately connect the individuals. The themes of household life, children´s and adult´s imagination, education, social movement meetings, artistic endeavours, and sexuality converge to form a multifaceted portrayal of the characters´ lives and the age itself.

Initially, everything appears harmonious and straightforward for the majority of the characters, who are surrounded by aesthetically pleasing creative things. Nonetheless, the lives of youngsters begin to be influenced by their parents or other figures, which is not always met with enthusiasm. Some dark family secrets are disclosed inconveniently; Hedda Wellwood discovers that her sister Phyllis and brother Florian are not the offspring of Olive, but of "auntie Violet," and Dorothy´s father is the German puppeteer Anselm Stern. The marriage of Olive and Humphry begins to disclose past or present difficulties. Humphry Wellwood participates in several extramarital affairs, which are not childless either. He has at least one illegitimate child, a son called Robin with Marian Oakeshott.

The Fludds family gain increased attention and enhanced stability via the helping hands of Philip Warren and his sister, Elsie. Philip commences his journey as a potter, acquiring skills from his mentor, Benedict

[191] Alfer and Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt*, 118.
[192] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 392.

Fludd. The passages dedicated to his work are told in great detail, featuring precise descriptions of clay mixing techniques, material and ingredient usage, glaze preparation, kiln operation, and manipulation with the finished objects. This is an example of the comprehensive description of the process of creating a green glaze as provided:

> *Philip mixed tin glazes and lead glazes, and was given mugs of milk to counteract the poison in the lead. He mixed antimony and manganese and cobalt. There was a substance called pin-dust, made of the copper powder left over from the manufacture of pins, which made green glazes.*[193]

Byatt dedicated her time to the study of this subject,[194] as expressed in her interview with Tanya Harrod and Glenn Adamson and as seen in the Acknowledgments, where she conveys her thanks to professional potters and specialists.

The next section is titled "The Silver Age," characterized, in Byatt's view, by *„a desire […] for a perpetual childhood."*[195] The narrative commences with Chapter 32. This section focuses on Dorothy Wellwood´s career trajectory, highlighting several challenges she faces as a woman pursuing medical education at the turn of the twentieth century. A woman had to decide between pursuing a career or marrying and starting a family. Olive´s writing career peaks with a theatrical play, originally composed as a personal narrative for her eldest son, Tom. He commits suicide by drowning after the play, and Olive comprehends her betrayal. This section also contains the suicide of Benedict Fludd, who drowns himself as well. A notable subject in this period is the escalating struggle for women´s rights, exemplified by Hedda Wellwood´s involvement in the suffrage movement.

The concluding section is titled "The Age of Lead" and commences with Chapter 50. The final chapters encompass the atrocities of war and the emotions of both the individuals who stay in the homeland and those who choose to confront the enemy. This section contains three poems authored by the character of Julian Cain from the battlefield. Themes of patriotic fervour contrast with apathy, agony, dread, relief, and solace.

The pastiche method is used by incorporating the shorts stories 'Peter Piper,' 'The Shrubbery,' 'The People in the House in the House,' or excerpts from Olive's tale 'Tom Underground,' or poetry from battlefield by Julian Cain to enhance the emotional depth of the narrative with authentic elements.

Byatt employs a consistent technique of depicting the majority of births and deaths, similar to her earlier writings. The turning points of life are succinctly articulated without metaphoric language, as shown by the description of Elsie Warren´s giving birth:

---

[193] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 128.
[194] Harrod and Adamson, 'Interview with A.S. Byatt'.
[195] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 394.

> *Elsie´s child was born in an attic in Dymchurch […]. The labour was long and terrible, and the bruised child – a very small child – was slapped and shaken into a quavering howl.*[196]

Imogen´s labour serves as another instance of concise representation, highlighting blood, a theme also present in Olive´s reflections on birth:

> *Imogen Cain´s labour began on the same day. It was long, and difficult. […]. A day of pain went past. The doctors brought chloroform, and Imogen struggled briefly under the mask. The small, pale girlchild was helped into the world with forceps, in a flood of blood, which was hard to staunch. […] Imogen lay in her blood, white as alabaster.*[197]

Nonetheless, Olive´s reflections on her labour may be seen as more extensive and complex than previous representations, with a vocabulary that leans towards the technical rather than the poetic:

> *She thought briefly about the coming birth, the blood that would flood, the pain that would gripe, the possibility that the emerging stranger on the flood of blood would be mottled, waxy and inert, a tight lidded doll, like Rosy. She knew about amniotic fluid – the unborn creature did not really float in blood – but blood went to it, her blood, down a livid rope that could give life, or could strangle.*[198]

The description of Olive´s labour is symbolic, reflecting the complexity of her works:

> *Olive thought she had forgotten what pain could be. She was a railway tunnel in which a battering train had come to a fiery halt. She was a burrow in which a creature had wedged itself and could go neither forwards nor back. She was arch after arch of electric pain and the imagination of geometry could not create an issue – the immovable object and the irresistible force were one thing, and could neither advance nor retreat, so that bursting seemed the only way out, like the eruption of a volcano. Something would drown in there, something would be engulfed by flame. The doctor begged her not to fling her head from side to side, not to waste her breath on shrieking and wailing, but to make an effort, for the sake of the child who could not come out, and expel it.*
>
> *She arched herself, howled and bore down. Red and angry, black-lipped and uttering a desperate whimper the child shot into the world. He was a boy. […] Blood and water were everywhere.*[199]

Florence´s birth is as succinct as Elsie´s labour:

> *It was not slow. The child was not born in the pony-trap, nor yet in the wheelchair in the clinic corridor. But she arrived, on a great crest of pain, with a loud, defiant wail, barely an hour later.*[200]

On the other hand, deaths are conveyed with barely any descriptions. Only subtle indications rather than explicit depictions of death exist, as seen by the exchange between Mr. Cain and Mr. Mallett about Benedict Fludd´s suicide:

---

[196] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 350.
[197] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 538.
[198] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 142.
[199] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 165–66.
[200] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 539.

> *I have just had a message from Barker Twomey. He's one of those line fishermen, at Dungeness. He caught a boot. Hadn't been in the water long. He thinks it's Mr Fludd's boot.* [201]
>
> *I am afraid Benedict Fludd may be dead. I am afraid he may have walked into the sea, down there at Dungeness, where the currents are thick and violent and the water is deep.*
>
> *[I]t's got clay in its eyelets and under the tongue. And it hasn't been decently cleaned, it's cracking. I think we know whose it is.*[202]

Tom Wellwood´s suicide represents the second depiction of death in the story. Byatt refrains from using any expressions of emotion and articulates Tom´s actions straightforwardly:

> *He walked down the shingle and on, without hesitating, into the waves and the lashing wind, the flying froth and the sinewy down-draft. He was still walking, in his socks, on the pebbles, soaked to the skin, when he slipped, and the wave threw him into the current. He didn't fight.*[203]

[201] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 456.
[202] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 458.
[203] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 533.

5.4.4 Historical, Social, and Cultural Context

Late Victorian

The plot of *The Children´s Book* starts on June 19, 1895, that is in the Late Victorian period. This era is characterized by diverse political, social, economic, cultural, and intellectual advancements, commencing with the collapse of the Vienna Stock Exchange in 1873. The era concluded with the demise of Queen Victoria in 1901.

The Late Victorian Era was shaped by the zenith of the Industrial Revolution, resulting in many social and economic transformations. The population began to increase fast, leading many individuals to migrate to cities such as London, Manchester, and Birmingham, transforming them into manufacturing centres. Advancements in transportation (bicycles, automobiles, aircraft) and communications (telephone, telegraph) expedited the movement of people, goods, and information. New discoveries and advancements fundamentally transformed Western culture; industries employed thousands of workers, factories began to be electrified, and individuals routinely used bicycles for transportation. [204] However, the advice was that *„women should beware of the dangers of cycling."*[205]

During the 1880´s and 1890´s, labour strikes arose as workers expressed dissatisfaction with salaries, working hours, and conditions. The strikes persisted until the onset of war in August 1914. As a result, during the 1890´s, workers articulated their socialist stances, leading to the formation of the Independent Labour Party in 1893, with James Keir Hardie as its leader. The requirements included the transfer of money from affluent individuals to the poor, money for unemployed, people having disabilities and the elderly, free secondary and university education, as well as the nationalisation of land, industry, banking, financial services, and transportation.[206] In 1884, the Fabian society was established to promote socialist activities and contributed to the formation of the Labour Party in 1900.[207] By the century´s conclusion, the social and cultural movement known as New Women began to acquire influence among middle-class women. The New Woman pursued further education and a professional job to achieve independence. A significant aspect of independence was the alteration of attire that allowed for unrestricted physical activity such as cycling.[208] Sarah Grand, George Egerton, Mona Caird, Ella

[204] Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain: 1640-1990* (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 229–32.
[205] Kate Lister, *A Curious History of Sex* (London: Unbound, 2021), 201.
[206] Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, 234.
[207] 'Our History | Fabian Society', *Fabian Society - The Fabian Society Is Britain's Oldest Political Think Tank. Founded in 1884, the Society Is at the Forefront of Developing Political Ideas and Public Policy on the Left.* (blog), 26 January 2018, https://fabians.org.uk/about-us/our-history.
[208] Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture*, Reading Women Writing (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 74–77.

Hepworth Dixon, Edith Arnold and 'Iota' are the most significant figures in the New Woman movement.[209]

At the beginning of a new chapter, A.S. Byatt often provides a comprehensive overview of the historical and social background; however, she frequently employs indirect descriptions based on the experiences and attitudes of the characters. The author focuses on the politics and the new tendencies promoted by members of the Fabian society, or New Woman and Suffragists. She dwells on the problematic topic of women´s education. She also pays attention to the cultural details. She frequently enumerates a multitude of literary works from the specific era and highlights the most noteworthy theatrical productions, museum exhibits, and other significant events, such as the 1900 Paris Exhibition. The characters then relate with most of the context personally and in detail.

Charles Darwin´s works, *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), promoted by Thomas Huxley together with subsequent discussions, transformed the foundational beliefs of human nature. In 1870 and 1882, the *Married Women's Property Acts* permitted women to legally own their earned income and inherit property; yet, both pieces of legislation represented only a partial achievement of feminist agitation for gender equality. The moralism of the 19th century and the concepts of masculinity and femininity were challenged by women's involvement in professions traditionally dominated by men. In addition, the trial of Oscar Wilde, in spring 1895, drew attention to homosexuality, which had been criminalized in 1885 and was to be legalized in 1967.[210]

Literacy rates enhanced with the increasing availability of education. In 1871, 81% of men and 73% of women had the ability to sign their names. People read more newspapers and also more books, which were published in rising numbers, with the proportion of works of fiction increasing. For example, novels such as Kenneth Grahame´s *The Golden Age* (1895) or *Pagan Papers* (1898) were published. Stories were often played on the stage presented with songs and musical interludes. By the year 1878, there were 78 large music halls in London and hundreds of smaller venues offering entertainment.[211]

The phrase Golden Age refers to the period approximately from the 1880´s to the early 1900´s. This term is frequently applied to diverse items of innovation, such as *„the golden age of bicycle,"*[212] or scientific disciplines, such as *„the golden age of physiognomy."*[213] In this case, it is employed for a period marked by the spread of industrialisation, accompanied by artistic aspirations and pursuits. The *fin de siècle*, distinguished by its allure for aesthetic beauty and a rejection of art´s moral or political functions, stood in contrast to art created from everyday items, such as furniture, stained glass, or books,

[209] Gail Marshall, *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9.
[210] Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, 229–33.
[211] Sir Richard Evans, 'The Victorians: Art and Culture' (YouTucabe video, Gresham College, 4 October 2010), https://www.gresham.ac.uk/watch-now/victorians-art-and-culture.
[212] Lister, *A Curious History of Sex*, 200.
[213] Lister, *A Curious History of Sex*, 76.

and politically motivated transformations that promoted machine production.[214] The Arts and Crafts movement and the Aesthetic movement were the most prominent movements of this period. The Yellow Book, released quarterly from 1894 to 1897, featured literary and artistic works aligned with contemporary movements. Furthermore, literature specifically aimed at children witnessed a significant surge.

By the mid-19th century, the creation of ornate furniture was regarded as a craft. Nevertheless, the expansion of industrialisation prompted changes in design education to initiate the mass manufacture of affordable and practical furniture. In response to this, William Morris´s company, Morris, Marshall, Falkner and Co., established in 1861, started producing handcrafted ornamental furniture. The combination of *„the aesthetes' worship of beauty with a utopian belief in the value of individual hand crafting as morally superior labour."*[215]

Associated with British socialism, this movement also provided an alternative to the mass manufacturing of books and magazines. William Morris and Emery Walker established the Kelmscott Press, a specialized small press employing pre-industrial hand-printing techniques. Their books were characteristically adorned with botanical or medieval motives. However, upon, the press ceased business shortly after Moris´s death in 1896.[216]

William Morris´s aesthetic defines the ambiance of Olive Wellwood´s household in the novel and aligns with the enduring idea of pursuing beauty. The Wellwood house (called Todefright, *„an old Kentish word for 'meadow'. No death or spectres!"*[217]) is replete with art in everyday life, including ceramics, furniture, wallpapers, and more. Notwithstanding the initial harmonious impression of the home, its chaotic or even sinister elements are persistently unveiled. The potter characters Benedict Fludd and Philip Warren represent producers of this art form. Their artisanal pots, vases, bowls, and other objects embody a rejection of industrial uniformity.

The main, socialist, idea behind Kelmscott Press was communal ownership and life. However, as West observes, only an individual who was already affluent enough and not burdened with existential concerns, *„could enjoy in the luxury of such an ambition."*[218] Patronage of the arts constituted an alternative option for an artist. *The Children´s Book* does not explicitly address the historical role of patronage. Nevertheless, the extraordinarily talented potter Benedict Fludd and his likely equally skilled

[214] Shearer West, 'The Visual Arts'', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 140.
[215] West, 'The Visual Arts'', 140.
[216] Margaret D. Stetz, 'Publishing Industries and Practices', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 118–21.
[217] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 527.
[218] Stetz, 'Publishing Industries and Practices', 118.

apprentice Philip Warren require financial backing, primarily sourced through connections with Olive Wellwood and her spouse, or Prosper Cain, the curator of the South Kensington Museum.

The Aesthetic movement responded to the characteristic decadent atmosphere of the period. Following Oscar Wilde´s trial in 1895, the peculiar elements of the *fin de siècle* diminished and were converted „*into the formalism and abstraction"* [219] characteristic of the early twentieth-century avant-garde. The avant-garde artists persisted in exhibiting their eccentric lifestyle and personality, complemented by unconventional attire. Over the years, older and newer technologies were amalgamated, resulting in an international *fin de siècle.*

The second half of the nineteenth century saw significant advancements in medicine, neurology, and mental science and growing interest in psychology and psychopathology. Sigmund Freud released his work *Die Traumdeutung* (1900) and, as the founder of psychoanalysis, profoundly transformed the discipline of psychology. Furthermore, his work significantly impacted numerous modernist, surrealist, and symbolist writers.

Along with progress in educational philosophy, this further inspired scientific interest in childhood, mental development and psychic identity. Darwin´s *Biographical Sketch of on Infant* (1877) was an important publication of the period. A leading figure in general and children's psychology was James Sully, the author of *Studies in Childhood* (1896), who examined the development of children´s imagination and myth-making, including their inventive alteration of objects, the significance of play, and the expression of inner fantasies. [220] In the 1880´s, parents were cautioned against excessively pressuring their children on educational duties. On the other hand, fantasy and imagination in children were also regarded by some as indicators of potential mental disorder, manifest, through *„dreamy mental states."* [221] The significance of identity formation during childhood is emphasized in the works of Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë.

The last third of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth centuries brought a surge in the publishing and popularity of children´s books, which earned them the label of the Golden Era of children´s literature. The books published in this period include Kenneth Graham´s *The Golden Age* (1895), *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) by Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Jungle Book* (1894) by Rudyard Kipling, or *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) by L. Frank Baum.

The central writer character in *The Children's Book*, Olive Wellwood, a children´s book author, achieves significant success with her narratives, enabling her to financially support her family. Nonetheless, the novel also illustrates negative aspects of the life of creative authors and their families. The novel is,

[219] West, 'The Visual Arts'', 150.
[220] Jenny Bourne Taylor, 'Psychology at the Fin de Siècle', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 24–25.
[221] Taylor, 'Psychology at the Fin de Siècle', 23.

partly, Byatt´s response to the significant incidence of suicide among the children of children´s fiction authors.[222]

[222] A. S. Byatt, AS Byatt's The Children's Book, interview by Ramona Koval, 24 April 2009, https://www.abc.net.au/listen/radionational/archived/bookshow/as-byatts-the-childrens-book/3134044#transcript.

Edwardian Era

The Edwardian Era began with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and lasted through the reign of King Edward VII till the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. King George V succeeded to the throne after his father´s death.

The social and political transformations continued, including the passing of the *Old Age Pensions Act* (1908) and the *National Insurance Act* (1911). Nonetheless, the new arrangements covered only a minority of the poor and the strikes, such as the National Coal Strike of 1912, persisted, advocating for increased pay for workers. Minimal advancements were made in mining or spinning techniques; hence, increased output relied on greater labour input. The deficiency of investments in the sector resulted in inflation and decelerated real wage growth. Therefore, the rise of real wages was almost entirely negated by inflation.[223] While the living conditions of the working classes were improving only very slowly, the modern inventions such as electric trams, automobiles, prototype airplanes, and wireless telegraphs were progressively integrated into the life of the middle class.[224]

During industrialisation, the upper class began to evolve into the upper-middle class, that included wealthy magnates, prominent government officials and nobility, and the lower-upper class, which included affluent entrepreneurs. Upper class continued to include predominantly the traditional landed aristocracy. Some of the new middle upper-class lords worked in their factories located in the towns and spent weekends at their estates in the countryside. The examples include Lord Guinness, with his brewery; W.H. Smith, with his stationery businesses; and Lord Leverhulme, who managed a soap factory. Many of them successfully entered politics, utilizing their aristocratic status and prestige. Nevertheless, due to growing dissatisfaction among the populace, the new politicians were preferred not to possess neither title nor estates.[225]

The Suffragist movement progressively gained power, and the outcomes of its successful reforms were evident in society. The birth rate was gradually decreasing, as women had more possibilities outside familial roles. The society´s purported purity increasingly revealed itself as hypocrisy; marriages, which were seen to embody *„sacred duties,“* [226] were perceived by feminists as *„a legal form of prostitution,“* [227] because they represented the only exactable option of women´s expression of sexuality. More changes were required. Generally, women sought not an escape from marriage, but rather equitable rights for partners. They asserted the right to be recognised as individuals rather than as their husband´s

[223] Henry Pelling, *Modern Britain: 1885 - 1955*, The Norton Library History of England (New York: Norton, 1960), 38.
[224] Pelling, *Modern Britain,* 55–56.
[225] Philipp Blom, *The Vertigo Years: Europe, 1900-1914* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 60–61.
[226] Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, 246.
[227] Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, 250.

property, the right to refuse sexual intercourse without the threat of legal action or custody disputes about children, and the right to equitable proceedings for divorce.[228]

The novel´s characters Olive, Hedda, Dorothy Wellwood, and Elsie Warren represent diverse perspectives on the suffragist movement. Olive, in her comfortable position of a successful writer, endorses the concept without engaging actively. Hedda Wellwood represents the extreme faction of the suffragist movement (WSPU), whereas Dorothy aligns with the moderate suffragist group (NUWSS) through her academic endeavours. A comparable trajectory is depicted through the figure of Elsie Warren, albeit from the perspective of a working-class woman.

The school system tended to prioritize the physical condition of the learners. The Boy Scout organisation, established in 1908, and the Girl Guides, created in 1910, began to transform the unhealthy condition of society. Cycling continued to gain popularity and became commonplace among industry and office workers. Women also embraced cycling, prompting considerable alterations in their clothing to facilitate mobility on the bicycle. [229]

In *The Children´s Book*, the Silver Age refers to the period that concluded with the outbreak of the First World War. The works of authors from this period exhibit a pronounced and more frequent realistic, critical, or questioning stance towards social conventions compared to earlier periods. G.B. Shaw´s *Pygmalion*, published in 1912, is one such piece. G.B. Shaw, John Galsworthy, and J.M. Barrie authored the majority of contemporary theatrical works. The public was, for the first time, captivated by the monochrome moving pictures and novels enjoyed significant appeal among the general public, with H.G. Wells, Henry James, George Moore, and E.M. Forster being among the most widely read authors.

Furthermore, literary works focus on the individual´s personality, its complexity, the subconscious, and the search of identity. During this time, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf began their very first experimentation with the narrative technique of stream of consciousness. Children´s literature similarly commenced to display a more intricate awareness of reality and the complexities of personality, identity, and its development. J.M. Barrie´s *Peter Pan,* examines the complexity of human personality. Today, the term “Peter Pan” is frequently employed to describe an individual who struggles with maturity and the assumption of personal responsibility.

In *The Children´s Book*, Olive Wellwood and her family watch a performance of *Peter Pan* on stage. She is captivated by J.M. Barrie´s portrayal of childhood and the creativity of children. Subsequently, when she had the chance to write a children´s play, her narrative demonstrates a comparable intrigue with the imaginary realm of children.

[228] Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, 250–52.
[229] Pelling, *Modern Britain*, 60–62.

The First World War

The war initiated several social changes. At the onset of the conflict, patriotic enthusiasm was evident; nevertheless, it rapidly began to wane. In 1914, the prevailing belief was that the war would endure for hardly a few months, and the hopeful rumours, or rather filtered reports, conveyed accomplishments from the frontlines that were later proven to be false. In the winter of 1914, the war reached England with the bombardment of Scarborough, followed by a succession of air raids conducted by airships known as Zeppelins. These assaults were regarded as *„barbarism,"* [230] and this perception intensified following the initial deployment of poison gas – suffocating gas emitted from German cylinders at the northern end of Ypres in Belgium.[231]

All the young men from *The Children´s Book* join in the army; some do so impulsively, others with patriotic enthusiasm, and some to avoid criticism for inaction. Byatt illustrates the hope of *Blitzkrieg*, the terror of combat, and the grief of those left behind. Young female characters contributed to hospitals; some having completed only brief courses.

Individuals with German names were perceived as proponents of German aggression, resulting in some being excluded from employment or recreational activities. Rumours circulated regarding the presence of spies or enemy agents among individuals who might be prepared to support potential German occupation. Furthermore, the German name of the royal family, Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, was altered to Windsor.

In the novel, Katherina Wellwood, the wife of Basil Wellwood, is of German descent, excluded from the customary meetings, and even her acquaintances decline her invites. On the battlefields, the injured receive medical care regardless of their nation of origin, and therefore proficiency in foreign languages is highly valued among the nurses.

The nation was persistently depleting its manpower, predominantly including young males from more educated classes. An entire generation was destroyed — severely injured or deceased. Consequently, a novel system of volunteering persisted until 1916. As the majority of young, competent males were dispatched to the frontlines, women assumed a variety of new roles such as *„bank clerks, railway porters, chauffeurs,"*[232] and labourers in gasworks. A significant number of them became nurses, cafeteria staff, or munitions workers.

Notwithstanding the increase in earnings at the onset of the war, various shortages led to an increase in prices. At the end of the war, wholesale prices were 140% higher than before the conflict. Excess Profit Duties were imposed to deter substantial profits from war contracts. Furthermore, throughout the

[230] Pelling, *Modern Britain*, 79.
[231] 'First Usage of Poison Gas', National WWI Museum and Memorial, accessed 5 December 2024, https://www.theworldwar.org/learn/about-wwi/spotlight-first-usage-poison-gas.
[232] Pelling, *Modern Britain*, 81.

conflict, taxes on alcoholic beverages and beer increased, along with additional charges on theatre and cinema tickets, as well as football matches.[233]

Towards the end of the war, the new Representation Act was ratified. It granted vote to all men aged 21 and older, as well as to women aged 30 and older. The *Education Act* was another measure that profoundly transformed society. The legislation established nurseries for preschoolers, expanded free primary education to the age of 14, and provided further education up to 18.[234]

World War One is remembered for poetry written by young artists who fought on the front, including Rupert Brooke, a poet mentioned in *The Children´s Book*, and Wilfred Owen, whose poems conveyed fatigue and apathy rather than patriotic celebrations of soldiers and combat action. The conclusion of the war was not commemorated as a victory; instead, it was perceived as a relief.[235] The subsequent efforts aimed to reconstruct the post-war nation and uplift the population following the extended period of disaster.

[233] Pelling, *Modern Britain,* 81–82.
[234] Pelling, *Modern Britain,* 83.
[235] Pelling, *Modern Britain,* 84.

5.4.5 Women, Society & Women´s Right

Role of Women

The role of women during the 19th century was strictly distinctive from the role of men. Women were primarily seen as wives and mothers. Middle-class wives were celebrated as "Angels in the House." Their houses were seen as pieces of heaven, a sacred private sphere that served, with its decorations and rules, as a symbol of social and political status. Middle-class women presented moral standards to children and were supposed to practise certain etiquette and household manners signalling their status to others. [236]

First changes occurred during the industrialisation and urbanisation. Meanwhile working-class women were labourers, middle-class women employ labour. By the keeping at least one servant in a household might be distinguished the middle class from the working class.[237] Majority of women were illiterate, and they gain knowledge from older women in their household. However, literacy rates enhanced with the increasing availability of education and in 1871, 81% of men and 73% of women had the ability to sign their name.[238] Byatt takes it into consideration when she describes *„a note of thanks from Seraphita, in round, childish handwriting."*[239]

First exclusively women´s school were often founded by female philanthropes who were wealthy and aware of the need of education for young women. Fields such as law or medicine were exclusively male-dominated, and women were unable to achieve a degree in these fields. North London Collegiate School for girls was founded in 1850 by Frances Mary Buss; Girton College of Cambridge were established as a women´s college in 1869 by Emily Davies and Barbara Bodichon. The Education Acts of 1870, 1876 and 1880 changed the provision of education for children of both genders and made it compulsory while trying to prohibit child labour.

The gap between men and women existed also in employment opportunities – men were working in industry, mining, or engineering and women, according to their class, in textile industry, domestic service or food production. Middle-class women were usually teachers, governesses, or clerks[240] as is the case of Patty Dace in *The Children's Book*:

> *She was the acting secretary of many groups: the local theosophists, the local Fabians, the Winchelsea and District Dramatic Society, the Circle of Watercolourists, and a group which worked for women's suffrage. She had taught at a London girls' school.*[241]

---

[236] Langland, *Nobody's Angels*, 8–9.
[237] Langland, *Nobody's Angels*,8–9.
[238] Sir Richard Evans, 'The Victorians: Art and Culture' (YouTucabe video, Gresham College, 4 October 2010), https://www.gresham.ac.uk/watch-now/victorians-art-and-culture.
[239] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 110.
[240] Sir Richard Evans, 'The Victorians: Gender and Sexuality' (Gresham College, 14 February 2011), https://www.gresham.ac.uk/watch-now/victorians-gender-and-sexuality.
[241] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 117.

Meanwhile Patty Dace is portrayed as an unmarried intellectual woman, Olive Wellwood is a married woman who was first educated by her working-class parents and later attended school for a year. Eventually, she and her sister Violet *„came to be in the audience of Humphry Wellwood's English Literature lectures."*[242] Despite the fact that Olive as an author provides sufficient income for the family, she is mainly wife and mother and as a married woman *„had no autonomous status under the law, no rights to income or property, and no custody rights to their children."*[243]

Women´s Rights Movement

By 1838, the working class advocated for the reduction of working hours, leading to the emergence of the Chartist movement. Numerous petitions were endorsed, although the House of Commons exhibited minimal response. Chartist leaders galvanized large numbers of workers, including women. The initial women´s riots and boycotts were conducted on behalf of their male relatives rather than for their own rights.[244]

Victorian middle-class ladies were raised to marry middle-class men or those of superior socioeconomic status. Until the 1890´s, women who were considered *„left on the shelf,"*[245] were perceived as unable to perform their societal responsibilities. During industrialisation and urbanisation, women began to articulate their demands for improved living circumstances, education for their children, and access to medical care and food, alongside concerns regarding wages and working hours.

The roles of men and women were distinctly defined. Men inhabited the public sphere, while women resided in the private sphere. Men were regarded as sexually active, whilst women were viewed as sexually passive, and public discourse about sexuality was absent. The hypocrisy of society about marriage and its purity was a central theme of Victorian moralism, which is perceived as prudery. In Victorian households, there was no discourse or even reference to sexuality or sexual activities.

The sensations of tension were frequently associated with feelings of guilt and shame, which were transmitted from one generation of women to the next. The men´s tension was transferred as aggression during school sports or leisure activities such as fishing, shooting, or hunting. It was regarded as advocating a manly and helpful form of Christianity. Weak emotional expressions were exclusively associated with women, while men with beards were sufficiently concealed to prevent such expressions.[246]

[242] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 90.
[243] Arlene Young, *From Spinster to Career Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Victorian England* (Montreal; Kingston ; London ; Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 174.
[244] Evans, 'The Victorians'.
[245] Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, 246.
[246] Evans, 'The Victorians'.

The number of children in Victorian families was estimated at six; however, sometimes one or two infants succumbed to mortality. The frequent pregnancies and complicated births were a burden for women. It changed with women increasingly participated in various forms of employment; therefore, they began to seek contraception, which was unfortunately largely unsuccessful at that time. The results indicated a reduction in the number of children per family to two over the last part of the 19th century,[247] and the suppression of women´s sexual needs and emotions, resulting in a broader differentiation between male and female. The Free Union and related Birth Control movements contended that marriage constrains women's freedom and binds them socially and economically to their husbands. Annie Besant, a figure connected also with spiritually oriented Theosophist, referenced in the novel, promoted the education of women regarding contraceptive methods and pregnancy planning.[248]

Numerous women´s movements are referred to or elaborated upon if any of the characters are engaged in them. The Women´s Suffrage movement, led by Mrs. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, is mentioned also with a note of the mathematical accomplishments of Mrs. Fawcett´s daughter at Cambridge. [249] Henrietta Skinner and Josephine Butler are cited as representatives of the Fabian society, *„whose courage had brought about the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts."*[250] Furthermore, Butler established the International Abolitionist Federation and advocated for a single standard of purity and restraint for everyone, urging men to learn self-control.

Emma Goldman, most recognised for her arguments against "Trafficking in Women," receives considerable attention in the novel. She is shown as a minor figure during Joachim Susskind and Charles Wellwood´s attendance of the 1900 Paris Exposition. Goldman is portrayed as an American Anarchist leader who guided American visitors around the exhibition and expressed irritation at their prudery and discomfort with the nude sculptures. In the novel, she encourages women to *„take control of their lives and their bodies."*[251] Even married women had to sell themselves because of very low wages, often with the approval of their husbands. Venereal diseases like syphilis were spread through the society. And *„[i]t was not the men who were punished by the state and its police and doctors […]. It was the women."*[252]

The New Woman´s movement similarly attracts significant attention in the novel. This movement was *„highly diverse"* and included supporters of rational dress, intellectual autonomy, *„social purity campaigners," „advocates of women´s sexual freedom"* or *„partakers in the spirit of the 'New', which in its amorphousness enabled the wholesale condemnation of its participants."*[253] The members of the New Woman movement expressed their views via journalism, poetry, theatre, and mostly through fiction.

[247] Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, 297.
[248] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 119; Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, 253.
[249] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 296.
[250] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 294.
[251] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 258.
[252] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 258.
[253] Marshall, *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, 9.

There are many supporters of this movement in the novel. Patty Dace articulates her enthusiasm for transformation and for *„new forms of art and democracy."*[254] Benedict Fludd perceives the trend as a desire for more comfortable clothing compared to clothing with *„whalebone and laces,"*[255] and he makes a comparison between women´s historical leadership roles as abbesses and *„principals of colleges."* Dorothy Wellwood works in a women´s hospital, where only female patients are treated by exclusively female physicians. Geraint Fludd considers the newly formed women´s organisations for advocacy to be *„very interesting."*[256]

Furthermore, Edward Carpenter and his views on the *„respectability of Victorian family life"*[257] are often mentioned in various debates throughout the novel. His assertion that *„sex-love and its expression were natural and necessary to both sexes"*[258] is endorsed, as articulated in his writings *Sex-Love, and Its Place in a Free Society* (1894) and *Love´s Coming of Age* (1896).

There are a few references to rational clothing for ladies seeking suitable attire for mobility or cycling. However, this impulse is sometimes met with *„ancient, prudish Puritanism."*[259]

[254] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 118.
[255] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 119.
[256] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 438.
[257] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 118.
[258] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 181.
[259] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 298.

6 ANALYSIS

Woman´s role

Olive Wellwood, born Olive Grimwith into a working-class family, with a father who was a miner and a mother who was the daughter of a draper and aspired to become a schoolteacher. While her mother, Lucy, taught her practical skills and behaviour, her father, Peter, he contributed to the development of her imagination and told her tales about

> *the living creatures down there, the soft-nosed ponies who trundled tubs of coal along the tunnels, the mice and rats who whisked in and out of the ponies' nosebags, ate the miners' snap and chewed their candles […]The coal […] had once been living forests – forests of ferns as high as trees and brackens as fat as barrels and curling things that were scaly like snakes.*[260]

He told her also stories about mysterious creatures with telling names. His stories were amalgamations of reality – *„[l]epidodendron, sigillaria,"*[261] *„[c]arbon dioxide,"* or *„methane,"* and magical aspects such as an invisible *„creature called Blue-cap, who was clothed in a flaring light-blue flame"* or *„a mischievous bogle-thing, called Cutty Soams, who delighted in cutting the soams, or traces."*

Olive´s brother Petey, with whom she had a deep bond, composed poetry and harboured aspirations he believed were unattainable due to their socioeconomic standing. He started working in the mine and laboured in complete darkness for twelve hours daily. Olive saw his fear of it, and after almost a year, she had to confront his death after the inundation of the mine by the river Gull. Shortly thereafter, her mother Lucy succumbed to illness along with her youngest child, while her father and brother Edward perished in the mine. The only survivors were Olive and her younger sister, Violet.

She had *„packed away"* her painful memories as a precisely imagined parcel that should not be opened at any time in the future: *„This vision was not a story."*[262] Subsequently, both girls resided with their aunt Ada´s household. Olive attended school for one year before being sent into service to generate essential income. Initially, she worked as a housemaid and *„[s]he was an object of disgust to herself."*[263] Subsequently, she became a *„maid of all work to two maiden lady schoolteachers"* and her feeling of disgust to her appearance connected to her social status not allowing her nature and talents, continued. *„She hated these clothes. When she looked at her face in the mirror in the morning she imagined a lady, in a ball-gown and a coronet sort of thing."*[264]

[260] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 84.
[261] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 85.
[262] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 84.
[263] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 88.
[264] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 88.

Through her servitude, she began to conceive her first narratives to endure the harsh realities of her existence. Her first story

> *was conventional enough. There was once a noble lady who had been stolen from, or had to flee, her true home, and was living in disguise, in hiding, as a kitchen maid.*[265]

Another story was about

> *a boy, Peter Piper, imprisoned in an orphanage, a boy alone in the world, with no one to love, and no one who loved him. And this boy formed a plan, which he carried out with meticulous patience, to escape at night and walk to the sea, away from the soot and the sludge and the sulphur. This tale was as precise in the telling as the other was loose and vague. Everything had to be imagined, and worked through – the staircase in the orphanage, the bolt on the inner door of it, the great locks on the outer, the stolen key that released them, the oil that silenced the grinding of the mechanism.*[266]

Olive´s early years were replete with unpleasant events, accompanied by little engagement of her mind. She used her imagination to transcend reality into her fictitious world of improved living circumstances. The images she envisioned were manifested in the reality she experienced. Her imagination served as both an escape and a defence against difficult circumstances. Despite her frustration, she chose to remain an irresponsible child to herself, taking no substantive action. However, Violet assumed responsibility for both of them and resolved to go to London to begin a new life.

Olive and Violet came to London and started attending literature lectures of Humphry Wellwood. *„Olive found Humphry, and the rhythms of Shakespeare and Swift, Milton and Bunyan, which she thought she had craved all her life without knowing it."*[267] The intellectual nature of both sisters was apparent from their interests in literature and theatre, where Olive agreed to play a role while Violet took care of costumes.

Humphry secretly wed Olive, and two months later, their first son Peter was born. They started living with Olive´s sister, Violet. Peter died shortly thereafter. Other children were born, some of whom died shortly after delivery, like Peter. Olive attained an improved social standing via marriage; nonetheless, she never had the feeling of possessing the items around her. *„They still had the quality Aladdin's palace must have had for him and the princess, when the genie erected it out of nothing."*[268] Another facet of her new reality was navigating certain *„social complexities,"* such as the organization of a ball, which elicited in her a *„primitive terror"* and a sense of self-betrayal. [269]

Conversely, there were situations, particularly related to her creative endeavours, when she was the centre of attention of activity as *„[s]he liked to charm, and to charm those she was excited to entertain*

[265] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 89.
[266] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 90.
[267] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 91.
[268] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 141.
[269] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 329.

– *in this case leaders of culture."* [270] Such special parties or private gatherings also provided opportunities to pursue intimate extramarital relationships, in which she preferred to participate, as seen by this example:

> *She turned an eager face to her visitor, as he took his chair. Humphry was sulking, Methley had vanished, Toby was going to the station with Dorothy, laughing and insouciant. She flirted in a serious way with August Steyning, of whom she was slightly in awe. He was hidden a long way behind his quizzical smile and his narrow face. She thought he really liked her, but was not sure.*[271]

The *„moment of passion,"*[272] as articulated by Olive´s daughter Dorothy, may be interpreted as an instance of liberation, autonomy, self-recognition, or the affirmation of allure and desirability. Nevertheless, such instances may result in unintended births, shown by Dorothy, whose father is Anselm Stern. During this period, extramarital relationships were a significant subject of discourse for both the Fabian society, which fundamentally repudiates such concepts, and free thinkers like one of the characters, Herbert Methley, who endorses it as free love and a deconstruction of conventional relationship rules. In addition, greater sexual liberation and toleration were among the markers of the microculture composed by the artistic and intellectual circles of the Late Victorian and Edwardian periods, in which women adopted thanks to the strengthening emancipation movement more active roles.

These moments of enjoyment seem to signify her genuine presence in reality; otherwise, she attempts to evade it, as will be shown subsequently. Nonetheless, her understanding of reality is somewhat constrained, as she acknowledges at the time of her sister´s death:

> *'Poor Vi. Not that it's not a good way to go, when your time comes. But I had no idea hers had. She did not complain. Though it is doubtful I would have heard, if she had.'*[273]

The maternal responsibilities are divided between the two characters, Olive and Violet, where *„Whilst Olive wrote her stories,"* which provided substantial income for the family, *„Violet instructed the smaller children on the lawn."*[274] The arrangement is actively promoted by Humphry who insists that, for the sake of a functioning home, *„Violet will take over. You [Olive] will rest and write."*[275] Olive generally provides encouragement, inspiration, and an environment conducive to creativity and intellectual development, while Violet gives daily assistance with practical matters.

Another aspect of Olive's identity is shaped by her role as a mother, which she approaches with a degree of reluctance, as evidenced by her perception of becoming *„not very willingly, a matriarch."*[276] However,

[270] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 55.
[271] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 357.
[272] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 383.
[273] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 542–43.
[274] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 91.
[275] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 67.
[276] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 301.

she exhibits a sufficient level of conscientiousness towards the unborn children, as illustrated in the following sentence:

> *She bit into the honey and butter and bread, nourishing herself and the blind life she had not exactly invited to settle in her.*[277]

The topics of pregnancy and childbirth are explored throughout the work from many viewpoints, with Olive´s being the most elaborately depicted. As previously stated, Olive faces another pregnancy with reluctance, partially due to the risk of maternal death and partly due to a loss of autonomy and a decline in her efficiency as an author and creator. Following several miscarriages and losses of life, Olive refrains from forming emotional attachments to the unborn, referring to it *„something coiled in a caul and attached, like a puppet, by a long thread to her own life,"* or *„the waxy stillborn, with their closed faces."*[278] During her labour, she refers to it in even more inhumane and impersonal terms as *„the immovable object."*[279]

Although she is reluctant to confront the pregnancy and childbirth, she feels a sense of responsibility for the new life. She perceives her obligation as a provider for the family, however she recognises the challenges of economic activity during pregnancy, stating, *„It won't be so easy for me to win bread."*[280] This statement indicates that her salary is far more important than her husband´s. Her accountability is seen in her actions:

> *Olive, despite her preference for legend and fairytale, had herself published two books, that year, about imaginary children, written fast, and easily, and compulsively. Money had been needed.*[281]

Art

Art significantly influences Olive´s identity formation. Firstly, she is a literary artist herself and secondly, she is an art consumer. Her home is adorned in a modern style, including wallpapers, furniture, and ceramics, and she holds Philip Warren´s pottery work in high regard.

She began to invent tales in her youth about little *„people on teacups:"*

> *I gave them all names, and worked out how they got stranded on those stony places, and how they were rescued by eagles, just as the North Wind set about to blow them over.*[282]

And this continues in her mind throughout her adulthood, as she confesses:

> *I still do that. People on plates, sipping from glasses they will never empty, plucking roses they never put in their hair. I imagine them escaping, out of their flat circle. I had an idea*

[277] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 83.
[278] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 83.
[279] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 166.
[280] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 67.
[281] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 177.
[282] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 69.

> *about two-dimensional beings trying to locate themselves in a three-dimensional world. And then the three-dimensional beings would enter another dimension in just the same way. Catch glimpses, of other life-forms.*[283]

Her imaginings are particularly specific as she constructs her characters devoid of any human nature. It may stem from her adverse recollections of individuals who may have been stillborn or who might have died under unusual circumstances that she is reluctant to acknowledge.

> *Olive had never supposed for one moment that fairies or spirits existed. She lived most intensely in an imagined world peopled by things and creatures that drew their energy and power from other human imaginings, centuries and centuries of them.*[284]

Olive often immerses herself in her stories after both *„delightful and […] threatening"* [285] encounters. Nonetheless, she mostly writes under circumstances when she feels *„disturbed."* She characterises the act of writing as a process detached from the actual presence where she does not feel comfortable.

> *[S]he might dream, finding the meaning, or abandoning the images, later. She wrote to get back into that other, better world.* [286]

She evades reality by immersing herself in her fantastical world, striving to avoid, for example, contemplation of her complex familial dynamics.

> *She had a sense, when she thought about it, which she tried not to do, that everything unseen in her household had shifted its invisible place. Things had always been behind thick, felted, invisible curtains, or closed into heavy, locked, invisible boxes. […] She was rather pleased with all these metaphors and began to plan a story in which the gentle and innocent inhabitants of a house became aware that a dark, invisible, dangerous house stood on exactly the same plot of land, and was interwoven, interleaved with their own. Like thoughts which had to stay in the head taking on an independent life, becoming solid objects, to be negotiated.*[287]

She recognises her life inside the environment she has created, reflecting on her encounter and affair with Anselm Stern, with whom she has a daughter named Dorothy:

> *They had met in masks, amidst music, in an unreal world where everything is permitted, which seemed more real than the real world, which was always happening to Olive.*[288]

She seems to be aware of her actions and intentionally chooses to disregard them, remaining oblivious to the repercussions.

In her contact with Stern, as in her interactions with other artists, Olive seeks inspiration for her work. In this case, it is a particular artwork to include into her magical narrative. This way she mirrors A.S. Byatt in her insatiable need to acquire background knowledge of subjects in order to write about them.

---

[283] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 70.
[284] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 181–82.
[285] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 276.
[286] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 224.
[287] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 424.
[288] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 425.

Olive seeks something particular, or as she said, something *„banal"* to transform into something extraordinary:

> *I want something that's always been missing – with a story attached to it, naturally – and that can be made to have magic properties, an amulet, a mirror that shows the past and the future, that kind of thing. You can see my imagination is banal, and I need your precise know ledge.'*[289]

In one of numerous metafictional comments that are often close to Byatt´s own viewpoints, the narrator explains that

> *Olive Wellwood had the feeling writers often have when told perfect tales for fictions, that there was too much fact, too little space for the necessary insertion of inventions, which would here appear to be lies.*[290]

It means that for stories to work, there must be sufficient space for the writer´s agency and imagination. Olive intertwines reality with the magical world she constructs, and, as is customary for her, the narrative unfolds in an underground setting reminiscent of the tales her father recounted throughout her childhood. Although the private personal narratives that she writes for each of her children are regarded as completely confidential, she contemplates the idea of disclosing them to her readership owing to their inherent charm:

> *She wanted her readers – Tom first, but she was very vaguely thinking of others – to see her air creature, as she had invented it.*[291]

Olive is characterised as a *„successful authoress of magical tales,"*[292] and her acclaim and achievement contrast sharply with the depictions of her daily existence as follows:

> *There was the steady scratch of the pen nib in the study, parcels of manuscript Violet took to the post, the satisfactory cheques that arrived with the admiring letters of readers, both children and adults.*[293]

> *Olive was sometimes frightened by the relentlessly busy inventiveness of her brain. It was good and consoling that it earned money, real bankable cheques in real envelopes. That anchored it in the real world. And the real world sprouted stories wherever she looked at it. […] her response to any performance, any work of art, was the desire to make another, to make her own. She was in that world, watching, not in flat dailiness.*[294]

Olive´s imagination is exceptional and very active so possibly dangerous. Her identity is fragmented and mostly shaped by her artistic endeavours and the creativity of her mind, resulting in both the enhancement of her existence and a disconnection from reality. Her fragmented and complex personality illustrates a struggle between her duties as a mother and novelist, and her propensity to evade reality.

[289] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 11.
[290] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 12.
[291] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 225.
[292] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 3.
[293] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 301.
[294] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 82.

Her literary gift often leads to a misreading of reality through the lens of her imagination, limiting her ability to see the nuances of life and understand relationships.

Olive engages with microculture of several fictitious and real artists who personify the bohemian ideals of that period. Her work aligns with the creative discourse of her circle and is well appreciated by her audience, so she integrates effortlessly into it. The cultural milieu she accessed via her marriage to Humphry offers her acceptance and motivation, therefore intertwining her cultural identity with her own identity. Her success as a writer cultivates confidence in her talents while simultaneously placing her under pressure to sustain her prosperous profession, please her audience, and generate sufficient income.

Another frequent situation for her was being pregnant while attempting to focus on work. She views the unborn child as an impediment to her intellectual aspirations.

> *She found it hard to write when she was 'expecting'; the stranger inside seemed to suck at her energy and confuse the rhythm of sentences in her blood and brain.*[295]

> *She took up her pen and began writing, on a new sheet. Blood flowed from heart to head, and into the happy fingertips, bypassing the greedy inner sleeper.*[296]

The examples above illustrate the feeling of separation between the body and consciousness during pregnancy, a topic previously noted in Byatt´s oeuvre. It is connected with the conflict between her maternal and artistic identity below.

Olive Wellwood is a prolific author creating two distinct bodies of work. Firstly, she writes public fiction for a diverse audience of children and adult readers. Secondly, she is a maternal author who composes personalised narratives for each of her children, using meticulously selected current aesthetics in hardcover format:

> *Each child had a book, and each child had his or her own story. […] Each story was written in its own book, hand-decorated with stuck-on scraps and coloured patterns.*[297]

This process may have commenced with the death of her first child, Peter, given that she writes in moments of despair. In this respect, her writing may be seen as therapeutic. The narrative composed for Tom that plays a crucial role in the novel is described as follows:

> *The project had begun with Tom's discovery, in his story, of a door into a magic world that appeared and disappeared. The imaginary door was in a real place, in a Todefright cellar full of coal and cobwebs. It was a small, silver trap-door, that would take a child, but not an adult, and it could be seen only by the light of the full moon. It led into an underground world full of tunnels, passages, mines, and strange folk and creatures, benign, maleficent, and indifferent. It turned out that Tom's hero, who was sometimes called Tom and*

[295] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 141.
[296] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 143.
[297] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 80.

> *sometimes Lancelin, was on an apparently endless quest to find his shadow, which had been stolen by a Rat, when he was in his cradle.*[298]

The children's narratives may be seen as analogies to the lives of Olive´s children, taking into account the themes tailored for each child. Young children read the tales and relate to the protagonist, crafted by Olive to reflect their particular characteristics. This parallel setup, however, posts an important question: Do the children lead lives as manufactured by their mother, or do their mother´s narratives derive from the children´s real lives?

> *All of them, from Florian to Olive herself, walked about the house and garden, the shrubbery and the orchard, the stables and the wood, with an awareness that things had invisible as well as visible forms, including the solid kitchen and nursery walls, which concealed stone towers and silken bowers.*[299]

Nearer the conclusion of the novel, all the children stop reading the tales. Tom pauses reading but persists in embodying the existence of the character from his book. Dorothy resolves to grow away from her magical story and pursue a profession of a surgeon, later confronting the grim realities of war. Phyllis simultaneously embodies the roles of a princess and a servant girl inside her father´s home, emulating both of her mothers, Olive and Violet. Hedda embarks on a quest for liberation in reality, using her skills and advocating for suffrage. The phrase *„Florian story had hardly begun"*[300] may allude to his brief, sheltered life prior to the war, from which he returns both physically and mentally shattered.

These are the children´s fictive versions in their mother´s narratives:

> *Dorothy's alter ego, a stalwart child called Peggy, had found a wooden door, with iron bolts, in the root system of the apple tree in the orchard. This proved to be a way into a strange country populated by half-beasts, people and creatures who could change their skins and sizes, sometimes by choice and sometimes by accident, so that you might find that you were a human child one moment, and a hedgehog the next, hiding in dead leaves. There were wolves in this land, and wild boars.*[301]

> *Phyllis's character, a princess who had been changed for a little servant girl, found a crack in a teapot she was being made to wash, in the middle of a picture of a pretty glade, in which ladies danced, with flutes and tambourines. You could make yourself small enough to slip through the crack by chewing a certain kind of Chinese tealeaf, known as gunpowder, which came in hard little pellets and unrolled into leaf shapes in hot water. In Phyllis's story there were princes and princesses all waiting in castles, frozen or sleeping, for the redeemer to find the clue, and release them.*[302]

> *Hedda's way in was inside the grandfather clock in the dining-hall. You could see the gateway whilst the clock was striking midnight. It led to a world of witches, wizards, woods, cellars and potions, with children roosting in cages like chickens in need of setting free,*

[298] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 80.
[299] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 81.
[300] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 81.
[301] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 80.
[302] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 80–81.

> *and wondrous contests in shape-shifting between magical dwarfs and wizards, black ladies and blue gnomes.*[303]

> *Florian's story had hardly begun. It was possible his door was in the chimney, where he claimed to have seen a hefty scarlet figure with a sack. It was also possible that he would grow out of that, and make another world. In the interim, his story was peopled by his stuffed toys, a bear called Furry, a white cat called Snowy, and a stripy knitted snake called Ringary. In the world through the portal they were figures of power, sleek and glossy, Bear, Cat, and Snake.*[304]

The stories are praised by the imaginary novelist character Herbert Methley for Olive´s profound *„insight into the hopes and fears of childish minds."* Nevertheless, Olive does not see parenthood as *„necessarily helpful"* for composing children´s literature.[305] She regards her aspirations and concerns, as well as her childhood, as more significant to her work, which may serve as an indication of her imaginative views on her children in their narratives. She contemplates that

> *It was probable […] that the whole complicated wanderings of Tom underground had started with her own childish fear of Thumbelina's mole-tunnel.*[306]

Hopes and fears are two prominent aspects of her stories, and she considers the boundaries of fear for children. She has to *„be careful […] not to overstep some limit of the bearable. She often came close to overstepping it."*[307] Yet eventually, she misjudges the degree of harm that the disclosure of a private story can cause to her closest child, Tom, who inherits her vivid imagination and hypersensitive, intuitive nature.

Every narrative of that era concludes with a wedding devoid of the unarticulated realities of postnuptial existence:

> *The prince always marries the princess. Or the daft young man gets the princess because of his good nature and because he is the third son. Or the prince becomes a roe deer, or a swine, and has to be disenchanted by the clever princess. […] All the tales stop off with marriage, or perhaps foretell a large number of progeny, undefined.*[308]

This sample may be seen as a feminist declaration, as marriage signifies legal transformations for the woman and her autonomous identity. Subsequent to the wedding, the woman´s identity fused with her husband´s identity. This is seen in her rights over property, children, and suffrage.

Fight for women´s rights

Olive´s choice of clothing demonstrates her liberating attitude, as inferred by Mr. Cain:

---

[303] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 81.
[304] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 81.
[305] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 183.
[306] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 83.
[307] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 83.
[308] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 212.

> *[She] was not in the habit of wearing such tight corsets, kid shoes and gloves. She moved a little too freely and impulsively. She had fine flesh, fine ankles. She probably wore Liberty gowns or rational dress, at home.*[309]

Olive, like her husband Humphry, was an engaged member of the Fabian society. She endorsed the gradual and continuous transformation in society regarding education, improved working conditions, and increased salaries. The freedom to vote was not her primary issue.

> *Olive, like other successful woman of her generation, had not involved herself in agitating for the Vote, although she accepted unreflectively that it was a 'good thing', better to have a Vote than not.*[310]

Despite Olive´s discontent with her life, characterised by perpetual pregnancies that hinder her writing, she lives happily and freely in a marriage devoid of constraints, and she is not much troubled by the responsibilities of parenting. Her familial identity is mostly shaped by her childhood worries, pregnancies, and experiences of motherhood, which are, nevertheless, rather limited thanks to her sister´s involvement in practical parenting and household duties. Her public persona is shaped by her creative endeavours, her successful authoring, and her advocacy for art education, which in turn affects her family identity.

Olive´s self-perception as a woman is deeply intertwined with her physical attractiveness. She perceives herself as a very beautiful woman, whose life is enriched by the presence of various men who express their passion for her. Her apparently simple management of social events suggests she is more extraverted. Nonetheless, her personal unconscious is replete with repressed memories and events from both infancy and adulthood, mostly associated with the loss of her loved ones.

Olive Wellwood´s behaviour profoundly affects her daughters´ perceptions of the roles of women and mothers in society. The eldest daughter, Dorothy, is troubled by her mother´s recklessness and the disorder she creates; hence, she resolves to embody the exact opposite of her mother by pursuing very strict medical career. Phyllis, while her real mother is Violet, is often praised for her beauty and regards both mothers as role models, seeing her future as a wife and mother with the obligations of sustaining a prosperous household. Hedda, ever feeling oppressed, seeks justice for herself and for other women in her contemporary society.

[309] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 10.
[310] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 402–3.

6.1 Violet Grimwith

Woman´s role

Violet´s identity as a woman was influenced from her early years. While the age difference between Olive and Violet is not expressly mentioned, Violet is considerably younger than her sister; still, she was the one who tended to their dying mother. Olive reminisces on her experiences from the age of twelve:

> *When Lucy took to her bed and began to die, with the new baby who refused meekly to take milk, or begin to live, Olive stood by her bed, still as a stone. Violet was wonderful. She made beef tea, having begged the beef from the neighbours, she spooned it into Lucy's cracked lips, she wiped her face, she stroked her hands, she bent over and pulled back the red eyelids, peering under and in.*[311]

Violet has always been practical, resourceful, and industrious, demonstrating a pragmatic approach to problem-solving, as seen from her first profession as a dressmaker when Aunt Ada set *„Violet, who was good with a needle, to helping her and learning her craft."*[312]

Her realistic approach to life is evident in her proposals and preparations of strategies to improve Olive´s and her own adverse living situations. She accepted responsibility and took action:

> *It was in fact Violet who suggested, one Christmas, when Olive was on a brief visit to Auntie Ada and her family, that perhaps they should run away. Violet was covered with bruises […]*[313]

> *We could get work of some sort there. I've saved up enough for one train ticket. We'll have to take the money for the other out of her purse.*[314]

Her maternal inclination towards Olive persisted, or rather intensified, after their relocation to London and subsequently after Olive´s marriage to Humphry.

> *And so they came to be in the audience of Humphry Wellwood's English Literature lectures, dressed in blouses, skirts and hats made by Violet, who had found a good job in a dressmaking shop, and had found work for Olive, too, in plain-sewing, nothing fancy.* [315]

> *Whilst Olive wrote her stories, Violet instructed the smaller children on the lawn.* [316]

Violet is consistently portrayed as pragmatic, straightforward, and compliant, as shown from Olive´s introduction to Philip:

> *This is my sister, Violet Grimwith, who makes everything work here – everything that does work, that is.*[317]

[311] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 87.
[312] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 88.
[313] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 90.
[314] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 90.
[315] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 90.
[316] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 91.
[317] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 18.

She remains operational after Tom´s first disappearance after being bullied at a boarding school, while Olive and Humphry dwell in despair and trepidation, drowning their sorrow in alcohol. *„Violet managed everything. Meals, letters to editors, the little children."*[318]

She endeavours to be unnoticed, or she acclimates to a condition of being overlooked by others. This is shown, for instance, by the scene where she nurturingly attends to Philip:

> *You don't need to mind me,' said Miss Grimwith. Let me see that scrape. There's nothing I haven't seen. I've nursed all their little wounds, all their lives, I'm the one they turn to, when they need to, and so I hope will you, young man.*
>
> *'Shut your eyes,' she advised him. 'Keep 'em tight shut, I'll get to the roots of it, I will.'*
>
> *She applied soap and water to his hair as she spoke pommelling and twisting and then massaging the skin of his scalp, probing with thin fingers for the taut muscles in his neck and shoulders.*
>
> *'Let go,' said the surprising woman. 'We'll have every cranny clean and lively, wait and see.'*[319]

Philip perceives her as an astonishing lady. His response may stem from her assertiveness; when she works pragmatically and decisively, she exhibits a nurturing, even maternal attitude towards a child she has never encountered before.

Another example of her invisibility occurs during an interview with her sister, when *„Violet handed round cocoa and biscuits, and did not appear in the picture."*[320]

Conversely, Violet is perfectly sure of her position, and her awareness of her indispensability in the family is apparent from her utterances:

> *If you want anything at all, I'm the one. Remember that.*[321]
>
> *'It helps,' Violet said to Philip, 'to have a dressmaker as an auntie, who can turn a toga into a ball dress and back, or magic silk flowers out of old stockings.*[322]
>
> *'There's not much I don't notice,' said Violet, with quick satisfaction.*[323]

Even from these examples, it is clear that she is very well aware of her indispensability, despite the mentioned invisibility. One can also perceive a certain paradox here, that fulfilling those traditional female roles of mother, caregiver, and housekeeper does not limit her, but rather empowers her. One could even speak of a certain subversion.

---

[318] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 202.
[319] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 19.
[320] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 301.
[321] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 20.
[322] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 38.
[323] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 217.

Additionally, Violet sometimes serves as a moderator in complex or heated circumstances. She contemplates the appropriateness of talking topics for children when men discuss poverty and hunger in London. She may be sensitive to the issue due to her own memories associated with it:

> *Violet said 'Really, Humphry, I see no need to disgust and upset the children.'*
>
> *'Don't you?' said Humphry, 'I hope they will remember, and remember again when they are choosing how to live.'*[324]

Likewise, she tries to maintain peace among the Midsummer party community when she asks others: *„Let us talk about something else. Let us make peace."*[325] Furthermore, she is uncomfortable *„with bright talk"* at parties and similar public events,[326] which might be caused by her subordinate role to Olive.

Violet tries to console and soothe Tom, encouraging him to see the situation after discovering the plan to stage a play derived from his personal tale in more positive terms:

> *Violet said 'So the hero's called Tom. That's nice, Tom.' 'Yes,' said Tom, 'that's nice.' His voice was unemphasised, toneless, not, Olive thought desperately, unlike Gladys Carpenter. He said 'I wasn't asked. Or told.' Violet said 'It was saved up for a nice surprise.'*[327]

Violet´s existence is profoundly shaped by her maternal position, despite being seen by children as a childless aunt, as shown from Dorothy´s perspective:

> *Violet liked to say she was their 'real mother' but as far as Dorothy could work out, she liked to say this precisely because she was not, she offered free mother-love from the position of not-mother, of maiden aunt.*[328]

Nevertheless, Violet has her own offspring, Phyllis and Florian, who, however, grow up not knowing who their real mother is. Violet thus endures a life without their acknowledgement of her as biological mother and compensates for it by proprietary embracement of all children in the household:

> *The children of my body don't know they are mine – though in some sense they are all mine, all, who is their mother if not I?*[329]

Art

Violet´s perspective on art is not specified throughout the story; the only reference to art is her refusal to play a role that was offered to her in the Midsummer play:

---

[324] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 58–59.
[325] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 61.
[326] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 55.
[327] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 521.
[328] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 149.
[329] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 312–13.

> *Miss Violet Grimwith, offered Hermia, or Hippolyta, said she had no ambition to act but would make the costumes, as she was a dressmaker.*[330]

Violet had a similar upbringing and education to Olive, they both attended Humphry´s lectures, although they lives were lead differently. Considering the missing Violet´s name in following sample, she might not be as interested in particular subject of literature as her sister Olive.

> *„Olive found Humphry, and the rhythms of Shakespeare and Swift, Milton and Bunyan, which she thought she had craved all her life without knowing it."*[331]

It seems that Violet was always overlooked by Olive. As it is seen from following sentences. First is from the young age, when they lived with her aunt Ada and second, after Violet´s death:

> *Violet was covered with bruises which Olive had only half-noticed.* [332]

> *'Poor Vi. Not that it's not a good way to go, when your time comes. But I had no idea hers had. She did not complain. Though it is doubtful I would have heard, if she had.'*[333]

The novel does not include any clear explanation of Violet´s choice of life. Her beginning of life with Olive and Humphry is simply described with the sentence: *„Humphry, Olive, Violet and Peter moved into a little house in Bethnal Green."*[334]

Violet´s assumption of the caregiver and housewife role seems to be grounded on her early experiences and the dynamics of the Wellwood family. She took care of her dying mother, then she is presented by her sister as housekeeper who makes everything functional.

> *She made beef tea, having begged the beef from the neighbours, she spooned it into Lucy's cracked lips, she wiped her face, she stroked her hands, she bent over and pulled back the red eyelids, peering under and in.* [335]

> *This is my sister, Violet Grimwith, who makes everything work here – everything that does work, that is.*[336]

Finally, she asks Dorothy (or herself):

> *'Who is a child's real mother? The one who feeds it, and cleans it, and knows its little ways, or the one who leaves it in the nest to do as best it can ...'*[337]

It is difficult to suggest what was the first impulse to choice of her occupation and her life as well. It might be her own decision, or decision of others, she accepted voluntarily. She identifies strongly with her roles, which correspond with her own attributes.

---

[330] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 32.
[331] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 91.
[332] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 90.
[333] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 542–43.
[334] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 33.
[335] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 87.
[336] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 18.
[337] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 92.

Fight for women´s rights

Violet is characterized as *„a scuttling, bustling little person, whose nature was domestic, like the aproned hedgehog-women in the underground kitchens of Dorothy's tale."*[338] Her stance on women´s rights movements is not precisely articulated. She is a woman with traditional principles and seeking emancipation would leave her powerless, because she possesses a form of power in the Wellwood´s household.

Conclusion

Despite Violet´s advantages from her sister´s prosperous marriage, her life continues to be work-focused by her own choice. She lives in an intellectual-artistic middle-class household and participates in the social activities associated with that socio-cultural milieu. She mostly serves as a housemaid or nanny for the household. Her capacity for action suggests that she would take action if her life became intolerable.

Dorothy´s, Phyllis´s, and Hedda´s views of and relationships with Violet vary, mirroring their different identities and life aspirations. Dorothy has an ambiguous disposition towards Violet. She describes Violet as *„pernickety and small-minded […] and [she] was sorry for her."*[339] Dorothy also refises ti acknowledge their common personal characteristics identified by Violet as *„the same eyes."* [340] Dorothy´s lack of affection for Violet reinforces her determination to pursue a medical profession, forsaking conventional female duties.

Phyllis has several personal characteristics akin to those of her biological mother. *„[S]he had a romantic vision of an ordinary, comfortable household, that kept strict hours and was warmly predictable. […] She would be the maker of a world with no shouting, no insecurity, no danger."* [341] She embraces her destiny of a married woman, managing a functioning family and nurturing children. Violet promises to her that the right man will arrive and find her, however without assuming any responsibility for it.

Hedda maintains suspicion towards Violet and „*spent a lot of time spying on [her], as a revenge for the fact that Violet spied on her, going through her private drawers and notebooks.*[342] Hedda is the one who reveals the secret of Violet´s sexual relationship with Humphry. This may explain why Hedda rejects authority and is very sceptical of authorities´ legitimacy to maintain household.

[338] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 315.
[339] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 315–16.
[340] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 316.
[341] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 402.
[342] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 216.

6.2 Dorothy Wellwood

Woman´s role

The path of Dorothy´s identity formation is apparent from the moment of encountering Philip. Dorothy starts realising how different life could be in comparison to her own experience and what is missing in her life that makes her feel unhappy.

> *„She was a clever, careful child, who liked to think of herself as unhappy. […] She was unhappy, […] [b]ecause, as the eldest girl, she was treated as a substitute nanny. Because she was not a boy, and did not have a tutor, as Tom did, to teach her maths and languages. Because Phyllis was pretty and spoiled, and more loved than she was. Because Tom was much more loved. Because she wanted something and did not know what it was.*[343]

She is *„[f]aced with Philip's hunger and reticence"* for knowledge, which appeals to her as a suitable path for her own life.[344] Philip´s earlier statement *„I wanted to make something…"*[345] reveals his creative drive and proactivity. Dorothy feels a similar urge to make a tangible contribution. Both of them search for a missing part of their identity – "something" to produce to fulfil their life.

The quote above shows that Dorothy feels overlooked and not loved by her family. As a result, *„[a]lmost unconsciously, she detached herself a little from love."*[346] The need of finding a substitute for love strengthens her determination to persist in her intention to pursuit career and continually carve out her identity.

Dorothy, at the age of eleven, expresses firmly her mature intention to become a doctor. Her wish is very unusual, partly due to her age and partly due to the fact that women of her time were not encouraged to study medicine with the aim of becoming doctors. Her sister Phyllis is quite sure about it and expresses her consternation over Dorothy's lack of desire to marry:

> *'But you must want to be married, Hejjog,' said Phyllis, using a nickname Dorothy disliked.'*[347]

Similarly, Philip expresses his lack of knowledge regarding female doctors: *„Can women be doctors?"*

When Dorothy encounters young men at a ball, they consider her intention incompatible with the traditional female roles:

> *If she said she meant to be a doctor, they said things like 'My sister took a course in nursing until her children were born.' They seemed to think she was confused about the medical profession. Whereas they were confused about her.*[348]

[343] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 25.
[344] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 25.
[345] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 14.
[346] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 149.
[347] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 53.
[348] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 232.

However, Dorothy is steadfast in her ambition, and her confidence about her future success stems from her awareness of her own abilities and personal strengths:

> *It's hard, I think, to get the training.' She paused. 'People don't think women should work.'*[349]

> *She thought a lot, analytically, about other people's feelings, and had only just begun to realise that this was not usual, and not reciprocated.*[350]

> *She was the one interested in the human body.*[351]

Dorothy´s personal identity at that young age combines her roles of an overlooked daughter, a misunderstood sibling and her own "self", searching for self-worth through studying.

Dorothy and Philip form an unexpected friendship of a doctor and a potter. They both produce real things with their hands, and both are ambitious and persistent in their pursuits:

> *The only person she knew who understood the glamour and the terror of work was Philip. They didn't bother each other. They didn't know each other. But they understood some of the same things.*[352]

Besides Philip Dorothy finds a more supportive attitude from outside of her family, partly because of her struggles with her family´s complex dynamics and partly by lack of understanding. Although Humphry is quite supportive, their family friend Leslie Skinner must remind him of the need to focus on his daughters´ education. He almost admonishes him:

> *UCL made provision for women to study science. […] Humphry […as] a good Fabian should consider his daughters' education as seriously as his sons'.*[353]

Dorothy´s identity is shaped continually throughout her study, when she realises that her chosen career path is incompatible with conventional family life. She questions thoroughly her decision, considering the future of her peers.

Did she want to know all that? People were married at twenty-one or twenty-two.[…] She looked down at her moving fingers in her lap, and thought, after all, how interesting flesh and bone is, how interesting the growth of a child from a seed is – is knowing better than doing?[354]

Her questioning shows her maturity and awareness of how crucial this decision is and will be for her future. It becomes even more personal when she falls in love. Love, too, is an object of analysis for her, but she struggles with its abstractness:

---

[349] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 63.
[350] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 26.
[351] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 149.
[352] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 447.
[353] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 169.
[354] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 401.

> *Quite suddenly and farcically, she fell in love. She fell in love with a demonstrator, Dr Barty*[355]

> *Dorothy, […] tried to think scientifically about Love.[…] Was it the same as sexual desire, which she did not think she had felt? Can sexual desire be experienced in the abstract, almost? She didn't want to grab Dr Barty, or to be grabbed by him.*[356]

> *Psychology was not her gift; she had set her will to being practical. She did not want to think about the feeling behind this coda. Her mind became full of an uninvited ghost of Dr Barty.*[357]

A profound shift in her previous perspective and understanding of familial dynamics transpires when Humphry reveals that she is not his biological daughter. Her perception of the archetypal role of father is shattered and is replaced by an indefinite idea symbolized only by a name and a brief description. Her previous perception of her mother also collapses:

> *You're not Violet's child. Phyllis is. And Florian. You're Olive's daughter. But not mine.' […] He's a German from Munich. His name is Anselm Stern. The puppet-man. […] She tried to rearrange Olive in her mind, and failed.* [358]

> *What exactly was she punishing her for? For a moment of passion (she supposed it was a moment of passion) with the mysterious and intriguing Anselm? For her own birth? She was glad she had been born, she was contented enough with who she was, even if that person turned out to have a different origin from what she had always supposed. For bringing her up in ignorance, as a Wellwood?*[359]

Dorothy is confronted with the inability to determine who the people around her are, and thus who is she herself. The sense of her own identity is seriously shattered. She decides to meet her biological father to find the answers about who she is:

> *She would go to Bavaria, where she had no particular wish to go, to find a father whom she did not particularly wish to see. But she was a practical being, and understood that she could not get away without going back.*[360]

> *'I want to know who I am.'*[361]

Despite the unexpected revelation of her true father´s identity, she comes to conclusion that knowing one's biological father is essential. At the same time, she realises that she can neither entirely dismiss the person who substituted for her father and raised her nor completely overhaul her perception of her family. Therefore, she reconciles with Humphry.

[355] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 470.
[356] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 471–72.
[357] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 475.
[358] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 345–46.
[359] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 383.
[360] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 354.
[361] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 370.

Dorothy´s sense of identity becomes even more intricate upon realising that her biological father is unaware of her existence. Nevertheless, she rationally reconciles herself with the situation and focuses her attention on achieving success in her studies.

Fight for women´s rights

The following excerpt shows that Dorothy´s perception of women´s freedom is predominantly connected to the right to education than to the right to vote.

> *Dorothy, Griselda and Florence wanted women to be able to study and work as they chose, but did not see the Vote as representing an automatic open gate to intellectual and financial freedom.*[362]

By rejecting the conventional priority of becoming wife and mother and deciding to study and pursue a professional career, she takes an active stance and could be seen as a model for the women of her time.

Art

Dorothy is a character in the story who is distinctly oriented on education and career advancement. She grew up and was raised in a home where art was the predominant emphasis. Consequently, she contemplated art and used her creativity.

> *Since she had had the bicycle she had dreamed frequently of flying, quite near the ground, skimming the flowerbeds, seated like a fakir on an invisible carpet.*[363]

Dorothy was very perceptive and intelligent from a young age, so she quickly understood the connections between the story and its creation by the author. With her analytical mind, she considers the issues of authorship and power:

> *Dorothy hadn't liked Cinderella, and didn't like this. Her head was full of the idea of spiders, and strings, and stings. She thought of the clever fingers controlling the story and its characters, and she thought, only half-consciously, of all such control as dangerous and to-be-resisted. She enjoyed the disintegration of Olimpia. She told herself she couldn't see the point, but she could, and didn't like it.*[364]

[362] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 482.
[363] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 27.
[364] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 75.

6.3 Hedda Wellwood

Woman´s role

Since childhood, Hedda´s personality has been shaped by her position among and interaction with her siblings and the adults' perception of her. Hedda *„belonged neither with the elder nor with the younger children"*[365] and her exclusion resulted in her accelerated isolation but also independence.

Her independence taught her to use situations to her advantage and also, not to blindly accept the opinions of adults. In her outsider position, *„Hedda was a finder-out, a sleuth, a discoverer and uncoverer."*[366] It was precisely Hedda who revealed the secret love relationship between Humphry and Violet, as well as the truth about the biological parents of some of the children.

Her character was significantly shaped by her environment. She acquired the ability to think and act swiftly. She had a sense of leadership and will to act, and therefore, she was often the main coordinator of the children's activities and pursuits.

Fight for women´s rights

Similarly to Dorothy, Hedda also tends to define herself in opposition to her surroundings rather than accepting their influence and models. Her upbringing left her with complicated feelings that intensified with time:

> *Hedda in 1902 was thirteen. She resented being female. She thought she had been born to suffer injustice, and subordination, and that she would rebel.*[367]

Her rebellion gradually shifts from her family and siblings and begins to turn towards the broader society and public institutions. Her choice of expressing resistance also suits her nature. She sees almost no benefit in lectures on poverty and hunger, or education. She regards radical expressions of dissatisfaction and disappointment as something that can change the conditions in society more quickly and decisively.

> *It was Hedda who, between 1903 and 1907, became more and more obsessed with suffrage, with opposition, with action, with revolt. She followed, eagerly, the campaign of the militants, as they broke glass and set bombs, were imprisoned, and later took to hunger-striking and suffered forcible feeding (1909). She occasionally hectored her mother and sisters. The rest of the time she brooded darkly. She would Act. In the beginning was the Act.*[368]

Unlike the other women in her family, Hedda views the right to vote as one of fundamental rights. Her actions thus focused on public support for this initiative, even at the cost of the dangers it entails.

---

[365] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 312.
[366] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 312.
[367] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 402.
[368] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 403.

> *Hedda's friends were workers devoted to Votes for Women. She had discovered the Women's Social and Political Union, and went to their new headquarters in Clements' Inn, off the Strand, where she helped with letter writing, poster-making, and fund-raising.*[369]

WSPU marches were *„fought back by the police with considerable roughness – and carried away dishevelled, leaving a trail of hatpins, hairpins and bonnets."*[370]

Although her suffrage initiative was significant, she preferred that her family be unaware of her participation. Nevertheless, she felt apprehensive: *„It made her sure she was alive, and that life had a meaning, which she had always been uncertain about."*[371] Her feelings from participating in the marches reflect the dynamics described by social psychology as crowd psychology, which also resonates several times in the novel, mainly through the character Charles Wellwood:

> *She enjoyed marching, hip to hip, skirt to skirt, shoulder to shoulder with women who had subdued their own needs and movements to a larger cause. Group life held and perturbed her, for she was naturally claustrophobic.*[372]

Her personal identity is intertwined with the identity of this dissatisfied crowd. She also embraces the idea of extreme expression of her discontent. Here, ambiguity emerges in her character in the form of an inherent apprehension over the deed and its repercussions.

> *The problem was, she was afraid. At first, the problem was to think of an appropriate act, and then, one day.*[373]

> *There were tales of suffering in cages, of force-feeding that amounted to torture – wooden gags between the teeth, or metal clamps, breaking them, the terrible tube forced in, whilst the warders held the struggling woman, by the ears, by the breast, by the hair, by the hands and legs.*[374]

Although she decides to carry out her radical act in public, she also chooses to stand against her family. She takes Olive´s precious keepsake and uses it to destroy a valuable artifact in the museum. Through this one act, she deliberately punishes both society and her mother: *„She would take Olive's stone with the hole and throw it at the golden bowl."*[375]

The expected consequences of her actions take her to prison: *„She was condemned to a year's penal servitude for damaging government property and taken to Holloway Prison."*[376] The prison experience brought about another significant transformation of her personal identity. Hedda became aware of her

[369] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 482.
[370] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 483.
[371] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 484.
[372] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 567.
[373] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 568.
[374] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 569.
[375] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 570.
[376] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 571–72.

ambivalence over the ideas of resistance that had been imparted to her. During her imprisonment, she senses an inability to fully identify with them.

> *She knew she must refuse to eat.*[377]

> *Once, which was the worst thing, she started thinking of the little jar of beef jelly as though it had the authority of the act she had performed. She must have the beef jelly. She must not. She must. She walked. To and fro, and then stopped and took up the spoon.*[378]

These feelings can be understood as a conflict between her personal sense of identity and the identity of the crowd. In the end, the fear over her personal identity symbolically wins, and she submits to the authorities in the prison.

Art

Similarly to Dorothy, Hedda´s personality primarily develops on different foundations than the art presented to her in her family. Interestingly, in her childhood, Hedda enjoyed the scary aspects of fairy tales, as shown by her response to an unusual toy:

> *'It is a most original toy,' said Violet.*

> *'You like it?' said Herr Stern to Hedda.*

> *'It's a bit scary. I like scary things.'*[379]

In the stories, Hedda also appreciates different characters from her mother´s, such as rats, mice or lizards. Her troubled identity and rebellious nature could be seen in her opposition to her mother´s literary works. It shows the consistency in her identity formation.

[377] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 572.
[378] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 572.
[379] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 45.

6.4 Elsie Warren

Woman´s role

Elsie Warren, Philip´s sister, is a character who enters the story with the news of their mother´s death and with a maternal intention to take care of her brother. When forming her sense of the self and the purpose of her life, she relates to her mother:

> *Elsie thought of her own mother. She had worked. She had been good at her craft and the air of the kilns had made her ill. She had tried to make a home for them.*[380]

Elsie, who has been growing up in extreme poverty, realizes her difference from the society she enters, but she soon discovers that her value lies in her practical skills. Despite her hard work, she never asks for any reward.

> *Elsie was intimidated by Olive's hat, which was black and ample, decorated with scarlet bows and fruit.*[381]

> *She doesn't try to be noticed,' said Olive, fairly. 'She gets on with fixing things, so that they work.* [382]

> *I don't think either of those two – Philip and Elsie get paid a penny.*[383]

She is very practical and efficient; however, she lacks not only confidence to form an opinion or act independently, but also the knowledge that she would be entitled to have an opinion:

> *'We must talk to Elsie,' said Frank, who was quite as aware as Olive was of the importance of Elsie.*

> *'Elsie'll do as she's told. Elsie's a good girl,' said Fludd.*[384]

Elsie acclimates to her subordinate role and the amount of work occupies her to the extent that she never contemplates the prospects of an alternative life.

> *No one asked Elsie what she thought or felt. Or, at least, with a youthful egoism which she had been forced entirely to conceal, Elsie believed no one asked or cared what she thought or felt.*[385]

Her entire personality is subordinated to her work and her service. As she herself expresses in the following excerpt, she has trained herself to earn from discipline and selflessness:

> *She was not, it should be said, naturally tidy or orderly or domestic. She wanted to go barefoot, and didn't really care if her underwear was in holes. But in this situation she needed to be needed, she needed to become indispensable, and she made herself so. She*

[380] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 293.
[381] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 160.
[382] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 208.
[383] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 208.
[384] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 209.
[385] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 209.

> *learned – for herself, no one thought to teach her – the embroidery stitches, cross-stitch, petit point, and unpicked and reworked where Pomona had gone wrong.*[386]

Despite her functionality and capability, she exhibits little attempt to enhance her own life. She neglects herself and her needs, and her identity and existence are defined through the service to others:

> *She had no money, and did not know how to ask for any, for she knew there was very little in the household to cover the bread and milk and vege tables. […] [S]he wanted new shoes, her own shoes. Shoes that wouldn't destroy her feet.*[387]

A key moment in the formation of Elsie´s identity occurs when she discovers her pregnancy. (The father´s name is never clearly disclosed in the novel.) She struggles to assume the responsibility for her conduct and for her child for she is aware that the conventional society will denounce and ostracize her. She is relinquishing any initiative once again.

She was going to have a baby. She would be cast out. If you looked at – all this – it would be unfair to turn her out, but that was what would happen. She would have, she said, in a steely way, to find one of those places for Fallen Women […][388]

Fight for women´s rights

Elsie is from the working class and, owing to her extensive labour, she lacks the time and energy to contemplate the abstract ideas presented at women´s rights gatherings. Engagement with the promoters of freedom, suffrage, or free love causes her discomfort. She perceives herself as inferior to them, lacking the knowledge of the language and political concepts used:

> *Elsie considered the jump of subject from shoes to freedom. She said she'd never had occasion to think about these things. She had too much to do, she almost said, and restrained herself, for she felt the sentence would sound silly.* [389]

> *She managed to work out what 'suffrage' meant, having always vaguely thought that it was to do with women suffering.*[390]

> *Elsie said 'It makes me see how ignorant I am. It makes me see I don't know enough and don't think enough.'*[391]

Upon the encouragement by the sympathisers of the suffrage movement in her surroundings, including the writer Herbert Methley, she starts attending the meetings and begins to comprehend the possibility of independent thinking and reflect on what she hears there. For example, she gets disturbed by the

[386] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 209.
[387] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 277.
[388] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 317.
[389] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 288.
[390] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 291.
[391] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 295–96.

excessive concern about domestic sphere and women´s duties at home. Her thoughts seem to express an anxiety over her past and the lack of choice she had.

> *She was right, of course, but she cared too much, Elsie wanted to stop watching her caring.*[392]

> *All this talk about what women did, or should, or might want was unsettling to her. She had wanted shoes and a belt and she had them. She wanted – she wanted – she wanted – to live. But it was beginning to irritate her that she had thought so little. If she had sat up all night reading, who would she be now? She raised her face under her gallant hat, to look at the women on the platform, who got so much out of both thinking and being dissatisfied.*[393]

Elsie suddenly realizes the possibility of different needs; devoid of choice, she only sought satisfaction for her basic material needs and never contemplated psychological, intellectual or social needs. Elsie begins to contemplate her existence and see herself as a valuable individual. She begins to comprehend her desires:

> *'I never meant to go into service, ma'am. What I do not want is to slave in someone else's kitchen and wash their clothes for the rest of my life. […] And that lot are so useless and helpless and don't pay me a penny.*[394]

> *She picked up books at Purchase Hall and tried to make sense of them. She recognised well enough the hunger for something more than housework, of which Marian Oakeshott spoke. She was thinking much faster than usual, and reflected sardonically that those hungry-minded women, those frustrated female thinkers.*[395]

Although she becomes aware of her own independent identity, she is unable to accept herself as equal to others. It could be seen from excerpt when she talks to Charles Wellwood:

> *'Being as I am both a woman and working-class, choice don't come into it, much, for me. I do what I must.' […] 'I imagine you don't talk to many of us, as against studying us in bulk. The dangerous masses. To be put in camps, and set to work on projects.' […] I am both working-class and not respectable. I am a Fallen Woman. I have a daughter. You don't want to be talking to me as if I were a person, Mr Wellwood.'*[396]

Art

Elsie does not consider herself an artist compared to her brother Philip. But she finds a certain degree of self-fulfilment in art-making. She creates *„little pots"*[397] – art for herself and for her own pleasure, regardless of reward or admiration.

Elsie undergoes an unusual experience of alienation from part of her personality due to an unsuspected invasion of her privacy. Elsie discovers that Benedict Fludd has been sketching her without her

[392] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 293.
[393] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 294.
[394] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 321.
[395] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 297.
[396] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 440.
[397] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 210.

knowledge, and he briefly reveals the range of drawings he has completed. Her response is apparent from this excerpt:

> *'I'm making myself a collection.' And he leafed through his sketch-block, showing her drawings she had known nothing about, Elsie bending a brooding face over the dishes, Elsie poised over a pie with a knife, Elsie feeding the chickens, with the wind in her skirts. The chickens were a miracle of economic indications of movement, a strutting one, one with its head back to crow, one with flaring wings attacking another. He had caught her own motions as he had caught the nature of the birds. She felt exposed, and that something had been taken from her.*[398]

In a way, Fludd´s intrusion resembles the type of identity stealth connected with contemporary social networks. Luckily, Elsie manages to escape Fludd´s usurpation and takes initiative. She starts to educate herself and expands her perspectives, leading her to see herself as a worthy individual. This is particularly apparent in her marriage to Charles Wellwood, by which she overcomes the social class barrier.

[398] Byatt, *The Children's Book*, 211.

7 CONCLUSION

A.S. Byatt, who grew up and was raised in a family of intellectuals, displayed extraordinary literary talent from an early age. Her passion for literature started with myths and fairy tales and also stories set in the Victorian era. During her studies, she encountered a multitude of authors who gradually appealed to her with their writing style, choice of topics, and the methods they used. Among them were authors such as Robert Browning, G. Eliot, T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster or Iris Murdoch. For a long time, she was unsure about her choice to become a writer; in her own words, she lacked experience. This opinion also puts her at odds with the reading method of close reading, that is reading without paying attention to any historical or cultural background, advocated by her then-teacher at Cambridge, R.F. Leavis.

Her first works, *The Shadow of the Sun* and *The Game*, achieved great success and attracted the attention of critics. Besides her career as a writer, she taught, wrote critiques, and edited. In 1990, she published the novel *Possession*, for which she was awarded the Booker Prize. The so-called Frederic Quartet followed, including *The Virgin in the Garden, Still Life, Babel Tower,* and *A Whistling Woman.* The works from the final stage of her career are *The Biographer´s Tale, The Children´s Book,* and *Ragnarök: The End of the Gods.*

The works of A.S. Byatt´s contain diverse themes, often reflecting the era in which the story takes place, the status of women, their rights, and diverse relationships. Furthermore, Byatt incorporates mythical and fairy-tale motifs into her stories or uses fairy tales as parallels to her stories. She also pays attention to colours and colour combinations that represent certain character traits, such as shades of green linked to mythical women.

Beyond the motifs associated with myths, Byatt draws on diverse art forms. She incorporates the paintings of Monet, Matisse, Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Velázquez into her stories, using them both for their colours and techniques as well as for what they depict. And just as art conveys a certain perspective on reality, so do her works strive to provide an accurate and realistic portrayal of the given era.

She uses facts, incorporates real historical figures, and creates fictional examples of works from that era. All of this forms the backdrop to her stories and her main focus remains on her characters and their lives. Another common feature of her works is intertextuality. She makes extensive use of it both in her writing and through her characters, who often engage in similar experiments as she does herself.

Byatt´s lifelong work is interwoven with many scientific issues, often very specialized. She herself felt the need to convey this fascination with life itself and the surrounding world in her texts. Therefore, it is not uncommon to encounter highly specialized topics such as neuroscience, genetics, geology, or entomology while reading her works. And this is just a fraction of her interests that have been reflected

in her works. Her texts also include autobiographical elements such as university life, work from a woman´s perspective, childbirth, and death.

As for her dominant literary style , using Kelly´s words, *„realism is Byatt´s preferred mode, though it is always a realism shaped by postmodern notion about slipperiness and language."* [399] She uses postmodern techniques such as incorporating real or fictionalized journals, letters, pieces of poetry, scholarly articles, and others. Her lexical choices and sentence structures also vary according to the theme. She experiments with language by, for example, attempting to describe certain experiences, in this case birth and death, in plain, non-metaphorical language Elsewhere, she experiments with multi-layered narratives and stories within stories while portraying her characters also in a postmodern way. They do not have a single cohesive identity, but a fragmented and fundamentally changing one.

Although Byatt´s works are acclaimed and she has received many honorary awards for her contribution to literature, her works have also faced criticism, mainly due to her allegedly excessive display of expertise. Her works have also been referred to as teaching material. Byatt has also been criticized for too much focus on her characters fulfilling her intellectual needs.

As mentioned above, Byatt strived to accurately portray the eras in which her stories take place. Most of them are set in her own lifetime, especially the period coinciding with the second wave of feminism, which lasted from 1960´s to 1980´s. Generally, she appreciated the improvements that feminist movements brought to women, but she did not identify with feminist literary theory, which transformed literature into programmatic writing. She expresses her views on feminist literary theory through her works and through the opinions of her characters. Through her female characters, she also often returns to the roles of mother and her intellectual aspirations and to the difficult connection or division of these paths.

The novel *The Children´s Book*, which is the subject of my analysis, is one of A.S. Byatt´s work where she intertwines many themes and motifs mentioned above. The work is set in the late Victorian era and concludes after the end of the First World War.

The novel constructs a realistic portrait of the era, enriched with fairy tales and myths that her characters are preoccupied with. Byatt delves into a very specific cultural environment of middle-class bohemian families through her characters, including writers, playwrights, actors, puppeteers, potters, and many others, and captures in detail the environment and aesthetics that surround them. Other characters include socialists, anarchists, Fabians, and freethinkers. The historical context of the era forms the backdrop for the lives of the characters. The era is thus reflected in their opinions, decisions, accepted changes, and their daily activities.

[399] Kelly, *A. S. Byatt*, 66.

Byatt, with her fascination for this era, managed to create a very faithful depiction of the time and thus conveyed the spirit of the period. The characters experience everyday reality during the time of peaking industrialization. Bicycles, automobiles, and telephones gradually enter their lives, causing a faster movement of both physical objects and information. These pieces of information also include new ideas introduced by various movements and associations that advocate for equal access to education, improved working conditions, increased wages, the establishment of working hours, and, among other things, women´s suffrage.

An important part of the cultural context of the time, which also pertains to the characters in *The Children´s Book*, is the company of William Morris, which produced hand-decorated furniture. This name is mentioned several times in the book with an aesthetic that includes botanical motifs or medieval motifs appearing on porcelain, wallpaper, or book covers. Art manifests itself in many other ways in the work. For example, through the potter Benedict Fludd and his apprentice Philip Warren, who bring creativity and meticulousness to the preparation of the material. Another perspective is offered by Prosper Cain, who is a procurator at the South Kensington Museum and has theoretical knowledge and an overview of foreign art. Last but not least, art is perceived through the eyes of Olive Wellwood, a children's book author, who, with her imagination and writing style, offers a unique glimpse into the fairy tales of the late Victorian era.

The other central characters are the children, who hold unique perspectives that vary according to their personalities. Their lives are influenced by adults, and they also differ according to their gender. Boys are encouraged to study various fields of knowledge, but girls are not given comparable opportunities. Dorothy, who aspires to be a surgeon, has to fight for her path. Hedda, whose life is characterized by rebellion against her own family, decides to support protests and boycotts for the right to vote through her actions.

Byatt describes female characters in her work and through them the era in which they lived. Most of them were influenced by art and therefore, their identities were shaped by their cultural environment. The examination of the identity formation and the construction of their female selves was the aim of my analysis, which includes five characters – Olive Wellwood, Violet Grimwith, Dorothy Wellwood, Hedda Wellwood, and Elsie Warren.

Olive Wellwood is a children´s book author who uses her imagination not only when writing her stories but also as a frequent escape from the reality of her life. Part of her personality contains repressed childhood memories, which include the deaths of her two brothers and father in a mine, as well as the deaths of her mother and youngest sister from pneumonia. From this time, however, she also carries with her the stories told by her father, containing supernatural beings moving in the dark corridors of the underground. Although she tries to escape her childhood memories, paradoxically, she still remains in the stories she heard during that time.

Both her life and her identity are daily influenced by her marriage to Humphry Wellwood and her cohabitation with her sister Violet in one household. With Humphry, they have a very open relationship allowing each other occasional extramarital affairs, which, however, bring illegitimate children to both Olive and Humphry. Olive´s identity is thus influenced by these relationships, which bring feelings of self-satisfaction or confirmation of her own attractiveness into her life.

The character of Olive represents a mother pursuing a professional career path. Olive often comments on this role of hers, which is often hindered by pregnancies. Olive often perceives the unborn child as an obstacle to her concentration and artistic activities and frequently refers to the child in a very depersonalized manner, which also indicates her effort to avoid emotional attachment to a child that might die.

Her self-concept is divided between the relations to her husband, her children, Violet, the artistic community and readers, and herself. In all these parts, her artistic view of the world is significantly reflected. Her marriage to Humphry gives her a suitable social status and introduces her to cultural circles where she can find self-realisation. Her role as a mother is limited by her distorted view of reality and by the participation of Violet, who performs most of the tasks associated with this role. Her identity in relation to Violet is quite unclear. Partly because she might perceive her sister through her imagination and partly because she sees her as a subordinate. Her personal identity intersects with the cultural identity of the circle of artists she associates herself with.

Violet Grimwith is Olive´s younger sister, who in the story definitely does not receive as much attention as Olive. Some aspects of her identity thus remain a subject of speculation. Violet grew up in the same household as Olive and, upon arriving in London, received similar education. However, their lives are extraordinarily different. Violet has been showing herself to be a very practical, capable person with maternal tendencies since childhood, which she expressed in the past towards Olive and later towards her own children. Her identity is therefore heavily influenced by this role of a mother.

Her role as a mother is purely practical and symbolic for the children, as they consider Olive to be their mother. However, as the story unfolds, they learn that two of the children—Phyllis and Florian—are actually the biological children of Violet and Humphry. Despite that, she is perceived as subordinate housekeeper, maid, or a nanny.

However, due to her sister´s impracticality, this ability gives Violet a sense of power even though her position may be perceived as subordinate. At the same time, Violet does not voluntarily participate in social events, nor does she engage in artistic circles like her sister.

Dorothy Wellwood is the eldest daughter of Olive and the German puppeteer Anselm Stern. However, Dorothy learns this information later in life, which affects not only her perception of her family and its members but also of herself. Dorothy´s sense of identity is thus fragmented, but this becomes an impetus

for her to reflect on herself. Another very significant factor in the development of Dorothy´s identity is her decision to become a surgeon. At that time, it was something rather extraordinary and unusual, and so her decision and actions encounter misunderstanding or not understanding from those around her.

This life mission also brings with it the decision to give up family life, which is incompatible with her career. The greatest turmoil within her arises when she falls in love. Her nature and her sense of analytical thinking are evident here. During the story, an unconventional friendship also develops between Dorothy and the potter Philip. They both share a desire to create real things. This desire is an essential component of Dorothy´s personality. Through Philip, Dorothy perceives art as a means of self-expression and precision.

Olive´s second daughter, Hedda, is watched her whole life because she is perceived as disobedient. Her resistance to this attitude manifests very early in childhood, and the ability to express dissent thus becomes integrated into her personal identity. Hedda proves to be a good member of radical movements fighting for women's rights, especially for their right to vote. Her identity intersects with the identity of the crowd marching through the streets and expressing discontent. Although she is confident in her opinions, she does not express them within her family.

Her identity is shattered at the moment she decides on a radical act. With this act, she wants to punish both her mother for her indifference and society for the injustice it inflicts on her as a woman. She feels fear of the consequences that await her. At this moment, her personal identity clashes once again with the crowd identity. In prison, she then decides to act in her own interest rather than in the interest of society. Thus, they prioritize their identity.

The last character analysed is the potter Philip Warren´s sister, Elsie Warren, who, like her brother, comes from the working class and therefore she is not used to thinking about herself or her life. She completely submits to authority, and her identity is therefore significantly shaped by her surroundings.

Her identity, which is observable at the beginning, is influenced by her perception of her mother. She therefore tries to be a mother to her gifted brother. She is practical and eager to learn. When she gets the opportunity to learn more about feminist movements and the ideas they promote, her identity begins to evolve significantly. She feels inferior as a woman from a working-class background and later as a fallen woman with a daughter. She regrets the time when she did not think about the world and her life enough to have the desire to change anything.

Although she does not consider herself an artist, she was used to seeing her mother create art, and her brother as well, so she occasionally models small pots out of clay herself. At the end of the story, her personal identity is reconciled with her position, which she is able to change through her diligence, and also with her marriage to Charles Wellwood, who has erased the differences in their status with his modern worldview and perceives her as his wife whom he loves.

This diploma thesis deals with the creation of female characters' identities through the art and cultural milieu that surround them. A further research could include the examination of male identities in the novel and its comparison with the female ones.

8 RESUMÉ

Diplomová práce je rozdělena na teoretickou a praktickou část. V teoretické části jsou popsány koncepty osobní identity a jejího formování, dále kultury a kulturní identity. Další kapitola je věnována autorce A.S. Byattové – jejímu osobnímu životu, obsahující informace o jejím studiu, začátcích kariéry, publikovaných dílech i oceněních, která za svého života získala. Dále shrnuji dominantní témata jejích děl, které zahrnují především autobiografické motivy, problematiku sociálních rolí a rovnosti pohlaví, dále mýty a pohádky, fikcionalizanou historii, umění, intertextualitu a fascinaci životem. Další část práce se zbývá literárním stylem A.S. Byattové, přijetí jejích děl odbornou veřejností a postoj autorky k feminismu v době mezi lety 1960-1980.

Část věnovaná románu *The Children´s Book* je rozdělena na část věnovanou kritické odezvě na její dílo, ději a struktuře románu, použitému literárnímu stylu díla a hlavním tématům. Další část představuje historický, sociální a kulturní kontext doby, ve které se dílo odehrává, tedy pozdní viktoriánské období, edwardiánskou dobu a období první světové války. Tato část poskytuje nahlédnutí do doby pokračující industrializace a života dělnické a střední třídy. Vzhledem k zaměření mé práce na ženy a jejich identitu, stěžejní část práce je věnována vyobrazení žen v pozdně viktoriánské společnosti – jejich postavení a změnám prosazovaných různými feministickými hnutími. Jsou zmíněny důležité historické i kulturní milníky, jako jsou zákony upravují práva žen obecně nebo ve vztahu k manželovi.

Praktická část mé diplomové práce je věnovaná analýze pěti ženských postav, a to Olive Wellwoodové, Violet Grimwithové, Dorothy Wellwoodové, Hedda Wellwoodové a Elsie Warrenové. Zkoumala jsem jejich identitu a vývoj identity ovlivněný hlavně jejich rolemi ve společnosti, uměním a kulturním prostředí, které je obklopuje a jejich postoji k feministickým hnutím té doby.

9 BIBLIOGRAPHY

9.1 Primary Works

Byatt, A. S. *A Whistling Woman*. 1. Vintage intern. ed. New York: Vintage Books, 2004.

———. *Angels & Insects: Two Novellas*. 1st Vintage international ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

———. *Babel Tower*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012.

———. *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays*. 1. Harvard Univ. Press paperback ed., 3. printing. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002.

———. *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings*. 1st Vintage International ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

———. *Possession: A Romance*. 1st American ed. New York: Random House, 1990.

———. *Still Life*. London: Vintage Digital, 2021.

———. *Sugar and Other Stories*. New York: Vintage Books, 2013.

———. *The Children's Book*. London: Vintage Books, 2010.

———. *The Shadow of the Sun*. 1st Harvest ed. A Harvest Book. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1993.

9.2 Secondary Works

Alfer, Alexa, and Amy J. Edwards de Campos. *A. S. Byatt: Critical Storytelling*. Contemporary British Novelists. Manchester (GB): Manchester university press, 2010.

Alfer, Alexa, Michael J. Noble, and A. S. Byatt, eds. *Essays on the Fiction of A. S. Byatt: Imagining the Real*. 1. publ. Contributions to the Study of World Literature 110. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001.

APA Dictionary of Psychology. 'Identity'. Accessed 23 November 2024. https://dictionary.apa.org/.

Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity'. *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–33. https://doi.org/10.2307/488538.

Bell, Kenton. 'Microculture Definition | Open Education Sociology Dictionary', 23 January 2014. https://sociologydictionary.org/microculture/.

Blom, Philipp. *The Vertigo Years: Europe, 1900-1914*. New York: Basic Books, 2008.

Byatt, A. S. 'A.S. Byatt on Iris Murdoch's The Bell'. *Literary Hub* (blog), 15 July 2019. https://lithub.com/a-s-byatt-on-iris-murdochs-the-bell/.

———. AS Byatt's The Children's Book. Interview by Ramona Koval, 24 April 2009. https://www.abc.net.au/listen/radionational/archived/bookshow/as-byatts-the-childrens-book/3134044#transcript.

———. City Arts of Sun Francisco Interview with Robert Hass, 8 November 1993. Pacific Vista Productions.

———. 'Reading, Writing, Studying: Some Questions about Changing Conditions for Writers and Readers.' *Critical Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (1993): 3–7. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8705.1993.tb00496.x.

———. The Drexel´s InterView, Episode 102 with A. S. Byatt, 12 2010. The Drexel University. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkcLdrUkKWc&ab_channel=TheDrexelInterView-Archives.

———. Women´s Writing is More than That, 5 April 1987. London Sunday Times.

Cakirpaloglu, Panajotis. *Úvod Do Psychologie Osobnosti*. Praha: Grada, 2012.

Drabble, John Frederick. *Death's Second Self*. London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1971. http://archive.org/details/deathssecondself0000drab.

Drabble, Margaret. '"He Spoke, It Seemed to Me, with the Wisdom of Solomon"'. *The Observer*, 14 June 2008, sec. Books. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jun/15/biography.features5.

Eliot, T. S. *Selected Essays*. 3. enlarged ed., Repr. London: Faber & Faber, 1991.

Evans, Sir Richard. 'The Victorians: Art and Culture'. YouTube video, Gresham College, 4 October 2010. https://www.gresham.ac.uk/watch-now/victorians-art-and-culture.

———. 'The Victorians: Gender and Sexuality'. Gresham College, 14 February 2011. https://www.gresham.ac.uk/watch-now/victorians-gender-and-sexuality.

Fabian Society - The Fabian Society is Britain's oldest political think tank. Founded in 1884, the Society is at the forefront of developing political ideas and public policy on the left. 'Our History | Fabian Society', 26 January 2018. https://fabians.org.uk/about-us/our-history.

Flood, Alison. 'Byatt Attacks Novelists Who Use Real-Life Characters'. *The Guardian*, 13 August 2009, sec. Books. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/aug/13/byatt-novelists-real-life-characters.

Hadley, Louisa. *The Fiction of A. S. Byatt*. Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Hansson, Heidi. 'The Double Voice of Metaphor: A. S. Byatt's "Morpho Eugenia"'. *Twentieth Century Literature* 45, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 452–66. https://www.jstor.org/stable/441947.

Harrod, Tanya, and Glenn Adamson. 'Interview with A.S. Byatt'. *The Journal of Modern Craft* 4, no. 1 (1 March 2011): 65–82. https://doi.org/10.2752/174967811X12949160068857.

Hicks, Elizabeth. 'Public and Private Collections in A. S. Byatt's "The Children's Book"'. *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 44, no. 2 (June 2011): 171–85.

———. *The Still Life in the Fiction of A .S. Byatt*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge scholars, 2010.

Homem, Rui Manuel G. de Carvalho, and Maria de Fátima Lambert, eds. *Writing and Seeing: Essays on Word and Image*. Internationale Forschungen Zur Allgemeinen Und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft 95. Amsterdam New York, NY: Rodopi, 2006.

Janktová, Renata. '"An Ambivalent Beast" The Literary Relationship Between A.S. Byatt and D.H. Lawrence'. Thesis submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy, University of East Anglia School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing, 2020.

Jenkyns, Richard. 'Disinterring Buried Lives'. *The Times Literary Supplement*, March 1990.

Johnson, Jennifer Anne. 'Beyond Belief : The Crisis of Faith in A.S. Byatt's Fiction'. *Journal of English Studies* 10 (29 May 2012): 81–104. https://doi.org/10.18172/jes.182.

Kellaway, Kate. 'Self-portrait of a Victorian Polymath' - Search - Newspapers.com™, 16 September 1990. London Observer. https://www.newspapers.com/search/results/?keyword=%22Self-portrait+of+a+Victorian+Polymath%22&publication-ids=1000.

Kelly, Kathleen Coyne. *A. S. Byatt*. Twayne's English Authors Series 529. New York: Twayne Publ. [u.a.], 1996.

Kent, Susan Kingsley. *Gender and Power in Britain: 1640-1990*. London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

Langland, Elizabeth. *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture*. Reading Women Writing. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Leith, Sam. 'Writing in Terms of Pleasure'. *The Guardian*, 24 April 2009, sec. Books. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/apr/25/as-byatt-interview.

Levenson, Michael. '"The Religion of Fiction." Rev. of Angels and Insects by A. S. Byat'. *New Republic*, 2 August 1993, 41–44.

Lister, Kate. *A Curious History of Sex*. London: Unbound, 2021.

MacFarlane, Robert. 'A Very Bad Case of Birds on the Brain'. *The Observer*, 15 September 2002, sec. Books. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/sep/15/fiction.shopping.

'Macroculture'. In *Wiktionary, the Free Dictionary*, 19 August 2024. https://en.wiktionary.org/w/index.php?title=macroculture&oldid=81267081.

Marshall, Gail. *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge Companions to Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2007.

Mitchell, Natasha. 'AS Byatt: Woman of Letters and ...Science! - ABC Listen'. Accessed 17 October 2024. https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/allinthemind/as-byatt-woman-of-letters-and-science/3021714.

National WWI Museum and Memorial. 'First Usage of Poison Gas'. Accessed 5 December 2024. https://www.theworldwar.org/learn/about-wwi/spotlight-first-usage-poison-gas.

Parey, Armelle, Isabelle Roblin, and Emilie Walezak, eds. *Special Issue: A.S. Byatt*. Journal of the Short Story in English, no. 76 (2021). Special issue. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2021.

Pelling, Henry. *Modern Britain: 1885 - 1955*. The Norton Library History of England. New York: Norton, 1960.

Raeff, Catherine, Allison DiBianca Fasoli, Vasudevi Reddy, and Michael F. Mascolo. 'The Concept of Culture: Introduction to Spotlight Series on Conceptualizing Culture'. *Applied Developmental Science* 24, no. 4 (1 October 2020): 295–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2020.1789344.

RCW Literary Agency. 'Langdon-Helen'. Accessed 31 January 2024. https://www.rcwlitagency.com/authors/langdon-helen/.

Rudaitytė, Regina. '(De)Construction of the Postmodern in A. S. Byatt's Novel Possession'. *Literatūra* 49, no. 5 (1 January 2007): 116–22. https://doi.org/10.15388/Litera.2007.5.7941.

Saunders, Max. 'Byatt, Fiction and Biofiction'. *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 7, no. 1 (2 November 2019): 87–102. https://doi.org/10.18352/hcm.543.

Schwartz, Seth J., Byron L. Zamboanga, and Robert S. Weisskirch. 'Broadening the Study of the Self: Integrating the Study of Personal Identity and Cultural Identity'. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2, no. 2 (March 2008): 635–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2008.00077.x.

Sorensen, Sue. 'Death in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt'. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 43, no. 2 (1 January 2002): 115–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/00111610209602175.

Stetz, Margaret D. ‘Publishing Industries and Practices’. In *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, edited by Gail Marshall. Cambridge Companions to Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Stout, Mira. ‘What Possessed A.S. Byatt?’ The New York Times, 5 1991. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/99/06/13/specials/byatt-possessed.html?_.

Taylor, Jenny Bourne. ‘Psychology at the Fin de Siècle’. In *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, edited by Gail Marshall. Cambridge Companions to Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

‘The 50 Greatest British Writers since 1945’, 5 January 2008. https://www.thetimes.com/article/the-50-greatest-british-writers-since-1945-ws3g69xrf90.

‘The Art of Fiction No. 168’. 2001. https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/481/the-art-of-fiction-no-168-a-s-byatt.

The British Academy. ‘Elections to the British Academy Celebrate the Diversity of UK Research’. Accessed 26 October 2024. https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/news/elections-british-academy-celebrate-diversity-uk-research/.

The Oxford Review - OR Briefings. ‘Cultural Determinism - Definition and Explanation’. Accessed 26 November 2024. https://oxford-review.com/the-oxford-review-dei-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dictionary/cultural-determinism-definition-and-explanation/.

Ting-Toomey, Stella, and Tenzin Dorjee. *Communicating across Cultures*. Second edition. New York London: The Guilford Press, 2019.

Uçar, Asya Sakine. ‘Looking At “Still Life” And Ekphrasis Through Van Gogh’s Speaking Pictures In A.S. Byatt’s Still Life’. *Looking At ‘Still Life’ And Ekphrasis Through Van Gogh’s Speaking Pictures In A.S. Byatt’s Still Life*, 1 January 2019. https://www.academia.edu/41634323/Looking_At_Still_Life_And_Ekphrasis_Through_Van_Gogh_s_Speaking_Pictures_In_A_S_Byatt_s_Still_Life.

Walezak, Emilie. ‘A. S. Byatt, Science, and the Mind/Body Dilemma’. *Journal of Literature and Science* 11, no. 1 (2018): 106–19. https://www.literatureandscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/WALEZAK-final.pdf.

West, Shearer. ‘The Visual Arts’’. In *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, edited by Gail Marshall. Cambridge Companions to Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Wood, Harriet Harvey. ‘AS Byatt Obituary’. *The Guardian*, 17 November 2023, sec. Books. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/nov/17/as-byatt-dame-antonia-byatt-obituary.

Yilmaz Yüksek, Yasemin. ‘A.S. Byatt’s Possession, The Djinn in the Nightingale’s Eye, The Children’s Book: The Woman Reader/Writer’s Revising Female Identity’. University of Istanbul, 2016. https://www.academia.edu/29811762/A_S_Byatts_Possession_The_Djinn_in_the_Nightingales_Eye_The_Childrens_Book_The_Woman_Reader_Writers_Revising_Female_Identity?

Young, Arlene. *From Spinster to Career Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Victorian England*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019.