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**THE STUDY OF  
A. S. BYATT'S POSSESSION: A ROMANCE  
ON A POSTMODERNIST MOVEMENT IN LITERATURE**

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- 6-Media**

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This study aims at introducing postmodernism, its reflections in literary works, along with social construction and human relations. The postmodern age, that we are in, fuses into the every aspect of our lives and has been very successful in digging the present time of consumer society although it is 'a cliché' to say that we are living the postmodern age.

This study tries to enlarge the usage of the word and after exemplifying it with the different instances from up to date occurrences, the features of postmodern culture are adopted in the novel of A.S. Byatt's **Possession: A Romance**, regarded her best novel, with which the writer has won the Booker Prize for Fiction and the *Irish Times* International Fiction Prize. The literary examination of the work begins with the introduction of the novel with a short summary so as to familiarise the reader with this popular success.

Several issues are dealt along with the study. The writer broadly enters the field of feminism and the sisterhood between the characters. In order to interpret the novel from a feministic point of view, related sources are read and made connections. The feminist epistemologies in postmodernism especially **The Fairy Melusina** of Christabel LaMotte are studied under the heading of that chapter.

The scope of language is also one of the goals of this study. The symbols, and the meanings in the novel are selected and the real intention of the writer is made clearer.

The language of the Victorian Period and the modern world are picked up so as to show the temporal usage and the differences. The 'bricolage' technique of rewriting history is studied and exemplified with the letters, poems and journals from the novel. The unreliability of 'metanarratives' and the hidden side of historical facts, the investigation, collecting the bits and pieces will be the focus of one of the chapters related to this narrative style. The archive industry, the influence of mass-media and the film version of the novel are interpreted since the postmodern age is the mixture of all the ways reaching to populars.

Different types of sources, including the web sites helped the study of the novel from a postmodern literary culture. The result of the study can be stated as: "The impact of the past over the present can not be underestimated, everybody's fate is different from the others' but we are possessed by the hidden secrets of the history."

**KEY TERMS:** Postmodernity, modernity, metanarrative, bricolage, feminism, media.

## ÖZET ve ANAHTAR SÖZCÜKLER

Yapılan bu çalışmanın amacı, postmodernizmin tanıtılması, toplumsal ve insan ilişkilerinin yanı sıra, edebiyattaki yansımalarının da gösterilmesidir. İçinde yaşıyor olduğumuz bu postmodern dönem, hayatımızın her alanına sızmış ve tüketici durumunda modern çağın sonunu getirmiştir. Her ne kadar postmodern çağda yaşandığını söylemek bir 'cliche' olsa da, yapılan bu çalışma hayatımızdan kesitler sunarak postmodern dönemi anlatmaya çalışacaktır.

Postmodern kültürün incelikleri A. S. Byatt 'ın Booker Prize For Fiction ve Irish Times International Fiction Prize ödüllerini kazandığı *Possession: A Romance* adlı eseri ile yansıtılacaktır. Kitabın edebi çalışmasına geçmeden önce kısa bir özeti verilerek kitap içeriği hakkında bilgi kazandırılacaktır.

Çalışmada bir takım unsurlar ele alınmıştır: Yazar feminizmin sınırlarından içeri girerek kardeşlik kavramı üzerinde durmaktadır. Kitabın feminizm açısından ele alınabilmesi için konuyla ilgili bir takım kaynaklara başvurulmuştur. Eserin içindeki feminist öğeler, özellikle de karakterlerden biri olan Christabel LaMotte 'un Fairy Melusina adlı şiiri üzerinde durulmuştur.

Dil kullanım özellikleri de bu çalışmanın üzerinde durduğu konulardan biridir. Eserde kullanılan semboller ve bunların kullanılış amaçları incelenmiştir. Viktorya döneminde kullanılan dil ile günümüz kullanımı arasındaki farklar kitaptan alınan örneklerle ortaya konulmuştur. Kitaptaki 'kolaj' tekniği üzerinde yapılan çalışmalarda eser içindeki şiir mektup ve günlüklerden yararlanılmıştır.

Tarih boyunca yapılan arşivleme ve güvenilirliği üzerindeki sorgulamalarda ise eserdeki parça-bütün kullanımından yola çıkılarak değerlendirmelerde bulunulmuştur. Televizyon ve kitle iletişim araçlarını postmodern dönemdeki kullanımı üzerine de bir takım örnekleme yapılmıştır.

Yapılan çalışmalarda farklı kaynakların yanı sıra internetten de yararlanılmıştır. Çalışmayı şu şekilde nitelendirebiliriz: Geçmişin günümüze etkisi küçümsenemez; herkesin kaderi diğerlerinden farklıdır ancak bizler tarihin bilinmezlikleriyle kuşatılmışızdır.

**ANAHTAR SÖZCÜKLER:** Postmodernizm, modernizm, kolaj, metanarrative, feminizm, medya.



## **I. POSTMODERNISM**

### **A. MODERNITY & ITS DISCONTENTS**

What is modernity? Perhaps, the answer to this question can help us to understand post modernity and clarify its boundaries.

The term defines ; the social order that emerged following the Enlightenment. But in a linear order, its roots may be traced further back and the term ‘modern world’ creates an unprecedented, dynamic, dismissive, marginal echo in one’s mind. The word ‘modern’, which collocates with terms such as ‘ building, fashion, design, cooking’ and the like, in fact was a word not widely in practical usage before the 1970’s.

Basically; there is not a great gap between modernism and postmodernism, and this quick shift enables us to determine modernity as clearly as possible so as to understand and make comments about post modernity.

The Enlightenment was the birth of the ‘modern period’ in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and it accelerated through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some historians date this period with the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789, and ending it with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Modernity tried to conquer the world in the name of ‘Reason’, but what was Reason? And what happened to these reasonable attempts? Why do so many people see modernity as its own gravedigger?

To be able to answer these questions, it will be useful to look at the basic tenets of modernism:

### **a. Differentiation**

Karl Max may be the social analyst 'par excellence' of early modernity understood as capitalist society, but other sociologists also made distinctive contributions that help us grasp what was going on.

As Karl Max noted in **The Communist Manifesto**:

The bourgeoisie can not exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and with them the relations of society... constant revolutionizing of production, in interrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation, distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. ( Lyon, 1999: 55)

In this extract Karl Max turns our attention into a modern world of great social change very detrimental for industrial -capitalist- technological growth.

Just as the motor car technology, often called Fordism, strengthened the system of production and consumer society, modernism made differentiations of terms such as; 'breadwinners' and 'housewives' in middle classes or drew a sharp line between men and women in terms of their lives.

Extended families turned out to be nuclear ones by the mid-twentieth century and became a unit of consumption rather than production. All these things are done for the sake of coordination of complex societies from a modernist point of view. But

...it has become apparent to many that worldview fostered through Modernism [and by the Western humanist tradition] is flawed, corrupt, and oppressive. Both recent events [i.e. since the World War Two], and the perception of those events, have given rise to the notion that Modernism has played itself out and is now floundering and directionless. (Witcombe,<http://...html> postmodernism)

### **b. Rationalization**

Max Weber's (1864-1918) vision of modernity was different in terms of what he holds as the key of modernism: rationalization. ("By this he meant the gradual adoption of a calculating attitude towards more and more aspects of life") (Lyon, 1999: 58)

According to Weber, the determining points of modernity are observation and calculation. 'The structuralist (modernist) fathers of critical economics, psychology, sociology and anthropology were all antireligious. The modernists were and are hostile to religion, because it represents a form of immovable unreason and dangerous irrationality. They envision a world freed of religious superstition.

A person's or group's self-understanding was not viewed as reliable knowledge, because it was distorted by psychological delusion, perspectival illusion and ideological prejudice. Just as science was able to prove much in nature that was counterintuitive, like the earth moving around the sun, the new social sciences of economics, psychology, anthropology and sociology would unveil the true nature of individual beliefs and social structures as causationally derived from some foundational base. (Grassie, <http://...postmodernism.html>)

Profit and loss in capitalism, bureaucratic rules and ranks in organizations are to gain a master control. Such careful calculations can tame nature, cities and make workers docile, books balanced. “The same tendency spread into art and music as well; machine-line precision became a motif of painting, and music ran along lines of notation structured by new ideas of harmony”( Lyon, 1999: 64).

### **c. Urbanism**

Cities were the focus of attention in the modern rational organization. Massive Migration and thousands of bodies settling in cities caused great social shifts afterwards.

As opposed to rural past, modernism created an urban ‘now and then’ for its productive and consumer society. Strange identities appeared in cities and thought themselves as the models of civilization. Distant relationships occurred between ‘distant superegos’ and flourished in ‘urban dwellings.’ The infra-structure was modern so as to carry ‘modern man’ in cities. “New people needed a new type of street that would be a machine for producing traffic!” ( Le Corbusier, 1971: 42)

No house, no shopping mall, no side café can obstruct the flow of traffic and of course, modern life of production.

### **d. From a Literary Perspective**

Modernism concerns a particular set of cultural or aesthetic styles associated with the artistic movement which originated around the turn of the century and has dominated various arts. Modern art and literature are experimental, formally complex and elliptical, containing elements of decreation as well as creation and tending to associate notions of artist’s freedom from realism, materialism with notions of cultural disorder.

From a literary perspective, the main characteristics of modernism include:

(Klages, <http://...pomo> http)

1. an emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity in writing (and in visual arts as well); an emphasis on HOW seeing (or reading or perception itself) takes place, rather than on WHAT is perceived. An example of this would be stream-of-consciousness writing.
2. a movement away from the apparent objectivity provided by omniscient third-person narrator, fixed narrative points of view, and clear-cut moral positions. Faulkner's multiply-narrated stories [e.g. *As I Lay Dying*] are an example of this aspect of modernism.
3. a blurring of distinctions between genres, so that poetry seems more documentary (as in T.S. Eliot) and prose seems more poetic (as in Woolf or Joyce)
4. an emphasis on fragmented forms, discontinuous narratives, and random-seeming collages of different materials.
5. a tendency toward reflexivity, or self-consciousness, about the production of the work of art, so that each piece calls attention to its own status as a production, as something constructed and consumed in particular ways.
6. a rejection of elaborate formal aesthetics in favor of minimalist designs, and a rejection, in large part, of formal aesthetic theories, in favor of spontaneity and discovery in creation.
7. a rejection of the distinction between 'high' and 'low' or popular culture both in choice of materials used to produce art and in methods of displaying, distributing and consuming art.

The figures usually categorized as modernists include: Joyce, Proust, Kafka, Forster, Conrad, Gide, James, Faulkner, Woolf in fiction; Eliot, Pound, Mallarme, Yeats, Stevens in poetry; Strindberg, Pirandello, Wedekind and Brecht in drama.



## **B. POSTMODERNISM**

### **a. As a term**

Postmodernism is a very complicated term or set of ideas, one that has only emerged as an area academic study since the mid-1980s. One should bear in mind that it is hard to locate postmodernism temporally or historically because it is not clear when postmodernism begins.

Before its historical background, it will be useful to define 'postmodernism' and the possible versions of meaning(s).

'Postmodernism' and 'Post modernity' are different terms and we can draw a line between them with these definitions:

Postmodernism (as a term)

a. cultural and intellectual phenomena, to the production, consumptions a distribution of symbolic goods.

Post modernity (as a term)

b. Post modernity on the other hand, while still concentrating on the exhaustion of modernity, has to do with putative social changes.

Certain features of modernity are being inflated, abide by contrast shrink others into insignificance to yield new social configurations ( Lyon, 1999: 76).

Clearly, postmodernism can not be understood without post modernity, any more than the cultural makes sense without the social and vice versa.

Over the last two decades the term 'postmodernism' has been in wide-spread use, but the story of its spreading through culture is fairly complex. Apart from a number of isolated early sightings of the term, it entered our lives mainly as an academic category concerned with certain developments in arts. In fact "postmodernism was a movement in architecture that rejected the modernist, avant garde, passion for the new" (Marley, <http://.../hF1 0242.html>).

It is possible to look at the field of psychoanalysis, identify its founding figure as Sigmund Freud, and go on to describe the main conceptual tools behind the psychoanalytic method. With postmodernism it is not quite easy to do so. Postmodernism is not, strictly speaking, a school of thought because it has fused into every inch of our lives with different modes and version so it is very hard to put it into a matrix of school and scholarship.

One cannot insist that this or that person is the spokesman of postmodernism; or postmodernism came into existence because it has some specific goals and perspectives. In fact 'it is not a unified intellectual movement.'

Postmodernism can be:

- a. An actual state of affairs in society
- b. The set of ideas which try to define or explain this state of affairs
- c. An artistic style , or an approach to the making of things
- d. A word used in many different contexts to cover many different aspects of

all the above. There are number of identifiable themes which run consistently through the different versions of postmodernism:

They propose that society, culture and lifestyle are today significantly different from what they were a hundred, fifty or even thirty years ago. They are concerned with concrete subjects like the developments in mass media, the consumer society and information technology. They suggest that these kinds of developments have an impact on our understanding of more abstract matters, like meaning, identity and even reality. They claim that old styles of analysis are no longer useful, and that new approaches and new vocabularies need to be created in order to understand the present (Ward,1997: 58).



Perhaps, the biggest problem arises from the word; 'Postmodernism' itself.

The prefix 'post' means 'after' and 'modern' means 'up to date' or 'current'. As one easily suggests, is it possible to be 'after' the 'modern'? It is easy to see that this paradoxical notion is very hard to handle. As a starting point, we can look at some of the word's history as follows.

### **b. Its History**

Early appearances of postmodernism are:

#### **The 1870's**

An English artist called John Watkins Chapman used it to describe painting which he saw as more advanced than that of French Impressionist painters like Claude Monet or Auguste Renoir. The work of the Impressionists had been seen as the very latest up to the minute expression of modern times in other words as the most modern of modern art. In Chapman's usage, postmodernism referred to new (post Impressionist art) which went further than Impressionism's attempts to capture in paint the fleeting appearances of nature.

#### **1917**

The German writer Rudolph Pannwitz spoke of nihilistic, amoral new 'postmodernism men' who had broken away from old established values of modern European civilization.

#### **1947**

In his summary of British Historian Arnold Toynbee's six volumes of **A Study of History** (1947) D. C. Somervell suggested that Toynbee's focus on history could be called 'postmodern'. Toynbee then looks it up, and in subsequent volumes of his work he puts forward the notion of a 'Post-modern age'. This age was the period following on from the Dark to Middle Ages (1075-1475) and the Modern Age (1475-1875). The 'Modern' was regarded by Toynbee as a time of social stability and progress. But since about 1875 Western Civilization, with the growth of industrialized cities had been troubled by social turmoil, anxiety and revolution.

**1957**

An American cultural historian Bernard Rosenberg named as postmodern the new circumstances of life in society at that time. He argued that important social and cultural changes were taking place. These changes included the rise of technological domination and the development of a mass culture of universal 'sameness'.

**1964**

Leslie Fiedler described a 'post culture' which rejected the elitist values of highbrow modern art and literature.

**1968**

American art critic Leo Steinberg noticed in contemporary visual art (for example, Pop Art) a change in interest from the representation of nature to the 'flat' representation of man-made images. He called this tendency postmodern because whereas older kinds of modern art (from Impressionism onwards) had been concerned with capturing visual or emotional truth, Pop Art was interested in artificiality (Ward, 1997: 76).

## **1. in ARCHITECTURE & SOCIAL RELATIONS**

Modern people spend most of their times out of their homes, on the pavements, shopping malls, factories, governmental buildings, schools, parks and the like. When one enters into a big shopping mall, s\he can easily observe different styles, decorations, tastes, structures standing hand in hand and forming a body, perhaps not a matching one but cozy.

Such forms of designs are of postmodern styles. In fact postmodernism showed itself firstly in architecture before it mingled with letters.

The critic Andreas Huyssen has suggested that modernism in the arts defines itself as necessarily outside of, and superior to the rest of the culture and society. Postmodernism, on the other hand, crosses the great divide that modernist art and criticism once tried to place between themselves and mass culture.

For Huyssen; “postmodernism represents a rejection of modernism’s ‘relentless hostility’ to mass culture and moves towards a new situation in which the pedestal of high art and high culture no longer occupies the privileged space it used to” (Ward, 1997: 81).

It can be claimed that postmodern architecture has a wide range of alternatives for different tastes and desires so that it displays a democratic juxtaposition of tastes and world-views. By this attitude, we get rid of the enforced sameness and can experience ‘culture of choice’ which is pluralistic and cosmopolitan.

**The features of postmodern architecture:**

- a. A mixture of architectural styles from past times (perhaps you can find echoes of Victorian greenhouse, art deco cinema, Georgian and so on)
- b. A mixture of styles from different places: American-style dinner, Italian-style pizzeria, London Pub, Breton cr  perie.
- c. Numerous ornamental, decorative or pictorial features (murals, relief, pediments, clock towers, columns that don't hold anything up)
- d. Lots of plays between different surfaces, materials, and colors.
- e. A high degree of 'fake'
- f. A high degree of 'reference'

After discussing postmodern architecture, the people and their life styles on the pavements should be touched upon. When one needs to know something about the postmodern society, the word 'consumer' is always stuck before 'society', such as: 'Post modernity and Consumer Society'. This is because of the fact that in modernism, people are regarded as the producers and they form smaller units like ants. When compared to postmodern time, there happens to be an erosion of the older distinction between high culture and the so-called mass or popular culture.

When we take mass-media into our focus of attention, we can easily observe that postmodern times try to provide illusions of individualism for instance advertisements for jeans, cars through images that define possible subject positions or create desired positions, that is to say: 'You are what you buy, may be cool with this jean, or romantic with that lip-stick...etc'.

‘As seen on TV’ and ‘As seen on MTV’ are more powerful than unmediated experience. Hyper reality, image saturation, illusion seem more real than ‘the real’, just the opposite of modern media industry.

As Frederic Jameson states for postmodern social life: “Postmodernism as a movement in arts in culture corresponding to a new configuration of politics and economics, ‘late capitalism’: “transnational consumer economies based on global scope capitalism” (Jameson, 1997:46).



## 2. in FEMINISM

Post structuralism enables some social groups such as feminist groups; queer sexual identities to voice their ideologies, and most of them take postmodernism as their starting point “Despite an understandable attraction to the [apparently] logical, orderly world of the Enlightenment, feminist theory more properly belongs in the terrain of postmodern philosophy” ( Flax,1990: 57).

And his face took the brightness of her glance  
As dusty heater takes the trumbling rays of the  
sun’s countenance and shines them back. Now  
was he hers, if she should ask of him body or  
soul, he would have offered all. And seeing this,  
at last, the Fairy smiled ( Byatt, 1990: 298).

Feminist outbreaks within social patterns are highly praised and valued in postmodernism. Especially after the post-1968 women’s movements gained much importance in terms of abortion legislation, legal and financial equality, opportunity at work and also by the publication of ambitious theoretical works such as Kate Millett’s **Sexual Politics** and Shulamith Firestone’s **The Dialectic of Sex** (both 1970). Social and cultural pluralism, disunity, unclear bases for social, national and ethnic unity have opened a way to alternative family units, alternatives to middle-class marriage model and also multiple identities for couplings and child raising as a contrasting tendency to, the modern nuclear family units and the idea of ‘the family’ as a central unit of social order.

Maggie Humm words that: “The emerge of feminist ideas and feminist politics depends on the understanding that, in all societies which divide the sex into different cultural, economic or political spheres, women are less valued than men” ( Humm, 1992:63).

With 'post modern supports', women's position changed from object of knowledge to the knowing subject, and from the state of subjection to subjecthood.

Feminist theory on the one hand claims women's equality but on the other hand claims that this equality must embrace 'differences' between women and accept a position of partial knowledge(s).

And once it occupies this position, feminist thought would seem to move away from its Enlightenment beginning, and to have much in common with postmodernist theory... both feminism and postmodernism argue that the grand or master narratives of the Enlightenment have lost their legitimating power.

Both also argue that Western representations - whether in art or in theory- are the product of access not to truth but to power. Both present a critique of binarism, that is thinking by means of oppositions, must always be devalued, both instead, insist on 'difference and incommensurability'.

Finally, both seek to heal the breach between theory and practice, between the subject or theory/ knowledge and its object ( Sim, 1998: 85).

### 3. in Literature

Although it is hard to draw the beginning of postmodernism, it can easily be stated that the dominant mode of literature between 1960 and 1990 was 'postmodernist' writing.

There are some significant occurrences for the birthday of postmodern writing:

- a. The assassination of John F. Kennedy and the 'fatwa' decree against Salman Rushdie due to his **Satanic Verses** (1989).
- b. The demolition of the Berlin Wall.
- c. Philip Roth's essay "Writing American Fiction" (1961) and Tom Wolfe's "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast: A Literary Manifesto for the New Social Novel".(1989)

Postmodernist fiction is really an international phenomenon, without boundaries, global such as: Günter Grass and Peter Handke (Germany); Georges Perec and Monique Wittig (France); Umberto Eco and Italo Calvino (Italy); Angela Carter and Salman Rushdie (Britain); Stanislaw Lem (Poland); Milan Kundera (former Czechoslovakia); Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru); Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Colombia); J.M. Coetzee (South Africa); and Peter Carey (Australia)...

Postmodernism has not only influenced writers, poets, playwrights all around the world but it has also influenced all literary forms. In fact, it has no significant relevance to modern poetry, and little to drama but it is widely applied to fiction. It is for this reason that this revision over postmodernism in literature concerns abundantly contemporary fiction.



### a. Temporal Disorder

Postmodernist fiction does not just disrupt the past, but corrupts the present, too. It disorders the flow of time or the idle hurrying of moments.

“It disorders the linear coherence of narrative by warping the sense of significant time, *kairos*, or the dull passing of ordinary time, *chronos*. *Kairos* is strongly associated with those modernist novels which are disposed around moments of epiphany and disclosure, such as James Joyce’s **A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man**” ( Sim, 1998: 124).

Postmodernist writing is full of subverted order, loss of centralized control and fragmentation. Decentered selves; multiple, conflicting identities conquer the most of the pages of postmodern literary works.

### b. Pastiche

The Italian word ‘pasticcio’ means “musical, literary or artistic work consisting of elements from various sources.” ( Cowie, 1989: 904). With this feature of postmodernism, the mood of consumer society is, somehow, reflected.

“Pastiche, then, arises from the frustration that everything has been done before. As Frederic Jameson notes in **Postmodernism and Consumer Society** (1983) ‘the writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and world... only a limited number of combinations are possible; the most unique ones have been thought of already’” ( Sim, 1998: 125-126).

The ‘pastiche’ tendency leads to the suspicion and the rejection of Master Narratives; local narratives, ironic deconstructions of master narratives.

### **c. Death of The Author**

Postmodernism undermines the whole concept of an expert, a consultant or a teacher as someone with privileged insight. Instead, experts are conjured into existence because of a need for their presence. Postmodernist analysis suggests that experts offer pre-packaged solutions.

Roland Barthes (1925-1982) was one of the figures who helped to formulate a postmodern view of authorship. Associated mainly with structuralism, semiotics and post structuralism, some of Barthes work set out to question how meaning is produced in works of art. ( Sim, 1998: 191)

In the phase of reading and criticizing a text, there are three main steps. The first step belongs to the author since he has his own notice, sensation, meaning or mental state. The author is independent and rules his mentality and emotions with his own will. He has his own verbal or visual language and does not need to signify anything yet. The second step; the author is busy with adoring his inspiration by the help of words, images. The third step; these meanings are conveyed and dug out by the reader(s).

Roland Barthes, in his short essay, “Death of The Author” (1968) suggests that this model of meaning puts the writer at the centre of the work and makes him the only source of meaning. When it comes to the role of the reader, it is to interpret the text and not to create anything out of it.

But Barthes reminds us that time and place should not be discarded while analyzing a text. For instance, one cannot interpret the works of Shakespeare as they were interpreted many years ago because time and occurrences have changed considerably. A text voyages through history, geography and culture constantly and gathers new meanings and revises old ones as it travels.

The unity of a text does not lie in its origin as it comes out from the author but in its destination. The destination, here, is the moment of being read. Of course, there will not be only one destination and the author has no impact upon where the text goes and what people do with it, that is to say; 'The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author'.



### III. POSTMODERNISM AND POSSESSION: A ROMANCE

#### A. SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

**Possession: A Romance** tells the story of two young academics in their study of researching the lives of mid- Victorian poet Randolph Henry Ash and his contemporary, Christabel LaMotte. The story of the novel begins with the pieces of old letters, probably forgotten and untouched throughout the years and left between the pages of Ash's own copy of Giovanni Battista Vico's \* **Principj di Scienza Nuova**. Roland Michell, one of the young academics, takes the letters secretly and makes up several theories that Randolph Henry Ash lived a secret relationship with a woman in his own time, a relation that was not reflected in his biography even to this time. Roland finds Maud Bailey who is studying on Christabel LaMotte's works in Women's Resource Centre, in Lincoln, and they start to investigate the hypothetical relation between the poets. Maud Bailey is very sensitive about this literary study since she is (said to be) the grand-grand child of Christabel's niece Maia.

As they delve deeper into the turbulent lives of the two poets through their letters, journals and poems and chase their movements from London to the north Yorkshire, they face with a haunting, spiritual, passionate blend of mystery and romance. The 'romance' comes to its climax when the buried box of Ash is found in the churchyard.

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\*Giovanni Battista Vico:(1668-1744); Italian Philosopher & Historian

The Victorian and the Modern face of the story fuses into one another near the tombstone of Randolph Henry Ash and the secrets embrace with moonlight.

There are several narrators in the novel so as to create a vivid vision of two separate periods. The major one is the writer herself, being the mouth-piece of the modern researchers and their investigations; the other narrators are contributing to the flow of the novel with their poems, journals and letters. **Possession: A Romance** can be described as 'the book within-a book' since there are different mouths and hands, telling and writing the novel. The narrative richness of the novel is achieved by the connection of symbols and thematic concerns. The two separate stories of the characters, Ash- LaMotte and Roland- Maud, run through the same path with an amazing match. Byatt also uses the power of language in two different temporal zones, and this is very much to observe.

A number of issues like feminism, the condition of the women in two separate times, the question of the importance of biography industry and its reliability, the social conventions and their reflections in the relation of men and women, the modern and the postmodern, the known and the unknown, candle-lit atmospheres to TV programmes, their advantages and disadvantages are discussed, paying attention to the romantic atmosphere of the work.

**B. LITERARY POSTMODERNIST ASPECTS in  
POSSESSION: A ROMANCE**

**1. LANGUAGE, SYMBOLS AND MEANINGS  
(THE POSTMODERN ALPHABET)**

*The man's sentence is unsuited for a woman's use.*

*Virginia WOOLF*

Life of language...words have been all my life, all my life-  
this need is like the Spider's need who carries before her a  
huge Burden of Silk which she must spin out-the silk is her  
life, her home, her safety- her food and drink too- and if it is  
attacked or pulled down, why, what can she do but make  
more, spin afresh, desing anew- you will say she is patient-  
so she is- she may also be Savage- it is her Nature- she  
Must-.or die of Surfeit- do you understand me? (Christabel  
LaMotte) (Byatt, 2002: 180)

This section of the study is about the usage of 'language' the writer has chosen to pour out herself in the novel. Meanings, symbols, language games, and sentences within the novel will be examined from the point of postmodern literary culture.

When one reads the novel, the writer catches him and forces him to sit in the middle of the events; write the novel as s/he wishes, interpret the events as s/he understands but suddenly, the writer gets bored and it is time to change roles. The writer is the writer, the reader is the reader. The linguistic move and the motives carry the reader throughout the novel to unknown distances, feelings and experiences and in this section, the vehicle of this voyage will be investigated.

**Possession: A Romance** is the very book where the writer is an adventure writer observing the events and collecting some proof so as to reach the end of the investigation or is sometimes a Pre-Raphaelite artist using her pen-strokes from the palette. She creates a world of her own. When the reader reads the book, it is very easy to follow the paths, the writer has drawn beforehand.

Although the novel consists of two different times and places, the turbulent lives of two poets and the complex ongoing between the two modern researchers, she is very successful in keeping the attention of the reader until the last page.

The novel begins with the term 'the book' which has no meaning shadow in the readers' minds: "The book was thick and black and covered with dust. Its boards were bowed and creaking; it had been maltreated in its own time..." (Byatt, 2002: 1). Then the optical area starts to enlarge, covers the library where the book waits for its readers and boils over the street where the library stands. A man loiters around with some pieces of papers, goes to his house and lectures. The beginning of the novel is so smooth and silent so one can think that the other parts will complete this tempo.

When the letters are included into the flow of the novel, the time shifts create a kind of breeze in the atmosphere of the routine events. The language shows its Victorian and modern make-ups by different narrative styles in poems, letters and dairies.

The skeleton of the language changes from time to time:

Maud said she couldn't and Lady Baily said she must, and Maud said she shouldn't have set out and Lady Bailey said nonsense, and Maud said it was an imposition and Sir George said that whatever the rights and the wrongs of it, Jonie was right and he would go up to see to Mildred's bed. Roland said he would help, and Maud said by no means, and Sir George and Maud went away upstairs to find sheets, whilst Laidy Bailey filled a kettle... (Byatt, 2002: 143).

Dear Miss LaMotte,

How generous of you, after all, to write so promptly and so fully. I hope my answer is not too precipitate- I would not for the world harass you importunately- but there was so much of interest in what you said that I should like to set my thoughts down whilst they are fresh and clear... (Byatt, 2002: 162).

The pulse of the language varies from time to time so as to reflect the energetic style of the modern and the sedentary style of the mid- Victorian Period. The setting of the novel is very much to observe, especially when it is changed from the past to the present time movements. The present time is written just like a scenario, ready to shift from one screen to another:

'Feminists don't like Ash.' 'She's been seen down here, since. Maud Bailey.' 'I don't know of anything to do with LaMotte, offhand.' 'I was pretty sure Roland did. But it may have come to nothing. Or he'd have told you.'

'He probably would.'

'Exactly.'

....

Val was eating cornflakes. She ate very little else, at home... (Byatt, 2002: 300-301).



The pace of the 'camera' begins to cease when the writer sheds the papers for depiction. Modern flats are described with so many adjectives, symbols, and colors that they lose their minimalist freedom of simplicity. By this usage of language, the writer succeeds in carrying the Victorian outlook into day time and combines them with a bridge.

At this point, it will be very useful to look at the meaning and the importance of language from the Dame Antonia Susan Byatt's own word :

I write novels because I am passionately interested in. Novels are works of art which are made out of language, and are made in solitude by one person and read in solitude by one person- by many different, single people, it is to be hoped. So I am also interested in what goes on in the minds of readers, and writers, and characters and narrators in books. I like to write about people who think, to whom thinking is as important and exciting (and painful) as sex or eating. This does not mean I want my books to be celebral or simply battles of ideas. I love formal patterning in novels- I like to discover and make connections between all sorts of different people, things, way of looking, points in time and space. But I also like the idea that novels can be, as James said, 'loose baggy monsters', a generous form that can take account of almost anything. Temperamentally, and morally, I like novels with large numbers of people and centres of consciousness, not novels that adopt a narrow single point-of-view, author's or character's. I don't like novels that preach or proselytise The novel is an agnostic form- it explores and describes; the novelist and the reader learn more about the world along the length of the book (Contemporary Writers, <http://...? p=auth 20>).

Throughout the story, there are several types of characters who are the 'co-writers' of the novel without a contribution to the flow of the events: Blanche Glover betrays Christabel to Ash's wife, Ellen Ash writes the accounts of the days while her husband is away from the house for vocation, Sabine de Kercoz -Christabel's cousin- makes the journal of her stay during her pregnancy in their house. By the help of various pens, loitering in the page of the novel, the writer helps the readers to learn more about the time and human relations, but what should take the focus of attention is that none of the diaries or the writings have impact upon the events that the protagonists will face, instead they only turn on the lights of the dark room but not to open a new window.

The writer's own words about what a novel should be is the very point around which **Possession: A Romance** is built. The language in the novel just describes the world with a different taste and manner. From this point of view, postmodernist usage of language is very much to observe:

Post-structuralism is an umbrella term which encompasses recent developments within literary criticism, including work by such diverse thinkers as Michel Foucault\*, Jacques Lacan\*\*, Jacques Derrida\*\*\*, and Julia Kristeva\*\*\*\*.

A central influence is semiotics: the study of signs which have no direct correspondence with the real world.

The implication for the analysis of literary texts is that the meaning of terms is not derived from external reality, but is determined by the place of those terms within the structure of the text and by their relationship to other signs.

For example, 'female' takes on its meaning through the ways in which it is played against the term 'male' within a specific text. (Robinson and Richardson, 1997: 108).

In **Possession: A Romance**, the characters can fly away and dream about their past and present with a very single item which reminds them of a couple of minutes or a long period of time in the past. Roland Michell is usually visited by a memory of a cat-pissed ceiling, of a room with no view when he is in Maud's apartment. During his short visit to his house, he is again warned against cat-piss but he can smell it; "He could. It was the old smell of failure and sourness, with a fresh intensity to it" (Byatt, 2002: 466).

His house, therefore his past, is filled with cats and cat-piss, which makes him watch out all the time for those unforgotten failures and mistakes. As for Val, Roland's ex-girlfriend, she goes to horse races which "were like the betting shops of her childhood, smell of beer and feg ends and, it seemed to her, sawdust and male piss" (Byatt, 2002: 413). Maud remembers her relation with Fergus Wolff when she sees the 'egg-white bed' in her house.

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\* Michael Foucault: Philosopher, Historian and Cultural Critic (1926-84): He has inspired whole schools of thought with his own distinctive form of discourse analysis.

\*\* Jacques Lacan: Psychoanalyst (1901-81): He was one of the central figures of French high-structuralism with his apocalyptic style.

\*\*\* Jacques Derrida: Philosopher (1930-): He is best known for his work on the relation between thought and language

\*\*\*\* Julia Kristeva: Feminist Psychoanalyst, Linguist, Theorist and Critic (1941-): For Kristeva; language is not a fixed system, but an ongoing process, since meaning is generated out of the dynamic interplay between semiotic and symbolic, whereby each modality regulates the other.

The female language reaches its utmost when **The Fairy Melusine** is brought into the novel. The motifs and the matrix in the poems of LaMotte' poems are studied by Leonora Stern and they reflect the minute details of language, in question as follows:

The heroines of La Motte's texts are typically watery beings... The fountain does not 'spring' but 'bubbles and seeps' up into the 'still and secret' pool, with its 'low mossy stone' surrounded by 'peaks and freshenings' of 'running and closing' waters. This may all be read as a symbol of female language, which is partly suppressed, partly self-communing, dumb before the intrusive male and not able to speak out. The male fountain spurts and springs. Melusine's fountain has a 'female' wetness, trickling out from its pool rather than rising confidently, thus mirroring those female secretions which are not inscribed in our daily use of language- langue, tongue- the sputum, mucus, milk and bodily fluids of women who are silent for dryness ( Byatt, 2002: 245).

The tongue of the novel is also adorned with colours and flowers just like a painting. The writer uses the language of colours and flowers so as to reach the inner parts of her readers. Colours have a utilizing power over the characters and between their relationships. In order of their appearances or their strength over the flow of the novel, the characters are matched with colours. Paola, Blackadder's assistant, is portrayed as: "...pale Paola, her long colourless hair bound in an rubber band..." (Byatt, 2002: 27), and this shows the reader that she is one of the flattest characters

in the novel. The essence of the colours reveals what the writer wants to say to her readers.

Throughout the novel, all the colours can be grouped in two predominant colour schemes which also shows the gender battle and struggle within the novel: Earth tones- brown, grey, black- are the quintessence of masculine power and identity. Vegetable tones- green, yellow, gold, white, silver- are the quintessence of female power and identity. All these colours fuse into the landscape and the atmosphere with a vision and delightful scene. The writer also makes use of other poets so as to strengthen her vision of colours:

Never shall a young man  
 Thrown into despair  
 By those great honey-coloured  
 Ramparts at your ear  
 Love you for yourself alone  
 And not your yellow hair [From W. B. Yeats]

(Byatt, 2002: 57).

The colour 'green' is densely felt in Christabel and Maud's life from their clothing and houses that is to say their field of freedom, purely feminine. The first meeting of Maud and Roland is conquered by the colour 'green':

She was dressed... her green and white length,  
 a long pine-green tunic over a pine-green skirt,  
 a white silk shirt inside the tunic and long softly  
 white stockings inside the tunic...long shining green shoes.  
 She drove an immaculately glossy green Beetle (Byatt, 2002: 39- 40).

The same description can be read at the meeting of LaMotte and Randolph, before they set out for Breton Coast:

He learned her. He studied the pale loops of hair on her temples.  
 Their sleek silver- gold seemed to him to have in it a tinge,  
 a hint of greenness, not the copper-green of decay, but a pale  
 sap-green of vegetable life, ...and her eyes were  
 green, glass green, malachite green, the cloudy green  
 of seawater perturbed and carrying a weight of sand  
 (Byatt, 2002: 277).

The two antagonists always carry their 'greenness' with them, pinned to one of their wearings; Maud's green, silk scarf covering her beautiful blonde hair and Christabel's green leather boots. By this intermingled usage of the same colour, the writer also associates their femininity and fate. In the opening pages of the novel, Randolph Henry Ash's description of Proserpina- the gold-skinned Goddess in the land of the dead- combines the two female protagonists by the usage of the colour 'gold'. Maud's hair is blonde and metallic and Christabel's hair also contains pale loops of silver-gold. This colour also combines the two feminine characters in terms of their fertility and growth; "Despite the snow/ Despite the falling snow"  
 (Byatt, 2002: 12).

Mine the bright earth  
 Mine the corn  
 Mine the gold throne  
 To which you're born  
 Lie in my lap  
 Tumbled with flowers... (Byatt, 2002: 153).

Stephen Dondershine states in her article:

Byatt uses colours to equate the parallel narratives of the R. H. Ash - Christabel and Roland Michell- Maud story with a primal struggle between men and women. The cold fire fountain is to the Ash- LaMotte relationship what it is to the Michell- Bailey relationship: they are progressive, protean incarnations of the same conflict; they coherently reflect the theme of possession. Colour is the link that binds them. the operations of engendered colour in the fountain visually express the dynamic of Christabel's relationship with Ash. Ash is described in the shadowy earth-tones and black of the masculine colour-triad (Dondershine, <http://...dondersh.essay.html>).

Both the writer and the readers encounter dark and earthly colours when they step into the masculine aura in the novel. Now, it is time to describe the shadowy image of the masculinities in the novel and the cloudy weather is very much to observe:

He [R. H. Ash] was a handsome man, with a flowing head of very dark brown hair, almost black but with russet lights in its waves, and a glossy beard, a little browner, the colour of horse- chestnuts...He had black brows, a little rough and craggy, under which very large dark eyes looked out at the world steadily enough, fearless but held in reverse... (Byatt, 2002: 273-274).

The male characters of the novel, belonging to the modern world such as James Blackadder, the lecturer of the Ash factory in the British Museum, and Mortimer P. Cropper, the opponent of Blackadder, are coloured with black and grey, too. Blackadder “ was a grey man, with a grey skin and iron-grey hair, which he wore rather long, because he was proud that it was still so thick” (Byatt, 2002: 30-31).

Mortimer P. Cropper, the villain of the novel who tries to collect the belongings of Ash, is matched with 'black' as "He wore a long black silk dressing gown, with crimson revers, over black silk pyjamas...His slippers, mole-black velvet..."

(Byatt, 2002:93).

Leonora Stern, who has lost her feminine identity in the novel, is dedicated to both masculine and feminine colours: "Leonora was majestically large woman, in all directions. She dressed up to her size...all covered with orange...an imposing nose, a full mouth, and a mass of thick black, waving hair..." (Byatt, 2002: 310). In a way, she represents the equality in a male-dominated world.

Beatrice Nest, another colleague of Maud, is 'whitened' because of her "sedentary swelling hips, a mass of bosom, and her minimal private life"

( Byatt, 2002: 112). Val, the ex-girlfriend of Roland, wore an ivory silk shirt, displaying an amethyst necklace on a smooth throat, above a purple skirt, the colour which shows her sexual happiness with her new boy friend Euan MacIntyre. The old woman in Whitby Harbour selling ornaments is "a very small woman... with a large apron covered with purple and grey florets, over a skinny black jumper..Her eyes were Viking blue..." (Byatt, 2002: 258). Her body is not in our focus of attention, but the jewellery that combines the past and the present of the story also combines the colours from the past and the present because the old woman almost seems to be made of colours.

The writer speaks and communicates in colours. In this way, she saves the novel from being a 'black and white' film atmosphere, making it a vivid past and present.



## 2. THE BRICOLAGE TREND

### (WHEN WERE YOU BORN?...)

This section has one clear motto: 'Master narratives are not true all the time in reflecting the history.' For this purpose the novel will be studied in the light of letters, journals and poems unknown by the majority of the researchers in the work.

Postmodern trend towards 'bricolage', the use of bits and pieces of old artifacts to produce a new, if not 'original' work of art, a work which blurs the traditional distinctions between the old and the new even as it blurs between high and low art makes the most of a novel.

Everything begins with only a piece of a letter which turns the biography industry up and down. It also shows the readers that the ties between the past and present are not and cannot be cut with biographical lists and books. The impact of the past is not far away from the modern face of history, and the people are walking around the borders of the past, willingly or unwillingly.

The metanarrative of history is powerfully affective throughout the novel, the past and the present are scattered randomly in the novel; just like the postmodern time. "There are things which happen and leave no discernible trace, are not spoken or written of, though it would be very wrong to say that subsequent events go on indifferently, all the same, as though such things had never been" (Byatt, 2002: 508).

When considering the story telling in **Possession:A Romance**, it immediately attracts the attention of the readers that the past occasionally exists on the same plane as the present. It is so because the writer tries to show the postmodern idea that 'master narratives should be investigated and questioned by the present studies.'

For this purpose, the writer makes the literary critics natural detectives. This is Maud and Roland's situation in the novel because:

You know, if you read the collected letters of any writer -if you read her biography- you will always get a sense that there's something missing, something biographers don't have access to, the real thing, the crucial thing, that really mattered to the poet herself. There are always letters that were destroyed. The letters, usually. These may be those letters, in Christabel's life.

He- Ash – obviously thought they were. He says so  
(Byatt, 2002: 89).

The criticism of the 'biography industry' is written by the help the character, named Mortimer P. Cropper. Several pages are allocated to his biographical past, and the writer creates a notion that although even the moments of his life are written in the papers; we, as the readers, can not sense the real intention of his appearance in the novel. He is the villain, the merciless collector of any work or piece belongs to Randolph Henry Ash. His main aim comes to surface with his behaviours, not with his adorned biography. Also the life account of Christabel and the related works about her are included in the novel, but when the reader dives into the investigations, it can be easily deleted from the minds because her biography is not the real Christabel, but just a mid-Victorian poetess.

The writer makes use of Ash's ventriloquist acts about the myth of 'Proserpina', who rises from the underworld every six months therefore she is associated with springtime and regeneration.

Every single item which looks very innocent in the novel turns out to be an evidence and helps the two detectives, Maud and Roland, in their investigation.

For instance; when they are in Seal Court looking at Christabel's room, they encounter with some dolls for which LaMotte wrote a series of poems. They were ostensibly for children, but the poem secrets a clue. Maud says, "It sounds, in here, like a treasure-hunt clue...As though Dolly is hiding something" (Byatt, 2002: 83). Then they find the hidden letters of the correspondence between the poets.

The story in the novel is left open ended because the writer is trying to be an obedient follower of the postmodernist vision about master narratives. Although Ash's belongings are found in his grave, the writer does not create an atmosphere that everything is solved and they reach the end of their investigation. In the last chapter, it seems that the novel is preparing to draw its curtains since each character decides to do something about their future. But when the readers turn the page over, they come face to face with a '*Postscript 1868*' which consists of the meeting of two people, never mentioned in the history of biography writing. The real truth is served to the readers so that, the child of Ash and Christabel meets her real father once, although Christabel has not revealed their child, Ash understands that he has a daughter.

The nature of biography industry is not totally overcome because this tradition is a continuous feature. That is the very reason the writer adds 'postscript' at the end of the novel in which the truth about Ash and his daughter is shared between the reader and the writer: "And on the way home, she met her brothers, and there was a rough-and-tumble, and the lovely crown was broken, and she forgot the message, which was never delivered" (Byatt, 2002: 511). Ash and the little girl share a couple of moments, and his name is not mentioned but described as; "there was a man, tall,

bearded, his face in shadow under a wide-brimmed hat, a wanderer coming up the lane, between high hedges, with an ashplant in his hand and the look of a walker” ( Byatt, 2002: 509). ‘The man’ can be filled with several characters in the history since there are a lot of unknown stories, matching theirs; so the writer does not minimize but leaves an open end.

“ As a postmodern revisioning of Melusine ... Maud represents her society’s eagerness to possess the Past, while the contemporary level of Byatt’s novel reveals that instead we are possessed by that Past” (Lesch, <http://...klposs.1.html>).

The flow of the novel has a fragmented order, immensely intruded by the letters, journals and poems coming from the past. This fragmentation does not prevent the reader from reading and understanding what goes in the novel. Because the writer combines the past and the present with symbols and references, that prepare the readers for the coming events. There are several evidences that notify this attitude in the work: Randolph Henry Ash’s poem **The Great Collector** is situated at the beginning of the biographical information of his life; his another poem, **Mummy Possess**, comes after the spiritual seances that he attends. The very important poem of Christabel LaMotte, **The Fiary Melusine**, comes after the nights that Christabel and Ash share in a hotel room in Breton Coast.

The fragments do not puzzle the minds of the readers’ since the events are tied to one another with invisible bonds. At the very beginning of the novel, Randolph Henry Ash’s ventriloquist poem **The Garden of Proserpina** (1861), the part that tells Heracles’s theft of apples from the Garden of Proserpina, is connected with the love making of Maud and Roland at the (end) of the novel:

In the morning, the whole world had a strange new smell.  
 It was the smell of the aftermath, a green smell, a smell of  
 shredded leaves and oozing resin, of crushed wood and  
 splashed sap, a tart smell, which bore some relation to the  
 smell of bitten apples. It was the smell of death and  
 destruction and it smelled fresh and lively and hopeful  
 ( Byatt, 2002: 507).

Added to this, the vision of Ash's daughter at the end of the novel in a corn field resembles the coming out of Persephone from the underworld every six months and the starting of spring time. Ash says the part of that poem while he cut a lock of hair from Maia's (the name of the daughter) hair:

...that fair field  
 Of Enna, where Proserpina gathering flowers,  
 Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis  
 Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain  
 To seek her through the world? (Byatt, 2002: 510).

Christabel's poem **The Fairy Melusina** is very much felt especially at the very moments that Maud and Roland share together. Just like Melusina's husband scrutinizes her, Roland does the same when Maud pulls off her hair " Her hair snaked down her back, and her tail snaked down the rock " ( Byatt, 2002: 260). Also when they are in Seal Court, spending one night, Roland puts his eye to the key hole and peeps Maud in the bathroom just like Melusina's husband does.

The characters also meditate their fragmentations in their own characters:

Narcissism, the unstable self, the fractured ego, Maud thought, who am I ? A matrix for a susurration of texts and codes? It was both a pleasant and an unpleasant idea, this requirement that she think of herself as intermittent and partial. There was the question of the awkward body. The skin, the breath, the eyes, the hair, their history, which did seem to exist ( Byatt, 2002: 251).

As Roland "... had nothing in the world but Maud- no home, no job, no future- and these very negatives made it impossible that Maud would long go on taking him seriously or desiring his presence" ( Byatt, 2002: 432).

Apart from the individual conflicts and the fragmentational 'wholeness' of the work, the writer also makes use of the hermeneutical project of reading in which the writer extracts herself from the flow of the occurrences and the text lives its own independence. Especially the fifteenth chapter in which Christabel and Randolph meets at the station to go to Breton Coast, the reader finds the writer away from the happenings. The writer is out of the text, observing and sharing the role of the reader; she does not mention the names of the characters as if she does not know, either. 'He' and 'she' pronouns linger in the atmosphere of the station until the arrival in Breton Coast.

With the writer, the reader cannot help guessing the 'he-she' coupling and trying to label several names. The information only comes from the pair, but not from the writer: they give a time break for an attempt to pencil their love among the bold-type written letters. These are the very moments that the couple share only for

their own memory; so the writer does not disturb the time, place and setting by chasing after them.

They were very powerful, indeed, since they were the forebearers of their descendants:

Somewhere in the locked-away letters, Ash had referred to the plot or fate which seemed to hold or drive the dead lovers. Roland thought, partly with precise postmodernist pleasure, and partly with a real element of superstitious dread, that he and Maud were being driven by a plot or fate that seemed, at least possibly, to be not their plot or fate but that of those others ( Byatt, 2002: 421).



### 3. FEMINISM

#### (THE POSTMODERN FEMININE TOUCH)

A Woman is a foreign land  
 Of which, though he settle young,  
 A man will never quite understand  
 The custom, politics, and tongue.\*

This section of the study will examine the novel from a feminist point of view. There will be two distinct issues so as to criticise the work. First, an analysis of feminism throughout the postmodern culture will be studied. Next, the feminist epistemologies in **Possession: A Romance** will be exemplified.

It will be useful to state at the beginning of the study that **Possession: A Romance** is not a kind of a novel which tries to add a new mile stone to the history of feminism and its battle with masculine power. It is a 'postmodern romance' in which the expectations of the readers from a romance are changed and mingled with the present time. "... a romance, the 'modern-text' of all those novels-written, and, read by women- in which innocent heroine meets brooding hero and lives happily ever after" (Robinson and Richardson, 1997: 118).

**Possession**, when compared to the definition of 'romance', is not a romance, though the two dominant characters are women; Christabel La Motte and Maud Bailey. They are not designed and written to please their feminine readers since they are under the influence of their own identities, untouched by the social and ethical conventions.

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\*Coventry Patmore: English poet (1823-96), **The Angel in the House**



They stand like ‘private persons versus traditionally brought up women’ in mid-Victorian Period and modern English time. From this point of view, **Possession** has a ‘smooth atmosphere periodically stormed with postmodern air actions’, which contributes to the post structuralist feminism: “ Post-structuralist feminist analyses reject the idea of an authentic female voice or experience, but see the women’s writing as a means of understanding patriarchy, mapping the possible subject positions open to women.” (Robinson and Richardson, 1997: 108).

**Possession** portrays Maud as a contemporary character and she tries to create a hidden and an anti-chaotic life out of a 1980’s modern living system deprived of love, faith, emotion and filled with technology, disorder. When it comes to the other leading character, Christabel La Motte, she is depicted as an ‘a woman with a rejection to the sedentary Victorian life.’

The two feminine protagonists are introduced by masculine visions, named as Roland Michell and Randolph Henry Ash. Christabel is to have an extraordinary conversation :

“ Dear Madam,

Since our extraordinary conversation I have thought of nothing else”

(Byatt, 2002: 5).

Maud Bailey is, from the point of view of Roland Michell: “ She would be hard to miss, if not to recognise” (Byatt, 2002: 38).

Although the feminine characters are introduced by the masculine power detections, Christabel and Maud have a free consciousness and thought, and they are walking on the line of feminist borders. Maud “thicks men’s blood with cold”

(Byatt, 2002: 34) and Christabel chooses to live with Blanche and in a lesbian relationship. They both scatter the men around by their free will. Although the two protagonist female characters live in two distinct times, they meet almost the same difficult conditions. As Lerner states, "...up until the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is rare to find a female writer who did not have to pay for her intellectual productivity with a distorted and unhappy life" (Lerner, 1993: 179).

In order to gain their autonomy, they need to close their relations around the world and that is why Maud can "do nothing with ease and grace except work alone, inside these walls and curtains, her bright safe box" (Byatt, 2002: 136).

The term 'enclosed space' is very much observed in Byatt's usage in **Possession: A Romance**. The writer always portrays it as an exclusively feminine zone. The two protagonists, Maud and Christabel, seldom emerge from their crusts. Christabel, the Victorian poetess, shares her house with Blanche, and Maud lives in her pristine apartment, having no alien footprint on the surface and works in her tower-like office. The other feminine characters of **Possession**- Val, Ellen Ash, Beatrice Nest, Lady Bailey- are defined by their enclosed spaces, and see masculine steps as 'intruders'. When Roland and Maud meet at the station and drive to Lincoln University, this is the first step that Roland takes into Maud's field of freedom. Just like an animal, "she smelled of something ferny and sharp. Roland didn't like her voice" (Byatt, 2002: 39). The writer makes use of animal's defence mechanism so as to show her irritation against a masculine breathing in her aura.

It goes on the same way when they come to Women's Studies Block. Roland hesitates to enter, but he is 'allowed naturally' with a frigid, forbidding voice. Also, Ash writes about his first impressions after he pays 1:00 pm. / Tuesday afternoon

visit to Christabel's house as: " I think your house didn't love me, I should not have come" (Byatt, 2002: 198).

Christabel's implications about a house can be easily understood via her poem, untitled:

What is a House? So strong- so square  
 Making a Warmth inside the winds  
 We walk with lowered eyelids there  
 And silent go- behind the blinds... (Byatt, 2002: 210).

'Yet heart may tap like loaded bombs' as the poetess blurs out her real intention, her desire to explode into the outer world. In the novel, Byatt creates two distinct images of women, possessing two conflicting wills; ' make your body stay indoor, let your desires scatter around'.

The women of Queen Victoria and the modern world bear the two contrasting desires and Christabel reflects these two binary oppositions in her poem **The City Of Is**, a Briton Legend.

The city is ruled by Queen Dahud, the sorceress daughter of King Gradlond, and the city is drowned in the sea for its wickedness. During the sink, the queen does not want to move but she desires to feel the destructive power step by step. She is in her safe place but wants to know;

...The height and movement of the sea  
 His colour and his strategy (Byatt, 2002: 331).

The self imprisonment causes 'a panic of identity' as Barry Lewis suggests in **Postmodernism And Literature(or: Word Salad Days, 1960-90)**: "To compensate for their hopelessness of their predicaments, these paranoids long for a state of complete fluidity and openness. However, their impulse towards freedom is tainted

both by their terror of the actual open road and their cynicism about possible escape” (Sim, 1999: 130).

For the purpose of showing her imprisonment, which is the most important problem that feminism handles more seriously from the very beginning, Christabel writes the story of a tailor and a princess in the glass coffin:

‘There was once a little tailor ...’ says the story and he counters a very beautiful princess, waiting for someone to rescue her from her coffin. The princess is very passive throughout the story unlike the queen in **The City Of Is**.

But then between the fronds he saw a face, the most beautiful face he could have dreamed or imagined... Her gold hair lay around her like mantle, but where its strands crossed her face they stirred a little when her breathing, so that the tailor knew she was alive. And he knew- it is always so, after all- that the true adventure was the release of this sleeper who would be his grateful bride... (Byatt, 2002: 63).

As it can be easily observed the women have two undesirable choices; stay indoors or let a man liberate you in the form of marriage. Although Maud and Roland are sharing the partnership about the investigation of the letters, Maud can not accept Roland as her match from the very beginning, and she shows it when they give a break on their way to Seal Court. She stands on the rim of the pool observing herself but; “...A figure loomed black on the white, a hand touched her arm with a huge banging, an unexpected electric shock. It was meek Roland. Maud screamed. And screamed a second time, and scrambled to her feet, furious.” (Byatt, 2002: 142). The sorceress and the princess like characters of the writer form a single unit in Christabel’s epic poem, **The Fairy Melusina** and it is accepted as being the very

important literary work of feminism by Maud, Leonora Stern and in a way by all feminist critics.

Sabine Baring-Gould writes about the fairy in her chapter **Curious Myths Of The Middle Ages** ( Baring-Gould, 1877 ) that in French mythology, Melusina or Melusine, was a water-sprite and the legend became extremely popular during the middle-ages, especially in the northern regions of France. Melusina was a cherished figure among noblemen and members of the royalty. The following part summarizes the story of Melusina by Homeira Foth:

Emmerick, the count of Poitou, is a wealthy and generous nobleman with two children, Bertram and Blanifert. One day as Emmerick comes back from a hunting trip he meets another count, the Count de la Foret, who through some misfortune, has lost all of his money. Out of kindness, Emmerick allows him to live on his land, he also adopts his eldest son, Raymond. Raymond and Emmerick become good friends and they go on several hunting trips. However, on one tragic trip, Emmerick is attacked by a wild boar, Raymond in an effort to save him, takes out of his sword and kills the boar as well as Emmerick. In the height of despair, Raymond comes upon a fountain in the middle of the forest: *Le Fontaine de Soif* (the Fountain of Thirst). Sitting by the fountain are three women dressed in white. Raymond has never seen a sight as beautiful as the three women. One of the women introduces herself as 'Melusina'. Raymond becomes enchanted by the beauty and the wisdom of the woman and asks her hand in marriage. Melusina says she will marry Raymond on one condition: He is not allowed to see her on Saturdays, under any circumstances. He agrees to her terms, and they get married. They have numerous children, yet every one of them is strangely deformed in some manner. They live peacefully for a

number of years. However, one Saturday night, during dinner, Raymond's father and his brother teases him about his wife's secretive behaviours, so he quietly opens the door to the bath just enough to see an unbelievable sight: Melusina, from the waist up, is her beautiful self; yet, from the waist down, her body has transformed into a giant serpent's tale. Raymond does not mention what he saw for sometime. One day, when they had a quarrel about their children he pushed her away and said: ' Away odious serpent, contaminator of an honorable race!' He regrets to what he says but it was too late. She transforms herself into her serpentine form and flew away (Foth, <http://...fr-essay.html>).

In the novel, A.S.Byatt introduces to us how Christabel interprets the tale in her modernized Victorian style. She tries to question the men's vision of Melusina:

And what was she, the Fairy Melusine?  
 Men say, at night, around the castle-keep  
 The black air ruffles neath the outstretched vans  
 Of a long flying worm, whose sinewy tail  
 And leather pinions beat the parted sky (Byatt, 2002: 289).

In fact, her aim is not to add something new to the masculine literary criticism of the tale, but instead she points out the imperfect and ugly description of female power throughout history:

But let the Power take a female form  
 And'tis the Power is punished.All men shrink  
 From dire Medusa and her writhing lock.

...

Daughter of Hecate, beautiful as Night? (of course-No!-)  
 Who weeps the fall of Hydra's many heads?  
 (Byatt, 2002: 292)

She is also fed up with the injustice between man and woman in terms of sharing power:

Man named Himself and thus assumed the Power  
 Over his Questioner, till the his Fate-  
 After, his slave and victim

(Byatt, 2002: 292)

At the end of the proem, she also shows her faithfulness to her religious beliefs:

My modern mind to those of ancient days  
 To the dark dreaming Origins of our race,  
 ..., O thou, the source of speech  
 Give me wise utterance and safe conduct  
 From hearthside storytelling into dark  
 Of outer air, and back again to sleep,  
 In Christian comfort, in a decent bed

(Byatt, 2002: 293)

In Book I, LaMotte combines the two contrasting images of princess and sorceress in her epic poem, **The Fairy Melusine**. Melusine is a half-human, half-snake and this shows her split nature and the disunity of usual fairy-tale roles. When it is read, it can be observed that LaMotte's power image is depicted much better and she does not share the same doom with her counterparts.

...And on the rock a lady sat and sang.  
 Sang to herself most clear and quietly  
 A small clear golden voice that seemed to run  
 Without the need to breathe or pause for thought,  
 Simple and endless as the moving fall,  
 Surprising as the springs that bubbled up...

(Byatt, 2002: 296)

The writer places the tale after the chapter in which Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte go to Breton Coast for Ash's investigations on nature, insects, and soil. With this journey, Christabel opens the door of her enclosed, secret, and totally feminine part to him. It is very strange and difficult to share the same bed with a male but she cannot resist it for a long time. Just like Raymond, the hero, scrutinizes the Fairy Melusina – this is the very point that they step into their privates- Randolp does the same and he conquers her, but she fights:

When he took her in his arms, it was she who said, harshly,  
 'Are you afraid?'  
 'Not in the least, now,' he said. 'My selkie, my white lady,  
 Christabel (Byatt, 2002: 283).

Christabel and Fairy Melusina are the mysterious beings and, infact, they get their feminine victory over the masculine occupations and the lines are:

...And his gaze took the brightness of her glance  
 As dusty heather takes the tumbling rays  
 Of the sun's countenance and shines them back.  
 Now was he hers, if she should ask of him  
 Body or soul, he would have offered all.  
 And seeing this, at last, the Fairy smiled (Byatt, 2002: 298).

...

You are safe with me [says, Randolph].  
 I am not at all safe, with you. But I have no desire to be elsewhere.  
 [says, Christabel] (Byatt, 2002: 284)

As her modern counterpart, Maud also experiences the same irritations when she has to share her apartment with Roland Michell. Because her flat is her own field of freedom, she cannot accept the presence of a man, although men have the



omnipotence of possessing everywhere in the world. When she studies a paper about Freud and shares the same atmosphere with Roland,

She was wholly aware of Roland...She felt the fuzz of his soft black hair, starting up above his brow, with imaginary fingers. She felt his frown between her eyes. He felt his occupation was gone; she felt his feeling. He felt he was *lurking*. If he went out of the room it would be grey and empty. If he did *not* go out of it, how could she concentrate?  
(Byatt, 2002: 430)

One can question if a woman be defined as feminist if she is the only runner of her house? This question is answered by the writer by using Randolph Henry Ash's wife, Ellen Ash. During her husband's vacation to Breton Coast, her writings from her diary are included in the book given to Maud by her colleague, Beatrice Nest. Ellen represents the dominated figure by her period, and her husband. The writer sets up the situation of women in the Victorian Period by the help of Ellen's habitual behaviours. "Master of this house is absent" (Byatt, 2002: 224), says Ellen, during the absence of Randolph, and she is much occupied with the house and her servants' problems. She displays her character in her diary; the handwritings are as follows: "[She played a chess with her friend]...moving my Queen freely across the diagonals. It is odd, when I think of it, that in chess the female may make the large runs and cross freely in all ways- in life it is much otherwise" (Byatt, 2002: 228). Ellen Ash has a severe migraine, and she even does not even want it to hurt her husband's comfort: "When he returns, I must be quick and lively. It must be so" (Byatt, 2002:232).

Throughout the novel, Ellen has to moderate her temper against her husband's secret relationship with Christabel La Motte. She plays the role of a devoted wife, being more understanding and tolerant. She creates 'an excuse' in her mind as 'I am no passionate and young'. She has no sexual desire for her husband. She prefers to be a housewife, which she has a great success according to her period, and a mother, which she has failed to be. The writer reveals her honeymoon, the short piece of time that Ellen cannot disclose even to herself, by the help of images:

She did not remember it in words. There were no words attached to it, that was part of the horror. She had never spoken of it to anyone, not even to Randolph, precisely not to Randolph. She remembered it in images.

A thin white animal, herself, trembling.

A complex thing, the naked male, curly hairs and shining wet, at once bovine and dolphin like, its scent feral and overwhelming.

A running creature, crouching and cowering in the corner of the room, its teeth chattering, its veins clamped in spasms, its breath shallow and fluttering. Herself.

An attempt. A hand not pushed away. Tendons like steel, teeth in pain, clenched, clenched.

The approach, the locked gateway, the panic, the whimpering fight.

Not once, but over and over and over (Byatt, 2002:458-459).

Throughout her life, Ellen, perhaps for the first time, criticises her devoted part to Randolph with the letter from Christabel, while she is accompanying her husband in his dead-bed. When she learns that they have a baby, she rejects her own status in the house and realizes that her husband accepted her as Ellen, his wife, but not his lover and his lady. He loved her devotion, her appearance in the house, may

be their chess parties and the domestic comfort, but not 'the real her'. She makes a very harsh conclusion about their couplings; "That other woman was in one sense his true wife. Mother, at least briefly, of his child, it seemed" (Byatt, 2002: 460).

The writer sets up different alternations of sexual preferences in the form of Leonora Stern, the colleague of Maud, and the relation of Christabel with Blanche Glover. The group of those people, including the writer in the form of a mental investigation, search for satisfactions in their times. Perverse sexuality does not bring something new, fresh, and happy to the characters, in the novel. "In deed, for Byatt, nineteenth century ideas about sexuality seem to be just as problematic for the individual as modern notion of sex" (Fronek, <http://...jlpomo3.html>).

Randolph's and Christabel's sexual activity are buried with the correspondence, and the improper relation results in Maia, their daughter; not aware of her real parents and she calls her real mother 'aunt', with whom she does not have a close relationship. "The management of Victorian and Victorian-derived sexuality in Byatt's.... texts reveals that any faith in narrative will produce only another set of false beliefs" (Fronek, <http://...jlpomo 3.html>).

The queer sexual identity of Leonora Stern and her interest in Maud, does not give Maud a real satisfaction. Maud is in confusion, and she is not sure whether she should accept a male shadow into her life. Loving Roland threatens her precious autonomy and her ability to do her work. What is strange is that in the novel, men do not bother themselves about the ongoings of their relations with women, for instance; Roland does not perceive that the relationship threatens his own career.

At the end of 'their story', they both question their end. Maud wants her autonomy back and does not share the same doom with her sister, Christabel: "I feel as she did. I keep my defences up because I must go on *doing my work*. I know how she felt about her unbroken egg. Her self-possession, her autonomy. I don't want to think of that going. You understand?" (Byatt, 2002: 506)

She thinks and judges love from the point of view of Christabel, feeling herself and looking 'icily regular, splendidly null'. The writer chooses to end their connection in a 'modern way' and with this ending, anyone who reads the novel will easily interpret their end since the reader is probably experiencing a modern relationship. The writer also avoids the question of what becomes of them. "Oh, love is terrible, it is a wrecker" (Byatt, 2002: 507) says, Maud but they find a modern way to put up with its destructions unlike their forebears who struggled with it before.

The morning atmosphere in both relations is very much to observe; the first one represents an ending without a real beginning, the second one is not a conclusion but a modern starting:

In the morning, washing, he found traces of blood on his thighs. He had thought, the ultimate things, she did not know, and here was ancient proof. He stood, sponge in hand, and puzzled over her. Such delicate skills, such informed desire, and yet a virgin (Byatt, 2002: 284-285).

The morning seance of LaMotte and Ash's relation is the vision of 'blood' that ends the possible continuation. The full stop of the coupling is very sharp enough to make the readers understand that something is wrong.

In the morning, the whole world had a new smell. It was the smell of the aftermath, a green smell, a smell of shredded leaves and oozing resin, of crushed wood and splashed sap, a tart smell, which bore some relation to the smell of bitten apples. It was the smell of death and destruction and it smelled fresh and lively and hopeful (Byatt, 2002: 507).

Maud and Roland bear the compensation of their forebears with the smell of 'death and destruction', but also it is a new beginning in their own modern time. The love making smells of 'a bitten apple' reminding the readers passion, sin and freshness.



#### 4. THE INFLUENCE OF MASS-MEDIA

**Possession: a Romance** is a very rich book, making use of different kinds of mediated and unmediated experiences. The work consists of journals, letters and poems written by the flat and round characters. The purpose, here, is to fuse into the minds of the readers by means of several ways of expositions.

This aim of the chapter is to underline the importance and also the influence of 'television' in postmodern culture. The novel implies the usage of television channels and their power in interpreting the written works of history and literature. They have an invisible potential of cutting and shaping the 'already shaped' materials and serving them for their own audiences.

The entrance of the image and the vision of a television setting in the novel, carries the investigation of the letters to a different point of understanding. The professor James Blackadder from The British Museum and Leonora Stern are invited to discuss the finding of the secret corresponding, carried by the young researchers Maud and Roland. It can be natural to think at first that literary programmes should deal with such findings so as to make them reach thousands of people. But what is held during the programme is not the kind that a literature lover will find 'fruitful'. What is dealt during the programme is what is expected to attract the attention of its audiences. Because;

TV, as a cultural technology and as an apparatus, involves complex interrelationships between producers, advertisers, texts and audiences. Its postmodern dimensions emerge most fully within these interrelationships and in thinking more broadly about TV as a social and cultural phenomenon

( O' Day in Sim, 1998: 113).

Before the programme begins Blackadder and Leonora agree upon some strategies about their interpretations:

...Make'em cry. Think what you got to say and  
get it said whatever that pretty creature out there tries  
to get you say...

...One thing you'll get said in the time, and that's  
your lot, Professor.

...One sexy thing, Professor ( Byatt, 2002: 402).

Clearly, the programme dwells upon the specific point that 'the letters smell sexuality only', since it attracts the most attention, very much oriented by cultural and social preferences. This orientation is also the focus of attention of the movie, watched by the thousands of cinema goers.

### III. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to first, examine the postmodern culture from different aspects and their reflections to the world of letters, literature. In order to create a good understanding of the post modernist tradition, it would be useful to touch upon the pre-phase of this culture. Modernism was remembered so as to open an entrance to the postmodern period.

The second and the main aim of the study was to reflect the tenets of postmodernism to Antonia Susan Byatt's novel: **Possession: a Romance**. The features of the literary movement in question are grouped and each part was interpreted with the novel. The echoing of the literary movement is exemplified with the instances from the novel. Added to the novel, numerous sources were cited.

Much of the novel insists upon the idea that 'master narratives can not be the sole sources to understand and learn the history'. They should be studied, rewritten; something should be added or cut as a devotion to the postmodern literary culture. **Possession: A Romance** is not a love story or a bibliographical work of letters, but they are 'used' in the novel. Letters are the way to understand the reality, the crucial part of what is felt and experienced in the lives of the characters. The choice of the characters are not from the daily life of Victorian Period, on the contrary Christabel and Randolph are the ones who are known and read and also are the ones who are studied over and over by modern researchers. The writer makes this choice deliberately in order to show that there can be something missing in the lives of well-known people, although they attract the attention of so many people. The book can be seen as a satire on the 'modern biography industry'. Biographers are very much possessed by their works that they can not see, or do not want to see, what lies or



should lie behind their study. If the nature of possession gets the biographer, he can easily be affected by the demands of his period and he discards the illusion of being 'real' or 'deeper'.

This study also tries to show the impact of the past and its influence over the faith of the characters. Maud and Roland rewrite and live again the secret relation of Randolph and Christabel, even at the same places. For instance; Maud and Christabel decide to visit a place called Boggle Hole solely because they like the name, not realizing that Ash and LaMotte walked on the same stones; their trip to a jewellery shop to buy a present brings the truth of Maud's brooch once belonged to Christabel.

The writer pours out her thoughts from Roland's mouth as:

Roland thought, partly with precise postmodernist pleasure, and partly with a real element of superstitious dread, that he and Maud were being driven by a plot or fate that seemed, at least possibly, to be not their plot or fate but that of those others (Byatt, 2002: 421).

Apart from the powerful impact of history over the characters, feministic issues are also the very nature of the novel. All of the female characters in the work are 'sisters', regardless of their time of existence. The novel smells something of feminine instinct and the usage of language is on the side of female characters. They are depicted more powerfully, making use of myths and nature whereas the male characters give the readers a kind of an 'intruder' identity. The events revolve around the females and the role of the males is just to fill in the 'gaps'.

All of the aspects of postmodern age can easily be observed throughout the novel; from the letters to TV screens. This mode of writing gives the 'bricolage' style of the age, in question. The events, sounds, words, identities, feelings, desires are the shareholders of the novel and they do create a very smooth and harmonical couplings. The novel is wholeheartedly intelligent in its story telling against its story zig-zags and it fills the reader with an unembarrassed zest till the end.

This study has described various features of postmodernism and its literary aspects in A.S. Byatt's **Possession: A Romance**. There is no doubt that it is a postmodern novel, represents the bits and pieces of the literary culture in question.

It is partly feministic in terms of the gender relations between the male and the female characters containing **The Fairy Melusina**, the Bible of feminism.

The novel is also the descendant of bricolage trend with its letters, journals and diaries forming a new mode of story telling. The language games with symbols and meanings leave a photographic memory in the minds of the readers.

By the help of this study, special parts of postmodernism has come into surface on the level of **Possession: A Romance**.

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