

A. S. Byatt's *Possession*: Campus Novel Meets Detective Novel

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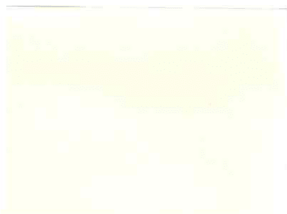
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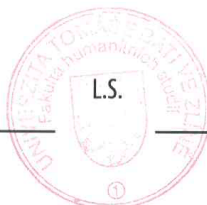
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na analýzu románu A. S. Byattové *Posedlost* s cílem prokázat, že je román příkladem různorodé kombinace detektivní fikce, univerzitního románu, milostného románu, historiografické metafikce, Novo-viktoriánské fikce a feministického románu. První část bakalářské práce se soustředí na klíčové životní a kariérní momenty A. S. Byattové. Následující kapitola pak přiblíží termíny postmodernismus a postmoderní literatura. Závěrečná kapitola obsahuje analýzu románu.

Klíčová slova:

A. S. Byattová, *Posedlost*, postmodernismus, milostný román, detektivní fikce, univerzitní román, historiografická metafikce, Novo-viktoriánská fikce, feministický román

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis aims to examine A. S. Byatt's novel *Possession: A Romance* and demonstrates that the novel is a curious mixture of detective fiction, campus novel, romance, historiographic metafiction, Neo-Victorian fiction and feminist novel. In the first part, the thesis focuses on key moments from Byatt's life and career, followed by the introduction of the book. The second chapter introduces the postmodern movement and includes an introduction to postmodern literature. The last chapter includes an analysis of the novel.

Keywords:

A. S. Byatt, *Possession*, postmodernism, romance, detective fiction, campus novel, historiographic metafiction, Neo-Victorian fiction, feminist novel

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to examine the acclaimed and well discussed novel *Possession: A Romance* by A. S. Byatt and will simultaneously focus on the novel's incorporation of a mixture of postmodern elements and different genres such as detective novel, campus novel, romance, historiographic metafiction, historical novel, Neo-Victorian novel and feminist novel.

Possession: A Romance (1990) is a novel written by the contemporary British writer A. S. Byatt that became a literary sensation and earned Byatt worldwide readership and fame. The novel is labelled one of the best English romances of the late 90s and was the top-selling book that won The Booker Prize in 1990. *Possession* was made into a movie in 2002, but unfortunately, the adaptation was not nearly as successful as the book, despite the all-star cast with Gwyneth Paltrow and Aaron Eckhart. The author Dame Antonia Susan Byatt, is an English scholar, literary critic, and novelist who publishes under the name A. S. Byatt. She is the daughter of a judge and a teacher, and her sister Margret Drabble is also a proclaimed novelist herself. Byatt graduated from the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge and Bryn Mawr College and taught at University College London. She published dozens of novels, for example, *Angels and Insects* (1992), *Babel Tower* (1997), *The Biographer's Tale* (2000), as well as short stories and critical works.

The novel is mainly a love story and a detective story, taking place in the academic environment. The narrative is composed of two parallel plot lines. One is set in the 19th century and one in the 20th century. The plot follows Roland Mitchell, a young struggling research assistant, who discovers letters written by famous Victorian poet Randolph Henry Ash addressed to an unknown woman while studying Ash's works in the London Library. Roland believes that the unknown woman might be the underrated Victorian poetess Christabel LaMotte, who was recently rediscovered by feminists. Acting on his colleague's advice, Roland visits and joins forces with a lecturer, feminist and expert on LaMotte Maud Baily. Working together, they find a piece of evidence in the form of correspondence between Ash and LaMotte, and their quest for the truth begins. They start to investigate this secret love affair, following the leads of the two poets, while slowly falling in love with each other.

Possession is a combination of different novelistic subgenres: A romance novel since the plot introduces and follows relationships between the main and the side characters in the past and the present. A campus novel because of the main narrative being set in the academic

environment, therefore in premises of a university and its campus, and the characters are academics themselves. Although Byatt's main characters are not investigating a crime, which is the main element in most detective fiction, they still collect evidence, search for clues, try to solve the mystery and finally discover the truth. The novel can also be interpreted as feminist fiction, although the feminist theme of the book is not that predominant. Byatt presents Christabel LaMotte, who is a strong female character, not a prototype of a typical modest Victorian woman. Christabel is an artist, an astonishing poetess, full of courage, living with her possible lover Blanche Glover in a lesbian relationship. She wants to break from the burdens and limitations of the 19th century. Last but not least, the novel is an example of a Neo-Victorian novel due to Byatt's incorporation of historical narrative.

In the second half of the 20th century, the post-World War II era, a new form of a movement known as postmodernism, the successor and response to modernism, originated. Postmodernism is a broad movement developed across philosophy, literature, the arts, architecture, cinematography, and music. The movement originated as a response of society that was trying to cope with the terrors of the Second World War and trying to restore what was left. The significant events that influenced and shaped this movement were the civil rights movements in the US, the erection of the Berlin Wall and the European colonies' dissolution. The postmodern authors began to depart from the more traditional approach and started to experiment in their works. The common features of postmodernism used in literature are irony, intertextuality, pastiche, metafiction, historiographic metafiction, temporal distortion, maximalism, minimalism, and magic realism.

As postmodern fiction, *Possession* has two parallel storylines linked together and in which various postmodern elements can be seen. For illustrative purposes, Byatt's usage of intertextuality is evident right from the novel's start. The novel starts with a preface to "The House of the Seven Gables" by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Intertextuality accompanies the whole book, and it challenges the reader's knowledge of other Victorian-era literary works. Another element of postmodernism used by Byatt is fragmentation. Byatt applies it by switching modes between letters, poetry, journals, and short extracts and switching between the genres. From a postmodern perspective, the novel is also considered historiographical metafiction, a combination of metafiction with history writing. Byatt employs many postmodern features in her novel while simultaneously challenging the postmodernist theories and action and showing her complex relationship with the genre. Another element Byatt uses is parody and ridicule. She parodies the contemporary academics to display the mentality of the literary

academic world of the twentieth century and make a statement on contemporary feminism through some of the female characters.

I. THEORY

1 BYATT'S POSSESSION

1.1 Dame A. S. Byatt

Dame Antonia Susan Byatt is a novelist, short-story author, distinguished critic, literary scholar, and biographer. She is the author of dozens of literary works and has been named one of The 50 greatest English writers since 1945 by *The Times* newspaper. She has received several honorary fellowships and literary prizes. For her contribution to literature, she was awarded the title 'Dame' in 1999. Byatt won the Booker Prize for her best-selling novel *Possession* (1990) and thereby secured a considerable degree of fame.¹ *Possession* was later in 2002 adapted into a film by American director Neil LaBute. Despite the book's success and all-star cast starring Gwyneth Paltrow and Aaron Eckhart, the film flopped at the box office.²

1.1.1 The life of A.S. Byatt

Dame A.S. Byatt was born on 24 August 1936 in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, England. The eldest of four children, daughter of a literary teacher Kathleen Marie Bloor, and a judge John F. Drabble, both Cambridge University graduates. A. S. Byatt stated, her childhood was rather unhappy due to her domineering mother's high expectations. Those expectations had been ultimately fulfilled since Byatt, and her sister Margaret Drabble, become successful authors of considerable popularity. In 1959 she married her first husband, the economist Ian Charles Rayner Byatt, with whom she had a daughter Antonia and a son Charles, who was at the age of eleven killed in a car accident. Her marriage was eventually dissolved in 1969. Later the same year, Byatt remarried Peter John Duffy and had two daughters, Isabel and Miranda.³

Byatt's love for literature started to develop from an early age. First factor that affected her perception of literature was for sure her mother, a literary teacher. Additionally, many of Byatt's childhood memories are associated with resting in a bed and reading books. The books were an opportunity for her to gain a kind of knowledge that she would otherwise have no access to as a child. Born in 1936, Byatt was only a toddler when World War II started. She became aware of the horrors of war and how tough life could be in this

¹“Dame A. S. Byatt,” British Council, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/A-S-Byatt#ref667873>.

² Andrew Higson, “Fiction and the Film Industry,” in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. James F. English (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 72-76.

³ Catherine Burgass, *A. S. Byatt's Possession: A Reader's Guide* (USA: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002), 7-15.

challenging period. Her father had to leave and fought in the war, and eventually, he returned after five years of service. The literature she has read was also a form of coping mechanism that has enabled her to understand the outside world better.⁴

1.1.2 Byatt's education and work

Byatt was sent and educated at two boarding schools, Sheffield High School and Quaker Mount School in York. Just like her parents, she attended Cambridge University. Byatt completed her Bachelors of Arts degree while graduating with first-class honours in 1957. Afterwards, she pursued postgraduate studies at Bryn Mawr College in Philadelphia and Somerville College, Oxford.⁵

From 1962 to 1971, Byatt began teaching as an Extra-Mural Lecturer at the University of London. She published her first two novels, *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964) and *The Game* (1967), along with her study on Iris Murdoch, *Degrees of Freedom* (1965). In 1972 Byatt was appointed full-time lecturer in English literature at University College London and published her third highly acclaimed first novel of a quartet, *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978). By the time she was elected the fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1983, Byatt had retired from academic life to become a full-time writer. In 1985 she published her second volume of the mentioned quartet *Still Life*.⁶

Byatt's most successful book, *Possession: A Romance* (1990), won The Booker Prize and Irish Times/Aer Lingus International Fiction Prize, became a best-seller, furthermore brought her adoration of both critics and ordinary readers. She then continued writing and published *Angels and Insects* (1992), a third volume of the quartet *Babel Tower* (1995), and *The Bibliographer's Tale* (2000). She completed her series quartet, *The Frederica Quartet Series*, once she published *A Whistling Woman* in 2002. Followed by *The Children's Book* (2009) and the most recent work of hers is *Ragnarök: The End of the Gods* (2011). In addition to her novels, she also published collections of short stories, including *Sugar and other Stories* (1987), *The Matisse Stories* (1993), *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* (1994), *Elementals: Stories of Fire and Ice* (1998), *Little Black Book of Stories* (2003) and a large amount of critical work.⁷

⁴ Christine Franken, *A. S. Byatt: Art, Authorship, Creativity* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 10-11.

⁵ "Dame A. S. Byatt," British Council, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/A-S-Byatt#ref667873>.

⁶ "Dame A. S. Byatt," British Council, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/A-S-Byatt#ref667873>.

⁷ "Dame A. S. Byatt," British Council, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/A-S-Byatt#ref667873>.

1.2 Byatt's Possession

A. S. Byatt's best-selling novel *Possession* (1990) follows two stories running in a parallel one. The protagonists of the first narrative are 20th-century academics Roland Mitchell and Maud Bailey, who are investigating a secret relationship between two Victorian poets Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte, whose story is told within the second narrative.⁸

Defining the genre of Byatt's multi-layered novel *Possession: A Romance* is a quite challenging quest since Byatt uses a whole range of genres and styles. *Possession* is a curious combination of romance, detective fiction, campus novel, historiographic metafiction, neo-Victorian fiction, and last but not least feminist fiction. This mixture fits together well, mutually supplementing each other in a well-balanced way.

The novel subtitle is 'A Romance', so it seems like Byatt hints right from the start that the readers may anticipate some of the conventions of the genre to be present. Byatt develops a double love story, one running in the present the other in the past.⁹ In the past, we meet Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte, two fictional Victorian poets who are having a secret love affair. Their romance is accompanied by other stories about love, such as fairytales and myths. The contemporary lovers are young scholars Rolland Mitchell and Maud Bailey, who fall in love while researching and investigating love letters between the two poets, thus having their very romance. *Possession* is not mainly a romance novel, but romance is undoubtedly one of the book's central theme.

Additionally, Byatt employs as well as combine the conventions and tropes of detective fiction and the campus novel. The plot is set in an academic milieu and follows 20th-century scholars, showing a reader how such an environment works. The plot's 'heart' develops around the investigation of the two 19th century poet's secret love affair.¹⁰ Roland discovers the previously lost intimate correspondence between Ash and an unknown woman. His discovery leads to Roland asking for the help of the fellow academic Maud, and their quest begins. Roland and Maud join their forces, and they start to function as 'detectives' using their academic research skills, power of intuition and deduction.¹¹ They seek clues, gather

⁹ Pilar Cuder-Dominguez, "Romance Forms in A. S. Byatt's *Possession*," *Alicante Journal of English Studies* 8, (1995): 79-80, accessed March 2, 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/39438764_Romance_forms_in_A_S_Byatt's_Possession.

¹⁰ Manuel Botero Camacho and Manuel Núñez Valeiras, "Retracing the Myth in Byatt's *Possession*: A Romance," *Journal 1616: Anuario de Literatura Comparada* 7, (2017): 280, accessed March 2, 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327623805_Retracing_the_Myth_in_Byatts_Possession/references.

¹¹ Cuder-Dominguez, "Romance Forms in A. S. Byatt's *Possession*," 85.

evidence in the form of letters and uncover the mystery surrounding the affair. Alike other detective stories *Possession*, has its mystery/case - letters, possible affair, detective - Maud and Roland and a villain - Mortimer Cropper. However, certain aspects of the story differ from detective fiction. Byatt's 'detectives' do not find the ultimate truth. The ultimate truth is revealed just to the readers, us, Maud and Rolland's fellow-questers.¹²

Possession is also an example of postmodern historiographic metafiction and Neo-Victorian fiction. The two poets are not actual historical figures, although accompanied with references to the Victorian era. Byatt's knowledge of Victorian literature helps her rewrite the past and enables her to create the historical atmosphere of the story. Byatt is revisiting the history from the 20th-century perspective and resurrecting the past through fiction.¹³ The book has also been read as a work of feminist fiction. Byatt explores the limiting roles of women in the Victorian Age as well as in the contemporary world. Her female protagonist Christabel LaMotte and Maud Bailey, are strong and independent women trying to find their place in the 'man's world'. For instance, a poetess Christabel is not a prototype of the proper 19th-century lady. She is living a self-sufficient life, transcending her limiting Victorian role. She is a young unmarried woman living with a friend or, as the story hints, possibly a lover, Blanche Glover. She has an illicit relationship with a married man, which results in them having a child, and Byatt decided to tell her story. Christabel is fighting for equality while challenging the view of women from a patriarchal standpoint of Victorian age society.¹⁴

¹² Cuder-Dominguez, "Romance Forms in A. S. Byatt's *Possession*," 87.

¹³ Fariba NoorBakhsh and Fazel Asadi Amjad, "Three Approaches toward Historiography: The French Lieutenant's Woman, *Possession*, and *Waterland*," *Journal of Literature Culture and Literary Translation*, no. 1 (2016): 17, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.sic-journal.org/Article/Index/414>.

¹⁴ Jenna Miller, "Dispossessing Femininity in Byatt's *Possession*," *AWE (A Woman's Experience)*, no. 2, Article 7 (2015): 34, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/awe/vol2/iss2/734>.

2 POSTMODERNISM

The term 'Postmodernism' was firstly introduced in the 1940s, although it remains prevalent in the contemporary world. At first, the term was used to express disagreement and contempt with the modern movement that dominated architecture. Postmodernism became commonly known in the 1960s as soon as cultural critics began to use it in practice. They labelled it either as something new that refused to be identified with the modernist approach further enhanced and adapted it.¹⁵ The postmodern movement is closely connected and influenced by the civil rights movements in the US, the erection of the Berlin Wall and the European colonies' dissolution. These events led to tremendous changes in the artistry and lives of ordinary people.¹⁶ All of them were set and ready to move forward and let the new year begin. Gradually the movement began to spread to various areas in culture, media, artistry, history, and philosophy. The major contributors and figures of postmodernism are the French philosophers Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, and Jacques Derrida.¹⁷

Postmodernism was a reaction to changes happening in the world. Therefore, the postmodernist movement can be understood as a movement that rejects modernism, yet some critics argue that postmodernism further develops and continues to use modernist elements rather than being a complete change from modernity. Most researchers suggest that postmodernism follow and engage with modernist tropes while trying to modify them.¹⁸ When understanding the movement, it is quite crucial to distinguish how postmodernism relates to and differs from modernism. According to Brian McHale, the main difference between modernism and postmodernism is the dominant of texts. The dominant of modernists texts is epistemological, and in postmodernist texts, it is ontological. Modernist authors are focusing on knowledge, while postmodern authors deal with the question of existence.¹⁹ The significant ways of recognizing epistemology are objectivism, constructivism, subjectivism; they determine how knowledge is constructed and how we know that the author is telling the

¹⁵ Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

¹⁶ Ramen Sharma and Preeti Chaudhary, "Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespeare," *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration*, no. 2 (2011): 189-198, accessed January 8, 2021, https://www.ripublication.com/ijepa/ijepav1n2_11.pdf.

¹⁷ Rachel Fisher, "Postmodernism," *The Alert Collector* 54, no. 1 (2014): 29, accessed: March 15, 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276343232_Postmodernism/stats.

¹⁸ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2001), 5-7.

¹⁹ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 9-10.

truth.²⁰ On the other hand, ontology in postmodernism takes an interest in the question about the nature of reality, existence, and being.²¹ Whilst modernist authors build their works on authenticity, responsibility, and conventions, postmodernists engage in improvisation, mixing styles and incorporating pastiche and parody. Modernists strive to be honest and solemn in their works, but postmodernists like to play with their texts, use irony and present challenges to the reader.²²

2.1 Postmodern literature

After the Second World War, rather radical changes in the economy and social attitudes occurred in Britain. British people and many other nations struggled to rebuild what was left after the bombing and slowly recovered from the war's aftermath. The United Kingdom had to cope with many social, gender, and class issues.²³

Postmodernist literature was a response to radical political and cultural transformation, along with a crisis of identity after the Second World War. Postmodern literature refers to the period from the 1950s to the 1990s.²⁴ Just like the movement itself, postmodern literature does not have a clear-cut definition, but common traits in postmodern works can be found. Even though there are several works of postmodern poetry and drama, narrative fiction appears to be the one that literary postmodernism has been focused on and employed the most.²⁵ Postmodern fiction works appear in the form of a novel or a short story; nevertheless, this isn't the only genre authors experimented with.²⁶

Postmodern authors take different approaches to poetry, fiction, and drama. One of the most distinctive methods used in postmodern fiction is 'metafiction' or 'fiction about fiction'. Its purpose is to remind a reader that the story is a constructed work of art, not a realistic depiction of the world.²⁷ Linda Hutcheon is the author of one of the most influential books about literary postmodernism. In her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she suggests that

²⁰ Mukhles M. Al-Ababneh, "Linking Ontology, Epistemology and Research Methodology," *Science and Philosophy Journal* 8, no. 1 (2020): 77, accessed March, 2021, <http://eiris.it/ojs/index.php/scienceandphilosophy/article/view/500>.

²¹ Steven Connor, "Postmodernism and Literature" in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steven Connor (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 65-66.

²² Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, 2.

²³ Alastair Davies, "From Imperial to post-imperial Britain," in *British Culture of the Post-War: An Introduction to Literature and Society*, ed. Alastair Davies and Alan Sinfield (London: Routledge, 2000), 1.

²⁴ Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, 2-3.

²⁵ Connor, "Postmodernism and Literature," 62.

²⁶ Connor, "Postmodernism and Literature," 74.

²⁷ Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, 16.

other aspects of postmodern fiction are irony, playfulness, black humour, and pastiche.²⁸ Other commonly used stylistic techniques of postmodern narration are, for example, intertextuality, temporal distortion, and magical realism, unreliable narrator, as well as erasing the boundaries between the low and high form of arts.²⁹

²⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1988), 22.

²⁹ Sheeba Sheeba, "Postmodern literature: Practices and Theory," *Excellence International Journal of Education and Research* 4, no. 3 (2017): 183-184, accessed: April 6, 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328449584_Postmodern_literature_Practices_and_Theory/citations

II. ANALYSIS

3 POSSESSION: AN ANALYSIS

3.1 Brief plot summary

Possession opens in 1986 with young academic Roland Mitchell, whom Professor Blackadder asks to research a book once belonging to a famous Victorian poet Randolph Henry Ash in the London Library. Roland finds out drafts of something that looks like love letters by Ash addressed to an unknown woman. Absorbed by the desire to know more, Roland steals the letters and starts an investigation. Using his knowledge and resources about Ash, Roland deduces that the unknown woman must be a Victorian poetess recently rediscovered by feminist scholars Christabel LaMotte. On the advice of his colleague Fergus Wolff, Roland pays a visit to a fellow academic, feminist scholar Maud Bailey, whose research specialises on LaMotte. They decide to keep this discovery secret and find out what exactly happened between the two poets.

They set for a trip to the Seal Court manor belonging to Maud distant relatives Sir George and Lady Joan Bailey, where Christabel stayed for some time. While our protagonists are searching Christabel's room, Maud remembers one of her poems, thanks to which they are able to discover the whole secret correspondence between the two poets hidden underneath a dolly's cot. Unfortunately, they cannot read them right away. In the meantime, Roland and his girlfriend Val have begun to separate. Finally, Baileys lets the scholars analyse the letters. They find more about their relationship and reveals an affair the poets had. Maud puts up a theory that LaMotte may have accompanied Ash to North Yorkshire in 1859. They review the journal of Ash's wife Ellen to find out whether their theory is true or not. However, their investigation is threatened since Mortimer Cropper, an American scholar and expert on Ash, is starting to be interested in that matter. He wants to expand his collection devoted to the famous poet and is ready to use whatever it takes to obtain it. The past is shown through Ash's point of view, letting readers know about their journey.

Roland and Maud are retracing the poets' journey. They travel to places described in the letters realising that both works of Ash and LaMotte include hints that the authors were together during this time. The scholars slowly begin to form a relationship and start to get closer to and more open with each other. Due to the help of Maud's friend, American scholar Leonora Stern, Maud sees a letter which describes that one of the entries in the diary of Sabine de Kercoz reveals that soon after the trip to North Yorkshire, Christabel fled to France to stay at her cousin's house. Another obstacle in their quest appears since Professor

Blackadder finds out about the letters. Maud and Roland flee to Britany. They read Sabine's journal revealing that Christabel was pregnant and gave birth to a child in the convent. Blackadder joins forces with Stern and Copper to go after Maud and Roland. Maud and Roland are still in Brittany when they spot their foes. They decide to flee back to England. Val, convinced that her and Rolland relationship is officially over, move on to Euan McIntyre.

Back in England, Maud learns she may be the possible owner of the letters. They discover that Ash's wife Ellen knew about her husband's infidelity. She was familiar with this situation due to Blanche Glover, who visited her. Blanche was a friend and possibly lover of Christabel, who committed suicide. Ellen writes that she buried Ash's secret with him, a secret held in a box in his grave. Copper knowing this information wants to rob the grave. Thanks to the timely intervention of Maud, Roland and their group of colleagues, academics, Copper is defeated. They seize the box containing the poets personal belonging, a photograph of a woman in a wedding dress, a lock of blond hair and a letter from Christabel. She told Ash about their daughter named Maia. Maia does not know about her real mother since Christabel's sister adopted her. This colossal revelation makes Maud a descendant of both poets, thus finding out the truth about her bloodline.

Rolland becomes a desired man in the academic field. He and Maud confess their love for each other whilst thinking about what will likely happen with them and their relationship. They won, thinking they uncovered the mystery, and finally, their quest is over. However only, a reader knows the ultimate truth. The *Postscript* reveals that Ash, after all, met his daughter Maia. He tells her to inform her aunt (her mother Christabel) about their encounter, but unfortunately, Maia forgets to do so.

3.2 Postmodern aspects in Possession

A. S. Byatt's *Possession* is generally regarded as a work of postmodern fiction and was labelled as postmodern historiographic metafiction. Byatt applies postmodern metafictional narrative devices, such as fragmentation, intruding narrator, intertextuality, pastiche throughout the story while simultaneously challenges postmodern theories. What makes the novel a postmodern one is a curious usage of several genres, styles and self-reflectiveness.³⁰ Doryjane Birrer has labelled *Possession* as "a postmodern anti-postmodern Victorian

³⁰ NoorBakhsh and Asadi Amjad, "Three Approaches toward Historiography: The French Lieutenant's Woman, Possession, and Waterland," 21.

historiographic metafiction Bildungsroman gothic detective story literary thriller romance.”³¹ *Possession* is an excellent example of postmodern experimentation. However, it simultaneously shows how evident is Byatt’s fondness of traditional literature. The novel offers an overall look at how complex Byatt’s relationship with postmodernism is.

3.2.1 Postmodern metafiction

Possession is a novel about the past, about representing individuals' past lives and about gaining knowledge from the past. Postmodern authors know that the interpretation of history is not perfectly acute, and they try to play with such a premise, creating their own perspective on history. Metafiction or 'fiction about fiction' is a tool used by the authors to communicate the work's fictionality and self-awareness. The novel belongs to the genre of biographic metafiction and represents the genre's subgenre, historiographic metafiction. The concept of historiographic metafiction was proposed by literary theorist Linda Hutcheon. She defines it as "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages." (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 5).³² The plot consists of two parallel stories developing in different timeframes, and thence *Possession* is a story within a story. Byatt uses various strategies to link the past with the present, blurring the boundaries between the two worlds. The presence of contrast between the characters as well as their relationship and actions is evident. Byatt moves between different genres, styles, voices and timeframes, uses different narrative techniques, third-person narration or various texts to tell the story.³³

3.2.2 Intertextuality/Pastiche/Parallelism

Intertextuality is a tool used by postmodernist authors to access the past. It is one of the leading postmodern features present in the novel. Intertextual references to literary/non-literary and historical/pseudo-historical texts dominate the novel.³⁴ Through the references to the Victorian age, Byatt challenges the reader’s knowledge of literary texts and authors of such an era. The novel also includes imitation or pastiche of Victorian poems, those of the

³¹ Doryjane Birrer, “From Campus Fiction to Metacritical Fiction: A. S. Byatt’s Academic Novels,” in *Academic Novels as Satire: Critical Studies of an Emerging Genre*, ed. Mark Bosco and Kimberly Rae Connor (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 50.

³² Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 5.

³³ Lena Steveker, “A. S. Byatt, *Possession* (1990),” in *Handbook of the English Novel of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. Christoph Reinfandt (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2017), 453

³⁴ Lena Steveker, “A. S. Byatt, *Possession* (1990),” 453.

fictional poets Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte, written and made up by Byatt herself included at the beginning of chapters and throughout the story.³⁵

Possession is a pastiche of literary styles and genres that provide a background for the Victorian period. The past is composed via letters, diaries, poetry, fairy-tales, epigraphs and myths researched by the 20th-century academic. Thus the past and the present are linked together. There is a clear parallel between the past and the present since Byatt created two parallel sets of the characters in both periods, mirroring each other.³⁶ The 19th-century poets seem to be more lively and exciting, full-of-mystery, although dead, whereas the 20th-century academics are rather dull and lifeless. Byatt uses parody and ridicule through contemporary academics to expose the mentality of the literary academic world of the twentieth century and make a statement on contemporary feminism through the one of her character Leonora Stern. The character of Leonora Stern is a caricature of a feminist and will be discussed within a further chapter.³⁷

3.2.3 Byatt's use of Fairy tales

Byatt is known for incorporating various fairy tales, folklore and myths within her fiction. *Possession* is a highly intertextual novel constructed via a variety of texts used. This structure allows Byatt to include such stories. Fairy tales in the book are frequently connected with her female character and contribute to their character developments. In *Possession*, those fairy tales are written and retold from the perspective of Christabel LaMotte (Byatt herself). This subchapter will focus on two of the stories. The first one is called "The Glass Coffin", retold version of a tale initially narrated by Brothers Grimm, and the second one is an adaptation of the medieval myth "The Fairy Melusine".³⁸

3.2.3.1 *The Glass Coffin*

"The Glass Coffin" is a pastiche of Victorians told to their children, included in the collection of stories by Christabel in the novel.³⁹ The tale tells a story about a good-hearted

³⁵ Lena Steveker, *Identity and Cultural Memory in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 123.

³⁶ Majid Al Hachami, "A.S. Byatt's *Possession* A Postmodernist Perspective Analysis," *Journal of University of Babylon* 23, no. 3, (2015): 1174, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://iasj.net/iasj/article/106211>

³⁷ Regina Rudaitytė, "(DE)CONSTRUCTION OF THE POSTMODERN IN A. S. BYATT'S NOVEL POSSESSION," *Literatura* 49, no.5 (2007): 122, accessed: March 17, 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330568533_DeConstruction_of_the_Postmodern_in_A_S_Byatt's_Novel_Possession/citations

³⁸ Margarida Esteves Pereira, "A.S. Byatt: Essays on the Short Fiction," in *The Radiance of the Short Story: Fiction from Around the Globe: Selected Conference Papers*, ed. Dr. Maurice A Lee and Aaron Penn (Independently published, 2019), 314-315

³⁹ Celia M. Wallhead, *A.S. Byatt: Essays on the Short Fiction* (Peter Lang, 2007), 114.

tailor wandering in the woods, who must overcome a series of quest in order to rescue a beautiful princess sleeping in a coffin made of glass. She reveals to him that a magician is to blame for her imprisonment. The magician wants to marry the princess, but she keeps refusing him, and due to her defiance, he curses her to enchanted sleep for hundred years in a glass coffin. He shrinks her castle, transforms her brother into a dog, and captures the men and maidens of the court in the glass bottle. The tailor helps the princess to defeat the magician. She is grateful for her rescue and offers him a marriage. The tailor, however, insists that the marriage should be her choice and if she does not want to, she will not get married. She then approves. The tailor stays with the princess and her brother in the castle, where he continues to practise and perfect his craft, and they live happily ever after.

When Roland reads it, he does not realize the importance the story holds for them and their future. The tailor devoted to his craft represents Roland, and the beautiful princess is Maud. The princess refuses marriage, the same as the Maud does. The story holds possible feminist motives, as the domestic roles of the protagonist are reversed. The tailor stays in the castle, and the princess is hunting and enjoying her freedom.⁴⁰

3.2.3.2 *The Fairy Melusine*

Possession includes several references to myth from medieval time about Melusine. Byatt retells her story through Christabel LaMotte and offers readers a different perspective and interpretation of the myth closely linked to the book's heroines Christabel and Maud. Melusine is a half-woman, half-snake fairy who marries a knight. Due to this marriage, she is granted mortality and turned into a human. The husband does not know of Melusine's true nature. They have ten sons and live a peaceful life together. This marriage, however, has one condition that must not be violated. Melusine bans her husband from visiting her on Saturdays when she baths and therefore reveals her true form. The knight ultimately breaks this promise and finds out the truth. Afterwards, Melusine is sentenced to life in pain and exile. She loses everything, including contact with her children and place to stay.⁴¹

Byatt chooses to depict Melusine not as a wicked creature but rather as a woman, mother, with an unfortunate faith. Christabel and Melusine share certain traits together. They live without their absent mothers while also unable to be present as mother figures in their

⁴⁰ Wallhead, *A.S. Byatt: Essays on the Short Fiction*, 115.

⁴¹ Susan E. Colón, "The Possession of Paradise: A. S. Byatt's Reinscription of Milton," *Christianity & Literature* 53, no.1 (2003): 84, accessed March 23, 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276450760_The_Possession_of_Paradise_A_S_Byatt's_Reinscription_of_Milton

children's lives. Melusine is deprived of her mother's role due to her husband and Christabel must separate from her daughter due to the conventions of Victorian society. Both women fight a battle they cannot win, therefore their fates being tragic ones. The myth of Melusine is a crucial device used in the relationship between Christabel and Ash. Christabel constantly uses the motif of Melusine in her works. Both nineteenth-century poets are often referencing Melusine and discuss the possible interpretation of the myth in their correspondence. Christabel identifies with Melusine and wants to tell her story from a different perspective showing her not as a monster but rather a misunderstood figure, deprived of her freedom and autonomy.⁴²

Christabel's poems about Melusine also link the past and the future since it is discovered and researched by feminist scholars. Maud is one of them, and her interest in Melusine goes beyond academic research. She admires her autonomy just like Christabel does. There are also certain parallels present between Melusine and Maud. Just like Melusine's husband disturbs her bath, therefore, breaks his promise, Roland is peeping into Maud's bathroom.⁴³

3.2.4 Neo-Victorian Fiction

In the second half of the twentieth century, artists from various fields started to be interested in the Victorian era. The fascination with the Victorian period began to appear in almost every aspect of everyday life, from television and film to fashion and politics, and of course, literary authors were no exception. The authors were no exception since many authors began to employ the Victorian period in their fiction, and A. S. Byatt is one of them. Byatt mediates an insight into such an era through pastiche in the form of diaries, poems, letters, fairy tales to the readers.⁴⁴ Byatt's use of pastiche offers readers cultural context and creates a particular image of the Victorian lifestyle and simulating the Victorian era.

The authors of Neo-Victorian fiction are incorporating historical narratives into their novels, recreating their visualization of the past, incorporating Victorian literary elements and using postmodern genre, known as historiographic metafiction.⁴⁵ The Victorian novel usually implies that the past has still its say in the contemporary world, as it shows to be valid for *Possession*. The Victorian history in the book disrupts the twentieth storyline. The

⁴² Franken, A. S. Byatt: *Art, Authorship*, 94-100.

⁴³ Colón, "The Possession of Paradise: A. S. Byatt's Reinscription of Milton," 88.

⁴⁴ Kate Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 1.

⁴⁵ NoorBakhsh and Asadi Amjad, "Three Approaches toward Historiography: The French Lieutenant's Woman, *Possession*, and *Waterland*," 2.

world of the novel's protagonist starts to be exclusively focused on the past as soon as the first drafts of letters are discovered. The twentieth-century academics start to slowly build a narrative of the events surrounding the poets' affair as a result of researching the historical texts. In *Possession*, the doors to the past are far from being closed. All over the novel, Byatt uses the word 'possession' in different connotations. For instance, modern academics are obsessed with finding the truth, thus possessing knowledge. Moreover, it applies also to the readers who are also possessed by the desire for knowledge of the past events.⁴⁶ The switching between the Victorian past and the contemporary present makes the novel engaging since the readers are taking the role of fellow-questers and fellow detectives.

3.3 Double Romance

Two of the main themes in *Possession* are love, adventure and romance. Byatt employs the conventions of traditional romance that are formed around the central motif of a quest. The word 'romance' is frequently used throughout the story suggesting that the term is, apart from being a word describing a genre, also a term used when describing life.⁴⁷ The story mainly focuses on relationships between the main characters and the relationship between the reader and the text. *Possession* juxtaposes two love stories, one of the 20th-century academics Roland Michell and Maud Bailey, the second being the illicit affair between the Victorian poets Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte. Fairy tales are woven into the story's narrative linking the past and the present. Fairy tales and women characters in *Possession* are closely connected.

The novel subtitle 'A Romance' along with Byatt usage of a preface to "The House of the Seven Gables" by Nathaniel Hawthorne, which describes what the readers should expect when an author chooses to label his work as 'romance' give the reader a particular idea about what Byatt is trying to do, and therefore provide a perspective to readers.

3.3.1 Love story within the love story

Regarding the relationships in the novel, there are quite a few similarities as well as differences between the two central pairs. To start with the young scholars, when they first meet their introduction is rather cold and highly professional, it may seem that without the mutual goal, discovering the truth, they would unlikely be interested in one another. However, due to their cooperation, while doing the research and playing detectives, they become

⁴⁶ Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, 94-100.

⁴⁷ Cuder-Dominguez, "Romance Forms in A. S. Byatt's *Possession*," 85.

acquainted with each other, eventually fall in love, and this quest somehow brings them to life. The last task awaits them, thence find a compromise between love and their carriers. It is essential to mention Roland's relationship before Maud with Val, which was slightly far from perfect since they do not have so much in common. Roland deems himself a cause of Val's unhappiness due to his financial and carrier struggle. However, in the end, they split up and find a more suitable partner for each other. Roland becomes involved with Maud, and Val finds solace and love in Euan MacIntyre, a young solicitor.

The first encounter between and the whole relationship of Ash and LaMotte is much more intriguing. Since their first meeting at a breakfast party, Ash is entirely captivated by LaMotte, despite being already married. They are both artists, just like Maud and Roland, are both academics, sharing their love for poetry. The affair is full of passion, romance and desire on the physical side as well as intellectual, although it does not end with a happy ending. On the other hand, Ash's relationship with his wife is quite the opposite, very conventional and without any sign of passion. Ellen Ash is a prototype of an oppressed Victorian woman. She is entirely devoted and loyal to her husband, although she finds out about his affair. Ellen remains with him, caring, until his last breath.

3.4 Campus novel meets detective novel

"Literary critics make natural detectives," said Maud. "You know the theory that the classic detective story arose with the classic adultery novel—everyone wanted to know who was the Father, what was the origin, what is the secret?"

—A. S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance*, p. 258

3.4.1 Campus Novel

The campus novel, also known as the academic novel genre, is a subgenre of contemporary fiction, born in the 1950s, and is considered a product of the Anglo-American world. It emerged simultaneously in the United States and the United Kingdom due to better access to higher and academic education. The genre was mainly intended for readers familiar with the educational environment and its world. Nevertheless it gained mainstream popularity and worldwide readership in the last two decades.⁴⁸

Most of the authors writing the academic novel have the first-hand experience with higher education or at least with being a university student. A great example is Byatt herself

⁴⁸ Petr Anténe, "*Campus Novel Variations: A Comparative Study of an Anglo-American Genre*" (PhD. diss., Palacký University Olomouc, 2015), 5-6.

since she has taught at University College London and is an acclaimed literary scholar. While writing *Possession*, Byatt drew on her own experience. She is familiar with the environment, the daily life and the tasks of professors and students. The plot setting is usually an academic environment, therefore universities and their campuses. The characters are mainly academics, or they belong to such space. One of the leading academic fiction elements can be satire or ridicule, yet many academic novels simply praise the academic lifestyle.⁴⁹

One of the significant contributors to the academic novel is undoubtedly Kingsley Amis and his *Lucky Jim* (1954). *Lucky Jim* a satiric novel about class conflict, set in the environment of an unnamed university. Its main protagonist being the lecturer of history, Jim Dixon.⁵⁰ Another example is David Lodge and his *The Campus Trilogy: Changing Places* (1975), *Small World* (1975), and *Nice Work* (1988). Furthermore, it is essential to remark that A.S. Byatt does not like *Lucky Jim* due to its sexism.⁵¹ The first major American campus novel is *Pnin* (1957) by Vladimir Nabokov, about an exiled Russian professor Timofey Pnin, who teaches Russian at a fictional university in New York.⁵² There can be seen a certain parallel to Amis's *Lucky Jim*. For instance, both Dixon and Pnin cope with academic struggles; one struggles because of his class, the other due to his nationality.

Possession is a campus novel that, and Byatt sets, its main plot into the university environment. Her two main protagonist Maud and Roland, are scholars using their academic skills, utilising the universities' environment they are part of and cooperating with their fellow academics. Roland is a research assistant a feminist critic Dr Maud Bailey working at the Women's Resource Centre at Lincoln University. Byatt portrays life inside campuses, and the protagonists are using their knowledge obtained from their education in a field of literary criticism.⁵³ The academics know how to research text and analyse it in order to gain information, and since their main quest is to discover the truth hidden in the texts of the Victorian poets which they are studying and researching as a part of their profession, they are the best resource to do such a task. They are used to work with literary texts, and

⁴⁹ Merritt Moseley, "Introductory: Definitions and Justification," in *Academic Novel*, ed. Merritt Moseley (University of Chester, 2007), 5-11.

⁵⁰ Milica Rađenić, "Class and Gender – The Representation of Women in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*," *Gender studies* 15, no. 1 (2016): 184-186, accessed: April 16, 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315063722_Class_and_Gender_-_The_Representation_of_Women_in_Kingsley_Amis's_Lucky_Jim.

⁵¹ Aida Edemariam, "Who's afraid of the campus novel?," *The Guardian*, October, 2004, Features & reviews section.

⁵² "Pnin," *Britannica*, accessed March 22, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pnin>

⁵³ Janice Rossen, *Women writing modern fiction – A Passion for Ideas* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 146-147.

therefore, this skill is a very useful tool in their investigation. The readers get an inside into University life, how the institutions and their staff operate. The novel deals with the investigation and critical research. Byatt also shows competitiveness among academics who are trying to fulfil their careers, achieving acknowledgement in the academic circle and woman's role in the 20th-century academic world. Byatt, who have attended a university and lectured herself, knows about the specific limitation of being a woman in the academic world.⁵⁴

3.4.2 Detective Novel

Although crime writing was present in the 18th century, detective fiction as we know it today began to develop in the 19th century. A crucial pioneering role in the development plays Edgar Allan Poe and his detective short story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841). He firstly featured the figure of a 'proper' detective who solves the crime. Therefore Poe established some of the conventions of writing detective fiction.⁵⁵ Poe's patterns found their way into England, more precisely into a detective novel *The Moonstone* (1868) by Willkie Collins.⁵⁶ However, the genre received praise and was popularised later by Arthur Conan Doyle and his stories featuring the famous detective Sherlock Holmes.⁵⁷ Continuing in its popularity, the next author is Agatha Christie and her novels about Hercules Poirot. Both Doyle and Christie are considered to represent the inter-war 'Golden Age' of crime fiction in Britain. The main task of detectives is to gather, decode and classify evidence to reach closure and expose the truth. Readers of such a genre follow the process and becoming 'literary' detectives themselves. Simultaneously with the detectives, readers are questioning their journey and forming their conclusions.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Jane Campbell, *A.S. Byatt and the Heliotropic Imagination* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), 19.

⁵⁵ Martin A. Kayman, "The short story from Poe to Chesterton," in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Martin Priestman (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41.

⁵⁶ Martin Priestman, "Introduction: crime fiction and detective fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Martin Priestman (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

⁵⁷ Sanja Matković, "The Conventions of Detective Fiction, or Why We Like Detective Novels: Hercule Poirot's Christmas," *Anafora Journal* 5, no. 2 (2018): 446, accessed: March 22, 2021, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Conventions-of-Detective-Fiction%2C-or-Why-We-Matkovi%C4%87/b7bb3b7d8a5d3d9f0fdbee5771e8dfe9ef9f5c8c>

⁵⁸ Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, 171-172.

The postmodernist detective novel is trying to change and experiment with the genre's possibilities rather than evade its essential elements. This new approach was the birth of a 'metaphysical' detective story, 'postmodern' detective story or 'anti-detective' story.⁵⁹

“A metaphysical detective story is a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective story conventions – such as narrative closure and the detective’s role as surrogate reader – with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot (Merivale & Sweeny, 2001/2002, p. 560-561).”⁶⁰

The plot of *Possession* starts in the London Library. It follows the discovery of mysterious letters of a Victorian poet Randolph Henry Ash to an unknown woman found by the protagonist Ronald Mitchell, not much of a successful postdoctoral part-time research assistant specialising in Victorian poetry and textual criticism. He identifies the woman as a Victorian poetess LaMotte and sees this discovery as an opportunity to advance in his career. Thus the novel starts as other detective fictions when a mystery is introduced.

Roland then joins forces with an expert on LaMotte and a feminist critic Maud Bailey, and their quest begins. The plot then follows the process of investigations of letters and diaries. The protagonists are finding clues, using their ability of deduction and interpretation, tracing the steps of the two poets, seeking advice from their colleagues, and therefore playing the roles of ‘detectives’. Through the investigation, they meet many challenges and obstacles. One of them and simultaneously the villain/antagonist of the story is an American scholar Mortimer Cropper, who cares only about his gain. He is a collector of Ash’s possessions. Cropper plays a significant role in the story climax.

The final clue and the most significant revelation is those of the last letter from LaMotte. Cropper almost thwarts the quest as he tries to rob Ash’s grave. Fortunately, thanks to the intervention of the protagonist and their colleagues, Cropper is stopped. The villain is defeated. The letter’s revelation uncover the mystery. The mystery is that the acknowledged married Victorian poet Ash and LaMotte conceived and had a child together out of wedlock.

⁵⁹ Kathleen Belin Owen, “The Game's Afoot”: Predecessors and Pursuits of a Postmodern Detective Novel,” in *Theory and Practice of Classic Detective Fiction*, ed. Jerome H. Delamater and Ruth Prigozy (London: Greenwood Press, 1988), 73-74.

⁶⁰ Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, “The Game’s Afoot: On the Trail of the Metaphysical Detective Story,” in *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*, ed. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 2.

The final letter is also proving Maud to be a descendant of both poets. The novel's 'detectives' are satisfied, thinking the quest is complete, and the mystery solved.⁶¹

However, *Possession* being a postmodern metafiction, the closure the twentieth-century scholars received, is not the same ending readers discover. In the novel's final pages, labelled Postscript, Byatt allows the readers to see that Ash, after all, met Maia, although still unaware of Maia being his daughter. Maud and Roland remain uninformed about the encounter. Byatt as a postmodernist author, knows that the truth and the history itself cannot be completely accurate.

3.5 Feminist implications

Byatt's feminist implications seem to be apparent due to the creation of powerful female characters. *Possession* is considered a feminist text, incorporating female characters who are trying to maintain their independence and creative autonomy while simultaneously holding back onto their femininity, and also those who embrace their feminine side at the expense of their dreams and hopes. Byatt's ambivalent position towards feminism is evident due to her parody of contemporary feminist literary theories throughout the novel. The novel is dealing with lust, betrayal, female sexuality and freedom.⁶² Byatt presents a contrast between success and womanhood, the Victorian stereotypes and the contemporary stereotypes surrounding women, and between patriarchal restriction and its overcoming.⁶³ In *Possession*, Byatt portrays those stereotypes and exceptions through female characters in the present – Maud Bailey, Val and Leonora Stern and also in the past – Christabel LaMotte, Ellen Ash and Blanche Glover.

The highly religious and patriarchal society of the Victorian period was not an ideal place to be a woman, let alone a woman who is an artist. Byatt shows a prototype of a Victorian woman through her portrayal of Ellen Ash. Ellen seems to be a character who embraces her femininity, although conscientious about her limitations and oppression connected with living her life as a woman. She spends most of her time caring about the household and her husband, even though she finds out about him having an affair. Unluckily, she does not have much choice. The Victorian Society expects her to remain silent and continue to be an example of a perfect wife.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Campbell, *A.S. Byatt and the Heliotropic Imagination*, 108.

⁶² Rossen, *Women writing modern fiction – A Passion for Ideas*, 128.

⁶³ Lynn Wells, "A. S. Byatt *Possession*: A Romance," in *A Companion to the British and Irish Novel 1945–2000*, ed. Brian W. Shaffer (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 540.

⁶⁴ Miller, "Dispossessing Femininity in Byatt's *Possession*," 38.

In contrast, LaMotte's alleged lover and friend, Blanche Glover, is living an independent life and trying to succeed as a painter. However, as a woman, she is not capable of earning as much as her male counterparts. Due to Ash and the social standards, the two things Blanche needed the most, Christabel and her autonomy, are taken away. These are the reason why is she decides to commit suicide.⁶⁵

Christabel is the complete opposite of Ellen. She does not surrender to the conventions of the 19th century. She is a mysterious poetess, transcending limiting Victorian role, although at the expense of discarding her femininity. Christabel is a young unmarried woman living with another female, Blanche Glover. She is also having an affair with a married man. Her desire and love for Ash threaten her independence as an individual and artist. Ultimately these fears prove to be just right. She must escape, gives birth to their illegitimate child, loses her autonomy and surrender her role as a mother. Even though Christabel is trying to fight for equality, she deeply knows she will never have the same liberties as men.⁶⁶ In the end, there is not a happy end waiting for her.

Maud is a strong female character, feminist and successful assistant professor. Nevertheless, her autonomy also is threatened, identically as Christabel's, by men and 20th-century patriarchy. Maud does not embrace her femininity due to fear of not being able to compete with men. Firstly, she is reluctant about her relationship with Rolland, feels scared and hopes that her love will not lead to her independence removed from her. However, in the end, she succumbs to Roland and her affection for him. Many considered the ending to be a cliché. However, *Possession* is, after all, still a romance.⁶⁷

The character of Leonora Stern, an American literary scholar, lesbian-feminist, is the one that Byatt satirizes the most. Leonora represents the stereotype of a feminist critic. She is convinced that Christabel and Blanche were in a lesbian relationship, although it is quite unclear, whereas this theory is or is not, she sees what she wants to see. Byatt portrays Stern as a caricature of feminist and mocks Stern's analyses which overuses all kinds of newest feminist theories. Although, Byatt's depiction of 'radical' feminist lesbian meets with various criticism.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Katsura Sako, "Byatt's 'Female Vision': An Attempt at Connecting," *The Hiyoshi review of English Studies* 55, (2002): 162-163, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://repository.dl.itc.u-tokyo.ac.jp>.

⁶⁶ Miller, "Dispossessing Femininity in Byatt's *Possession*," 34.

⁶⁷ Steveker, *Identity and Cultural Memory in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, 450.

⁶⁸ Franken, *A. S. Byatt: Art, Authorship, Creativity* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 89-90.

In *Possession*, Byatt shows that there is obviously more freedom given to females of the twentieth century than women of the Victorian era, as far as rights and education are concerned. Nevertheless still, there are some obstacles modern women must overcome to achieve success. On the other hand, Byatt displays a promise of a bright and hopeful future for women. When they join their forces and start to work together in order to assert themselves within such a competitive environment of the academic world and perhaps women will not have to choose between showing their femininity or following the path of success.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Campbell, *A.S. Byatt and the Heliotropic Imagination*, 126-128.

CONCLUSION

A. S. Byatt's multi-layered best-selling novel *Possession: A Romance* (1990) is a successful combination of various styles and themes as well as a wide range of genres. The novel is a curious mixture of romance, detective fiction, campus novel, historical novel, feminist novel, neo-Victorian fiction and even more. The novel finds its audience within the experts due to its sophisticated form and ordinary readers, who enjoy thrilling adventurous quest-like mystery story with a bit of romance. *Possession* was awarded a prestigious prize for literature, The Booker Prize, in 1990 and brought Byatt worldwide recognition and readership, fame and secured her a position within a world of literature.

Dame A. S. Byatt is undoubtedly a multitalented artist, acclaimed scholar, award-winning writer, and literary critic. She is an author of plenty of novels, short stories as well as critical works. Byatt uses her skills and knowledge to create intriguing stories incorporating multidimensional characters, mainly heroines who are strong, independent, adventurous, gifted and with whom a female reader can identify herself. Byatt's work is a vast contribution to literature itself, and *Possession* seems to be quite a turning point in her career. The novel has been analysed countless times and is still creating discussion within the literary critics to this day.

The novel is being recognised as a work of postmodernism due to its incorporation of postmodern tropes such as metafictional narration, mixing different genres, pastiche, intertextuality, parallelism, parody and satire, yet Byatt simultaneously challenges postmodernist views of the world throughout the book. This approach shows how complex Byatt's relationship with postmodernism is and how she experiments with its key features. *Possession* is regarded as historiographic metafiction since Byatt resurrected the past via fictive historical Victorian plot and did not differentiate between actual historical events and those she invented within the book. Byatt is also known for incorporating various fairy tales, myths and folklore within her fiction. *Possession* and its highly intertextual structure allow Byatt to do so. The fairy tales and myths are crucial in the development of her female characters. This thesis focuses on the retold fairy tale called "The Glass Coffin" and the poem adaptation of "The Fairy Melusine". Byatt creates parallels between the stories and the novel's main characters, creating a narrative full of stories within stories.

The plot follows two parallel storylines set in different time periods, where the past and the present are joined together due to the main character's action. The first narrative explores the adventure of twentieth-century scholars, and their hunt for truth closely follows

their quest and observes their action as they collect evidence that helps them to reach their ultimate goal. The second one pursues a secret illicit relationship between two Victorian poets from the nineteenth century that is revealed through love letters the poets shared. Both scholars and poets become possessed in different ways, one desperate to possess knowledge, the other trying not to be possessed.

Defining *Possession* in terms of genre is a very challenging quest due to its diverse structure that Byatt used. It is a romance since it follows two love stories and uses the main features of the genre. The depiction and exploration of the Victorian era are what makes it a neo-Victorian novel. Also, it is detective fiction because the central theme is an investigation of a great secret that can impact the literary world. The main characters are placed in the role of detectives on a textual quest for the truth. *Possession* is, furthermore, labelled a campus novel due to its main plot being set in the academic milieu and the protagonists being scholars and a campus satire because of the parodist portrayal of some of the characters from an academic circle. Last but not least, *Possession* is interpreted as a feminist novel. Byatt introduces strong, independent female characters and gives the space for their story to be told and heard. On the other hand, she criticises modern feminist theories and satirises characters that are perceived as 'radical' feminists. These are all indicators of the fact that the novel is a curious mixture of various genres, modes and styles. This mixture fits together very well, and all the different elements used are mutually supplementing each other. The switching between the modes and genres is engaging and provides many intriguing moments for readers.

A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* is genuinely a complex novel that takes its readers on the journey along with the main characters. Readers together with the contemporary protagonists are discovering different secrets and clues, thinking about the historical accuracy of mentioned events and characters, unfolding the mystery and speculating how it all ends. Therefore the readers become co-participants in this intense, thrilling and unpredictable quest. Byatt successfully let the Victorian period return on the map of contemporary literature. *Possession* offers a glimpse of the Victorian past that is far from being finished and that is still intervening with the present times and simultaneously shapes the destiny of contemporary scholars.

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