THE DANGER OF INTELLECTUAL MASTERS: LESSONS FROM HARRY POTTER AND ANTONIA BYATT

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ABSTRACT

The theoretical focus of this essay is Michèle Le Dœuff's work on "erotico-theoretical transference" in which she discusses the relation between the intellectual woman and her male mentor and the possibility of a dangerous "confusion of (the) amorous and (the) didactic." This claim is explored with relation to two texts, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998) and, more substantially, Antonia Byatt's *Possession*: *A Romance* (1990). The essay illustrates Byatt's negotiation of the problem through a management of sexual politics, literary theory and literary form. But the essay also suggests the continuing difficulty in being, in Byatt's words, 'a passionate woman and a passionate intellectual'.

KEY WORDS: Harry Potter, Antonia Byatt, *Possession*, Michèle Le Dœuff, "erotico-theoretical transference," the intellectual woman.

RESUMEN

El enfoque teórico de este ensayo es la obra de Michèle Le Dœuff sobre la "transferencia erótico-teórica", en la que se aborda la relación entre la mujer intelectual y su mentor masculino y la posibilidad de una "confusión peligrosa entre lo amoroso y lo didáctico". Este argumento se examina en relación a dos textos, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), de J.K. Rowling y, más en profundidad, *Possession*: *A Romance* (1990), de A. Byatt. El ensayo ilustra la negociación que hace Byatt del problema a través de su tratamiento de la política sexual, la teoría literaria y la forma literaria. Sin embargo, el ensayo también sugiere la continua dificultad de ser, en palabras de Byatt, "una mujer apasionada y una intelectual apasionada".

PALABRAS CLAVE: Harry Potter, Antonia Byatt, *Possession*, Michèle Le Dœuff, "transferencia erótico-teórica", mujer intelectual.

Near the start of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), Harry looks at the bibliography which has been sent by the new teacher of Defence against the Dark Arts to pupils about to enter the second year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The list reads:

The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2 by Miranda Goshawk
Break with a Banshee by Gilderoy Lockhart
Gadding with Ghouls by Gilderoy Lockhart
Holidays with Hags by Gilderoy Lockhart
Travels with Trolls by Gilderoy Lockhart
Voyages with Vampires by Gilderoy Lockhart
Wanderings with Werewolves by Gilderoy Lockhart
Year with the Yeti by Gilderoy Lockhart (38)

Subsequently, on a trip to Diagon Alley to buy the books, Harry with his friends, Hermione and the Weasley family, come across Gilderoy Lockhart doing a book signing for his autobiography, *Magical Me*. Here is Gilderoy, looking like a kind a wizarding version of Kilroy Silk:[1]

> Gilderoy Lockhart came slowly into view, seated at a table surrounded by large pictures of his own face, all winking and flashing dazzlingly white teeth at the crowd. The real Lockhart was wearing robes of forget-me-not blue which exactly matched his eyes; his pointed wizard's hat was set at a jaunty angle on his wavy hair. (49)

On other occasions we see Gilderoy in "palest mauve," "deep plum" and "lurid pink." Surrounded by admiring women of a certain age, including Mrs Weasley who is "breathless and... patting her hair," (49) Gilderoy signs books and announces that it is he who is the new Defence against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts and, hence, he who had sent the striking bibliography. When the term begins his first class with Harry and his friends consists of a thirty-minute test. The questions include:

1. *What is Gilderoy Lockhart's favourite colour?*
2. *What is Gilderoy Lockhart's secret ambition?*
3. *What, in your opinion, is Gilderoy Lockhart's greatest achievement to date?*

On and on it went, over three sides of paper, right down to:

54. *When is Gilderoy Lockhart's birthday, and what would his ideal gift be?* (77-8)

What is later revealed as the chaos of Gilderoy's lessons is matched only by the intensity of Hermione's repeated defence of him. She also sends him a Valentine's card; she keeps under her pillow a note he sent her; she trembles at the sight of his handwriting.

[1] Kilroy Silk is a British daytime TV presenter, well-known for his smooth, confidential manner with his largely female audience.

French philosopher Michèle Le Dœuff would argue that Hermione is in the thrall of an "erotico-theoretical transference" relation, a dangerous "confusion of (the) amorous and (the) didactic" (104). Le Dœuff's argument is grounded in philosophy but the mention of "transference" indicates how she draws on the insights of psychoanalysis. The process whereby the analysand transfers emotions from her/his relations with other people onto the analyst and, conversely, the process of countertransference from the analyst to the analysand can be replicated in the teaching situation, as commentators have pointed out.[2] "What distinguishes psychoanalysis from other relations," claims Jane Gallop, "is the possibility of analysing transference, of being aware of the emotions as a repetition, as inappropriate to context" (212). What might distinguish psychoanalysis doesn't necessarily distinguish teaching. Le Dœuff is concerned about the lack of awareness in the teaching situation of the workings of transference and countertransference; she is concerned also of the form this transference and countertransference can take and, within the context of gender, of the potentially damaging consequences for the female student of the male teacher.

To be caught up in a process of erotico-theoretical transference may, at first, seem attractive in that it allows the girl or woman to pursue, to some extent at least, her intellectual interests while maintaining a proper feminine attachment to a "superior" man. As countless female students, research assistants and junior staff have discovered it can also be exciting since, in one sense, the relationship crosses all kinds of boundaries though, in another sense, the gender and power relations are usually utterly conventional. The teacher becomes "the professor" (sometimes actually *is* the professor), "the intellectual master" and "the father-figure" but also, rather confusingly, "the lover." The reverence and devoted admiration that the pupil has for the intellectual master, "the subject supposed to know," as Lacan would say, and which is evident in the blushings and stammerings of Hermione can equally be present in the male pupil. We can all name from our own experience many male Lacanians, Foucauldians, Derrideans etc., etc., all obsessively tied to his master's voice. But, generally, it is easier for men to pass through the transference relation and move beyond the initial affiliation to a more autonomous position in the intellectual field. The disappointment of the male pupil in finding the master inadequate produces, Le Dœuff argues, "a radical lack which the Other cannot complete" (107). Trying to fill this radical lack encourages critique, the pursuit of knowledge and independence though —and again we could all give examples— the male disciple may simply move into another transference relation with another master who also in time "fails."

Le Dœuff believes it is more difficult for the female student to break that relationship of tutelage because of the erotic attraction. She is, of course, talking

[2] See, for instance, Roland Barthes ("Writers" 190-215); Shoshana Felman; Arthur W. Frank (28-35).

here in the context of heterosexual relations and there is a whole other story to be told with respect to gay and lesbian relations.[3] The female student becomes emotionally and intellectually bound to the male teacher —a devotée, a handmaiden, the keeper of the sacred flame. Moreover, men have had greater access to the institutions of education, employment, publishing which can act as "the third factor" (Le Doeuff 106) to break the intense relationship and to enable the man to enter a wider critical field than the master's own. The knowledge the chosen male pupil gets from the master is not only an education into certain theories, beliefs and practices but is involved, as Pierre Bourdieu would suggest, with the transmission of forms of capital —cultural, symbolic, social. The woman is more likely to be caught in a "definitive fealty to one particular form of thought," (Le Doeuff 107) that of her intellectual mentor. For the intellectual father, the daughter's devotion is extremely pleasurable and, hence, the lure towards countertransference: "How can it not be gratifying to be seen as a plenitude when one is oneself caught in incompleteness and disappointment?" (Le Doeuff 107). The daughter too has the rewards of being indispensable and favoured but at the price of existing only in the margins of the institution and, as Elizabeth Grosz has pointed out, of sometimes becoming a victim of sexual exploitation when the fantasy erotic relationship becomes real (206). Who knows where Lockhart's letter under the pillow could have led?

Lockhart's attitude to Harry Potter, by turns anxiously competitive and falsely avuncular, is underpinned by Oedipal rivalry as the intellectual father sees himself usurped, very easily in this case, by the son. In a reversal of the usual generational relation it is Harry who has the greatness Lockhart desires. Lockhart doesn't know whether to identify with it —hence, he orchestrates a photo with Harry and shmoozes up to him —or to undermine it— hence, the frequent put-down comments. By the end of the story, however, the sham of Lockhart's authority is revealed; his monstrous egotism is merely a desperate strategy to hide his lack. Lockhart loses his wand —read, phallic power— when with characteristic incompetence he uses a Memory Charm against himself. "Impaled on your own sword, Gilderoy!," says Professor Dumbledore, the Headmaster of Hogwarts. "'Sword?' said Lockhart dimly. 'Haven't got a sword. That boy has, though.' He pointed at Harry. 'He'll lend you one.'" (244) Though no one in the real world ever is the complete intellectual master, that plenitude is possible in the magical world and Harry's journey is to ensure that he will have it all.

Lochkhart's demise frees Hermione from the negative aspects of this transference relation. However, Le Dœuff comments on how sometimes the female student in philosophy escapes the intellectual father only to find fellow male students

[3] Just how difficult that story can be is evident in Jane Gallop (*Feminist* and "Resisting") and the critical responses to Gallop in the same issue from James R. Kincaid and Ann Pellegrini. Further Critical Responses, from Tania Modleski, Lisa Ruddick, Terry Caesar and, again, James R. Kincaid and Ann Pellegrini, can be found in *Critical Inquiry* 26.3 (Spring 2000).

pressing on her the same relation of tutelage. The male student who is seen as more brilliant than her offers to become her guide and mentor and the erotico-theoretical transference starts again. It is the relationship of Sartre and de Beauvoir which is much in Le Dœuff's thoughts at this moment.[4] In her essay, "Long Hair: Short Ideas," she mentions the sentence from de Beauvoir's *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* when Sartre, on telling de Beauvoir that she had passed the *agrégation*, remarks, "From now on I will take you in hand." Le Dœuff repeats this point in *Hipparchia's Choice* and discusses also the scene in the Luxembourg Gardens, again from *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, when the young de Beauvoir argues philosophy with the equally young Sartre and declares herself "beaten."[5] Toril Moi describes this as a "primal scene" for Beauvoir: "In the course of three hours in the Luxembourg Gardens Simone de Beauvoir has indeed been transformed: if she arrived as a woman with a philosophical project of her own, the elaboration of a new ethics, she leaves as a woman undone, or to put it differently: as a *disciple*" (17). As Moi indicates, Sartre's intellectual mastery of de Beauvoir is like a defloration and, equally, the desire of the woman caught in erotico-theoretical transference "turns the man into philosophy: his body comes to represent phallic knowledge to her" (18).

I haven't read any later volumes of the Potter sequence so I don't know how Hermione is fairing and if there is any indication that her erotico-theoretical interests are moving towards another potential intellectual master, Harry himself, but I think Le Dœuff would be concerned about Hermione's conformity. Le Dœuff remarks: "Having being trapped in dual relationships, women are now in danger of burying themselves in a relationship to narrowly university-defined institutions." She wonders if this relationship with the institution is "a denial or a sublimation of the transference relationship" (120). What Le Dœuff is thinking of is the woman who invests all her energies in the institution, volunteers for every committee, identifies with institutional goals. Just as, in Moi's view, the man comes to represent the philosophy, so here the institution becomes a substitute for the man. Harry is clearly a New Man and treats Hermione with egalitarian ease. But it is notable that Hermione is a swot. Her intellectual prowess is the product of effort; Harry is simply exceptional. Hermione is also the institutional conformist, tut-tutting when Harry, the rule-breaker, takes another imaginative, and always successful, leap into the unknown. Is Hermione in danger of becoming the dependable research-assistant to this new magical master?

In Antonia Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990), it is the old-school literary critic, Beatrice Nest, whose personal and professional history follows most closely that mapped by Le Dœuff. As an undergraduate Beatrice had focussed all her intellectual aspirations and her sexual longing on the Victorian poet, Randolph Henry

[4] In addition to Le Dœuff's essay "Long Hair: Short Ideas," see also on the Sartre/de Beauvoir relationship Le Dœuff (*Hipparchia's*); Toril Moi (*Simone*); Alice Jardine ("Death" 84-96).

[5] See Le Dœuff ("Long" 119; *Hipparchia's* 135-8).

Ash, discovering in his poetry "a painful and as it seemed illicit glimpse of a combination of civilised talk and raw passion which everyone must surely want, and yet which no one... seemed to have" (114). The unattainable ideal to be found in a combination of "civilised talk and raw passion" is a peculiarly academic erotic fantasy. The fact that Ash is long-dead doesn't prevent him from functioning as a transferential love object and, conveniently, it also allows Beatrice the promise of passion without any of the problems of pursuit or consummation that would challenge her conventional social world. Yet Beatrice is not permitted even the role of handmaiden; her desires are stifled by her supervisor who believes Ash to be beyond her research capabilities —how could a young woman produce any significant "Contribution to Knowledge" (114) about the mind of a great man? By excluding Beatrice from the study of Ash, her supervisor maintains the value of the subject and his ownership of it. Beatrice is blocked in both her erotico-theoretical transference relations and her access to the institution. Her supervisor steers her towards the "modestly useful, manageable" (114) journals of Ash's wife, Ellen.

Beatrice's only output over the next twenty-five years is, appropriately, a slim volume about the dutiful wives of important men and her institutional position remains resolutely marginal. Excluded in the early days from the Senior Common Room and the decision-making in the pub, despised in recent years by many of her male co-researchers and regarded unsympathetically by even the feminist critics who occasionally visit her archive in the basement of the British Museum, Beatrice has defensively entombed herself: "In an inner room, beyond the typewriter cubicle, was a small cavern constructed of filing cabinets, inhabited by Dr Beatrice Nest, almost bricked in by the boxes containing the diary and correspondence of Ellen Ash" (27). The final line of defence which, at the same time, declares her impossible femininity is Beatrice's own large breasts. Though she had at first hoped that she could retain contact with Ash through Ellen's writing —"some intimacy with the author of the poems, with that fine mind and passionate nature" (114)— that was not to be. Gradually she becomes involved in Ellen's life, justifying her dutifulness, her complaints, her dullness. The narrator's comment —"There was no PhD in all this" (115)— confirms Beatrice's secondary status within the discipline and the institution. Yet in two ways Beatrice manages to deviate from Le Dœuff's schema. Though stowed away in the British Museum, Beatrice doesn't bury herself in the institution in quite the manner Le Dœuff fears. Beatrice is obdurate and un-cooperative. Through a mode of deliberate obfuscation, which parallels the obfuscation of Ellen's journal, she is involved in her own small rebellion against the university and the field of literary criticism which despises her anti-theoretical research. Secondly, becoming involved in Ellen's life moves Beatrice away from an idealisation of "the subject who is supposed to know." Ellen has little in terms of "civilised talk and raw passion;" she can't elicit a starry-eyed admiration from Beatrice. A different kind of identification takes place as Beatrice recognises a sister, like herself easily dismissed and in need of fierce protection.

Byatt is acutely aware of the problem for women in combining the intellectual and the erotic. She remembers her own difficulties as a young woman:

> I thought you could possibly manage to be both at once, a passionate woman and a passionate intellectual, and efficient, if you could just switch gear and switch gear from one to the other, but if you let them all run together organically, something messy would occur and you would get overwhelmed. (Tredell 27)

The unattractive options seem to be either intellectual independence and sexual containment or erotic passion and intellectual dependence and there is certainly a long history of women finding it difficult to reconcile their cleverness with their femininity generally and their sexuality specifically. As Sarah Bennett perceives in Margaret Drabble's *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1967), a woman "can't be a sexy don. It's all right for men, being learned and attractive, but for a woman it's a mistake" (183-4). Such is the problem for feminist literary critic, Maud Bailey. Though highly intellectual and efficient, she has great difficulty in expressing her passionate femininity. Like Christabel LaMotte, the Victorian poet she researches, she is a "chilly mortal" who needs "quiet and nothingness" (285-6) so as to focus on her work.[6] Her long blonde hair, variously signifying the sexual, the frivolous, an anti-feminist preoccupation with female beauty, has to be kept covered. Thinking about contemporary theories of the subject, Maud is accepting of herself as "intermittent and partial" but finds it much more difficult to accommodate her body, "[t]he skin, the breath, the eyes, the hair, their history, which did seem to exist" (251). The research discoveries about Christabel are also a confrontation with the difficult materiality of the female body, what it might mean to be a Victorian, middle-class unmarried mother.

Byatt explores these problems through the figure of the egg. Maud identifies with Christabel's metaphor of the unbroken egg and its connotations of the self-contained, particularly when she recalls the tormenting image she associates with her liaison with another academic, Fergus Wolff: "Her mind was full of an image of a huge, unmade, stained and rumpled bed, its sheets pulled into standing peaks here and there, like the surface of whipped egg-white" (56). One reason why Beatrice gives Maud access to the Ellen Ash journal is because Maud understands her antipathy to the current critical pre-occupation with sexuality: Maud thinks of "the whole tenor and endeavour of twentieth-century literary scholarship" and then of "a bed like dirty egg-white." (221-2) The egg white suggests both semen stains and the loss of the sealed autonomy held in the unbroken egg.

The relationship with Fergus has already been an education for Maud in the dangers of erotico-theoretical transference. If Maud gave an inch, Fergus could so easily become the Sartre to her de Beauvoir. In the historical and political contexts in which they work —late twentieth century, theoretically conscious, alert to feminism— he would not dare to offer himself as Maud's mentor but he does

[6] Though not the focus of this particular essay, Christabel LaMotte's story could also be usefully discussed with reference to "erotico-theoretical transference" relations.

delight in suggesting that Roland Michell, with whom Maud is working, is her intellectual inferior while he is her intellectual equal. At another point he gives Maud a Lacanian reference which Maud with irritation tracks down. The irritation comes through her awareness of the threat posed by Fergus's knowledge and "helpfulness" and at this juncture it is the egg image which again returns to her mind: "[t]he tormented bed rose again in her mind's eye, like old whipped eggs, like dirty snow" (141). Fergus produces papers of consummate theoretical aplomb —"The Potent Castrato: the phallogocentric structuration of Balzac's hermaphrodite hero/ines" (57). His unctuous manner and his "apparently" feminist arguments are but the sheepish exterior that hide a wolfish heart. Having lost Maud as a sexual partner, he tries to possess her through her work. He writes to Maud about his plans to give a paper on Christabel LaMotte: "Would you be pleased to hear I have decided to give a paper on Christabel at the York conference on metaphor. I thought I'd lecture on The Queen of the Castle: What is kept in the Keep? How does that strike you? Do I have your imprimatur? Might I even hope to be able to consult your archive?" (138). Fergus's lecture plans carry their own metaphorical associations. Maud with her room at the top of Tennyson Tower is like the Queen of the Castle; exploring the secrets of the keep and the archive could have penetrative connotations. Everything can be accommodated within Fergus's "slippin-an-slidin" theoretical interests. His approach of false deference, wiliness and opportunism signifies, in a text highly conscious of literary form, both the rapacious fairy-tale wolf and the villain of a Victorian melodrama, in each case homing in on their innocent prey.[7]

One could argue that as the intellectual woman enhances her educational capital, her social and institutional status she would be less likely to fall unwittingly into an erotico-theoretical transference relation. Byatt presents the problem in generational terms. For Beatrice, a student during the war years and from a restricted background, the danger is pressing; for Maud Bailey, younger and a successful academic, the position is different. To Roland Michell, Maud appears, initially, not as an academic equal, certainly not as a victim but in the guise of castrator. He is overwhelmed by the complexity of one of her essays that he reads on his way to first meet her and the Maud he confronts is taller than him, unsmiling, has a patrician voice that unnerves him and, humiliatingly, she tries to carry his bag. Maud's cleverness, competence, her refusal to use a masquerade of deference or charm and her intimidating height have an un-manning effect. The focus of the humour here might be on Roland but this is possible only because the figure of the woman intellectual as a castrator still holds cultural credibility. Indeed, that figure once again shows in its own way the difficulty for the intellectual woman to be both erotically and theoretically fulfilled. If engaging in an erotico-theoretical transference relation provides no answer, neither does achieving intellectual prowess on

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[7] Of course, "Wolff" also suggests —with terrible irony— "Woolf" as in Virginia.

one's own account since success as an intellectual is predicated on a failure of true womanliness.

For Byatt to bring together Maud and Roland in the narrative's twentieth-century romance requires some nifty footwork on her part and, in this final section of the essay, I want to consider three ways in which she effects this, the first being in terms of sexual politics. Having evaded Fergus's strategies, it is essential that Maud doesn't enter into an erotico-theoretical transference relation with Roland. This doesn't seem likely since she is of a higher social class than him, professionally more secure and intellectually more confident —hence, as we see, her castrating role. But Maud does have to find some way of maintaining her intellectual independence while giving full expression to her "passionate femininity." Meanwhile, Roland has to be rescued from his castrated, inferior position and his intellectual status recognised while ensuring that he doesn't take up the position of the intellectual master.[8] It is fortunate that Roland is happy about Maud's need for separateness, in large part because he has the same need. This is expressed in the novel in the image of the white bed. Roland tells Maud of his vision of "the white bed" (270) and on the research trail in Yorkshire and Brittany, they have separate rooms "with the requisite white beds" (421).[9] Their carefully restrained speech and physical contact both heighten their awareness of sexual potential and emphasise their separateness; as Maud had commented earlier, "Celibacy as the new volupté. The new indulgence" (271).

Roland, the Knight, eventually crosses the liminal space that separates him and Maud, breaks through the metaphorical hymen, that is the "Thresholds. Bastions. Fortresses" (506) that have been both the focus of Maud's research and indicative of her psychic resistance, and captures his Princess, taking "possession of all her white coolness" and promising to take care of her (507).At this perilous moment, Maud remembers Christabel's unbroken egg and "[h]er self-possession, her autonomy" (506). The "taking possession of" and the "taking care of" have worrying connotations of domination. Once again, there are echoes of Sartre's promise to "take (de Beauvoir) in hand." The "taking possession of" and the "taking care of" *could* shade into what Byatt called in her comment above, something "messy" and "overwhelming." There is no effusion in Maud and Roland's declarations of love; rather the language is hesitant, staccato, at times briskly practical. Maud finally commits to Roland only when she is sure that he "would never —blur the edges messily" (506) and at consummation there can then be a willing fusion on Maud's part as "her white coolness... grew warm against him, so that there seemed to be no boundaries" (507).

[8] This is rather like the problem Charlotte Brontë faces in *Shirley* when the tutor Louis has, somehow, to be made worthy of the masterful Shirley. However, Brontë's power reversal would not suit a contemporary audience.

[9] For further discussion of the meanings of whiteness, see Jennifer M. Jeffers.

Secondly, Byatt constructs the relationship of Maud and Roland in terms of a debate on literary theory. For the intellectual woman, and in a book so theoretically knowing, resolution cannot be only a matter of sexual politics; it must also be a theoretical *rapprochement*. Maud is at first included by Byatt in her satire of contemporary critical theory. For instance, she features as one of the authors in an edited collection on LaMotte:

> They wrote on 'Ariachne's Broken Woof: Art as Discarded Spinning in the Poems of LaMotte.' Or 'Melusina and the Daemonic Double: Good Mother, Bad Serpent.' 'White Gloves: Blanche Glover: occluded Lesbian sexuality in LaMotte.' There was even an essay by Maud Bailey herself on 'Melusina, Builder of Cities: a Subversive Female Cosmogony.' (37-8)

It is not only the subject matter of the essays or the critical vocabulary indicated in "subversive" and "occluded" and "cosmogony" but the actual form of the titles with the obligatory colon —in one case, two colons— that Byatt mocks. Yet, as the heroine of the contemporary romance, Maud cannot be merely an object of satirical derision and this requires careful placing in the critical field. She has to be distanced from what Byatt sees as the follies of contemporary critical theory, particularly feminist critical theory and, hence, Maud's alliance with Beatrice, her cautions about the determination of the loud, flamboyant, bisexual Leonora Stern to see everything as related to sexuality and her antipathy to the theoretically cutting-edge but, in truth, amoral, apolitical and opportunist interventions of the oleaginous Fergus Wolff. Byatt's dislike of the theoretical positions Leonora and Fergus represent is writ large but she also dislikes their methodology, their freewheeling mode of association. What unites Maud and Ariane Le Minier, "a passionate precision in their approach to scholarship," (334) is much more to Byatt's taste.[10]

The romance dictates a working through of the theoretical differences that separate Maud and Roland. Signs are not auspicious at first. Maud, with her work on feminism, psychoanalysis and Winnicott, is theoretically sophisticated; Roland describes himself as "an old-fashioned textual critic" (50). Yet it is Roland who initiates the research endeavour with Maud and who convinces her that there is something significant to be discovered in the relationship of the poets, Ash and LaMotte. As they work together intellectual relations develop. Though the theoretical frameworks are different, Maud's "passionate precision" (334) in her intellectual work is not far removed from Roland's close textual analysis and Maud does describe herself as a "textual scholar" (211). Roland concurs with Maud concerning her reservations about Leonora. Reading Leonora's Irigarayan essay on the relation

[10] See also Christien Franken (135, n. 22). Franken notes how Byatt positions Maud at some distance from what is in Byatt's view Leonora's over-identification with gender and in agreement with Ariane's interest in moving beyond gender-identification.

between imagined landscapes and the female body he feels that the emphasis on sexuality homogenises everything. Both Maud and Roland have an initial aversion to biography. Maud dislikes feminist interest in private lives and claims that "[y]ou can be psychoanalytic without being *personal*" (211). Both want to focus on the author's mind rather than the details of their lives; both, like their nineteenth-century counterparts Ash and LaMotte, give priority to "the Life of Language."[11]

Towards the end of the book, Roland embraces with increasing confidence critical positions that Maud would question. He finds his own liminal space on the border between criticism and poetry and begins to write "lists of words that resisted arrangements into the sentences of literary criticism." (431).[12] He also questions the lessons he had learned from poststructuralism:

> He had been taught that language was essentially inadequate, that it could never speak what was there, that it only spoke itself.
> He thought about the death mask. He could and could not say that the man and the mask were dead. What had happened to him was that the ways in which it could be said had become more interesting than the idea that it could not. (473)

Byatt's phrasing is careful here. It is not that Roland is reinstating a fixed relation between the signifier and the signified, rather that such a hypothesis is a fruitful notion to explore, particularly for the poet. Similarly, Roland's reaffirmation of "the author" —"He could hear, or feel, or even almost see, the patterns made by a voice he didn't yet know, but which was his own" (475)— has a complex relation to the self.[13] Though this is not Maud's theoretical position, it is no bad thing for the resolution of the romance that Roland has staked out a territory which is different from, though compatible with, Maud's and, potentially, of equal status to Maud's. Byatt has transposed a nineteenth-century notion of separate spheres to the intellectual terrain of the twentieth century.

Moreover, though Maud is absorbed in theory, it is wrong to see Roland as a theoretical *ingénu*. For example, he endorses, as Maud would, anti-essentialist concepts of the subject but then both have to reappraise the theory. If in erotico-theoretical transference relations the theoretical leads somewhat problematically to the erotic, Maud and Roland learn how it is also possible for the theoretical to lead to an impasse in the erotic. If you know everything about sexuality theoretically but, like Prince Charles when marrying Lady Diana, you distrust the idea of being

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[11] In this respect it is not always helpful to see the male and female critics in the book as in opposition as Elisabeth Bronfen does in her essay, "Romancing Difference, Courting Coherence: A.S. Byatt's *Possession* as Postmodern Moral Fiction." On Byatt's mapping of theoretical positions, see also Louise Yelin.

[12] See Byatt's comments in her interview with Tredell on her own parallel experience (27).

[13] See Frederick M. Holmes (72-3) for similar comments. Note how Holmes sees here a link with Romanticism which Roland earlier rejected. See also Byatt's essay, "Identity and the Writer," (23-6).

"in love," if you reject a notion of your essential self or anybody else's, if you have no belief in coherence or resolution, if everything is constructed and plotted and nothing innocently chosen, how will boy ever meet girl and live happily ever after? For theoretically-conscious literary critics the words of love have no authenticity and can exist only in the context of a postmodern irony or, as we saw earlier, an awkward hesitancy.[14]

Finally, it is inevitable that Byatt has to reclaim older narrative forms and techniques to provide the resolution the romance demands. Roland is speaking for Byatt when he thinks of coherence and closure as "deep human desires that are presently unfashionable. But they are always both frightening and enchantingly desirable" (422). The text also resurrects the omniscient narrator. The authorial voice that emerges in "Postscript 1868" tells of things that "leave no discernible trace" but it is also quite absolute that "[t]his is how it was" (508). There is no parodic edge to this voice. Rather the bitter-sweet story that is told of love and loss, as Ash meets his daughter, recognises her and sends a message to Christabel which the child loses, has the deep affective power on the reader that Byatt and Roland recognise as so pleasurable. Byatt reveals both intellectual interest and satirical distance as she plays with postmodern fragmentation, uncertainties and discontinuities but the stronger, more deeply-held narrative drive is to connection, resolution and closure. To achieve this, Byatt must reinstate the narrative modes of the realist novel and turn away from satire. As David Lodge reminds us when talking of his own satirical romance, *Small World: An Academic Romance*, a novel which like Byatt's both questions and employs realist conventions, "satire is the antithesis of romance, because romance is ultimately about the achievement of desire; satire is saying you won't get what you desire, you don't deserve it" (Haffenden 159).

Thus, Maud and Roland's tentative optimism for the future is supported by a shrewd management of literary form. Roland is aware that he is operating in "a vulgar and a high Romance simultaneously" (425). He is a Knight wooing his Princess; he is searching for the Holy Grail; he is, also, a lower-middle-class academic, hoping for a decent job and in love with a woman who is socially and, perhaps, intellectually above him. "Reader, I married him," concludes Jane Eyre; "Reader, I have admitted my love for Roland but will maintain my autonomy while Roland can commute between Lincoln and his new job, perhaps in Amsterdam" is —roughly— Maud's guarded modern equivalent. Byatt looks to her heterosexual romance to reconcile oppositions, male and female, poet and critic, erotic and intellectual; her play with form allows the reader to "feel the passion" and "do the standing back and thinking" (Tredell 25);[15] and the hope is that Maud's plan will

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[14] This links to Umberto Eco's point when he muses on how it is possible, in a postmodern age, for a man to say "I love you madly" to "a very cultivated woman." (67).

[15] See also Byatt's essay, "People in Paper Houses: Attitudes to 'Realism' and 'Experiment' in English Post-war Fiction," (165-88) and Bronfen's interesting comments on the essay (120-1).

enable her to be both the passionate woman and the passionate feminist intellectual without an unhealthy dependence on Roland. But in trying to reconcile everything the novel inevitably invokes the terms that could split the resolution apart. It is, as its sub-title tells us, a romance and its balancing act constructed within a liberal-humanist discourse is cheering but vulnerable. As romance is the antithesis of satire, so Roland realises that it is also the antithesis of social realism. The novel must end before social realism can kick in, before, for example, Maud has experienced motherhood and the strains that can put on the independent woman. What Roland Barthes calls "the N.W.P.," that is the "non-will-to-possess," can be "a tactical notion" in which possession is secured by apparently renouncing it or "a final snare" in boosting one's virtuous self image (Barthes, *Lover's* 233). At some stage, quite unexpectedly, Maud might find herself in a position of economic and emotional dependence; in such circumstances she could find her intellectual autonomy difficult to maintain and Roland could then be cast as the new *paterfamilias* taking everything in hand.

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