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EÖTVÖS LORÁND TODOMÁNYEGYETEM
Bölcsészettudományi Kar

Diplomamunka

Napistennők: A női alkotó ábrázolása A.S. Byatt műveiben
Sun Goddesses: The Representation of the Female Artist in A.S.Byatt's Novels

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Angol irodalom

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A HKR 346. § ad 76. § (4) c) pontja értelmében:
„… A szakdolgozathoz csatolni kell egy nyilatkozatot arról, hogy a munka a hallgató saját szellemi terméke…”

NYILATKOZAT

Alulírott Gubacsi Beáta ezennel kijelentem és aláírásommal megerősítem, hogy az ELTE BTK Anglisztika mesterszakján Angol irodalom szakirányán írt jelen diplomamunkám saját szellemi termékem, melyet korábban más szakon még nem nyújtottam be szakdolgozatként és amelybe mások munkáját (könyv, tanulmány, kézirat, internetes forrás, személyes közlés stb.) idézőjel és pontos hivatkozások nélkül nem építettem be.

Budapest, 20 .....

aláírás

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Introduction

A.S. Byatt's (1936 –) academic and creative works are all highly metatextual as they are exploring the theme of imagination mostly from the female characters' point of view. Her academic writings are devoted to women writers, such as George Eliot or Iris Murdoch, and the analysis of female creativity. Her novels, dramatizing the process of becoming an artist, are also concerned with female authorship and creative power which is encoded in Byatt's composite symbolism. The center of this system is the Sun which is her metaphor for creative and visionary capability. Therefore, the 'Sun' and its derivative metaphors, such as the snake, are instrumental in establishing the metanarrative level of Byatt's novels.

Three of her novels are especially significant in terms of the Sun symbolism and metatextuality. *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964), which is her debut novel, *The Game* (1967), and her best-known novel, *Possession: A Romance* (1990) show such interest, and will be the material of this thesis paper. Byatt in these works dramatizes the neoplatonic or western creation myth, which is based on the binary oppositions of male/female, mind/body, and Sun/Moon. As she puts it in her contemplative "Introduction" to *The Shadow of the Sun*: "the Sun is the male Logos, or Nous, or Mind, that penetrated inert Hyle, or matter, or female Earth, and brought it to life and form" (*The Shadow*, xiv).

This paradigm denies women's creative power and assigns them in the creative process the mere function of the passive muse, lover, and mother, whose bodies gradually become a text, which is created and formed by the god-like male genius.

Therefore, the male author and the literature he produces is normative, genderless and unmarked, while women writers necessarily have to define themselves as the other; their art is always against literary norms; it is marked as female, and, as a result, it is marginalized.

Byatt describes the effects of the heliotropic paradigm on male and female authors, contrasting their experiences, letting them interact, and then she distances herself from this dichotomy by using and rejecting feminist theory which fights against markedness of women's writing but keeps it marked at the same time. In her exploration of female creativity, “the sun becomes quietly female” (*The Shadow*, xv), women writers become sun goddesses, whose creative energies are not denied or diminished but prosper. Still, the process is silent, sensitive, secretive and almost humble; at any rate, not offensively bright.

Consequently, there is a paradigm shift in Byatt's heliotropic imagination from the dichotomous neoplatonic creation myth to a less exclusive and limiting metaphor which invites women writers in the creative process as active agents. This new metaphor is what I call the continuum of light. According to my thorough research, there is no data that this term has ever been used to mark the ultimate form of Byatt's heliotropic system of metaphors, which is the result of a gradual development visible in her novels. The significance of Byatt's establishment of 'the continuum of light' is that it can terminate the markedness of women's writing. On a continuum there are no scales and degrees or end points which might lead to establishment of normative literature. The continuum do not result in deviance as the gender based categorization, therefore,

there is no point in marking authors and works.

The purpose of this paper is to delve into Byatt's universe and decipher her riddles about the intertwined nature of creativity, sexuality and power which materializes in the neoplatonic creation myth and the metaphor of the continuum of light. The first chapter is devoted to the detailed discussion of the three selected novels in chronological order, concentrating on the representation of male and female geniuses, their interactions, and the nature of their visions in terms of Byatt's heliotropic symbolism for imagination. In the detailed discussion of the novels the analysis of her symbolism is restricted to short description of those metaphors which are the most significant in constructing the metanarrative. This limitation is necessary as Byatt's symbolism is so immense and complex that it could have been the topic of an other thesis with a different focus. The second chapter of this paper concentrates on the sexualization of creativity which portrays women as “blank pages” upon which the pen-penis writes. The chapter enumerates and analyzes the metaphors, from the lover and mother over to the lesbian, which attempt to distinguish women and female imagination from the sexualized concepts of creativity. In the end, Byatt's portrait of the female artist will be sketched.

1. "You have to be the sun"[1]: Paradigm Shift From the Sun/Shadow Dichotomy to the Continuum of Light

The selected novels, *The Shadow of the Sun*, *The Game and Possession: A Romance* show how Byatt discovers the Sun as a metaphor for creativity and visionary power, and how she explores the metaphor through her female characters struggle to get access to the sunlight and become artists. Therefore, this chapter is going to focus on the neoplatonic creation myth, which is the cause of women writer's struggle, and the paradigm shift from this dichotomous neoplatonic creation myth to the continuum of (sun) light, which gives them freedom to become Sun goddesses.

The neoplatonic creation myth is built on the dichotomy of man/woman, often represented by the dichotomy of Sun/Moon, which assigns superior status and creative power to men, and renders inferior, mere bodily, passive presence to women in the creative process. Male imagination is symbolized by the vastness and brightness of the Sun, while female creativity is described by the exiguity and blankness of the Moon. In contrast, the continuum of light categorizes writers independently from their sex or gender in terms of the intensity of their visions, thus, their closeness to the Sun. The Sun in Byatt's interpretation is the metaphor of creative and visionary power as it is suggested in her self-definition as an artist: "[…] my secret self is […] someone who saw everything too bright, too fierce […] This vision of too much makes the visionary want to write." (*The Shadow*, x)

1Byatt in her retrospective "Introduction" to the new edition of *The Shadow of the Sun* claims that Cecil Day Lewis, her publisher, suggested that she should change the title to "the mellifluous" (xiv) *Shadow of a Sun.* Thirty years later her response to this: "The sun has no shadow, that is the point. You have to be the sun or you are nothing." (xiv)

It is vital to elaborate on a particular issue concerning the Sun/Moon dichotomy upon which the neoplatonic creation myth is based. As far as I can see, reading Byatt, in her heliotropic system of metaphors it is not the Moon with which the Sun is in binary opposition as it might be logically and traditionally expected, but *the Shadow*[2]. As I will argue, the Shadow seems to be not only a more accurate way of representing women's writing than Moon. The Moon is the lack of light which is creativity and imagination is Byatt's universe. The Shadow on the other hand suggests that the light is blocked. In the case of women writers what is in their way of incorporating sunlight keeping them in the shadow is the ideology behind the neoplatonic creation myth. Therefore, the Shadow, as opposed to the Moon, gives more space and autonomy for Byatt's female artists, which is the first step in emerging from the limiting dichotomy toward the liberating continuum of light.

The dichotomy which associates men with the Sun and women with the Moon is originating from Judeo-Christian traditions which affected Western culture the most. Barbara Black Koltuv in her *The Book of Lilith*[3] recalls a sequence from the Zohar[4], which suggests that the image of Lilith, the first woman, originates from the battling binary oppositions of Sun/Light and Moon/Darkness. The myth reports that the Sun (male) and the Moon (female) were always fighting, and God separated them to end the

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2The Shadow in my thesis does not go back to Jungian archetypes. In Byatt's "Introduction" her first book, *The Shadow of the Sun*, she mentions that she was asked to change the title to *Shadow of a Sun*. She remarks that it has totally different implications and she prefers *The Shadow of the Sun*. Therefore, I will stick to 'the Shadow' with article.

3Barbara Black Koltuv in *The Book of Lilith* follows the traces of Lilith from her ancient origins to the Freudian interpretation of her obscure figure and presence in contemporary feminist literature.

4The Zohar contains the fundaments of Jewish spiritual philosophy, the Kabbalah.

constant skirmish. But God in so doing gave greater power and light to the Sun, while the Moon had to shrink and fade, and be in charge of ‘lower ranks’ (Koltuv, 3) of creatures, those who fly and crawl. Since the tension between the Sun and the Moon can be interpreted as sexual, which gives birth gives birth to Lilith, the Sun/Moon dichotomy inherits gender bias deriving from differences in sex and sexuality (See Chapter 2 on sexuality and creativity).

Consequently, the Sun is male, ruling the sky, the day, dominating everything it casts light upon. It represents autonomy and power. It is potent enough to impregnate the vastness of passive dark Earth, to give it seed, life and content. The Sun's light is sacred; associated with clarity, rationality, norms, and the law, which expels and outlaws the Moon. Therefore, the Moon's connotations, as the symbol of womanhood, are abnormality, irrationality, a cyclical and bodily nature, sexuality, even profanity. These features are dangerous and incomprehensible to the male Sun and to the order it represents. The assumed danger reinforces women's markedness and marginalized position. As Farwell puts it “the female most often represents those qualities that need to be controlled – emotion, darkness, desire, intuition – and the result is a paradigm that focuses on male control of the dangerous side of human nature.” (105) Therefore, the Sun/Moon dichotomy represents a gap between men and women in terms of social standing and influence, mental and physical capabilities, and morality and creative power.

Considering some of the Moon's features, it does not seem as if they gave a valid description of women's or women's writing. The Moon is necessarily the diminished

form of the Sun in the sense that it has no light of its own, it can only reflect the Sun's light. The Moon will never be able to produce light, it will never be independent from the Sun in this respect. Nor it will be independent from Earth in this sense which that Earth is blocking the Sun's light from time to time. Also, figuratively, Earth is usually represented by feminine imagery in the Western culture, therefore, Earth can be a metaphor for women, as well, which is again very limiting. The Moon (and Earth, too) is passive in lacking light, consequently, associating female artists with the Moon, as the dichotomy dictates, is the denial of women's creative power, and the acceptance of the status quo as defined by the neoplatonic creation myth which renders inferior status to women in the creative process.

The Moon as metaphor for women's art or the female artist is unfortunate for another reason, too. The Moon appears and disappears from time to time, while female art existed all the time in various forms, from tapestries with abstract patterns to personal or public journals, yet these artifacts were anonymous and, therefore, not considered as art only until recently when feminists have discovered them.

Kate Soper in her *What is Nature?* explores the parallels between woman and nature. She suggests that Western culture naturalizes women as a result of their greater bodily engagement in reproduction. Nature, in return, is feminized by the feminine imagery of the (raped) virgin, the tamed woman, or the nurturing mother. According to Soper, women's marginal position establishes them as mediators between society and nature, as they were producing commodities from raw materials.

Still, as a result of their liminal position, they had no place in civilization and its

innovations, such as history or art. Women produced art throughout their undocumented history but it was not considered as aesthetically valuable as a result of their pragmatic and domestic features. As Pomeroy[5] writes:

> I am going to forget, i*n order really to see them*, that a group of Navajo blankets are only that. In order to soncider them as I feel they ought to be considered as Art with a capital 'A' – I am going to look at them as paintings – created with the dye instead of pigment, in unstretched fabric instead of canvas – *by several nameless masters of anstract art*. (qtd. in Soper, 140)

Soper points out that this approach suggests that female art does not exist on its own but in the frame of patriarchal culture. She rebukes this view for "not only its blindness to the chauvinism of its patronage of female 'art', but its failure to appreciate that the abstract pattern of the Navajo Blanket could be viewed as 'art' only after (male) 'high art' had come to encompass and value abstraction." (140) According to Soper, the case of the Navajo blankets demonstrates how limited and limiting male art criticism is; and suggests that "female cultural production was actually in advance of 'masculine' aesthetic conceptions". (140) Women's (art) history is still being established, explored mostly by feminists scholars as women's art was nameless and domestic, which was not part of history. Yet, the "namesless masters" (140), mother and the daughter, the female community always had their narratives in various forms, yet, it was silent or silenced,

5 Ralph Pomeroy is quoted in Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker's *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981) . The Pomeroy passage is from his 'his appriciative, formalist critique of the London exhibition' of Navajo art in 1974. (*Old Mistresses*, 68)

and certainly kept in the shadow (See chapter 2.2. on the metaphor of the mother and the significance of female 'genealogy' in art).

Turning to Byatt's metanarratives, she explores these ideologies behind the Sun/Shadow dichotomy of the neoplatonic creation myth and attempts to establish a metaphor for creativity and imagination in which women writers can claim their own sunlight and freedom to become and exist as visionary artists and not "poor mad exploited sibyls and pythonesses." (*The Shadow*, x) Her first novel, *The Shadow of the Sun* fails to depict the female protagonist, Anna, as a visionary character as she cannot define herself as an artist due to the limitations of the Sun/Shadow dichotomy. Yet, the novel starts to dismantle the neoplatonic creation myth as it demonstrates that both male and female characters are struggling to meet the requirements set by the binary oppositions, and, in fact, they fail in the sense that in the novel there is no perfect sun and shadow type character.

Byatt's next novel, *The Game* is not framed by the Sun/Shadow dichotomy. Both of the female protagonists are artists who have already discovered their sun quality, therefore, they can be interpreted in terms of metaphor of the continuum of light, yet they are not successful visionaries but 'mad poor and exploited'. The last novel to be discussed in this chapter is *Possession: A Romance* which is significance for two reasons: first, for incorporation of both the neoplatonic creation myth and the metaphor of the continuum of light; and second, for depicting the female protagonist as a visionary artist equal to her male partner.

1.1. The Sun/Shadow Dichotomy: Anna and Henry Severell in *The Shadow of the Sun*

The very title, *The Shadow of the Sun* is instrumental in establishing a binary system in which the two elements are the Sun and the Shadow. The title should be understood on terms of grammar and stylistic as the literal meaning of it is rather problematic considering physics. The Sun is the head of the noun phrase, it organizes the syntactic features of the expression. The Shadow is subordinated to it, it belongs to the Sun, yet, seemingly, it gets more emphasis due to its frontal position. The characters' relationships can be depicted by the same syntax, as the novel's 'grammar', the plot and the narrative, suggests the same structure.

The contrast in Byatt's portrayal of Henry and Anna in her 1st novel has intriguing implications concerning female identity, autonomy and imagination. Henry is depicted as the Male Genius, yet his status as is undermined by Anna, Caroline and Oliver, which shows the artificiality and weakness of the concept. Anna's character formation, on the other hand, is built on lack and absence as her character is the "portrait of the artist with the artist left out" (*The Shadow*, xii). Yet, there is great emphasis on her talent and her resemblance in her artistic impulses with her father. These separateness of these characters translated into the Sun/Shadow dichotomy, while their sameness is the first step towards the paradigm shift resulting in the metaphor of the continuum of light.

Henry and Anna are in every sense the complete opposites of each other which feed the binary opposition of male/female or the Sun/the Shadow. Henry is a giant of a

man, while Anna is small even for her age. Henry has overwhelming visions as material for his novels, while Anna is struggling with her creative impulses and the fragmented nature of her insights. Henry is defined by his achievements as a war veteran and popular novelist, while Anna is defined only as Henry's daughter, or as a future wife of someone. Therefore, Henry is the Sun, and Anna is the Shadow, more precisely, *his* Shadow.

Henry Severell is described by sun images, haloed by golden rays of sunlight, radiant with potency and authority. He is the visionary novelist, a bearded prophet-god and the patriarch of the family:

> The *first impression* of him was *overwhelming* – he was an enormous man, well over six feet tall, broad shouldered, with strong, wide hands, and a huge head, covered with a very thick, springing crop of prematurely white hair, which merged into an equally live, almost patriarchal beard. This had been grown originally to cover scars left by the war, but had *the effect* now of a *deliberate flamboyance*, of *a pose*, *aesthetically entirely satisfactory*, it had to be admitted, as the successful literary giant – if the idea of *posing* had not entailed *the idea of fraud*, which few people would have accused him of. He was successful, and he was *generally considered* to be one of the few living *giants*. He looked like a cross between God, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Blake's Job, respectable, odd, and powerful all at once. [italics mine] (*The Shadow*, 9)

Henry's depiction establishes him as sublime character, in every sense of the word. Yet, as Franken suggests, Henry's Burkean masculinity and creativity, are highly ambivalent, which "undermines his reputation as a genius" (Franken, 45). The italicized expressions make his image artificial and constructed by his readers and relatives. The exaggerated parallels between him and Biblical patriarchal figures from God to Samson (*The Shadow*, 9, 214, 279) makes him slightly ridiculous as the shadow of his immense figure "cast[s] even on the rejected *lemon pie* an extra significance" (*The Shadow*, 49). As Franken evokes Eagleton "the dividing line between the sublime and 'the ridiculous' is very thin and the narrator is fully aware of this" (46). Byatt clearly criticizes male supremacy in the Western literary tradition as well as the Burkean masculine sublime which excludes women from it by assigning them the sphere of beauty which is always dependent on the eye of the beholder.

Anna's description emphasizing her smallness, fragility and clumsiness is on the very next page, which is instrumental in showing the ridiculous effect of Henry's exaggerated description, and, therefore, the Sun/Shadow:

> She was small for her age apparently, and thin, with pronounced hollows above the bones at the base of her neck; she suffered, nevertheless, from that late adolescent padding of flesh which cannot be called fat, or even puppy fat, but contributes certain squareness to the whole appearance of girls of a certain age, adds heaviness to the cheeks and chin, makes the waist less marked, and the ankles thicker than they may later be, and suggests even in those who carry

themselves well, a certain clumsiness. (*The Shadow*, 10)

Their descriptions suggest that on a very fundamental level in their oddness they are quite similar, yet, they way they are constructed by their relatives separates them which, in fact, affects both of them.

Anna struggles in this possessive relationship, which is expressed even by the novel's title, in order to be able to separate herself from her father, yet she cannot define herself otherwise but through this relationship. Steveker defines female identity "depending on an inherently paradoxical relation between the female need for a separate self and the diametrically opposed experience of bonding." (54) Anna's artistic frustration is linked to her relationality, while her father's separateness in identity which makes him inaccessible to Anna adds a further dimension to the initial conflict.

The problem is that Anna finds her creative impulses, which could help her to separate herself from her father's shadow, to be his father's genes reflecting in her: "it was likely enough – though not certain – Anna often reflected, that it was almost entirely because of him that it was writing, and writing novels, which so occupied her meditations." (*The Shadow*, 16) If her talent is coming from the same place as her father's, it is a logical assumption that it works the same way. Yet Anna has no visions of the kind Henry has an access to.

Henry is writing "a very violent, stylized action, remote on the whole from the way most people lived" (*The Shadow*, 59) which requires him keeping a distance from his family, and physical action to dissolve in his overwhelming visions. In order to gain inspiration he sets out to climb the nearby hills and mountains. In the open fields or in

the sunshine he knows what to write and how. His involvement in inspiration “deposits [him] as a visionary genius who creates through a 'sublime' experience” (Franken, 40) Henry in his physical, emotional and intellectual separateness from his family represents the impersonality of the artist, a concept popularized by T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis. Byatt has a rather ambiguous relationship to this concept, as she claims Leavis to be one of the major obstacles in her career, yet she agrees that impersonality is necessary in order to become a good artist.

Henry's separateness in his sublime experience results in a special kind of impersonality, which is clearly reflected in the “Leavisite definition of 'the artist' as someone who realizes his own separation and then starts framing and imagining the world. There isn’t this desire to be fused into a collective.” (Franken, 19) Leavis built his theory upon T.S. Eliot's essay “Tradition and Individual Talent”, where Eliot suggests that the poet has to respectfully dissolve in literary tradition and incorporate its elements in poetry rather than letting personality define art. Eliot claims that “poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.” (T.S.Eliot, 80) Byatt does not agree with Eliot in that poetry has to be an escape, yet she is 'adamant that writing should be “impersonal”, should be something other than an expression of the self.” (Franken, 12) Henry's overwhelming visions, his separateness from the domestic world of his family and his taking part and contributing to Romantic traditions make him an impersonal artist.

For Anna it is highly problematic and, indeed, intimidating to follow such

traditions. First of all, she does not have macho visions like her father; she has more delicate and fragile experiences with the sublime which does not mean, however, that her visionary power is lesser. While Henry's visions are overly masculine and dependent on his actions and muscles, Anna's visions are related to daydreaming and materialize in the subtler and calmer forms of water and glass. Anna's wishes to fulfill her creativity and preserve her autonomy are expressed in her vision of how she would like to live and write

> retreated to a cottage on these cliffs, writing good novels and contemplating the water. She would have rooms with little windows and deep window seats . . . She would have a table with a typewriter, in a window looking out in the direction of the sea . . . (*The Shadow*, 109).

The cosiness and intimacy of her visions requires a remote place, symbolized by the bathroom, as is apparent in the following lines, as well:

> She carried [the glass of water] across to the window and held it so that light was directed and split through the water onto the floor of the bath. The circle of brightness opened like a flower, with crisp, spinning petals. She curled up in the wide windowsill and turned the glass lovingly, with outstretched arms. (*The Shadow*, 134)

What is common in Anna's visions besides the recurring motifs of glass and water is that she is always disturbed in her encounter with the sublime by male characters, namely, Henry and Oliver. It is clear that Anna has found light in herself and her perception of

the world is occasionally filtered through it; still, her father and her lover are shrouding her light and cast shadow upon them, figuratively speaking. Therefore, Franken is right when she suggests that in Anna's portrayal it is not the female artist that is missing but "the traditional genius is, indeed, absent" (Franken, 54)

Anna does not lack the talent but the opportunity to practice writing. She finds no tradition which could be instrumental in her becoming an impersonal artist. She cannot follow in her father's gigantic footsteps, she cannot see herself as a 'Lawrentian woman' and she has to refuse the sort of femininity and domesticity Caroline and Margaret represent. As Campbell puts it, "the male-authored novels, which she knows have no place for her, and the women's magazines, which represent working women's lives through images of 'the bed-sitter', the 'cocktail party', the boy meets girl in London" [The Shadow, 91], also offer false images. (40) Therefore, Anna experiences the same difficulties as Byatt enumerates in her retrospective foreword to *The Shadow of the Sun*, that is, the lack of female artists as examples and a place where they could work and talk about art as they receive it. Byatt, however, do not find Virginia Woolf's art an example to follow for herself, she repeats Woolf's claim for a 'room of one's own' and shows the same indignation over women writer's status. Russ in *How to Suppress Women's Writing* also argues that autonomy in every sense of the word is required to create, yet patriarchy invents different methods to keep women away from writing, or, as in Byatt's metaphoric system, patriarchy keeps female artists in the Shadow by blocking sunlight.

In addition to that, Anna has no possibilities to separate herself from others. While Henry can trot in the sunlight hunting for visions Anna has to stay at home, study

with Oliver and do chores. Even the picnic at St. Anna or her Cambridge residence cannot provide her with the freedom and autonomy she would need. In the case of Anna relationality is a curse because in the Western patriarchal context her wish to bond means the loss of her autonomy as she is automaatically described as Henry's daughter, Oliver's lover, or Peter's soon-to-be-wife.

Henry, on the other hand, enjoys the advantages of the surrounding women's relationality as they are providing him with the necessities and the proper feedback to see himself as Samson. Yet, Samson is destroyed by women, and Henry experiences the drawback of his own need of women's assistance. As Franken suggests, "the autonomy and stability of the sublime/masculinity are, however, illusionary. In order to hold on to his idea of himself as a man who creates art through his visions, Henry is shown to be far from an independent Genius." (47) That becomes clear when even Caroline starts to doubt Henry's artistic abilities, as he is unable to finish his book, which makes him similar to a frenzied bull. Oliver, the 'homme moyen' of the novel, also sees Henry's weaknesses and eagerly makes him face them. Henry leaves his separateness and tattempts to save Anna from Oliver's influence, and in experiencing relationality, bonding and engagement in someone else's life he loses his artistic potency:

> Again, the narrative uses the figure of a woman – Anna Severell – to expose the instability of the masculine sublime: Henry's awareness of his love for Anna leads to a writer's block and to a crisis in his sense of himself as a visionary and a writer. In the past he enjoyed the selflessness the sublime caused him to feel, a

> fictional death of the author, so to speak, after which he rose again like Lazarus from the grave to create. (Franken, 48)

The novel, therefore, – with subtle feminist considerations – explores the differences between the possibilities of creativity available to male and female artists' which form their identity and their art. The dichotomy limits both of them. Anna has to separate herself in order to become a Sun of her own while Henry cannot leave his separateness without losing his sun light, which is, in fact, kept up by the female characters relationality to him. The dichotomy keeps them apart: their very name "Severell", incorporating the verb 'sever', suggests separation and splittin. Ironically, it is exactly what makes them related.

1.2. The Continuum of Light: Julia and Cassandra Corbett in *The Game*

From a structural point of view *The Shadow of the Sun* and *The Game* are twin novels, yet, since the latter contains the paradigm shift from the Sun/Shadow dichotomy to the continuum of light, "*The Game* goes beyond The Shadow of the Sun in its investigation of female imagination." (Campbell, 43) The paradigm shift is present here in the sense that neither of the female artists presented are uncertain if they are allowed to write, or if they had talent for pursuing writing. They simply do not know how to write in the patriarchal context, but they know that their ability is given as they have access to their sunlight which means that they are understood in terms of the continuum.

The novels are based on the opposition of two characters. In the case of *The Shadow of the Sun* the title and dual structure establish the Sun/Shadow dichotomy to

explore the severability of male and female identity and creativity through Anna's and Henry's relationality, and to explore their sameness and separateness. *The Game,* on the other hand, with the twofold structure "alternating between Cassandra's and Julia's retrospect and present narratives" (Campbell, 46), dramatizes two sort of lights on the continuum, and two different approaches to creativity.

Byatt attempts to depict the female artist as visionary fail again with Julia and Cassandra's portrayal. Yet they are both female artist on the continuum of light. They are not in the shadow blocked by from sun but they are suffering from too much brightness that they receive differently. In terms of their relationship, visions and imaginations they resembles Anna and Henry Severell.

Julia, just as Henry, is an established writer. Her status is undermined in the same way as Henry's since their fame appears to be based merely on gossiping 'you speak for a generation, or so the girls in the village tell me... (*The Game*, 30) In many ways, Julia separates herself from her family, just as Henry does. She keeps a comfortable distance from her adolescent daughter and husband and watches them as characters of her domestic novels. In fact, she fictionalizes their lives, or as Campbell phrases it "she intensively appropriates the lives of others as material for her novels." (44) She, thus, has the amount of autonomy and authority which is necessary for her creative work but she is unable to gain enough impersonality to become a good artist because of her relationship to those whom she incorporates into her fiction. In an indirect way, she is writing some sort of a self-expressive autobiographical work which is the reason why her novels embodies the "fear of the 'woman's novel' as an immoral

devouring force" (*The Shadow,* xii) Franken further elaborates on that in the following way:

> [Byatt] dislikes the idea of the writer as somebody who autobiographically expresses him- or herself in fiction and believes that writing serves as an escape from the self towards the imagination of other worlds, other people's minds, lives, feelings and thoughts. Much of her criticism of women's writing stems from this source. Byatt feels uncomfortable with what she detects as solipsistic tendencies in women's writing and expresses her criticism. (13)

Julia is clearly dissatisfied with her writing as self-expression. In this sense, even though she separates herself from her family as much as she can in order to reach a higher level of art, she claims that her family is an obstacle to her:

> But I'm a woman, and women are restricted. Men have so many choices. […] And my books do try to say we must accept things, I hope they do come down to acceptance. Love is a prison; it's unrealistic and become limitations. It's common. (*The Game,* 63)

Therefore, Julia's womanhood which necessitates her relationality is something she cannot leave entirely behind. Her first aesthetically artistic work, the *Sense of Glory,* shows how she learns gradually to use her relationality to serve her creativity. Her book appropriates Cassandra's life and expresses her own love for Simon, which is similar to her previous artistic practices. Yet, this time she creates a persona from Emily Bronte's figure, Cassandra's hopeless obsession with Simon and from her own unfulfilled desires

in term of sexuality and creativity. Julia is speaking for this constructed persona which makes the book a quite proportionate mixture of impersonality and solipsism, and her a ventriloquist, which is a recurring motif in Byatt's oeuvre and it is most apparent in *Possession: A Romance*.

While Julia is a 'trendy' and popular author with an active social life and overwhelming media publicity, Cassandra conducts an almost ascetic life style in the remoteness of her Cambridge room. Her figure and devotion was inspired by Helen Gardner, Byatt's long-ago supervisor as she points out in her "Introduction" to *The Shadow of the Sun*. Campbell remarks that "Cassandra, whose reclusive, celibate life recalls Helen Gardner's ideal of the dedicated, nun-like existence of scholar." (43) Cassandra's seclusion assures her autonomy while her relationaliy finds a way of expression in her imagination as she is bonding with medieval figures of her subject and the Apollo-like image of Simon Moffit. The contrast between the two sisters suggests that being a scholar is some sort of an alien and passive creativity which transforms the artists' sublime vision into dead academic texts. Julia claims on several occasions that criticism feeds on fiction; however, it is her reality that feeds on Cassandra's imagiantion as the case of *The Sense of Glory* suggests.

Cassandra definitely has artistic ambition and creativity. She invented the Game they played and set the rules as she narrated their stories of knights and maidens. She is writing an extensive journal in which she records minute details of her life keeping in mind the creation of an even more gigantic piece of art. She seems to experience the sublime in the tiniest things of her life. At this stage, Cassandra much resembles Anna.

She is waiting for grand, overwhelming visions in order to be able to start writing her epic. Yet, she defines herself as a failure because she seems to lack some significant qualities which Julia is in possession. The following Cambridge party excerpt offers insight in her insecurity concerning her position as an artist:

> Cassandra had always been like Charlotte Bronte incurably romantic, nourished a vision of herself, the epic written, arriving with all her integrity in the literary world to be belatedly feted by the Thackeray of the day. She saw now that this world was not what she had thought and was for ever closed to her, and, worse, Julia's incursion into her own world revealed to her that that too had, must always have had, dimensions she was incapable of apprehending. (Game, 118)

As Julia's greedy creativity fictionalizes more and more of Cassandra's life and imagination, Cassandra's sense of reality seems to be lost which invites dangerously overwhelming sublime visions. Cassandra's dream vision are extremely composite and as allegorical as medieval paintings. As Franken explains: "when she dreams that she is walking in a forest with Simon, the beauty, lightness and warmth of her surroundings give way to a panorama that resembles a painting by Hieronymus Bosch" (71):

> she would see things she recognized; a pile of those clammy, featherless baby birds, blind reptiles with gaunt triangular heads, that fall from trees. A dead mouse, with maggots lumping themselves shapelessly across the browning flesh. A flattened hedgehog, like a blood-fringed doormat (qtd in Franken 71;Game, 104).

Cassandra with her visions and losing hold on reality is gradually becoming similar to her namesake, the mythical Cassandra, and Lord Tennyson's Lady of Shalott, as “the narrator makes clear that [her] self-image is, indeed, that of the failed visionary and artist.” (Franken, 70)

Byatt relies heavily on these tales, yet she is not a follower of the feminist tradition of revisionist mythmaking as she is not rewriting these age old stories but uses some elements of them to give her characters another dimension in which they can develop. By avoiding this feminist tradition and following the original myths faithfully she is trying not to go back to patriarchal traditions and gender bias. She attempts to write her characters out of such traditions, and she uses mostly the characteristics of archetypical female figures that empower her own characters to some degree. As Campbell puts it,

> Byatt's use of symbols, myths, and allusions is extremely subtle and intricate, as we would expect from a writer who is so much concerned with the play of the mind with its materials. […] In her use of symbols and their controlling myths, Byatt sacrifices completeness and consistency in order to let the structure grow in a more natural way. (52-53)

Byatt's characters are, most of the time, aware of their mythological or literary connotations and they often reflect on their deviations from their 'precursors'. Cassandra describes herself in terms of Emily Bronte but she knows she is not going to be a real artist and she gives herself to her more and more demanding visions just like her ancient

namesake, and she ends it like the cursed Lady of Shalott.

Byatt uses the motif of unfulfilled love of both stories, as well as the recurring motifs of glass, water and snake which are all connected to power, sexuality and creativity. As a visionary, Cassandra's imagination is similar to that of Anna. The glass and mirror refer to the fragility of female autonomy and, therefore, of art. Unmarked male literature is robust in immense traditions and in its shadow female art had to be delicate and transparent. In all the three novels, “men violently [destroy] glasses and make-up bottles owned by creative women” (Franken, 51), which is the destruction of their separateness symbolized by their own things, and the denial or their art being art.

Glasses and mirrors also can be read in terms of reality and fiction, which is a main theme of *The Game* as well. The writer's and the scholar's opposition reflects on the problematic nature of how art can be read and perceived as reality or a filtered version of it. The Lady of Shalott does not see reality as it is but its distorted reflection. Cassandra sees herself and her life in the mirror of Julia's fiction of her most private and intimate moments. Since Cassandra's self-image is the failed visionary and artist, she does not believe that she could fictionalize her own life and in the process make it real and her own. Her only chance to preserve herself and claim her reality and autonomy is death, which is symbolized by the cracking mirror of the Lady of Shalott. The crack, in Cassandra's, is the gap between her reality and the imagination in which she loses herself and her sense of reality.

Julia's novel, *Sense of Glory*, claims so much of Cassandra's self fiction that is makes her think she is not even real but a character in her sister's fiction. 'Sense of

Glory' might refer to Julia's supposed winning of the Game of her sister. Yet, her seeing her own ghostly presence in Cassandra's mirror reciting the cracked mirror lines of the Lady of Shalott and the vivid manuscripts of Cassandra as the last word of the novel undermines Julia's glory. *Sense of Glory*, might also refer to Cassandra's glory of reaching the brightest level of visionary insight, still, she fails to transform it into art. Her death, which gives her autonomy and separateness, and the ice-cold manifeto of her being real is her first and last completed work of art.

The snake motif, and, especially, the glass snake Julia gives to Cassandra, is a metaphor for imagination as it is associated with Simon who inspires both women's creativity. The snake of the Genesis gives knowledge to humanity – Knowledge as in creativity and sexuality. In Scandinavian mythology, which affected Byatt considerably, the snake is what holds the world together and what destroys it gnawing at the roots of the tree of life. Imagination feeds on reality as it is shown in Julia's art, and, therefore, makes the lines between fiction and reality apparent but opaque, which gives an opportunity for the artist to peep into what lies beyond reality in the forms of visions and transform the revelations into an aesthetic whole. Cassandra's fear of snakes, in reality, is her fear of her overwhelming visions and of the even more overwhelming reality, which is death.

On a metanarrative level, the snake, or rather, the snake that is eating itself, the ouroboros, could be the perfect symbol of Byatt's creative and academic work. The repeated patterns of themes and motifs and the richly woven intertextuality keep returning into themselves in their endlessness and vastness. As Hennelly interprets

Byatt's “Old Tales, New Forms” fifth chapter in her *Histories and Other Stories*,

> “To call the infinity of the repetitions of the stories, in the same sentence, tentacles and spider-web is to suggest that the tales are traps, the endless labyrinths closed” [Histories, 146]. […] Byatt relevantly suggests that “myth, like organic life, are shape-shifters, metamorphic, endlessly reconstituted and reformed... A myth derives force from its endless repeatability” [Histories, 125, 132] She notes further, “I have myself become increasingly interested” in writing “intricately layered and mythic” narratives; and her craft of fiction has developed from “pervasive and metamorphic metaphors as ways of patterning and thinking out of a text” to such mythic narratives. [Histories, 130-31] (Hennelly, 452)

The snake with its cyclical metamorphoses is not only a metaphor for the myths, but also for Byatt's work, and in many ways for women's writing. Women's writing tends to feed on itself, stemming from the body, from the domestic surrounding. Creativity, as described in terms of sexuality and maternity, also show the ouroboric wholeness and lack at the same time. Julia's and Cassandra's parasitic relationship both as siblings and artists is symbolized by the glass snake that can shatter any time.

1.3. Sun Goddess: Christabel LaMotte and R. H. Ash in *Possession: A Romance*

All previous attempts of female artists to become the equivalent of the Male Genius have failed so far in Byatt's novels. Anna cannot separate herself from Henry and Oliver,

the major obstacles in her artistic fulfillment. Julia, the established writer and the voice of the women of her generation, definitely has autonomy. She is even an authority figure for her husband and daughter. Yet she is unable to reach impersonality, which is, according to Byatt, essential to being a good artist. Her imagination remains a way of self-expression, and even her first attempt to be a real novelist is heavily biographical. Cassandra, considering her visionary ability and her immense perception of the sublime, could have been the Female Genius. Still, she dissolves in the brightness of her imagination as she is not capable of giving it a shape. Christabel LaMotte seems to be the perfect merger of autonomy, impersonality and visionary power which makes her the first accomplished female visionary artist, a real Female Genius, in Byatt's novels; Christabel gradually becomes a Sun Goddess.

Christabel LaMotte is the unknown poetess whose exiguous oeuvre is ridiculed by male scholars such as Blackadder. She is critically acclaimed only by few feminist scholars such as Lenora Stern, whose fierceness and radical thinking are parodied even by Byatt herself. In terms of the Victorian audiences' reception, which defined the later academic discourse as well, Christabel LaMotte is the Shadow of her lover, Randolph Henry Ash, is the Sun. His middle name, Henry, refers back to Henry Severell, the ultimate male visionary genius and the Great Poet, as they were "both [...] modeled on Victorian men of letters."[6] (Franken, 88) Ash is the celebrated poet of his time whose brightness has not faded during the centuries. The neoplatonic Sun/Shadow dichotomy seems to apply. Yet, as the plot moves forward, and their relationship matures, it turns

6 According to Franken Henry Severell was inpired by Lord Tennyson, while R.A. Ash is a composite portrait of Matthew Arnold, G.H. Lewes, and Robert Browning. (87-88)

out that Christabel LaMotte is Ash's Sun that feeds his imagination and not the other way round. Therefore, *Possession: A Romance* incorporates the dichotomous neoplatonic creation myth on the surface but celebrates the metaphor of continuum of light, which is dramatized by Christabel's and Ash's artistic relationship in which they mutually inspired each other showing the same amount of visionary power.

Byatt claims that "in all [her] novels there are characters whose thoughts the reader shares and those whose thoughts are opaque, who are seen from outside." (The Shadow, xi) In *The Shadow of the Sun* the opaque character is Oliver Canning. *The Game*'s "opaque" character is Simon Moffit. In *Possession: A Romance* Christabel LaMotte becomes a distanced and obscure figure. The reader has no direct link to her. Christabel's thoughts and feelings are only known from her fragmented writings, or from other characters' journals, letters and poems. Her elusiveness is increased by the fact that she often identifies herself as a mythical heroine, Arachne, for example; and her lover, Randolph Henry Ash, refers to her several occasions as Melusine, Embla or Lady of Shalott.

Christabel gains and preserves her autonomy as a female artist in the shadow of the Male Genius through her deconstruction and reconstruction of the myths she identifies with. Her eager acceptance of the curse of the female visionary, which is apparent in the Cassandra myth, the tale of Melusine, and the poem of the Lady of Shalott, mocks and parodies the very existence of the curse. The curse is, in Byatt's words, that "female visionaries are poor mad exploited sibyls and pythonesses. Male ones are prophets and poets. Or so I thought. There was a feminine mystique but no tradition of female mysticism that wasn't hopelessly self-abnegating." (*The Shadow*, x). Christabel's expansion of her relational identity toward

fictional characters on the one hand gives her a chance to be part of some sort of a female tradition and to contribute to it; and, on the other hand, it gives her the freedom to claim her separateness in her sexuality and in her creativity as well. The infiniteness of the intertextual references and repetitions in her oeuvre and in her life, too, suggests that she is not so much a sensitive experiencer of the sublime but is part of it. The level of impersonality which she reaches in her eccentric and sumblime art makes her a ventriloquist, however, she is not writing dramatic monologues like Robert Browning, but fairy tales, which are, according to Russ, "an area either so badly paid or of such low status that men don't want it". (101)

Ventriloquism requires a strange mixture of impersonality and solipsism. R.H. Ash, whose public and private selvs seem to overlap, is the Great Ventriloquist in the Victorian plot line. His identity is less relational and more separate; therefore, his ventriloquism incorporates less self-expression than Christabel's whose relationality makes her define herself through and against her characters, consequently, her writing contains more of her own personality. Byatt, in general, disapproves of art as self-expression or as an escape from it, and she also rebukes solipsistic writers because of the monotonity and self-centeredness of such narratives. Byatt herself identifies with Ash, and sees herself as a ventriloquist:

> She compared herself to him when she said that *Possession* allowed her to 'invent a poet in a novel' in the same way Browning said 'he could bring people back to life . . . by breathing life into them'. According to Byatt, Ash resembles Browning in his greed for knowledge about other people and his ability to use the writing of poetry for other ends than self-expression. (Franken, 87-88)

Christabel, therefore, is closer to feminist literary traditions Byatt does not think instrumental in narrowing the gap between unmarked male literature and marked women's writing; Christabel is too much appropriated by certain feminist agendas.

Byatt's identifying with Ash does not mean that she disowns or abandons Christabel and what she stands for but that Byatt respects Christabel's and the like-minded women writers' own autonomous space, their own room, so to say, in the 'house of fiction' (*The Shadow*, ix). In many ways, therefore, the separateness of Byatt and Christabel's is an evidence for her remarkable autonomy. Franken further elaborates on the Byatt's and Christabel's relationship, which is not the typical puppet-puppeteer one:

> Byatt's attitude towards the nineteenth-century poet Christabel LaMotte is different. *Possession*'s portrait of LaMotte also has composite elements: she and her work are inspired by nineteenth century poets such as Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Brontë, Christina Rossetti and Elisabeth Barrett Browning. In an interview Byatt said that Christabel LaMotte has been named after the British suffragette Christabel Pankhurst and after the heroine of Coleridge's unfinished poem 'Christabel'. In the period just after she won the Booker Prize, Byatt's statements about LaMotte seem almost to imply that she is an auto-generational character, as if she created herself and was suddenly there, independent of the writer. (Franken, 88)

Christabel is clearly originating from feminist (literary) tradition; in fact, she becomes even a proto-feminist character with her education, financial independence and freedom

of sexuality. Byatt's apparent distancing herself from Christabel clearly shows her ambivalent relationship to feminism and feminist literary theory. On the one hand, Byatt is obviously voicing feminist issues in creating her characters and universalizes the difficulties her female characters' experience as writers, scholars, wives and mothers.

On the other hand, she quite openly ridicules and rebukes feminism. Byatt finds feminist theory useful in discovering women writers, who, so to say, lived in the shadow of the sun; creating a firm female literary tradition; and giving power and will for women to write. Yet, she has to reject feminist literary theory since it is keeping the status quo, it limits women's writing by marking it again and again, and, thus, holds it in a marginal position. Therefore, feminist literary theory in her view keeps her sun goddesses in the dark.

Christabel, her ventriloquism and her writings are slightly different from Byatt's or Ash's writings, yet their visionary quality cannot be denied. Ash's imagination, just as Henry Severell's, his precursor's in Byatt's universe, feeds on the sublime. Still, Henry's visions were violent and threatening in their overwhelming nature, while Ash's sublime is Christabel herself. Yet, she is not just a passive muse but another creative artist.

Ash's "Ragnarök" testifies Christabel's greatness as a visionary genius. While in Western tradition woman's valence is considered negative, she is identified with The Fall and said to be the weaker sex, Ash's turning to Scandinavian mythology provides him and Christabel with another sort of female power. Ash's poem describes the creation of the first human couple from a tree's branches and twigs. All the male gods are gathered but the creation cannot be complete without the Sun's participation and

contribution. In Norse mythology the Sun is a Goddess:

> The new sun stood in the blue; her chariot's course
> Not more than twice completed, who has since
> Circled and run from dawn as Earth
> Grows cool and cloudy in the calmer light,
> No ever fails, nor swerves a pace from true
> Till all be swallowed in the final Fire.
> Allfather [sic] in her heat felt his own force.
> (Possession, 240)

Ash identifies Christabel with the Sun Goddess and admires her creativity and writings when he calls her the "manifestation of secret perfection" and the "life of things" (Possession, 310). Therefore, she is associated with the Nordic Sun Goddesses fire which gives life to the first human couple. Christabel incorporates Scandinavian mythology into her poetry and relational identity, as well. Their relationship dramatizes the paradigm shift from the Sun/Shadow dichotomy to the continuum of light. While her contemporaries blinded by the dichotomy of Sun/Shadow could not read Christabel as a visionary poet, Ash, who himself is in the possession of such qualities, could see Christabel's sunlight shining through her lines. In Byatt's universe, Christabel and Ash are the first accomplished visionary writers on the continuum of light, suggesting the gender equality and unmarkedness in their imagination – just as Ask and Embla in the Nordic Genesis represents the first human couple who hand-in-hand leaves "a linee of darkening prints" (*Possession*, 242) .

2. Sexuality and Creativity: Lovers, Mothers and Lesbians

The two paradigms of heliotropic symbolism for creativity, that is, the neoplatonic creation myth or Sun/Shadow dichotomy, and the continuum of light, originate in bodily and mental differences between men and women, which was the topic of many ancient Greek medical and philosophical texts, such as Aristotle's and Hippocrates' writings. Helen King in her *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece*, discussing the emergence of the medical science of gynecology and the different approaches to the female body, identifies two different models of describing the nature of men and women according to their bodily participation in reproduction:

> In one, sexuality exists as a continuum from female to male, with both sexes contributing an active seed to the process of reproduction. This model admits the possibility of a number of gradations of masculinity and femininity. In the second model, women lag so far behind men in body heat that their role in reproduction is entirely passive, they cannot produce seed. (11)

These two medical approaches show the idea behind the linking of sexuality and creativity by considering the contribution to reproduction equal to the creative power. Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* explore the intertwined aspects of the supposed biological superiority of the male sexual organ and writing. They suggest that the problems of authorship manifest in the sexualization of the creative process which is defined in terms of gender bias. The male genius is described in the following way:

> In patriarchal Western culture, therefore, the text's author is a father, a

> progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. More, his pen's power, like his penis's power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim […] (7)

The overwhelming creative power of the male genius is apparent. The public figures of Henry Severell and Randolph Henry Ash could have been described in these terms: authors, fathers and gods. As Farwell remarks in her extensive article "Toward a Definition of the Lesbian Literary Imagination", discussing the problems of the recent trends in defining female creativity and the female artist: "creativity, reproduction and god are collapsed into a single expression of man's identity." (105) In contrast, women writers are presented in less grandiose terms in Western culture.

Farwell in her article distinguishes three metaphors for the female artist, the lover and the androgyne (they are so closely related that the article always mentions them together. Therefore, it counts as one methaphor with two intertwined aspects), the mother and the lesbian. Byatt rebukes 'writing from the body' and feminist scholars such as Luce Irigaray[7], since '[they reduce] everything to sex and gender as though there was nothing else in the world' (Franken, 91). Still, Byatt's interest in the feminist agenda is obvious from her exploration of female imagination showing the intertwined nature of power, sexuality and creativity.

Sexuality, either the absence or the fulfillment of it, has a great impact on the heroines' identity and art. Byatt's interpretation of sexuality in terms of power and

7 According to Franken, Irigaray is the basis of Byatt's satiric portrayal of Lenora Stern in *Possession: A Romance*.(pp90-91)

creativity is composite. Through sexuality her heroines can gain or lose their autonomy, which is, definitely, a requirement for pursuing artistic activities. Consequently, the heroines' choices concerning their sexuality determine their opportunities as artists. The following subchapters are devoted to the thorough discussion of how Byatt's creative heroines can be read as the embodiments, exploration and criticism of the metaphors for the female artist, such as lover, mother and lesbian.

2.1. Ladies of Shalott: The Lover as Threat

Lord Tennyson's Lady of Shalott can be interpreted as the portrayal of the female artist. As Byatt describes The Lady in *On Histories and Other Stories* 'she is enclosed in her tower, and sees the world not even through the window, but in a mirror, which reflects the outside life, which she, the artist, then weaves into “a magic web with colours gay”' (157) Once she stops her immense work to look out of her window to see the shining figure of Lancelot. The mirror cracks and her tapestry frays. She dies from a mysterious curse. 'Preserving solitude and distance, staying cold and frozen, may, for women as well as artists, be a way of preserving life.' (Histories, 158) Weaving is a typical female activity; and the claustrophobia of the domestic sphere, and being 'half sick of shadows' are part of the female artists' experience.

In Byatt's oeuvre, the Lady's is a recurring source of reference. As Franken puts it “A. S. Byatt shares with many feminist critics, writers and painters a strong interest in Tennyson’s poem 'The Lady of Shalott'. When asked what literature had influenced her work, she said that as a young girl she knew the poem by heart: '[its rhythm] haunts

everything I write.'" (51) In *The Shadow of the Sun*, Oliver, as Lancelot, distracts Anna with his love, bringing his curse which prevents her from exploring her creative impulses. *The Game*'s Cassandra's celibacy and exile in her Cambridge tower-room makes her the most similar of Tennyson's Lady. Her death is caused by her cursed 'shadow' of a love affair with Simon Moffitt. Julia, visiting Cassandra's room and looks in the mirror, invokes the curse lines from Tennyson's poem, which makes her a reflection of both the Lady and Cassandra. In *Possession* Tennyson's Lady of Shalott is mentioned several times in the correspondence of Ash and Christabel, and Blanche Glover's painting of the Maid of Astolat and her death also shows some resemblance to that of the Lady's.

The significance of Tennyson's Lady of Shalott in Byatt's interpretation to this thesis is twofold. First, the Lady's tower is 'the room of her own', the symbol of her isolation which assures her autonomy. Therefore, the source of her autonomy and creativity is her celibacy, her distance from the patriarchal pressure of marriage and reproduction. Second, the curse, which is, in fact, a recurring motif in myths of female creation, is sexuality. Lancelot's *penetration* into the Lady's mirror-world leads to her death. In Byatt's novels sexuality is very often depicted as a major threat for the autonomy of the female artist.

Byatt in her "Introduction" to *The Shadow of the Sun*, explaining her difficulties as an aspiring scholar and writer, mentions Helen Gardner "who believed, and frequently said, that a woman had to be dedicated like a nun, to achieve anything as a mind." (*The Shadow*, ix). 'A nun's dedication', literally, is the central motif of Isak

Dinesen's (Karen Blixen) “The Blank Page” and Susan Gubar's “'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity”. The short story explains how Portuguese royal maidens' blooded sheets of the marital bed become women's narratives of their silent (or, rather, silenced) female experiences by the Carmelite nun's devotion who collect, frame, exhibit and celebrate the female art of blood and body. For the nuns, their autonomy, which they are deriving from their distance from the patriarchal traditions, are essential to create art. The sheets and the women using them in themselves are not enough for art but the nuns' intention and freedom to let silence[8] weave its own narratives will create works of art.

Gubar in her discussion of female creativity explains the significance of blood as the sign of objectification of women in the patriarchal tradition of marriage which makes it equal to martyrdom. As she puts it:

> The blood on the royal sheets is considered holy because it proves that the bride is a valuable property, given by father to husband for the production of sons. In other words, before the sheet is collected by the convent sisters and assumes the status of art, the bloodstains are a testimony to the woman's function as a silent token of exchange. (254)

What is sacrificed, accordingly, is female autonomy by the assurance of male authority. Therefore, female autonomy is only possible in remote and enclosed places where male

8 Isak Dinesen, “The Blank Page”: "Who then," she continues, "tells a finer tale than any of us? Silence does. And where does one read a deeper tale than upon the most perfectly printed page of the most precious book? Upon the blank page. When a royal and gallant pen, in the moment of its highest inspiration, has written down its tale with the rarest ink of all -- where, then, may one read a still deeper, sweeter, merrier and more cruel tale than that? Upon the blank page."

authority is not present. Remoteness and enclosure either taken literally as convent and celibacy or as the independence of the body and its sexual nature seem to be a requirement for the female artist.

Byatt's heroines all show some kind of a withdrawal from all sort of companionship and society in order to establish the physical space of their autonomy. Anna in *The Shadow of the Sun* keeps returning to the garden to a secret place to write her first attempts in fiction. Cassandra Corbett, *The Game*'s protagonist locks herself in her room as a child to compose her diary and her stories, and she completes her masterwork, her suicide, in her tower-room at Cambridge. Christabel LaMotte and Blanche Glover live in a cottage where they can practice their art undisturbed.

What is also common in the examples above is that all these women are violated, mostly, by male characters. Oliver finds Anna in the shed who is shrinking in his presence, and later Henry reads her hidden writings. Cassandra is violated in the solitude of her childhood's room by her sister's, Julia's parasitic curiosity, just as she is visited by Simon just before her suicide. According to Blanche's journal, there is a 'Prowler', a 'Peeping Tom' (Possession, 46-47) around the cottage, who is none other than the poet Randolph Henry Ash.

Male penetration is not only the literal violation of their space and autonomy, but also sexual initiation. The female characters get engaged in love affairs which give them 'a sense of glory' in their womanhood and sexuality, yet their independence is endangered. 'Byatt's [oeuvre] is thus represented as one that merges two beings together, making them one. While this process is not said to threaten the male self in its

individual existence, it is shown to annihilate the female self as a separate entity.' (Steveker, 52) Therefore, the loss of virginity is equal with the loss of autonomy in the (hetero) sexual intercourse.

The oneness, the dissolution of gender and identity in the moment of orgasm, and in the climax of the creative process as well, are incorporated in the metaphor of 'lover and androgyne' a role, “which women writers at various times have attempted to appropriate” (Farwell, 104). At first sight, these related metaphors seem to be satisfactory to define the female artist, as they can solve the problems arising from the tension between sexual drives and creative impulses, which seem to be very similar in nature.

Yet, even in the androgynous oneness the male part is dominant due to biological reasons: the violence of the penetration and the motion of the semen. As Farwell claims 'In Western images of andogyne and lover, then, the metaphoric union of male and female qualities – of soul and body, intellect and emotion, idea and matter – requires the absorption by the male of the female and the qualities she represents.' (104) Therefore, the problem of the model is that, actually, it cannot ensure the equality of the genders in itself, which necessarily leads to the loss of female autonomy.

In Byatt's novels sexuality is significant for two reasons. First of all, it is an inevitable step in the process of identity formation; and second, for the female characters sexuality seems to be a way of liberating themselves as women and as artists, yet it leads to the complete loss of their freedom. Anna loses her virginity to Oliver to rebel against her father and that way gain her autonomy. Yet, this relationship entrapped

and imprisoned her. Her pregnancy leads to further limitations of her already diminished (if even existing) autonomy, which would have been vital in her becoming an actual practicing artist. Christabel, on the other hand, was more conscious about the dangers of her claiming her sexuality in a heterosexual relationship. Her pregnancy resulted in the complete loss her autonomy as she had to leave the solitude of her own cottage to move in together with her sister who adopted her daughter. Motherhood, however, might be an opportunity to gain back the autonomy necessary for creativity.

2.2. The 'Mother' as the Female Artist

The mother is probably the most complex of all the metaphors to describe the female artist. The definition of the mother in itself is problematic in terms of power, sexuality and creativity. First of all, the mother is defined by her body, her great involvement in reproduction, yet she is not recognized as a sexual creature. As Nancy Chodorow claims in *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities* 'the mother tends not to be seen psychologically or portrayed culturally as a sex object. She is there to serve the child's interest and her sexual power is denied.' (59) Of course, this does not mean that the mother is not powerful.

On the one hand the mother is as much an authority figure as any man in the female artist's struggle. The figure of the mother with her sameness and separateness and her creative potential is threatening the female artist's autonomy. On the other hand, the mother is a domestic figure whose creative, sexual and reproductive power is subjugated to patriarchy. The fragility of the mother is explored by Adrianne Rich in her

book *Of Woman Born*, in which she suggests that 'under the institution of motherhood, the mother is the first to blame if theory proves unworkable in practice, or if anything whatsoever goes wrong.' (222) In Byatt's works motherhood and the concept of the mother is no less composite.

In *The Shadow of the Sun* Caroline, Anna's mother, clearly devotes her life to Henry's artistic pursuits no matter her occasional doubts concerning his creative potential. Due to her overwhelming engagement in supporting; and making it possible for Henry to write his novels, she has no time and energy for Anna whom she quite openly dislikes anyway. The source of their mild animosity seems to be the tension between their sameness and separateness.

The sameness of their beauty is emphasized by the Anna's depiction in which her features and characteristics make her a replica of Caroline:

> Her hair, straight and dark and fine, was like Caroline's but suffered from Anna's indecision over whether or not she was growing it. […] She had Caroline's large, dark eyes, and Caroline's narrow nose, but her mouth where Caroline's was wide and generous was prim and round and was pursed in an expression of a habitual vague disapproval. (*The Shadow*, 11)

Their resemblance, which is visible not only in terms of appeal but also in their social standing as they are living in Henry's shadow, is a threat to Anna because she yearns to identify herself with Henry, to follow his career and write, rather than Caroline's domestic sacrifice. Their separateness lies in exactly their difference in ambition. In

their opposition Anna is the Sun, who has artistic sensitivity, and Caroline is the Shadow. Yet, Caroline, being blind to Anna's underlying sun quality, is a major obstacle for Anna.

The same sort of mother-daughter relationship appears in *The Game* where Julia, the Sun, the accomplished novelist, being busy with her career, fails to support Deborah's exploration of her own talent and sunlight. The ambivalence of their sameness and separateness reaches its zenith in a fight scene, paradoxically, motivated by love:

> They were now fighting on their knees; Julia shook her hair out of her eyes, pinned Deborah down with one hand on the carpet […]. Deborah wriggled and bit and fought back; both weeping, they battered each other into a breathless and bleeding calm. (*The Game*, 227)

This part suggests that not only Julia and Cassandra are playing their deadly game but Deborah participates in it, too. Julia fictionalizes her daughter's life, which creates a distance between them, just as there is distance between the author and the reader. Julia's authorship is authority over her daughter. Deborah claims her right to be real, she claims her autonomy against Julia's authority, and in this fight she fails because of her mother pinning her down with her words, her logos 'You are my daughter, I love you. I do love you. I can't let you go.' (*The Game*, 227) Julia, therefore, in many ways is an almost patriarchal authority figure.

According to Byatt's novels, the mother – whether either absent or present – defines and threatens her daughters' exploration and development of their creativity. As

Rich remarks 'the institution of motherhood finds all mothers more or less guilty of having failed their children.' (223) The failure is twofold here. First, the sameness and separateness in terms of autonomy is quite similar to the lover and androgyne metaphor in which, despite the supposed equality, one of the parties is more powerful. The mother, therefore, fails to support her creative daughter. Second, the mother metaphor is still bound to reproduction. Reproduction is necessarily binary; therefore, autonomy is hardly accessible for both parties. As Farwell explains the problem:

> Yet, mother is related to [androgyne and lover] metaphors because in androgyne and lover the male, who creates by himself, in effect, becomes a mother by absorbing the female power to create. In this confusion and appropriation of all gender roles, the androgyne and lover become pregnant and deliver their creativity product through the impregnating inspiration of the female other. (108)

The mother as a metaphor for the female artist, then, has to be rejected on this basis. Yet, it has further relevant implications which might lead to the formation of a more suitable metaphor.

Motherhood is instrumental in creating a female genealogy as opposed to the patriarchal lineages. The major frustration of the female artists is that they cannot reach impersonality because they cannot dissolve their personality and talent in any sort of a female literary tradition. The mother as a link between her progeny promotes the formation of creative female communities, and a proper medium of discussing, distributing and celebrating women's art. The mother as an ancestor also awakens a

certain sense of female history to collect and exhibit female art which prospered nameless and scattered in the patriarchal societies. This seems to be the only way for the mother to secure her daughters freedom to create. As Gubar concludes in her exploration of female creativity:

> The veiled, brown, illiterate old woman who sits outside the city gates in Dinesen's tale therefore represents her grandmother and her grandmother's grandmother: "they and I have become one." Existing before man-made books, their stories let us "hear the voice of silence." (260)

The mother is, consequently, essential to establishing a continuum of narratives and that of female experience which can assist female artist to place themselves and their art in the tradition of female creativity.

In addition to this, the mother metaphor evokes the daughter's physical and emotional closeness to her mother's body and personality, which sheds light to the importance of the female body, sexuality and autonomy in female imagination and its exploration. Farwell believes that despite its flaws the mother is the most significant step toward the lesbian as a metaphor for the female artist: 'The paradigmatic relationship of this community is the mother-daughter relationship, the return of the woman to her original love. Mother as an image of female creativity is subsumed by the larger image of the lesbian, the one whose creativity springs from her primary attention to women.' (113) Therefore, the metaphor, which is not limited by the male sexuality and gives access to the most autonomy and sunlight (as in creative power) for women to

make art, is the mother's lesbian daughter.

2.3. The ' Lesbian' as the Female Artist

One of the most recent trends of defining female creativity in terms of autonomy and sexuality is the model of the lesbian, as 'Adrienne Rich and Monique Wittig have recently proposed'. (Farwell, 100) The lesbian is in many ways different from the androgynous lover and the mother. The idea of the lesbian as the essence of the female artist, and that of the female community of artists is explored by Byatt mainly in her *Possession* through the relationship of Christabel LaMotte and Blanche Glover, and the significance of Ellen Ash as an ignored female artist.

The nature of Christabel's and Blanche's relationship is quite uncertain in the novel. They were certainly living together, they removed themselves from society in order to pursue their artistic activities. Their relationship, considering Blanche' jealousy of Ash for Christabel's attention, must have been close and intimate. Yet, the following excerpts from the book suggest an actual homosexual relationship between them:

> [Christabel] came in to me as I knelt there and raised me up, and said we must never quarrel and that she would never, ever, give me cause to doubt her, and I must not suppose she could. I am sure she meant what she said. She was *agitated*; there were a few tears. We were quiet together, *in our special way*, for long time. (*Possession*, 46) [Italics mine]
>
> In the morning, washing, he found traces of blood on his thighs. He

> had thought, the ultimate things, [Christabel] did *not* know, and there was ancient proof. He stood, sponge in hand, and puzzled over her. *Such delicate skills, such informed desire, and yet a virgin. There were possibilities, of which the most obvious was to him slightly repugnant, and then, when he thought about it with determination, interesting, too.* He could never ask. To show speculation, or even curiosity, would be to lose her. (*Possession*, 285) [Italics mine]

Comparing these two quotations, Christabel as a woman in a sexual intercourse, and therefore, as a female artist is completely different. In the first one, which is from Blanche's journal, therefore, from another woman's point of view, Christabel is an active agent. Christabel's and Blanche's intimacy does not involve blood, there is no penetration, but some sort of a common language spoken by the body 'which can accommodate women who speak to one another, a language where women are the authors/speakers, readers/auditors, and subject' (Farwell, 112). Christabel and Blanche in their lesbian relationship does not experience sexuality as a threat to their autonomy as a woman and as an artist but they understand it as a way of expressing their creativity in a “communal act” (Farwell, 113). Therefore, the oneness of them as lovers does not mean the loss of autonomy.

In the second quotation, in which Ash, the male genius/the great poet, is the focalizer Christabel is the mere object of his thinking. Christabel is not even there. Only her blood is present which she left as a sign of her virginity and womanhood, in Denisen's and Gubar's terms, the token of her value in the patriarchal context. Ash is

definitely in a power position as a male observer of the otherness of the female body and sexuality. Yet as the French feminists claim that 'resistance [against patriarchy] does take place in the form of *jouissance,* that is, in the direct reexperience of the physical pleasures of infancy and of later sexuality, repressed but not obliterated by the Law of the Father' (Jones, 248), Christabel's sexual initiation *outside* of the patriarchal scheme of marriage can be interpreted as her gaining autonomy over her sexuality and creativity.

Christabel and Blanche in the freedom of their sexuality and sexual practices become the embodiment of the lesbian as a metaphor for the female artist. Farwell defines the metaphor as follows:

> For a woman to claim a sexuality and therefore a subjectivity of her own, outside of male influence or control, defies the symbology of the Western tradition. As a metaphor for creativity, lesbian also refuses many of the elements essential to the connection between heterosexuality and creativity: dualism, transcendence, ecstasy, reproduction, and a product. Instead it emphasizes the autonomy of the creative self, the community of readers and writers, and the diffuse physicality of the creative act and of the text itself. (Farwell, 110)

Considering these features, therefore, Christabel and Blanche are obviously lesbians in every sense of the word, but they are not the only ones in *Possession*. Surprisingly, the ignored and misunderstood Ellen Ash can be interpreted as a lesbian, too.

Ellen Ash, the wife of the Great Poet, due to the ‘echoing’ absence of her husband (Possession, 222) and their lack of intimacy can gain and preserve her

autonomy to read poetry and write her journal. Her writing is clearly public. She is aware of the fact that as a result of Ash's popularity her diary is going to be read as a faithful record of their marriage and Ash's private self. Ellen is consciously editing her journal, she keeps rewriting it, omitting words, as it is clear form the following example: "~~Despite all~~ We have been so happy in our life together, even our separation contribute to the trust and deep affection that is between us" (Possession, 229). Shiffman interprets Ellen's self-editing, or even self-censorship, as a method "to create the fiction of the perfect marriage" (99).

Her conscious working on her writing has two significant implications. First of all, she is perfectly knowledgeable in terms of gender bias. Ellen recognizes the expectations and requirements she has to meet as the wife of the Male Genius, and she composes the persona of her journal to fit perfectly in the context of the domestic woman. She shares the dull details of the household which disguises her public writing as a private past time of the angel of the house. Shiffmann describes her writing as follows: 'like quilting, sewing, or gardening, her writing is a delicate process of selection and shaping that serves to construct a fictional persona, a version of the self that Ellen, the diarist wishes to project. (99)

Yet Ellen is clearly not the dull domestic woman. Ellen is an educated reader and a sensitive critic of literature. She discovers and secures Christabel's position as a Female Genius and, yet, she claims that the Victorian public will never acclaim her: "It is truly original, although the general public may have trouble in recognizing its genius, because it makes no concession to vulgar frailties of imagination, and because its virtues

are so far removed in some ways at least from those expected of the weaker sex." (*Possession*, 120) Ellen Ash is highly aware of gender bias concerning the reception of literature as she experiences them, too. Shiffmann describes Ellen's activity as such: "The woman who "writes herself" both deconstructs and reconstructs womanhood: by publicizing herself. Choosing to valorize certain details of her life by recording them in written form – she challenges the dominant cultural construction of femininity as passive and muted. (94) Ellen protests against the double standards in literature but she does it in such a satiric way that even the modern scholars of the novel fail to detect it as they use it only to give account of the life of Ash and its surroundings.

Ellen's journal is significant for another reason. She chooses the genre on purpose as it is a highly paradoxical construct. It is neither private nor public. She is the object and the subject of her writing at the same time. The omissions, the absence gives her a chance to tell her own narrative as it is. Her self-censoring is similar to what As in Isak Dinesen writes in the "Blank Page":

> "Who then," she continues, "tells a finer tale than any of us? Silence does. And where does one read a deeper tale than upon the most perfectly printed page of the most precious book? Upon the blank page. When a royal and gallant pen, in the moment of its highest inspiration, has written down its tale with the rarest ink of all -- where, then, may one read a still deeper, sweeter, merrier and more cruel tale than that? Upon the blank page." (Web)

Ellen, therefore, is an artist, just like Christabel or Blanche. Even her elegant and

eccentric style resembles Christabel's Melusine. Ellen is a lesbian[9] who defines, explores and redefines her womanhood through her art; in fact, her art itself is becoming a manifesto of her womanhood. To do so, she chooses a genre which is usually identified with women, the diary: "Ellen's journal exploits the way in which diaries can be constructed like any other writing. The boundaries between diarist and author, ordinary and extraordinary, private and public conflate, and the female diarist ultimately emerges as a powerful literary talent." (Shiffmann, 95) Ellen, in many ways, is one of the most successful women writers in Byatt's novel universe since she could gain and preserve her autonomy even in the patriarchal setting and use its limitations to expand herself in writing through her female experience.

Conclusion

The central element of Byatt's metatextual oeuvre is the Sun, which is the metaphor of visionary imagination. The neoplatonic creation myth appropriates the Sun as male and dominant in its power which necessarily means that women cannot write, or at least, they cannot create good literature, which seems to be inherently male. Byatt's first step in denying the neoplatonic creation myth that she establishes the Shadow as the binary opposition of the Sun instead of the Moon which is a limiting metaphor for female artists as it assigns them a passive role in the creative process.

The Shadow of the Sun depicts the Sun/Shadow dichotomy as limiting for both sexes

9 Farwell claims that the concept of lesbian is metaphoric, therefore, women writers who do not engage in actual lesbian relationship can define themselves as a lesbian. As she puts it: 'What is called a lesbian does not depend on women loving women genitally but, rather, on the presence and attention of women to other women that is analogous to the act of loving sexually another like oneself" (110)

since it is setting unattainable expectations to them. Neither Anna nor Henry fits perfectly in the dichotomous categories, as in Henry's case his visionary potency is doubted, while in Anna's case its presence is justified. The novel defines the good artist as impersonal which made necessary to explore the male and female characters identity. According to the primary and secondary literature female identity is fundamentally relational which makes it more difficult for women to gain and preserve autonomy which is constantly threatened by love, sexuality and marriage.

Byatt's next novel, *The Game* leaves behind the neoplatonic creation myth which incorporates the Sun/Shadow dichotomy, and she comes up with a new 'arrangement' for sunlight, that is, what I call as the metaphor for the continuum of light. The continuum, as opposed to the dichotomy, does not categorizes artists, it embraces them regardless of their sex, gender, age, race, or social standing. In *The Game* Julia and Cassandra gives testimony of their sun quality in their exploration of their visionary power. Yet, they fail as visionaries due to their inconvenience in the patriarchal literary field. *The Game* is also is also significant for the exploration of a new concept of impersonality which seems to be in contrast with domesticity which, therefore, becomes the danger of a certain kind of women's writing. The concept of impersonality appearing in *The Game* is the precursor of ventriloquism which is going to be a recurring motif in her later works. This concept, and her snake symbolism reinforces the metatextual layer of the novel, which makes the fine lines between reality and fiction blurred.

P*ossession: A Romance* is an exciting mixture of the two types of Sun metaphor. It applies the Sun/Shadow dichotomy to show it works mostly on the part of reception which

stubbornly wants to categories authors according to gender bias. Byatt, on the other hand, shows how metaphor of the continuum of light liberates Christabel as a female visionary from patriarchal curses and establishes her a Sun Goddess. This way, Christabel becomes an equal with Ash in terms of imagination and creative power, however, she has to struggle in a patriarchal society and its restrictions of which she tries to distance herself.

Sexuality has a significant role in the novels for two reasons. First, creativity itself is defined in sexual terms, such as the pen-penis or the blank page. The heteronormative features of penetrative sexuality are applied for art, which assign an active and dominant role for men and a passive supporting one for women. Second, sexuality seems to be a curse for the female artist as it threatens her autonomy to create. Byatt, just as feminist scholars, explores the possibilities of avoiding the sexualization of creativity. She has to reject celibacy, lover and androgyne, and mother because they are all determined by their involvement in the reproductive process. Byatt's exemplary female characters suggest that among the other metaphors 'lesbian' is the most fruitful approach as it is not interpreted in terms of power penetrative sexuality.

Byatt's ideal female artist is, then, autonomous above all who is not limited by patriarchal traditions and expectations. Autonomy derives from the freedom of either physical or emotional separation from others. Undisturbed solitude is required for visions and for developing an impersonal voice since in Byatt's definition visionary and impersonality are the most significant aesthetic concept in literature – unmarked by gender bias.

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