

**„My sense of my own identity is bound up with the past“**

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**The Quest for a Female Identity in Historical Novels by British Women Writers:**

**Penelope Lively, Margaret Drabble, A.S. Byatt, Esther Freud**

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Roth, im Februar 2014

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*"Only connect."*

In loving memory of my grandparents.



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## List of Abbreviations

The primary sources often used and extensively quoted in the following text are abbreviated as:

<b>HU</b>	Penelope Lively. <i>A House Unlocked</i> .
<b>MIU</b>	Penelope Lively. <i>Making It Up</i> .
<b>MT</b>	Penelope Lively. <i>Moon Tiger</i> .
<b>OJ</b>	Penelope Lively. <i>Oleander, Jacaranda</i> .
<b>PC</b>	Margaret Drabble. <i>The Pattern in the Carpet – A Personal History with Jigsaws</i> .
<b>PM</b>	Margaret Drabble. <i>The Peppered Moth</i> .
<b>RQ</b>	Margaret Drabble. <i>The Red Queen</i> .
<b>BT</b>	A.S. Byatt. <i>Babel Tower</i> .
<b>HS</b>	A.S. Byatt. <i>On Histories and Stories</i> .
<b>PoM</b>	A.S. Byatt. <i>Passions of the Mind</i> .
<b>SoS</b>	A.S. Byatt. <i>The Shadow of the Sun</i> .
<b>ST</b>	A.S. Byatt. <i>Still Life</i> .
<b>ViG</b>	A.S. Byatt. <i>The Virgin in the Garden</i> .
<b>WW</b>	A.S. Byatt. <i>A Whistling Woman</i> .
<b>SG</b>	Esther Freud. <i>Summer at Gaglow</i> .

## 1. “My sense of my own identity is bound up with the past”<sup>1</sup> – The Quest for a Female Identity in Historical Novels by Women

For too long a time women have remained in the shadows of history and only hesitantly have they eventually stepped out of their shadowy existence and into the light. This move has been encouraged by a developing feminist consciousness and was strongly demanded and put into practice by the women’s movement of the mid-twentieth century – a movement which in due course began not only to shape women’s possible future but to question and examine their past as well. Stephanie Kramer accordingly points out: “Frauen fingen an, die Objektivität der fast ausschließlich von Männern gezeigten Frauendarstellungen zu hinterfragen und diese zu revidieren. Auf ihrer Suche nach alternativen Lebensentwürfen und Vorbildern zur eigenen Identitätsfindung haben sie überdies eine Vielzahl vergessener Frauen in das öffentliche Bewusstsein gehoben“ (Kramer, 319). Thus a new interest in and a growing awareness of a specific female history was kindled: To know your past and to know where you have come from is to know yourself.

As this statement implies, history is indeed strongly connected with identity. Therefore, the quest for a specific female identity has to go hand in hand with the identification of a female history. Both history and the quest for identity have not only been of interest for anthropologists or historians but have occupied the minds of novelists as well – especially the minds of female novelists. Indeed, fictional texts offer women, as Marion Gymnich stresses, more possibilities to solve the identity quest by creating new and innovative concepts of a female identity which consequently help them not only to criticize and undermine but also to replace traditional notions of identity (comp. Gymnich 2000, 14). The novel therefore serves as a perfect tool for female authors to discover and create a specific female identity, and it furthermore allows a recreation of women’s history in a way historiography has not been able to. A history of women has never been recorded so that novels began to fill in the gaps thus helping to eventually shed light on a female past.

The knowledge of this connection between history and identity has led female authors to the writing of historical novels since this genre gives them the perfect opportunity to examine the female quest for identity, as well as to rewrite women’s history. These novels thus display “a fuller, more vivid, more hypothetical narrative precisely around what we are

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<sup>1</sup> Byatt, A.S. “True Stories and the Facts in Fiction.” in: A.S. Byatt. *On Histories and Stories*: 93.

*not told*” (HS, 103). As numerous female novelists have therefore begun to analyse female identity they have eventually allowed women a voice in history. When she asks herself why so much modern fiction uses the past as a subject although the historical novel has often been dismissed, A.S. Byatt gives a revealing answer. She not only stresses that “[a] preoccupation with the ancestors has always been part of human make-up” but also points out that “[her] sense of [her] own identity is bound up with the past” (HS, 93). Consequently, one major reason for the preoccupation with the past in literature and elsewhere is especially but not only for women a longing for an own identity and history.

As we are to notice, women writers have thus created a sub-genre of the historical novel which is characterized by its preoccupation with a reconstruction of a female history that goes hand in hand with an examination and a reshaping of (traditional) historiography, as well as with the quest for a female identity. This new female historical novel often classifies as a hybrid genre which displays, due to its fluid borders between the historical novel, the Bildungsroman and (auto-) biographical writing, a strong connection between history, memory, and identity.

In the following study I am going to analyse and compare several selected female historical novels written by contemporary British women writers in order to show how women have finally gained access to formerly predominantly male literary domains – ranging from the historical novel to the Bildungsroman – and turned them into a specifically female experience.

In order to document the tradition out of which these contemporary British female authors compose their historical novels and to provide a context to my own criticism of the female historical novel, I intend to give a short introduction not only to the development of the (male) historical novel throughout the ages but also to the ongoing discussion about the connection between historiography and literature – a topic that features prominently in female historical writing. I will then sketch the beginnings of the retrieval of the formerly unheard female voice in history, the eventual rise of the female historical Bildungsroman and its connection to the tradition of female autobiography. The obvious link between the literary genres Bildungsroman, historical novel, and (auto-)biography is emphasized by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning who point to their relevance as a place for considerations of identity and memory: “Aber nicht allein (Auto-)Biographie und historischer Roman sind Orte des

individuellen und kulturellen Gedächtnisses. So handelt es sich bei den Strukturen des Bildungsromans um kulturelle Denk- und Sinnstiftungsmodelle für die Kodierung von Lebenserfahrung“ (Erll/Nünning 2003, 13).

The main part of this study then consists of detailed analyses of particular female historical novels which give a new form to the traditional genre by considering and expanding its boundaries. The historical novels I am going to examine all share elements of the Bildungsroman as well as (auto-) biographical information. The analyses of the novels are completed by a short introduction to their authoresses as to show how their works often mirror their own lives. In this chapter I furthermore attempt to point out how the novelists contribute to the tradition of the female historical novel by adding new topics to it such as the quest for a specific female identity, the problems and development of historiography and the historical novel, feminism and motherhood, as well as the striving for independence and creativity, as Ansgar Nünning summarizes: “Indem Autorinnen [...] den geschichtlichen Erfahrungsbereich der Frau in den Mittelpunkt stellen, nutzen sie das Genre des historischen Romans als Medium revisionistischer Geschichtsdarstellung, feministischer Gesellschaftskritik und moralischer Bilanzierung der Folgen der Modernisierung” (Nünning 1999, 35).

The authors I have chosen to exemplify the contemporary female historical novel are Penelope Lively, Margaret Drabble, A.S. Byatt, and, as a representative of a younger generation, Esther Freud. I am aware of the abundance and variety of studies already existing not only on these authors but on the historical novel in general. Since the historical novel indeed resembles a never ending story which re-invents itself every once in a while, it thus continuously poses new questions to criticism. In fact, it seems as if the interest in history has even turned into quite an obsession in the fiction of contemporary writers and a new wave of *historytainment* is evolving.<sup>2</sup> However, this did not discourage me to add yet another thesis to this multitude. Historiography needs a renewal. In particular, women have

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<sup>2</sup> Asked to explain the success of historical novels and films professor Wolfram Siemann of Munich University states: “Das sich ausbreitende Geschichtsinteresse ist für mich ein Reflex darauf, dass unsere Welt globaler wird. Allein die Allgegenwärtigkeit der Nachrichten und Informationen ergibt eine Konfrontation mit Wissen, die vollkommen unstrukturiert ist. So etwas schürt das Bedürfnis nach Ordnung und nach Übersicht. Und die wird dann gern aus dem Reservoir der Erinnerung geholt. Es gibt aber noch einen anderen Zugang zur Geschichte: In den fern gelegenen Epochen kann man ein völlig fremdes Leben wahrnehmen und sich doch vergleichen: Auch Cäsar, auch die Ägypter, auch die Pompeianer, die vom Ausbruch des Vesuvs betroffen sind, erleben Schicksale, Leid, Not, Liebe. Genau das, was in unterhaltsamen Romanen Spannung und Anziehung erzeugt. Mit dem Unterschied, dass hier authentische Qualität hinzukommt. [...]”.( André Mumot, Interview with Wolfram Siemann in: *Bücher. Das Unabhängige Magazin zum Lesen*. 3 (2007): 94)

to finally be included into historiography and their role in and contribution to history has to be acknowledged. As historiography has left history with hardly a trace of female participation, novelists have begun to fill in these gaps. The neglect of women as cultural agents is related to gender inequality and as such a topic for women writers who intend to demonstrate women's presence in history. Historical fiction can be used to re-write and set right history and historiography by focusing on female protagonists. Being a part of history then allows women to (re-)consider their selfhood and identity. I am therefore going to examine how female writers use the historical novel as a platform to display the quest for a female identity. They do this by combining the traditional genre of the historical novel with elements of the Bildungsroman, biography and autobiography.

Hence, the development of the female historical novel as a new branch of historical writing is just as much of interest as its contemporary forms and innovative themes. As a representative of this genre Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger* cannot be dismissed. Her work *Making It Up* furthermore demonstrates the present evolution of the historical novel and its expansion by including (auto-) biographical aspects. I then concentrate on Margaret Drabble and her two novels *The Peppered Moth* and *The Red Queen*. Drabble's recent work has not gained nearly as much critical attention as her earlier work has. Yet, these two novels are an informative display of how history and female identity are intertwining. Margaret Drabble's work furthermore stresses the influence of feminist thought on historical writing by women. After the great success of A.S. Byatt's *Possession* the author and her work have been subject to much literary criticism.<sup>3</sup> Although *Possession* is the prototype of the contemporary female historical novel, I intend to concentrate on Byatt's rather neglected 'Frederica Quartet' because these four novels (*The Virgin in the Garden*, *Still Life*, *Babel Tower*, and *A Whistling Woman*) display a fascinating combination of historical novel and female Bildungsroman, of public and private history mixed with a hint of the author's own autobiography. I will conclude this study with an examination of Esther Freud's novel *Summer at Gaglow*. Since Freud is of a younger generation than Byatt, Drabble and Lively, the analysis of her work is to

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Todd, for instance, dedicates the first chapter of his work on the Booker Prize, *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today* (1996), to Byatt and her hugely successful novel *Possession* giving an account for its "phenomenal international success" (Todd 1996, 1). He stresses that *Possession* is a quintessentially English book which has nevertheless "seen success and recognition not only in Britain's traditional export markets such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa, but to a remarkable extent in Europe and even the United States (where interest in British, let alone English, fiction is intermittent and unpredictable)." (ibid., 1) It can hence be concluded that there is indeed a worldwide interest in the history of women and the emphasis on women as historical and cultural agents.

serve as a view of the prospects for the future female historical novel. Freud's novel furthermore demonstrates that younger novelists are just as well occupied with the quest for a specific female identity and display a highly developed historical consciousness, thus continuing a tradition inspired by their literary predecessors.

Each of these women writers' approach towards the historical novel is different. They thus exemplify the grand diversity of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century developments of this genre.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The popularity of historical writing is for instance reflected in the shortlist for the Man Booker Prize 2009 as has been emphasized by many a critic: "A lot of commentary [...] has focused on the 'historical' nature of the shortlist, from Hilary Mantel's Tudor spellbinder *Wolf Hall* to Sarah Waters's psychodrama of austerity Britain (and homage to Josephine Tey) *The Little Stranger*" (McCrum). Robert McCrum furthermore rightly points out that the "Booker remains a truly important prize because it's about so much more than the winner, or the shortlist. It has become the indispensable literary thermometer with which to take the temperature of contemporary fiction (outside the US). This year Booker [sic] seems to be reflecting the zeitgeist more than ever" (ibid.). The contemporary interest in historical fiction is consequently also mirrored in 2009's winner – *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel, a historical novel set at King Henry VIII's court. In a review of this work, Olivia Laing asks herself why Henry VIII and his age still have such an appeal for today's audience. She answers this question by pointing to the importance of history to the present since the past not only shapes cultural memory but also individual identity: "Henry's reign continues to draw us because it is the moment that the past comes into focus and becomes recognizably our own" (Laing). In 2012, the Booker Prize once again considers the still current interest in history as Hilary Mantel's historical novel *Bring Up the Bodies*, a sort of sequel to *Wolf Hall*, was awarded with the prize.

## 2. Historiography and Literature – Science versus Imagination

Much has been written on the historical novel, on its emergence, on its progress throughout the ages, its heyday in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There has also been much discussion on its development in modern and especially in postmodern times. Indeed, although a genre of many years' standing, it is very interesting to observe the historical novel's future evolution. The past has over the ages always occupied the minds of writers, philosophers, scientists, and, of course, average men. History has thus been and remains to be a source of inspiration for writing, both imaginative as well as scientific. However, exactly at this point of intersection, historians and novelists have often gotten into each other's way since both tend to claim history their very own territory.

In the following I would like to give a short and only sketchy overview on this traditional problem of historiography and how it eventually led to the emergence of the historical novel. Though it would take me too far afield to give a detailed analysis of the whole complex development, I consider it necessary for the examination of the chosen novels to point out at least certain aspects of it.

The opposition between historiography and historical imagination is indeed of special importance to the writing of female historical novels. Women's history has for centuries not been part of the public historical record and was therefore not examined in detail. The female historical novel tries to fill in this gap and thus aims at a completion of history. In this case, fact and fiction often have to combine to create a "fictive reconstruction of the lived history" (HS, 4). The separation of, as well as the connection between, historiography and historical fiction are consequently of great interest to contemporary female historical writing. Indeed, as Amy J. Elias explains: "Thus, both the traditional historical romance and the postmodernist historical romance raise questions about how history can be narrated and what the relationship between historiography and fiction might be" (Elias 2001, 9).

### 2.1 "Perhaps history *is* just story-telling"<sup>5</sup>

[...] Schuld haben die Künstler. [...] Die Schriftsteller, die Bänkelsänger, die Geschichtenerzähler. Denn sie gestalten die Vergangenheit nach ihren Vorstellungen um. Sie nehmen einen Narren und machen ihn zum Helden. Sie nehmen einen Säufer

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<sup>5</sup> Swift, Graham. *Waterland*: 133.

und machen ihn zum König. – Sind sie denn allesamt Lügner? – Lügner, fragte sie, oder Zauberer? Sie sehen das Skelett im Staub und bekleiden es mit neuem Fleisch, so dass eine durchschnittliche Kreatur als Fabeltier wieder aufersteht. (Gabaldon, 937)

This quotation from Diana Gabaldon's bestselling novel *Die Geliehene Zeit* (1996) exemplifies how historians tend to devalue the novelists' handling of history. In a historian's opinion novelists usually distort and misrepresent the past by ignoring facts or (ab)using them as they like. Traditionally, historians regard history and consequently historiography as a science neglecting the possibility of historical resurrection through fiction. The result is therefore a confrontation of history and literature as incompatible counterparts. The historian tends to emphasize the importance of evidence and facts and detests the imaginative writer's mixing of historical reality with fictional material. This opposition of fact and fiction in historical writing has already been a topic in the early days of historiography and the discussion has continued in our times. Ansgar Nünning, for example, points out that the opposition between fact and fiction has now even become a central aspect of the contemporary historical novel which discusses it "in Form poetologischer und epistemologischer Selbstreflexion" (Nünning 1995a, 42). A predecessor for these thoughts can already be found in the novelist Walter Scott, whose name is inseparably connected with the genre of the historical novel, and who was in fact quite conscious of the possible liaison between fiction and historical reality. As a

storyteller and historiographer, Scott constructed his fictional project around the relationship between the language of fiction and historical reality, the possibility of grasping the movements of history in the language of fiction, and the denial of that possibility. Conscious of the fictionality of his narratives, he deliberately played fiction and history off against one another, not only as 'artifice' against 'reality', but as codified forms of written discourse. (Kerr, 1)

Centuries before Scott and the postmodern writers of historical fiction, the first Western historians, Herodotus and Thucydides, were also concerned with the question of how to separate fact from fiction and history from myth in historiography. They were faced with this problem after having recognized that the most important texts about the past were Homer's as well as Hesiod's epic and poetic works which indeed contained important historical information. Nevertheless, these statements were expressed through verse and embedded in an unmistakably mythological background, thus denying a scientific and

historical verifiability. And yet, Herodotus and Thucydides could not ignore these texts as Christian Simon in his *Historiographie: Eine Einleitung* explains:

Sie konnten sie nicht einfach weglegen, weil es für die gesamte antike Historiographie mangels Quellen keine Möglichkeit gab, die Lücke zwischen den mythischen Berichten in den Epen einerseits und den Perserkriegen andererseits zu schließen. Die Epen waren so etwas wie die ältesten 'Geschichtsbücher', an die sie anschließen mussten. (Simon, 44/45)

The early historians consequently had to ask themselves if myth, if fiction, was to be part of historiography. Or were historical facts to be valued more than fiction? Herodotus and Thucydides both approached this problem in different ways. Whereas Herodotus combined history and myth, Thucydides totally neglected myth and literary imagination in order to favour historical facts instead. He furthermore tried to keep to a certain chronology of historical events and is thus now regarded the first rational and pragmatic chronicler of the Western world.

Herodotus, on the other hand, considered myths an integral part of a society's cultural history and therefore combined history with mythology in his historical prose masterpiece *Histories Apodeixis* – which is now nevertheless considered to be one of the most important sources to display the history of the Ancient World and the Persian Wars.<sup>6</sup> By sprinkling his work with tales and anecdotes to not only give a further characterisation of historical personalities but also a clearer if not more dramatic picture of historical events, Herodotus made it obvious that there is a close relationship between the narrating of history and the narrating of a story, thus between historiography and literature. Historical objectivity can indeed not easily be achieved and he already sensed that there is more to historiography than the mere reproduction of facts, events, and dates. However, his view on this interacting relationship between historiography and literature was not yet to be established. In fact, it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that his ideas were taken up again. Instead, Thucydides' opinion that literature and historiography are to be strictly separated further developed and eventually reached a climax in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

But before taking the step into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is important to note another influential view expressed on the connection between history and literature. Approximately

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<sup>6</sup> In recent historical fiction this connection between myth and history is discussed as well. Indeed, myths even feature prominently in many a contemporary historical novel: "One of the most noticeable developments in recent fiction, particularly in what is here called historiographic metafiction, seems to be the reinvention of myth as a viable attitude in relation to the past." (Fludernik, 94)

one century after Thucydides, Aristotle, too, occupied himself with the problem of the separation of historiography and literature. In due course he abolished the opinion that historical literature is less important than or even inferior to historiography and accordingly stresses in his work *Poetica*: “Daher ist Dichtung etwas Philosophischeres und Ernsthafteres als Geschichtsschreibung; denn die Dichtung teilt mehr das Allgemeine, die Geschichtsschreibung hingegen das Besondere mit” (Aristoteles in translations by Manfred Fuhrmann, 29). Aristotle also explained the differences between historian and novelist. He pointed out that one of them tells what really happened, whereas the other concentrates on what might possibly have happened: “Denn der Geschichtsschreiber und der Dichter unterscheiden sich nicht dadurch voneinander, dass sich der eine in Versen und der andere in Prosa mitteilt [...]; sie unterscheiden sich vielmehr dadurch voneinander, dass der eine das wirklich Geschehene mitteilt, der andere, was geschehen könnte” (ibid., 29).

Aristotle’s observations not only influenced his contemporaries and their views on historiography and literature but also remained valid in the years and centuries to come: “Dass die auf Aristoteles zurückgehende Ansicht, der Historiker schildere tatsächliches Geschehen, während sich der Dichter mit dem Bereich des Möglichen befasse, bis heute nachwirkt, zeigt sich etwa an der modernen Unterscheidung zwischen fiktionalem und nicht-fiktionalem Erzählen [...]” (Nünning 1995a, 129).

However, the strict borders that separated history and literature, installed by the early historiographers, soon became blurred and remained rather vague until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was only then when the interrelation between historiography and fiction was again to be analysed. This examination finally culminated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time which was subordinated to the dictate of hard facts, and a time in which fiction was consequently condemned as the opposite of truth. It was nevertheless in this same century that the historical novel flourished as the following chapter on the development of this genre will show.

The age was heavily influenced by the German historian Leopold von Ranke, who defined the duty of any historian in representing history how it actually had been. He claimed that an account of the past had to be objective and was bound to matters of fact solely. Subjective interpretation of history was to be strictly avoided. Instead, the facts were to speak for themselves. Oddly enough,

[a]lthough 19th century historians were quite aware of the fact that their allegedly factual representations of past events produced almost as many

different reports and explanations as there were historians, they still kept to their belief that if one only tried hard enough to avoid distorting ideologies and attempted to be true to the given facts, historical objectivity could easily be achieved. (Engler, 20)

There were only few who saw through this ambiguity and did consequently not subscribe to the Rankean doctrine. They rather stressed that one's view of history is always subjective and individual and that therefore the demanded objective view on history was indeed impossible. Ranke's claims had to be dismissed. As Engler emphasizes, "[i]nterpretation was regarded as necessary – either on the basis of the sheer incompleteness of the historical record or the need to integrate separate and seemingly unrelated events into a coherent and unified narrative pattern" (Engler, 20). By pointing out the obligation of the historian to interpret history and to write down historical events in a narrative form, these few 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophers of history helped pave the way for those of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, historiography and literature eventually moved closer together as Theodor Lessing in his *Geschichte als Sinngebung des Sinnlosen* stresses and which is pointed out by Petra Deistler: "Indem Lessing die Aufgabe des Historikers in einer Umformulierung formulierter Welt sieht, verweist er ihn in den Bereich des Fiktiven" (Deistler, 22). An objective reconstruction of history by mirroring the hard facts only is now indeed regarded impossible. This idea was further developed by the English historian R.G. Collingwood who insisted that the historian is comparable to the novelist in that both select, construct, and criticize. Thus, both create works of imagination that only differ in the historian's claim to "construct a picture of things as they really were and of events as they really happened" (Collingwood, 246). Collingwood saw in the historian a story-teller who was to make a coherent story out of historical facts, thus emphasizing the selective and interpretative task of the historian. However, as Engler rightly points out, Collingwood was not yet ready to "accept the notion of the ultimate fictionality of all historical representation" (Engler, 22). This notion was firmly established by Hayden White who continued and extended Collingwood's ideas by arguing that historiography is indeed nothing but a fiction-making process.

White turned his back on the old concepts of historical writing by stressing that the writing of history is "a mere fiction-making operation performed by historians who stage the past in the manner in which Shakespeare devised his history plays" (Volkman, 325). James

Kerr further describes White's historian hence as "an inventor" and "a discoverer of the past. More artificer than scientist, he approaches the historical record with a notion of the kinds of configurations that can be recognized as stories by his audience" (Kerr, 4). Of course, this suggestion is a bit too far-fetched. Ruth Klüger's opinion voiced in her essay "Fakten und Fiktionen" seems on the other hand more accurate: "Für die Historiker wie für die Literaten ist die Geschichte, das Geschehene, Rohmaterial, dem sie eine Interpretation, eine Form angedeihen lassen" (Klüger, 84). Historiographic texts are, as she emphasizes, indeed comparable to fictional narratives in so far as the historian and the narrator of a fictional work both share the effort to re-constitute "human experience in the medium of language. In the act of narration, the historian re-constitutes history. He/she has in common with the narrator of fiction or any narrator the endeavour to transform experience into meaning, to structure the unstructured" (Löschnigg, 105). With the recognition of history as a construct instead of a reality that only waits to be communicated in language, the 20<sup>th</sup> century consequently encouraged historiographers to focus on the role of narrative in historical writing.

Historiography is considered to be a science which tries by means of a critical analysis of the available sources to examine and classify the representation of history. But historiography is, due to its more or less literary arranging, a part of literature as well. As Linda Hutcheon points out in her *Politics of Postmodernism*, there are "important parallels between the processes of history-writing and fiction-writing" (Hutcheon 1989, 58). Fiction and historiography can therefore be regarded as sister arts.<sup>7</sup> The historical novel can even be called a companion to historiography as Michel de Certeau explains in *Das Schreiben der Geschichte*: "Die *Historiographie* [...] enthält im eigenen Namen das Paradox – und beinahe das Oxymoron – einer zwischen zwei antinomischen Begriffen, der Wirklichkeit und dem Diskurs, hergestellten Beziehung. Ihre Aufgabe ist es, die beiden zu verbinden und dort, wo die Verbindung unvorstellbar ist, so zu tun, *als ob* sie sie verbinde" (de Certeau, 9).

Though historiography and the historical novel are often separated by different approaches concerning matter and mode they share a common interest in the same subject – the past. Furthermore, they both have to make choices concerning the representation of their subject matter, as Martin Löschnigg puts it: "If the historian's selection is restricted by

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<sup>7</sup> David Cowart points out that this close relationship between history and fiction is even mirrored in "the linguistic tendency to obscure the distinction between veracious and imagined narratives" since "in many languages the words for story and history coincide. Italian *storia*, French *histoire*, Spanish *historia*, Russian *istoriya*, German *Geschichte* [...]" (Cowart, 17)

the authority (and availability) of his/her sources, he/she once again resembles the novelist in his explanation and interpretation of data" (Löschnigg, 105).

However, whereas scientific historiography tends to focus on public history, thus conveying a picture of the past based on events and dates, literary historiography, as one might call the historical novel, often tries to give a more private insight into the past by portraying individuals, consequently stressing what is often hidden in the greater context. And Elizabeth Wesseling adds that "the historical novel represented aspects of the past that had as yet not been dealt with as extensively by historians, namely the daily lives of ordinary people" (Wesseling, 33). It sheds light on the formerly neglected private sphere of history and thus on the lives of women.

Novels, and especially historical novels, "represent a meeting point between the individual and the general, bridging the isolated subjectivity and the peopled world, and giving an individual dimension to the otherwise abstract or disembodied nature of shared norms and values" (Connor, 1). Eventually, this interest in the individual and its place in history caused the rapid rise of the historical novel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is still an incentive to write historical novels in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **2.2 The Development of the Historical Novel and its Rise in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a rising interest in historical material which finally culminated in the emergence of the historical novel. As has already been stated, historical data had of course entered imaginative writing long before the actual ascent of the historical novel itself: "[d]ie Benutzung geschichtlicher Vorgänge, Ereignisse und Personen in der Literatur ist beinahe so alt wie die Literatur selbst" (Steinmetz 1988, 8). History plays a major part in ancient epic writing, and it also figures prominently as a theme in classical tragedy. This tradition continues in Elizabethan theatre, as Shakespeare's history plays prove. His dramas about historical events were indeed very popular with the Elizabethan audience as they reflected the patriotic zeal of the age and described historical actions of the past that still seemed to shape the life of the contemporary audience. Already Renaissance writers used such literary genres as the history play or the historical poem as means to create a picture of the past as well as to highlight the past's influence on the present. This connection between past and present is an important notion which is still of relevance today. Contemporary

historical writing continues to stress the idea that history is to be regarded as a bridge which arches the stream of time and thus connects past and present. Indeed, as A.S. Byatt argues, “the novelists are trying to find historical paradigms for contemporary situations” and are convinced that “[one] cannot understand the present if [one does] not understand the past that preceded and produced it” (HS, 11).

It is however important to note that Shakespeare’s history plays are not always strictly historically accurate. The famous playwright took for instance the freedom not to follow a historical chronology of events for the purpose of dramatic effects. This intervention of the narrator has to be kept in mind when reading historical fiction: historical facts have always been filtered through the mind of the narrator and thus probably lost their objectivity. The poet Shakespeare had thus coloured historical facts with subjective opinions and digressions. He thus resembles 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers of history such as Hayden White, who states that historical facts do indeed not speak for themselves and are therefore subject to the historian’s subjective selection and interpretation. Historiography and literature can therefore not be clearly separated anymore.

Toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century history eventually began to invade a then still new and innovative literary genre – the novel. It became a topic not only because of the general wish “to understand, celebrate or assess a national past” (Alexander, 124) and the need to give the individual a place in history, but also to grant the novel a certain attitude of truthfulness. Authors used the past as an appropriate background and setting for their nevertheless mainly fictional characters. As Elizabeth Wesseling states in her description of the emergence of the classical model of historical fiction, novelists began “to draw upon information collected by antiquarians concerning the manners, customs, clothes, and architecture of former ages in order to situate the adventures of predominantly fictional characters in concretely detailed, historical surroundings” (Wesseling, 27). The writers thus emphasized an impression of reliability that they wanted their works to convey and which helped them to distance themselves and their works from their literary predecessors: “Nicht mehr das Schicksal edler Prinzen und Prinzessinnen, die abenteuerlichen Kämpfe tapferer Ritter oder wunderbare, übersinnliche Ereignisse und Begebenheiten standen auf dem Programm, sondern die realistische Darstellung zeitgenössischer gesellschaftlicher Wirklichkeit” (Mengel, 11).

Though the past has already figured as an important element in literature for a long time it is nevertheless one author whose name is forever connected with the creation and rise of the historical novel. In 1814 Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley, or 'Tis Sixty Years Since* was published and with it the historical novel began its triumphant progress. Scott is generally considered to be the one author who left an indelible mark on a whole genre – or at least upon the first phase of its development.<sup>8</sup> Heinz-Joachim Müllenbrock stresses that this 19<sup>th</sup> century writer was indeed the first novelist to achieve the balance between history and fiction that has long been sought after. Scott managed to combine historical facts with fictional narration without blurring the borders between both areas. He regarded the historical facts as his raw material which he as a novelist could shape and arrange and thus fictionalize.<sup>9</sup> Whereas in the years and centuries before Scott historiography and historical fiction often intertwined, he considered both different branches of, however, the same tree. Walter Scott consequently regarded the historical novel as an addition to historiography which he dismissed as a dry and unattractive collection of historical facts only. Müllenbrock puts it thus:

Andererseits [...] ließ sich nicht verleugnen, dass den vielfältigen, hauptsächlich dem Mittelalter geltenden historiographischen Bemühungen bei aller Aufgeschlossenheit für den Reiz des Vergangenen der Staub des Altertümlichen anhaftete. In diesem Manko nun erkannte Scott die sich dem historischen Roman eröffnende Chance. [...] Das für die Fachhistoriographie insgesamt kennzeichnende Fehlen imaginativer Wärme ließ in Scott die Einsicht reifen, in dem historischen Roman ein Instrument zu schaffen, mit dem die Einverleibung der Vergangenheit in das Gegenwartsbewusstsein auf anschaulichere und somit wirksamere Weise erreicht werden konnte. (Müllenbrock, 34/35)

Traditional historiography was in Walter Scott's opinion not able to capture the whole power, the turmoil and emotions caused by historical events and thus the historical novel had to assume this duty. Scott furthermore gave attention to the daily lives of ordinary people, an aspect that had until then been excluded from general historiography. His

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<sup>8</sup> It is however interesting to take a closer look at the postscript to *Waverley* in which Scott acknowledges the influence of Maria Edgeworth. In fact, Edgeworth's first novel *Castle Rackrent*, published in 1800, is often regarded as the first historical novel and so the early female influence on this genre long dominated by men is undeniable. *Castle Rackrent* further displays the interplay of historical facts with fiction as Edgeworth used a real-life family history as the basis of her story.

<sup>9</sup> For more information concerning Scott's treatment of historical facts in combination with fiction I recommend a closer look at Heinz-Joachim Müllenbrock's essay "Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian*. Überlegungen zur Leistungsfähigkeit des historischen Romans." in: H.-J. Müllenbrock. *Der Historische Roman – Aufsätze*: 25/26.

historical novel was therefore to complete historiography or, as Petra Deistler puts it: “Der historische Roman kann sich nur als Ergänzung zu einer wahrheitsgetreuen Geschichtsschreibung etablieren, indem er sich zur Aufgabe setzt, dem Leser die Lebendigkeit, den Geist vergangener Zeiten nahezubringen“ (Deistler, 21). Moreover, it is very interesting that Scott’s historical fiction not only

reflected but also influenced nineteenth-century historians’ work. [...] Scholars have argued that Scott’s work influenced historians such as Augustin Thierry, whose *History of the Conquest of England by the Normans* (1871) turns to the particular and oral to fill in the gaps of official recorded history, and Thomas Babington Macaulay, who called for a redefinition of history that would include the specific and particular. (Elias 2001, 10)

Of course, other novelists took up history as a subject as well and thus continued and expanded the tradition of the historical novel founded by Scott. Among his followers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were such famous writers as Dickens, Eliot, Thackeray, or Trollope. Yet, the new century came along with a new generation of novelists who thought the whole genre of the historical novel over and eventually tried to break its tradition. Elizabeth Wesseling even points out that “Scott suffered a steady loss of prestige in the twentieth century” (Wesseling, 67).

### 2.3 The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Historical Novel

As many a literary critic emphasizes, the historical novel rose to another heyday in the century after Scott. However, it was only in the 1960s that the historical novel experienced indeed an evident renaissance.<sup>10</sup> Of course, it has as such never been really outdated and there had always been novels using a historical background or setting or even historical personages to tell a story, but the experimental writers, the literary avant-garde, of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century generally neglected historical material and were rather intent on making a rupture with the past. In a climate like this the literary adaptation of historical material was therefore certainly not supported. Ezra Pound has expressed this modernist differentiation from the past in his demand to “make it new”.

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<sup>10</sup> Ansgar Nünning as well as Heike Hartung indicate that a renaissance of the historical novel had already begun in the late 1960s and reached a highpoint in the 1980s. With the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the historical novel has well established its place in literature. History is as popular as ever, if not even more so.

Nevertheless, this dictum can also be applied to the historical novel which as a genre was indeed renewed. Reshaped and reborn with many a change in form and content it appeared again in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But novels like Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography*<sup>11</sup> (1928) or *Between the Acts* (posthumously published in 1941) were indeed so innovative "that it took some time before these works were consciously read as historical novels, that is, before they were placed in a relation of continuity and innovation with preceding literary adaptations of historical materials" (Wesseling, 74).

As the historical novel underwent several changes and adaptations to the new century the discussion on the differences as well as similarities between historiography and historical fiction went on. In fact, the old topic of fact vs. fiction which has occupied many a writer and historian for ages figured prominently in modernist historical writing as well. Historical novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> century indeed foreground the problematic nature of the conventional distinction between history and fiction and the question if history is nothing but a fiction has been asked frequently. Yet, it is still not possible to give an unanimous answer to this question. Hence, these issues are now more or less openly discussed in the novels themselves and are no longer to be restricted to theoretical or philosophical writing. By "[i]ncorporating reflections upon the retrospective recovery of the past into the very structure of the novel itself", Elizabeth Wesseling stresses, "modernist writers changed the traditional position of the novelist vis-à-vis historiography from a complementary into a metahistorical one" (Wesseling, 93). In the years to come, this development of the metahistorical novel as well as the problematic fact-fiction-dichotomy became indeed a central concern of the postmodern historical novel as well. The eventual introduction and establishing of historiographic metafiction, which "refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction" and "refuses the view that only history has a truth claim" (Hutcheon 1988, 93) is yet another indication that historiography and literature cannot be clearly separated anymore but rather intertwine in the 20<sup>th</sup> century historical novel.

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<sup>11</sup> Having several themes in common, Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* can already be considered a predecessor to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century female historical novels I am going to examine. In *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf considers such topics as the quest for identity in a world where specific gender expectations and stereotypical gender roles regulate and fix a woman's live. This partly highly biographical work (it can indeed be considered a literary portrait of Woolf's friend Vita Sackville-West) furthermore displays the struggle of a woman for (artistic) creativity and independence, a subject still on the minds of today's authoresses.

The historical novel's unique combination of history and fiction points to its generic indeterminacy. That the historical novel is really a hybrid genre is already expressed in the term 'historiographic metafiction' itself, which was coined by Linda Hutcheon in her influential *Poetics of Postmodernism*. The term seems to be a contradiction at first, combining the factual and real with the imaginary, thus history with fiction. It also expresses a combination of the rather realist mode of writing to be found in historiography with the self-reflexivity of postmodern metafiction.

There is, of course, still the traditional form of historical fiction which follows Scott's model but there also emerged exciting new and innovative types. These new historical novels, often regarded as postmodern, distinguish themselves from the Scottesque ideal by displaying a certain tendency towards the crossing of borders concerning narrative techniques, literary forms etc. Ansgar Nünning has made a great effort trying to explain, or rather to identify, the innovative "Grenzüberschreitungen" postmodern historical novels can display. In one of his influential essays he states:

Bei einem hybriden Genre wie dem historischen Roman, der Themen der Geschichte mit Mitteln der Fiktion darstellt, liegen Grenzüberschreitungen gewissermaßen in der Natur der Gattung. Dennoch unterscheidet sich der zeitgenössische historische Roman in England von jenem traditionellen Gattungsmodell, das durch die Werke Sir Walter Scotts geprägt wurde, durch die Vielfalt der Entgrenzungstendenzen, mit denen er etablierte Trennungslinien zur Disposition stellt und Gegensätze zu neuen Synthesen verknüpft. In den für innovative historische Romane typischen Grenzüberschreitungen zwischen Fakten und Fiktionen, Historie und Legende, kollektiver und individueller Geschichte kommt eine revisionistische Geschichtsauffassung zum Ausdruck, die den Akzent vom Öffentlichen auf das Private verlagert, die der Wahrnehmung des historischen Geschehens im Bewusstsein durchschnittlicher Menschen Bedeutung beimisst und die Grundannahmen positivistischer Historiographie in Zweifel zieht. (Nünning 1993, 54)

These content-oriented extensions are furthermore accompanied by formal innovations. By the end of the 1960s it became for instance more and more fashionable to replace the rather restrictive mode of realistic narration in historical novels by a more experimental (postmodern) approach and add to the genre the multiplicity of postmodernism with its interest in fracturing and fragmentation, indeterminacy and plurality. The postmodern historical novel hence began to raise "questions about the very status of reality and the world" (Malpas, 24). Whereas a seminal idea of modernist thought stresses the "notion of

historical development and progress towards more rational and just forms of social organisation and cultural interaction" (Malpas, 80), postmodern critics and writers question and challenge this linear historical progress and come to the conclusion that history has indeed rather come to an end. Linda Hutcheon further enlightens this thought by stating that "the postmodern is not ahistorical or dehistoricized, though it does question our (perhaps unacknowledged) assumptions about what constitutes historical knowledge" (Hutcheon 1988, xii). And Simon Malpas adds that "what has ended is not the production of [historical] events themselves, but rather our need or ability to form a narrative from them that demonstrates their coherent, developmental logic and points to a utopian future in which the conflicts and contradictions between them will have been resolved" (Malpas, 89/90). History is no longer a grand coherent story but instead "splits into multiple versions and narrative types that are generated by the needs and desires of particular communities whose conflicting ideals can never be reconciled in a universal system" (ibid., 98). A new emphasis is hence put on the way history can be told. When postmodern writers of history began to break the grand narrative into fragments they thus finally allowed formerly silenced voices to be heard and question their exclusion from the traditional accounts of the past.

As the novelists further added this new self-reflexivity to the postmodern historical novels, it eventually developed into what is now known as historiographic metafiction. With this expression Hutcheon describes "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (Hutcheon 1988, 5). Those texts labelled historiographic metafiction do not put an emphasis on the representation of historical events and personages but rather on the reflection of historiographic problems. Simply put, they are writings about the writing of history, and Nünning adds: "Solche Romane setzen sich mit Problemen der narrativen Repräsentation vergangener Wirklichkeit auseinander und werfen Fragen nach den Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschieden zwischen Geschichtsschreibung und Fiktion auf" (Nünning 1999, 31). Again, the historical novelist is faced with the question of how to separate fact and fiction in historical writing. But in contrast to their predecessors the postmodern writers of historical fiction openly address this problem and even turn it into a central topic of their novels. They toy around with fact and fiction, with history and myth, and thus draw attention to the problematic writing of history.

However, postmodern historical fiction does indeed not restrict itself to the writing of historiographic metafiction. Although Linda Hutcheon seems to have applied this term to all postmodern and especially historical fiction, there are several other subspecies of the historical novel that have to be named. "This near obsession with history in contemporary fiction has led to a number of critical attempts to categorize and redefine the genre of the historical novel" (Gauthier, 8) and Ansgar Nünning, above all,<sup>12</sup> "argues that different types of historical fiction can and should be distinguished and tries to throw a new light on the various functions that postmodernist historical fiction can fulfil" (Nünning 1999, 15). He subdivides historical fiction into five groups: the documentary historical novel, the realist historical novel, the revisionist historical novel, the metahistorical novel, and last but not least, historiographic metafiction. Whereas a documentary historical novel generally focuses on verifiable historical events or personages and rather exhibits a tendency to veil its fictionality, a realist historical novel uses history only as a setting for the fictional plot that is at its centre. Revisionist historical novels are mainly critical examinations of the past and its effects on the present while they also display innovative and often experimental narrative techniques. Brian McHale explains why the postmodern historical novel is revisionist: "First, it revises the content of the historical record, reinterpreting the historical record, often demystifying or debunking the orthodox version of the past. Secondly, it revises, indeed transforms, the conventions and norms of historical fiction itself" (McHale, 90). The metahistorical novel then is very self-reflexive and relates to "a series of events that have taken place in the past, but focuses on the ways in which these events are grasped and explained in retrospect" (Wesseling, 90). In that sense it resembles historiographic metafiction, though this subgenre is furthermore engaged in problems concerning the writing of history itself: in historiographic metafiction history steps back behind historiography. Nünning clarifies: "Im Unterschied zum traditionellen Roman liegt der Akzent in historiographischer Metafiktion somit nicht auf der Darstellung geschichtlicher Personen oder Ereignisse. Vielmehr stehen die Bezugnahme auf geschichtliche Themen und die

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<sup>12</sup> Linda Hutcheon, Elizabeth Wesseling, Brian McHale, and David Cowart have already successfully subdivided the whole genre of historical literature before Ansgar Nünning undertook this task. However, it seems to me that Nünning, by considering, evaluating, and further developing the ideas of his predecessors, has done the best job giving a categorization of the postmodern historical novel. I have therefore concentrated on his subgroups of the historical novel. It has nevertheless to be noted that his typology is, when it comes to the actual interpretation of chosen contemporary novels, too inflexible. Several novels simply deny a definite classification. This resistance of the, as Heike Hartung calls them, "polytypisch geprägte Romane" (Hartung, 12) only proves the hybridity of a genre such as the postmodern historical novel.

metafiktionale Qualität von *historiographic metafiction* primär im Dienst der theoretischen Reflexion über Probleme der Geschichtsschreibung“ (Nünning 1999, 30).<sup>13</sup>

This classification of the contemporary historical novel shows that it has gone through many formal changes as well as through an extension of its contents. New choices of subject have been added, one of them being the as yet untold history of the so-called *Other*.

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<sup>13</sup> I have only given a short sketch of these five subgenres of contemporary historical fiction since I intend to discuss a few of them in more detail in my analyses of selected contemporary historical novels. For further information consider Ansgar Nünning's essay "Beyond the Great Story: Der Postmoderne Historische Roman als Medium Revisionistischer Geschichtsdarstellung, Kultureller Erinnerung und Metahistoriographischer Reflexion" (1999) and especially his two volumes of *Von historischer Fiktion zu Historiographischer Metafiktion* (1995).

### 3. Silenced Voices and Hidden Histories – Historical Writing from the Margins

Historiography has been selective. For centuries, history and the writing of history have tended to focus solely on the actions of great white men.<sup>14</sup> Others, restricted by their class, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender, were pushed to the margins of history, and were thus silenced. Their voices and consequently their stories remained unheard.

These stories and histories, though untold, have nevertheless always been there. They are now more and more to be uncovered to let us know the past differently and thus finally allow a complete picture of history. This task has not only been undertaken in historiography but in many a recent historical novel as well, as A.S. Byatt stresses: “One very powerful impulse towards the writing of historical novels has been the political desire to write the histories of the marginalised, the forgotten, the unrecorded. In Britain this has included the histories of blacks and women [...]” (HS, 11). In the following I will concentrate on these forgotten histories of women now to be discovered and restored in contemporary historical fiction.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, since women’s history has not been recorded for a very long time, it seems to be lost or worse, not to exist at all.<sup>16</sup> However, it is important to note that women have in fact always “participated in the great and small events of human history” (Wallach, 49/50), as Joan Scott Wallach emphasizes, too. They nevertheless remained almost always invisible as historical subjects in official historiography which had to do with women’s traditional restriction to the private sphere<sup>17</sup> of life, which is an area historiography tended to totally

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Wesseling gives three reasons that may have caused the selectivity of historiography. The first cause she claims to be “a purely accidental one” and explains that “we have to make do with whatever relics happen to have survived the wear and tear of time”. She secondly blames the historian for only selecting “as noteworthy those historical data that fit into the picture which he has in mind”; historiography therefore depends on the one looking at history, is at the same time subjective as selective. Since historians for quite a long time tended to be men it seems only too natural that the lives and history of women had no space in their minds and were consequently neglected and, pushed away into their own private sphere, not considered worthy a topic of historiography. Wesseling’s third cause is as follows: “Historiography can only concern itself with those individuals and collectivities who have made the historical record. [...] Consequently, historiography tends to write the history of the victors, while those who suffered, rather than made history are quickly erased from our historical memory” (Wesseling, 126).

<sup>15</sup> I have nevertheless to confess that I cannot claim to have given a complete picture of female historical writing since the choice of the authors and novels discussed focuses on white and heterosexual women.

<sup>16</sup> Although the history of women has not been part of the official record of historiography it nevertheless survived in diaries, letters, memoirs, or indeed in novels. These often personal accounts document another area of history and thus lead to a completion of traditional historiography.

<sup>17</sup> The differentiation between the public and private spheres of life, history, and society began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a re-structuring of society took place and the roles of men and women were re-considered. Both

neglect. This injustice and inequality was soon discovered but nevertheless accepted as a fact. It took years over years to really realize and eventually solve this problem and allow women their legitimate place in history.

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Virginia Woolf was one of the first to call energetically for a history of women. She demanded that history should be re-written so that female history finally can be added. Woolf already voiced this wish in an early essay called "The History of Women", written in 1897 when she was still a young girl with a marked sense of justice. Although this essay does not exist anymore, her strong opinion on women as historical subjects has also and clearly been expressed in her popular treatise *A Room of One's Own* (1929), based on two lectures on women and literature Woolf had given in Cambridge in 1928. The text not only stresses the importance of women's emancipation but also functions as a call for a history of women.

Interestingly enough, Virginia Woolf also occupied herself with the problem of fact and fiction in historical writing as her unpublished work "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" shows. It becomes obvious that Woolf situated the historical novel and historiography on quite the same level. She insisted that the historian uses his imagination just as the story-teller does too. Novelists and historians alike employ narrative conventions to tell their story/history. Consequently, the boundaries between historiography and fiction are somewhat blurred or even open and "it is precisely in the cracks, the slippage between fact and fiction, that Woolf can begin to sight (site) the possibility of the missing woman" (Anderson 1990, 129). Linda Anderson further states that this opening up of "the generic boundary between history and fiction" thus serves "as a way of releasing the woman into a life beyond her conventional confinement within the divisions and paradigms of patriarchal thinking" (ibid. 130/131).

The historical novel with its unique combination of fact and fiction seems therefore to be the perfect genre to display the long lost identity and the silenced history of women. Since women cannot simply be added to history but rather have to be re-envisioned in it, fiction functions indeed as an important element in female historical writing. Fiction and myth serve as tools of freedom, helping women to find and eventually change their place in history and in the world. It is therefore that women writers repeatedly turn to the historical

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spheres were immediately gendered: whereas the public sphere was regarded as the area of men, the private was attributed to women. 19<sup>th</sup> century society seemed to deny that both spheres are indeed intertwining and their borders rather blurred.

novel – “an interest”, as Beate Neumeier explains, “that has to be seen in the context of a literary rebellion against the exclusion of women from historical discourse. This project of writing her/stories<sup>18</sup> seeks to recover and reclaim the past on behalf of those who have been silenced and marginalized by inequality and historiography” (Neumeier, 3).

In the 1970s Virginia Woolf’s cry for a history of women was finally answered when feminist historians began to recover women’s submerged and unrecognized past and now, as Joan Scott Wallach happily acknowledges, the first step toward an integration of women into history has been taken and bookshelves are eventually “filled with biographies of forgotten women, chronicles of feminist movements, and the collected letters of female authors” (Wallach, 15).

### **3.1 Public and Private History – The Integration of Women into History**

In order to eventually write a history of the forgotten and unrecorded, historians have attempted to reconstruct female history by making women in a sense finally visible. To achieve this, feminist historians neglected the male dominated public sphere which was to be regarded the essential part of history and historiography and focused instead on what was traditionally considered to be the typical private and female sphere of household and family. This private sphere of women has for a long time been assumed to be outside history or to even be incidental to it.

By shedding light on the private and female side of history and society, the public-private divide was eventually challenged and the importance and interest of those areas usually labelled private, such as family and gender relations, reinforced. It became also obvious that the borders between public and private spheres are indeed fluid and both areas therefore connect, a fact often ignored by historiography. Women’s private sphere of life can consequently not be clearly cut off from male and public history. Indeed, women have not only been occupied with the private but also with the public spheres of life and history. And as the roles women played in the private sector were examined and historicized, feminist historians also uncovered and recorded how women took part in public, formerly male, fields, such as politics, culture, or economy.

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<sup>18</sup> History has too long been the story of men’s lives. Feminists therefore began to play with language for political ends and eventually came up with the term ‘herstory’, pointing out that history so far has indeed been his/story and that the time has now come for her/story.

Ultimately, all areas of female activity, private and public, have to be reconstructed so that a full picture of women in history can be given. The history of women therefore has to be a history of mankind and of men as well, a history of the relationship as well as of the differences between the sexes. Her/story has to include women's position in the world, their powers, their roles, their silence as well as their language (comp. Duby/Perrot, 9). And Gerda Lerner adds: "Women's history must contain not only the activities and events in which women participated, but the record of changes and shifts in their perception of themselves and their roles" (Lerner 1979, 160/161). Both the role women played in society as well as the perceptions they have of themselves have certainly undergone many a change during the past decades as the picture of women in general has changed. This change of roles and perception, public as well as private, and the ongoing integration process of women into history and society are often reflected in the fiction as well as in autobiographical writings of women.

The roles women have assumed during the ages have often been imposed on them by a patriarchal society in which there was no room for female individuality. Hence these gender roles were mostly stereotypical and sexist. Even today, women are still influenced or even judged by those arrogated perceptions. Madonna, seductress, or muse were for instance the typical female archetypes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Women were labelled mother, wife, lover, virgin, or whore and are thus in a way devalued or even reduced to their sex only. Women were glorified or reduced, seen as a saint or a whore, and thus devalued to a very one-dimensional picture which denied them not only a personality but individuality. This pigeon-holing neglects the fact that there is more to a human being, that there is more to every woman.

Burdened with the roles society demanded them to conform to, women were hardly able to express their identity and individuality. It is consequently very important for women to achieve a specific female identity by reacting to those clichés imposed on them by society as Gymnich states as well:

Da Identität das komplexe Spannungsfeld zwischen Individuum und sozialem Umfeld erfasst und damit sowohl die grundsätzliche Möglichkeit zu Selbstbestimmung als auch die – mehr oder minder kreative – Verarbeitung gesellschaftlicher Vorgaben berücksichtigt, bietet die Frage nach weiblicher Identität wichtige Überschneidungen und Berührungspunkte mit anderen feministisch relevanten Fragestellungen, insbesondere mit einer Untersuchung weiblicher Rollenmuster und mit dem Problem weiblicher Emanzipation. (Gymnich 2000, 18)

The process of integration is at times and especially for women accompanied by certain self-sacrifices and a loss of individual identity since women are often neither sure of themselves nor of their identity. Finding one's role in history and/or society without giving up one's individuality is consequently a difficult task and the reason why women often find themselves in a dilemma. Marion Gymnich has examined this quest for a female identity in the fiction of contemporary British women writers. In the detailed introduction to her *Entwürfe weiblicher Identität im Englischen Frauenroman des 20. Jahrhunderts* she emphasizes that identity does not only depend on an act of self-definition, asking and answering *who am I?*, but also on the individual's examination of his or her integration into society: "Identität, die Antwort eines Individuums auf die Frage 'wer bin ich?', beinhaltet zwar eine mehr oder weniger individuelle Komponente, erfolgt aber gemäß sozialpsychologischen wie psychoanalytischen Vorstellungen stets auch in der Auseinandersetzung mit gesellschaftlichen Vorgaben und dem sozialen Umfeld, in dem das Individuum eingebunden ist" (Gymnich 2000, 11).

Self-awareness, self-discovery, finally self-consciousness are the prerequisites for integration as well as individuation. And personal identity and external reality have to be connected in order to achieve an integrated self. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century women had, as their autobiographical writings prove, eventually developed a new self-consciousness and in society in general a new interest in women as both intellectual as well as psychological individuals can be sensed. This development and the changes in perception it brought with it, were also mirrored in society and eventually even led to a modification of women's role in society. Women's autobiographical writing followed these changes as well as it followed "the course of women's history, especially their efforts to defy or combat established institutions" (Jelinek, 151).

Autobiography is a genre which is used by women to voice their quest for identity and autonomy. Autobiography offers a possibility of self-discovery and focuses on a private history, a personal story, as well, thus presenting a perfect opportunity for women to shed light on their life and history. Women considered their domestic as well as emotional life an appropriate subject matter for their autobiographies. These women writers consequently allow us to gain an insight into the private sphere of history and thus complete our picture of the past. Summarizing the development of women's autobiography from antiquity to the end of the nineteenth century, Estelle Jelinek concludes that they all share "a common

emphasis on the personal. Until professionalism becomes their means of self-validation, women's approach is generally subjective. And they document not the events of male intellectual history but those of their own" (Jelinek, 87). Women's autobiography is therefore a part of historiography as well and furthermore serves as a means to establish a female history which does indeed exist. The subjective has to complement the official record of history as the private completes the public. The self-discovery practised in autobiographies leads women eventually on a path to individuation and autonomy and at the same time establishes their part in world history. This genre consequently not only deals with the integration process of women in history and society but even pushes it ahead.

The female quest for identity and growth is not only an issue in the autobiographical writing of then and now but also features as a prominent topic in the fiction of today. Especially the contemporary female historical novel exemplifies that women are indeed on a double mission – on a quest for identity as well as on a quest to achieve a role in history and society. As both are strongly connected, historical novels by women writers frequently take the quest for identity as a theme, thus creating what can be called the female historical Bildungsroman which is indeed an interesting amalgam of autobiography, biography, history, and fiction.

### **3.2 The Quest for Identity in Historical Writing – The Female Historical Bildungsroman**

The historical novel has from its beginnings also been used as a means to find and define a nation's identity. The Victorians, for example, compared and contrasted their world and that of their ancestors extensively. They drew analogies between the past and the present which were intended to help them not only to a better understanding of their recent social or political problems but even to find solutions for these difficulties. The past was also to serve as a tool either for the nation or the individual to find one's place in history. Consequently, historiography as well as historical fiction were to share one aim: to satisfy the striving for self-identity against the background of history. Indeed, literature proves to be a powerful medium through which self-definition can be sought. For women, writing opened new ways to not only gain but also to eventually take control over public female identity. It turned out that writing even helped women to integrate themselves into society and history and to thus find their place in the modern world. Literature therefore was the perfect device to establish

feminism and emancipation as Lidia Curti stresses: “The link between writing and the search for identity has been underlying feminist thought and practice for a long time” (Curti 1998, 108).

As the quest for identity is a topic in several, and especially in female, historical novels, the relationship with the Bildungsroman cannot be denied. Both the historical novel and the Bildungsroman originated approximately at the same time, no coincidence as it seems since both genres perfectly complement one another. Whereas the historical novel includes a view on the macrocosm of history, the Bildungsroman concentrates on a historical microcosm, on the private history and development of an individual. If Bildungsroman and historical novel are combined, if we have what might be called a historical novel of development, it becomes obvious that public and private history often intertwine and are inseparable. Already Victorian historical fiction was “linked to the idea of private history and personal evolution implicit in the *Bildungsroman*” (Sanders, 23). This emphasis on personal history also demonstrates the Bildungsroman’s affinity to auto/biographical writing. Bildungsromane are indeed often fictional autobiographies as Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722) or Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) exemplify. With this novel Brontë has created an early model of a female Bildungsroman in which a young heroine’s quest for identity is displayed. Jane Eyre does not conform to the standards of female behaviour expected of her from society. Like the male hero of the Bildungsroman, she sets out on a journey to find herself and in the context claims independence. The 20<sup>th</sup> century eventually allowed the questing heroine of the Bildungsroman to venture on world-wide journeys and expand her horizon.

The connection between public and private history remains to be a major focal point in 20<sup>th</sup> century historical fiction just as the search for identity against the background of history still proves to be a topic. Today, this striving for self-identity is even, as Susana Onega puts it, “the general aim of historiographic metafiction” (Onega, 17). Historical fiction and the Bildungsroman therefore prove to remain intertwining genres. Yet, Onega continues by pointing out that the traditional historical novel and its contemporary representative nevertheless differ considerably in at least two major points: “firstly, in the identity of the hero – or heroine – who does not belong to the dominant class, sex, race or culture, but rather to the social, sexual, racial or cultural fringe, and secondly, in the kind of past events that pinpoint his/her quest” (Onega, 17). Indeed, it becomes obvious that therefore many a

contemporary woman writer has chosen the historical Bildungsroman as her medium to give a voice to those formerly silenced and to tell their hidden histories. The female historical Bildungsroman consequently explores female identity by examining a specific female history, thus pointing to the important interrelationship of public and private history.

Finding their places in history and being in fact a vital part of history helps women to form an identity. This quest for individuation of the self is a traditional pattern of the Bildungsroman. Being at odds with the sexual and social roles allotted to women, female writers use this genre to express their own as well as their heroine's search for self-assertion. The fictional heroine strives to overcome the traditional roles of mother, wife, and housekeeper assigned to her by patriarchal ideology. On her quest, her pilgrimage, the heroine is to overcome these restrictions imposed on her by society and to eventually develop an individual personality. Esther Labovitz stresses that the heroine's quest for self-assertion usually involves a rejection of patriarchy and the effort to gain control of the self. The ultimate goal of her quest is therefore self-realization. To achieve this, the heroine on quest has to notice, analyse and often reject certain "attitudes on marriage, children, careers, literature, and even clothes" society tries to establish. "As rebels and feminists, the heroines of the female *Bildungsroman* challenge the very structure of society, raising questions of equality, not only of class, but of sexes, as well" (Labovitz, 25).

Her pathway to self-discovery is a learning and growth process that focuses not only upon family issues, friendship, love, marriage, and career, but concentrates heavily on education. Since education – Bildung – has for centuries not been an integral part of female life,<sup>19</sup> the Bildungsroman, like the historical novel, remained to be a male dominated genre. It was only when "*Bildung* became a reality for women, in general, and for the fictional heroine, in particular" (Labovitz, 6) that a specific female Bildungsroman could originate and supersede its predecessors that focused on a young, white, male hero. But "[w]hen cultural and social structures appeared to support women's struggle for independence, to go out

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<sup>19</sup> Public institutions such as schools and universities were for centuries strictly male domains of education. Girls were generally educated at home, if at all: "Die Schule der Frauen ist, so die Überzeugung, das häusliche Leben [...]. Lernort bürgerlicher Mädchen soll das Haus sein, wo Kenntnisse, Fähigkeiten und Einstellungen von der Mutter an die Tochter weitergegeben werden. Lernmethode ist Erfahrungslernen. Lernziel ist neben den häuslichen Kenntnissen eine spezifische emotionale Grundausstattung: Im Zentrum weiblicher Bildung steht nicht Wissen, sondern Wesen" (Pia Schmid. „Weib oder Mensch, Wesen oder Wissen? Bürgerliche Theorien zur Weiblichen Bildung um 1800.“ in: Kleinau/Opitz. Bd. I. 327). However, already the 18th century gave a new impetus to the debate concerning female education. Women were slowly granted a broader education and the proportion of female illiteracy began to sink so that they could conquer the field of literature and eventually develop a literature of their own.

into the world<sup>20</sup>, engage in careers, in self-discovery and fulfilment, the heroine in fiction began to reflect these changes" (Labovitz, 7).

Thus women writers began to use the historical Bildungsroman in order to destroy stereotypical roles and to change society not only by exposing how women have always participated in history but also by displaying their struggle for autonomy and "[a]utonomy for women means moving out from a world in which one is born to marginality, bound to a past without meaning, and prepared for a future determined by others. It means moving into a world in which one acts and chooses, aware of a meaningful past and free to shape one's future" (Lerner 1979, 162).

In the following chapters I would now like to analyse selected works by Penelope Lively, Margaret Drabble, A.S. Byatt and Esther Freud in order to discuss in detail how the female protagonists of the chosen novels venture on a quest for their identity and in due course find their place in history and society.

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<sup>20</sup> The typical male Bildungsroman emphasizes the young hero's way of development as an actual journey which leads him away from home, often through foreign countries and finally to a place that turns out to be his new home. As the prototype of the Bildungsroman Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/96) has to be named which found many imitators not only in German but in English literature as well. The Bildungsroman, or novel of development, became quite popular in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century English fiction. Major examples of this genre would be Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860/61), Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* (1903, posthumously), D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913), or James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Going out into the world, travelling, experiencing adventures (also sexual ones), and gaining knowledge was considered to be essential to the young man's development (comp. Buckley, 17/18). Women on the other hand were often denied these possibilities and were instead restricted to the private household and family cosmos. It was only much later that women gained the independence to discover themselves by discovering the world.

#### 4. Penelope Lively – A Passion for Literature and History

Penelope Lively's books, not only those for children but those for adults as well, display in most cases clearly their author's fascination with history. Lively occupies herself devotedly with the flow of time, with memory and the connection of past and present, as well as with history and historiography. This preoccupation has most probably something to do with the place she spent the first influential years of her life at. Penelope Lively was born and raised in Cairo, Egypt and only left for England at the age of twelve. She describes Egypt as a complex place where ancient and modern times not only coexist but where past and present easily intertwine.<sup>21</sup> Growing up in a country where one naturally meets with history at literally every corner, it is no wonder that she developed such a strong interest in the past. However, Lively's fascination with history does surely not only stem from her life in Egypt but also from her growing up in a world shaken by the turbulences of World War II, an event that left a remarkable impact on world history as well as on Lively's personal history as she and her parents witnessed its expansion to the Egyptian desert. In her first autobiography which mainly deals with her childhood in Cairo the author states that she indeed "grew up in a geographical area in which for a few years history had gone into overdrive" (OJ, 147).

History had always formed such a prominent part of her life that it seems only natural that Lively eventually decided to study history at St. Anne's College in Oxford. Yet, her first love must presumably have been literature since already in early childhood she enjoyed reading and writing as her favourite pastimes and describes them as "the compulsive retreat of a solitary child" (OJ, 106). Her solitude was reinforced by not being allowed to attend a public school during her years in Egypt. Instead, Lively was home-schooled by her nanny and together they worked with an educational program that served as "a sort of do-it-yourself education kit to expatriate parents" (OJ, 94). This program put a strong emphasis on literature and encouraged children to read extensively. Penelope Lively even extended the suggested curricula by reading her way through her parents' library so that at a very young age she had already read the Bible, dwelled on Greek mythology and discussed Dickens and Thackeray with her nanny.

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<sup>21</sup> In an interview with Mary Hurley Moran, Lively explains that her obsession with history might derive from her "growing up in as temporally complex a place as Egypt, which juxtaposes time in the most extraordinary way, I mean in the sense that you have Pharaonic and Mameluke and Turkish remains and Greek and Roman all coexisting [...]. [...] here was a complex muddle of a place in which centuries all seemed to coexist without any structure" (Moran, 9).

Soon her passion for reading resulted in an urge to write. Again encouraged by the educational program she attended, Lively started off with re-writing the stories she had read for class but eventually began to construct and create her own. However, this fascination with the written word was not nurtured during her years at a boarding school in England (where she had been sent to after her parents' divorce)<sup>22</sup> but flourished again during her time at Oxford where she "became a public library addict", "shooting into English literature, which was not supposed to be [her] subject, and into areas of history ignored by the syllabus" (MIU, 178).

Lively nevertheless stresses that she has never regretted her decision to study history instead of literature since "reading history totally formed me. It didn't make me a novelist, but it determined the kind of novelist that I have become. It formed a climate of mind" (Hardyment, 30). Consequently, history and the occupation with the past feature as prominent topics in almost all of Penelope Lively's writing and when she started writing professionally she was finally able to combine her two passions: literature and history. This interest in both history and literature also surfaces as a theme in her writing when she deals with the problem of fact and fiction in historical narratives as we shall see in the following chapters on *Moon Tiger* and *Making It Up*.

In the years after her graduation Penelope Lively got married and had children, leading the life of a full-time mother and wife. In retrospect, these years devoted to her family indeed prove to have been crucial to her final development as a writer. Since Lively did not go to work but decided to rather stay at home raising her children, she enjoyed the opportunity to read extensively once again.<sup>23</sup> And, remembering the pleasures she derived from it in her childhood, the more she read the more she wanted to write herself. So when her youngest child started school, Penelope Lively began her career as an author.

After having read many a book to her children, she became fascinated with the genre of children's fiction and consequently took a chance at it. In 1970 her first work, *Astercote*,

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<sup>22</sup> Indeed, in her autobiography Lively reminisces that reading was even regarded as a form of "perversion" (OJ, 112) at her boarding school so that she "went underground. [She] read under the bedclothes at night, and on rare occasions when [she] could find a secluded corner and thought that no one was looking" (OJ, 113).

<sup>23</sup> In May 2008, Lively held a lecture at Yale University titled "Reading History and Writing Fiction – A Life in Books". She there describes how reading history – both in the sense of studying it at Oxford and literally reading historical books – shaped her own interests and influenced her writing. Lively further dwells on her love affair with libraries and the treasures they hold in the form of books. She states that she has always loved to read and that the three years 'reading' at university followed by three years of extensive reading while taking care of her children destined her future as a writer. While reading, Lively also discovered what possibilities fiction offers and what the novel can do. Despite having a degree in history, she consequently turned to fiction as her field for she noticed that fiction could fill in gaps historiography left open.

was published and achieved immediate public interest.<sup>24</sup> It was then that Penelope Lively decided to become a full-time author, with one book published approximately every year. Seven years after her first publication and after establishing herself as a writer of children's fiction, Lively turned away from this genre and towards fiction for adults instead. With *The Road to Lichfield*, her first novel for adults, Lively continued the literary success of its predecessors.<sup>25</sup> *The Road to Lichfield* (1977) and *According to Mark* (1984) were even shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize – which Penelope Lively was eventually awarded for her bestselling novel *Moon Tiger* in 1987.

In the following chapter I would like to take a closer look at Lively's *Moon Tiger* which represents not only a fascinating example of historiographic metafiction but of the female Bildungsroman as well. Furthermore, I will also analyse the feminist context of the novel since "*Moon Tiger*, like many postmodern texts, in querying historiography, decentres the definitive historical story, allowing repressed narratives that are no less definitive to surface" (Raschke, 116) and here the repressed narrative is that of a strong woman who is eager to link her/story with world history. Another chapter is dedicated to Penelope Lively's *Making It Up*, published in 2005. The author herself calls it an "anti-memoir" (MIU, 2), and indeed it is a curious mixture of autobiographical history and fiction, ranging somehow between *Oleander*, *Jacaranda* and *Moon Tiger*. *Making It Up* displays how fluid the generic borders in literature have become, a development Linda Hutcheon already described in her *Poetics of Postmodernism* in 1988: "who can tell anymore what the limits are between the novel and the short story collection [...], the novel and the long poem [...], the novel and autobiography [...], the novel and history [...], the novel and biography" (Hutcheon 1988, 9)?

#### **4.1 Moon Tiger**

As Mary Hurley Moran states, Penelope Lively's work has undergone many a stylistic change so that she is now "moving in an increasingly radical direction, replacing chronological plot with spatialization and implying the postmodernist, poststructuralist view that reality is a

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<sup>24</sup> Describing Penelope Lively's background (her vita as well as her writing) in her comprehensive work on the novelist, Mary Hurley Moran also provides a short yet informative overview of the author's fiction for children. However, Lively's other works (for adults) have received much more consideration.

<sup>25</sup> Indeed, *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe*, published in 1973, is one of Lively's most popular and praised historical novels for children. It was awarded with the Carnegie Medal, Britain's most prestigious prize for children's literature.

function of language and of human consciousness” (Moran 1993, 7). Moran voiced this observation already in 1993 and pointed out that Lively’s radicalism and experimentation concerning style and content had reached for the time being a high point with *Moon Tiger*, which she regards as “the most impressive display [...] of her unconventional narrative methods” (Moran 1993, 111). But Lively has indeed even improved this unconventionality regarding narrative form and content as is to be seen in *Making It Up*.

However, although Moran describes these unconventional methods in her comprehensive work on the author she nevertheless fails to explicitly attribute them to historiographic metafiction. Despite the fact that Linda Hutcheon coined this term as early as in 1988 and used it to describe “those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (Hutcheon 1988, 5), Moran neglects classifying *Moon Tiger* as a very well written and highly readable example of historiographic metafiction.

#### **4.1.1 *Moon Tiger* as Historiographic Metafiction**

Although the setting and background of this novel are certainly historical, *Moon Tiger* cannot be regarded a conventional historical novel. It certainly deals among other things with World War II and its aftermath but does indeed not focus on the war per se or on any other historical event. Instead, the novel is mainly occupied with the problems of how to write history, which is, as Nünning explains, a major feature of historiographic metafiction:

In historiographischer Metafiktion werden nicht nur Konventionen von Fiktion thematisiert, sondern auch epistemologische und methodische Fragen der Historiographie problematisiert. Im Unterschied zum traditionellen Roman liegt der Akzent der historiographischen Metafiktion somit nicht auf der Darstellung geschichtlicher Personen oder Ereignisse. Vielmehr stehen die Bezugnahme auf geschichtliche Themen und die metafiktionale Qualität von *historiographic metafiction* primär im Dienst der theoretischen Reflexion über Probleme der Geschichtsschreibung. (Nünning 1999, 30)

*Moon Tiger* focuses on historiographic thoughts concerning the adoption, reconstruction, and representation of history and thus displays an interest in the issues characteristic for historiographic metafiction which Nünning calls “Reflexionen über geschichtstheoretische Fragen” (Nünning 1995b, 307).

Lively's novel also discusses differences as well as similarities of historiography and fiction, thus pointing to *Moon Tiger's* self-reflexivity, its awareness of being fiction. The metafictional aspects of *Moon Tiger* declare its "representationality", its "blatant constructedness", as well as its "foregrounding of textuality through various literary techniques that highlight the conditional representation of the past" (Gauthier, 6). The novel is therefore an example of a writer's search for truth and the problems of how to write about those truths. Claudia Hampton, and with her Penelope Lively, deliberately play with the text's illusion of reality and with the reader's expectations thus admitting that what is most elusive in a postmodern world is truth itself.

Indeed, as I have already emphasized in my introduction, postmodernism has brought with it a re-evaluation of the relationship between fiction and historiography. *Moon Tiger* consequently explores "the boundaries between fact and fiction by amalgamating historical and fictional characters and events and by discussing explicitly the nature of history and the problem of historical awareness or knowledge" (Löschnigg, 104). Lively uses her novel to suggest, as Hayden White and other philosophers of history have done before her, that historiography and fiction bear indeed a close resemblance to each other. Thus, by regarding historiography and fiction as intermingling sister arts, the non-objectivity of history is also pointed out as Nünning confirms:

Mit fiktionalen Mitteln zieht *historiographic metafiction* den Anspruch der Historiographie auf Objektivität, Totalität und Wahrheit in Zweifel und ersetzt solche Vorstellungen durch die Einsicht, daß Geschichtsschreibung nie mehr als eine subjektabhängige und selektive historiographische Konstruktion sein kann, eine Annäherung an geschichtliches Geschehen, nicht aber dessen getreue Abbildung. (Nünning 1999, 39)

*Moon Tiger* furthermore manifests its status as historiographic metafiction by discussing among other things the inter-relationship of public and private history and it consequently rejects the Rankean doctrine which emphasizes the need of an objective eye considering and re-writing history. Instead, a text like *Moon Tiger* suggests a representation of history that depends on the individual and the subjective.

#### 4.1.1.1 Public and Private History in *Moon Tiger*

Adopting the form of a fictional autobiography<sup>26</sup> *Moon Tiger* conveys not only its main character's but also Penelope Lively's thoughts<sup>27</sup> on history and on "the way in which war and other historical events intersect with and affect private lives" (Moran 1993, 112). By choosing an autobiographical way of narration, which is a highly personal way of telling history, *Moon Tiger* suggests a private realm of historiography which is consequently moved away from neutrality and objectivity. Claudia Hampton as the narrator or creator of her personal history of the world indeed fuses the autobiographical form with documentary completeness of history, the personal view or 'truth' of autobiography and an artistic shaping of literature.

Lively stresses that history is indeed something deeply personal. Hence, historiography depends on the individual writing it. This opinion of the author is mirrored in the novel's main protagonist, the historian Claudia Hampton,<sup>28</sup> who emphasises for instance that her work on Mexican history and Hernando Cortez reflects the views "of a polemical opinionated independent Englishwoman of 1954" (MT, 154): historiography as a mirror of the mind of the person reconsidering history. History can hardly be retold in an objective way, but is for the most part subjective. It is therefore only too natural that public and private history intersect and are not to be separated on different levels.

If we take into consideration what kind of sources Penelope Lively has drawn her information and inspiration for *Moon Tiger* from, it becomes already obvious how the subjective and objective planes of history can overlap. In order to compare her very own memories of her personal experiences with World War II in Egypt to historical facts, Lively has consulted numerous historical sources conveying exact dates, names, or locations of the war. Besides considering these public facts of official historical record she has also read many a private account on historical events, such as war memoirs, diaries, and

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<sup>26</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fictional autobiography was one of the most popular literary forms. It was widely used by female writers to narrate their stories of memory and identity since "[i]ts overtones of privacy, of conducting a private conversation between the narrator and the reader, saved the fictional autobiography from being perceived as a female intrusion into the public, male sphere of authoritative literary production" (Gymnich/Lazarescu, 126).

<sup>27</sup> However, it has to be noted that Claudia Hampton's and Penelope Lively's views on history and historiography are certainly not always synonymous. Claudia is really more experimental and rebellious in her approach towards the writing of history than the rather conventional Lively herself.

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it strikes one's eye that in many a contemporary historical novel one or more of the protagonists is professionally – as biographer, history teacher, historian, archeologist etc. – occupied with the past. This device is used to further stress the intense occupation with history and the past.

autobiographical notes, which allowed her to take an individual and personal view on history. She furthermore visited the Imperial War Museum with its photographic, film, and art archives and finally added to these collected impressions her very own memories – those “brilliant frozen moments” (OJ, viii) stored in her mind once experienced by a little girl “understanding little but seeing a great deal” (MT, acknowledgments). In that sense *Moon Tiger*, the fictional autobiography, resembles Lively’s own autobiography *Oleander, Jacaranda*. Both are records of that “interesting collision between the firm statement in the head and the equally firm statement of recorded history” (OJ, 99) and thus they are also examples of how public and private history can collide in every one of us.

As I have already said before, Penelope Lively passes her approach towards history and the writing of history on to *Moon Tiger*’s central character. But Claudia Hampton takes this approach even a bit further. Her way of writing history differs remarkably from that of her contemporary historians. Therefore, Claudia Hampton’s radical way of approaching history is often denounced as non-academic or non-scientific and as rather non-professional (comp. MT, 59). Especially her attempt to integrate her individual history into the whole of history and her intention of thus becoming a part of history herself – “Because unless I am part of everything I am nothing” (MT, 207) – is condemned by fellow historians who tend to divide life and history into two distinct spheres – public and private. Claudia Hampton draws attention to these supposed boundaries between the public and the private sphere and goes so far as to reject this idea. For her, public and private history often touch and frequently even intertwine. Public history is not something that is far away but rather something that influences everybody and can shake simply anybody’s life.

Claudia Hampton must have been in her mid-thirties when she resolves “to write a vastly pretentious book [...] a history of the world” (MT, 65). Which proves to be a pretentious project not only because telling the history of the world that contains “the whole triumphant murderous unstoppable chute – from the mud to the stars” (MT, 1) is probably an almost unsolvable task but also because this book is to align Claudia’s “own life with the history of the world” (MT, 2) and thus is supposed to turn history into both something “universal and particular, your story and mine” (MT, 1). Claudia Hampton’s history of the world is going to be the story of an individual’s life that has always been entangled with public historical events. The emphasis is therefore always on herself, not on the historical event as such. This is why the autobiographical form is perfectly chosen for a

task like this. An autobiography allows a personal story to take centre stage and proves that it is indeed more than an accessory to history.

Public history is furthermore to be regarded as the context of one's life, as the unavoidable circumstances that time brings with it. History is something that belongs to everybody's life. Public history therefore always influences private history. And, in fact, since everybody is part of history it consequently consists of all those individual his/stories. The planes of both private and public history have to be connected and one is nothing without the other. The collective past is the skeleton, private histories add the flesh and blood and eventually breathe life into history:

Geschichte ist nicht zuletzt die Summe ungezählter Lebensgeschichten, Biografien, die niemand erzählen kann außer den Menschen, die sie durchlebt und oft genug, gerade im 20. Jahrhundert, durchlitten haben. Nur wer ihnen, die mit dem Begriff „Zeitzeugen“ eher abgestempelt werden als treffend beschrieben, zuhört, kann ein annähernd vollständiges Bild vergangener Realität gewinnen. (Kellerhof, 29)

History is no lifeless “uniform grey pond” (MT, 15) but is on the contrary “fractured into a thousand contending waves”, each of them containing a “babble of voices” (MT, 15) that talk to us and tell their individual stories that eventually amalgamate into history. This explains why there cannot be a single omniscient narrator passing on history and why *Moon Tiger*, the history of the world as Claudia sees it, contains so many voices. Indeed, iconoclastic Claudia rejects the habit of telling history from an omniscient point of view. She is certain that there cannot be only one single voice to tell the story but that history is instead “composite” and consists of “many voices” (MT, 5) which all have to be heard. Her story is not hers alone, many people have been involved: “My story is tangled with the stories of others – Mother, Gordon, Jasper, Lisa and one other person above all; their voices must be heard also, thus shall I abide by the conventions of history” (MT, 5/6). That is why Claudia does not tell the history of the world as the only narrator but allows other persons to add their voice to it as well. In fact, all the important figures in her life give their point of view on certain events. Their interpretations of special occurrences often differ from Claudia's and thus convey a totally different picture. These shifts in narrative voice encourage an inclusion of different versions of the same event and thus this technique offers a means to question and examine the historical past.

This technique of including several voices to tell a story also displays Penelope Lively's sense of postmodern experimentation in her texts. Concerning this narrative approach, Lively might have found a literary predecessor in Gertrude Stein who in her *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) deconstructs narration by using anecdotes which are continuously repeated. Every time the incident is recounted once again, new information and details are added to it. Estelle Jelinek amplifies that Stein thus "transforms Picasso's cubist technique into literary planes, presenting new aspects of the same subject with each anecdotal variation" (Jelinek, 196). Gertrude Stein deliberately fragmented her *Autobiography* and neglected the chronology usually used in autobiographical writing. *Moon Tiger* shares this disorder and fragmentation of narration to exemplify that history is indeed personal and historiography subjective: One single narrator in historiography cannot convey the absolute truth; more voices have to be heard. This narrative device is furthermore intended to reflect Claudia Hampton's consciousness of the chaos of her times.

Moreover, the destruction or breaking-up of narration and its discontinuous, non-chronological form is also a way to express the fragmentation and multidimensionality of a woman's identity. Claudia describes herself even as "a myriad of Claudias who spin and mix and part like sparks of sunlight on water" (MT, 2), a statement which makes obvious that she does not regard herself suitable as an omniscient narrator either of historiography or of her own autobiography. She considers it therefore necessary that not only public historical events but also special events of her private history are seen from different views and angles, too, and need, as history in general, more than one narrator. This technique of multidimensional and fragmented narration also emphasizes that women in historiography and in autobiography alike tend to move away from a male heroic self-image which used to stand in the focus of attention. Women rather deny this self-assertion and examine themselves in their relationships to others. Hence, the same episode of Claudia's life and history is often repeated two or three times from several participants' point of view thus mirroring a modernist "multiple-points-of-view-technique which can best be described as kaleidoscopic [...] narration" (Moran 1993, 4), a technique which stresses that history cannot depend on one narrator only. One person's single perspective is always limited.

Indeed, history is interpreted by every individual in a partial way, depending on one's "particular cargo of associations, knowledge, and emotional needs" (Moran, 4). Moran continues explaining that "[b]y continually shifting point of view, then, Lively undermines the

convention of positing a narrative authority and thereby drawing our attention to the fact that there is no final truth about anyone or anything” (Moran 1993, 120). Therefore, no single, individual version can ever be complete or even true. History is and has to be polyphonic as well as multilayered. What Penelope Lively tries to convey is “the notion that history itself is fluid, that it is not received opinion but a matter of debate and discussion and interpretation” (Lively 1987, 19). History, therefore, is deconstructed and fragmented and thus replaced by *histories*.

One of the most interesting narrative experimentations in *Moon Tiger* is the inclusion of parts of Tom Southern’s diary. Pages from his journal written in the Egyptian desert during World War II are worked into Claudia’s narration not only to emphasize the intensity of his and Claudia’s love affair but also to give even more insight into his/story and biography. Tom’s personal his/story tells more about history than conventional historiography could ever do and thus stresses once more the importance of private histories. The diary not only sheds light on a soldier’s life at the front but also gives a vivid description of battle. Indeed, Penelope Lively has gained much approval from World War II veterans for this truthful account of a man’s, a soldier’s thoughts and fears.<sup>29</sup>

Claudia Hampton and presumably Penelope Lively as well want their readers to recognize the subjective that lies buried beneath a seemingly objective history. Lively herself has often stressed that she cannot agree with the prevailing idea that history can be viewed objectively: “She argues that for historic events, as for all events, there is no definitive interpretation” (Moran 1993, 2). History is indeed more than history books convey, consists of more than evidence, facts, dates and names without a face – history consists instead of personal histories. In fact, “the collective past is composed of myriad private pasts” (Lively 1987, 21).

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<sup>29</sup> The actual reality of Lively’s reproduction of a soldier’s diary becomes strikingly obvious when looking at *Newsweek*’s special issue “Voices of the Fallen” from April 2007 where the Iraq War is brought uncomfortably close through letters, e-mails, and journal entries of fallen American soldiers: “They are gone, but their words live on in letters, journals and e-mails. On the fourth anniversary of the start of the Iraq war, *Newsweek* lets America’s lost warriors describe the conflict as they lived it, often until their final moments. The result: history of the most immediate, and wrenching kind” (ibid. 3).

#### 4.1.1.1.1 Historiography versus Historical Fiction – “True Stories and the Facts in Fiction”<sup>30</sup>

For Penelope Lively and, of course, for the novel’s main protagonist, *Moon Tiger* also serves as a means to discuss the rivalry and/or alliance between historiography and fiction. Claudia Hampton ponders extensively on the relationship between historical fiction and precise scholarship and asks herself how much truth there is in both.

Written down in the “cool level tone of dispassionate narration” (MT, 8), historiography is generally a simple “account of which general comes out of it the best, who had how many tanks, who advanced where at which point and why” (MT, 70) but does not tell what actually happened to the people behind these numbers and statistics. The feelings and emotions<sup>31</sup> of those who participated in historical events are regarded unimportant and are thus absent from historiography. Historiography demands objectivity and has to stick to the “essentials” (MT, 78) of history so that the private sphere of life has to be left out. History has indeed often been written about from a great distance, turning it into something “quaint” and something “the historian can write objectively about” (Moran 1993, 121). And Mary H. Moran continues explaining that “in Claudia’s day the academy’s approach was very conservative: history was regarded as a series of political events that could be written about in an objective way, from the vantage point of the contemporary historian’s superior understanding” (Moran 1993, 159). Claudia Hampton, of course, cannot agree with this opinion since she regards history in a totally different light: “And when you and I talk about history we don’t mean what actually happened, do we? The cosmic chaos of everywhere, all time? We mean the tidying up of this into books, the concentration of the benign historical eye upon years and places and persons” (MT, 6). Thus, objectivity deprives history of life and advances history’s slipping away into unreality. History becomes subject to statistics and numbers. Tidied up and put into chronological order the past shows no signs anymore of the actual mess it used to be and consequently turns into “grey stuff. Products. Systems of governments. Climates of opinion” (MT, 186).

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<sup>30</sup> “True Stories and the Facts in Fiction” is the title of an essay by A.S. Byatt to be found in her collection of essays titled *On Histories and Stories. Selected Essays* (2001).

<sup>31</sup> Feelings and emotions were generally and stereotypically considered to be female domains and as thus were neglected in male and objective historiography. Only with the inclusion of a female history and a new emphasis on the private, emotional matters were slowly considered to be worth noting in historiography.

Because Claudia is aware of how chaotic history really is and how the times are often out of joint, she has in contrast to her fellow historians/historiographers deconstructed and fragmented her history of the world. In her opinion, historiography has to mirror the past in all its turmoil and confusion; hence, her history of the world is a non-chronological, multidimensional and passionate narration in which even love and sex feature. Having witnessed World War II and having lost her one true love to it, history is uncomfortably real and personal to her and has lost all its neutrality which explains her radical approach towards history; for her the political has indeed become private. She has experienced history's public as well as private consequences: "When the times are out of joint it is brought uncomfortably home to you that history is true and that unfortunately you are part of it. One has the tendency to think oneself immune. This is one of the points when the immunity is shown up as fantasy" (MT, 103). She has understood that public history is always private as well. She cannot distance herself from history.

History, as Claudia stresses, always depends on the eye looking at it and is in fact no "matter of received opinion" (MT, 14) as some history books want to make their readers believe: "The collective past [...] is public property, but it is also deeply private. We all look differently at it. My Victorians are not your Victorians. My seventeenth century is not yours. The voice of John Aubrey, of Darwin, of whoever you like, speaks in one tone to me, in another to you. The signals of my own past come from the received past" (MT, 2). Universal history is to some extent always unique as well: "You are public property – the received past. But you are also private; my view of you is my own, your relevance to me is personal" (MT, 29). History is really personal and always changes with the one examining it. Consequently, history alters as the times change. Claudia Hampton stresses this assumption in a comparison of her contemporary biography of Hernando Cortez with older biographies on this Spanish conquistador: "Prescott, peering back from Boston in 1843 [...] wrote great history about him. History which is also, of course, a mirror of the mind of an enlightened, reflective American of 1843. Just as my view was that of a polemical opinionated independent Englishwoman of 1954" (MT, 154). Since public history is deeply subjective and personal, historiography is as well. Yet, even Claudia Hampton has to confess that there are certain historical facts that cannot be changed and are "indisputable" (MT, 70). Those pillars of history are unquestionable and to be taken over unchanged by historiographers. Although these facts certainly embody the truth of history it is only private history, public history's

concomitant, which makes it seem real. Personal histories contain this seemingly unimportant and needless information that convinces us that history is true and a reality: “There was a spaniel on board of the Mayflower. [...] What I find remarkable about this animal is that I should know of its existence at all, that its unimportant passage through time should be recorded. It becomes one of those vital essentials that convince us that history is true” (MT, 31).

*Moon Tiger's* protagonist's unusual and unscientific approach to history has never really been approved of by her fellow historians. They cannot agree with her “quasi-historian[']s” (MT, 14) style of recording history and detest her way of adding “life and colour, [...] the screams and the rhetoric” (MT, 2) to her/story which is supposed to be objective and rather neutral. However, Claudia does not give in to their criticism and continues to personalise what others want to be impersonal:

As a non-professional historian – a “populariser” – she has been loftily disdained by some academics, angrily refuted by others. [...] Reviewers have frequently condemned her out of her own lush and – it must be said – frequently imprecise and contradictory prose. “Technicolor history”, “the Elinor Glyn of historical biography”, “the preaching of an autodidact”; this is the language her critics have used (MT, 59/60).

Indeed, her popular historical biographies seem to miss a certain claim to truthfulness. Her readers can consequently not always rely on her or depend on what she has written. The fact that *Moon Tiger* is indeed Claudia Hampton's autobiography underlines the unreliability of the author in general. A memoir depends on its creator's subjective memories, (relevant) things might have been forgotten or deliberately left out and thus the past can individually be formed. Memory has its special ways, as Saleem in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* declares: “[i]t selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also” (Rushdie, 211).

Similarly, Claudia's biographies on influential historical characters may appear more like fiction than examples of accurate historical research. A biographer, just as the writer of an autobiography, revises history by filtering a life through his or her mind. Miss Hampton herself therefore describes at least one of her biographies as a piece of “narrative history” and as a “tale” (MT, 157) which implies that she is also aware of how she tends to fictionalize fact and she consequently denies her own aspiration to a reality of history. Biography and

autobiography are indeed capable of any combination of truth and fiction, thus denying a classification as either history or fiction.

How easily historical fact can be turned into fiction is described in the episode on the film-making of Claudia's Mexico book, a biography of Hernando Cortez. With this book Claudia herself slightly blurs the distinct borders between history and fiction by not focusing on what has been handed down by historiography. Instead, her Hernando Cortez is the invention of a new character. The man had already been a myth before Miss Hampton decided to question and expand this myth at her own discretion. The movie, however, disregards all historical evidence and consequently turns out to be a mere "charade" (MT, 157). History is clearly turned into fiction and all aspects of truth and reality are stretched: " 'I suppose you realise they never actually met in battle?' says Claudia. The producer gives her a look. 'Well, we're stretching a point, eh? Besides, you gave me a long lecture yourself about conflicts of evidence. This is a bit of conflicting evidence'" (MT, 156/157). Claudia is well aware of the closeness of fact and fiction and since history in her opinion depends on the one looking at it she has to accept that there can be no such "thing as absolute truth" (MT, 14) in historiography. Her history of the world is consequently to some extent a masqueraded history in which fiction and fact clearly mix. This mixture of "fact and fiction, myth and evidence, images and documents" (MT, 1) is emphasized by the use of a "lunatic language that lays a smokescreen of fantasy" (MT, 67) on history and helps to move history to a greater distance instead of bringing it closer to the readers. Regarding history from a subjective point of view might make it more interesting and more readable but it does not, in contrast to Claudia Hampton's opinion, contribute to make it more real for upcoming generations: " 'Sounds like a film,' says the nurse, 'the way you tell it'" (MT, 153).

The problem with private histories such as Claudia's history of the world is that the reader depends on a narrator who is extremely unreliable. Only Claudia, in this case, knows what is fiction and what is fact, whereas one can usually rely on the accounts of conventional historians. *Moon Tiger*, however, seems to convey that history is fiction and thus unreliable. Although Miss Hampton very much rejects Jasper's TV series that follows the life of a fictional character at the time of World War II and shows his entanglement with history, her book on the history of the world is, just as her historical biographies, in fact not any different. They all connect the dimensions of public and private history, mix fact with fiction, and, to a certain extent, turn "history into entertainment" (MT, 49). Just as Jasper is

trying to captivate great numbers of viewers by (ab)using history as spectacle, Claudia is trying to attract her readers by romanticizing history. This treatment of the past as entertainment is something Penelope Lively deeply despises. In fact, “[o]ne of the major targets of her criticism is the television industry’s production of slick historical costume dramas, which contribute to the public’s view of the past as picturesque” (Moran 1993, 33). This view of the past, of course, explains this certain sense of unreality history has for many people.

#### **4.1.1.2 History and Her/Story in *Moon Tiger***

Mary H. Moran rightly points out that “the feminist subtext in this novel is far more subtle and complex than the mere portrayal of a feminist role model. Rather, it consists of an extensive subversive attack on established assumptions about reality, assumptions that radical feminists argue are male devised” (Moran 1993, 125).

Claudia Hampton, of course, is nevertheless a feminist role model. She is a strong, independent and brave woman who always fights to find and eventually go her own way at a time when women are traditionally restricted to the home and suffer the “mother-madonna-angel-in-the-house syndrome” (Raschke, 119), as Debrah Raschke nicely names it. But Claudia soon begins to cast off those conventions and restrictions imposed on her by society and thought fitting for the female sex. She dismisses the traditional female role and the values and beliefs of patriarchal culture concerning femininity as well. She dares to be sexually liberated and enjoys various affairs without ever getting married:

Claudia, like her writing, is unorthodox. Adventurous, witty, and a bit arrogant, Claudia has innumerable affairs in various ports, a cryptic incestuous liaison with her brother, Gordon, a daughter whom she frequently ignores for her career, and a casual sexual relationship with the father of her child, whom she never marries. She lives unconventionally but fully, playfully disregarding the confines that usually mark women’s roles. (Raschke, 115)

As Rascke points out in this quotation, Claudia frequently ignores her daughter Lisa which shows that she rejects the stereotypical belief of society in the natural or biological purpose of women as mothers. Indeed, she seems even to deny the fact that she is a mother at all. As a child Lisa is consequently often shoved off to stay with her grandmother whenever Claudia wants to pursue her career. Although Claudia has decided to have a child on her own,

turning down Jasper's marriage proposals, she nevertheless neglects her duties towards her daughter when the girl turns out to be utterly different from her mother's idea of an ideal child. Claudia, it seems, has given birth to Lisa out of pure egotism, wanting to find her alter ego, a re-born Claudia, in the girl: "She was a disappointment to me. And I, presumably, to her. I looked for my *alter ego*, the querying rebellious maverick child I had been myself; Lisa looked for a reassuring clothes-shopping sherry-drinking figure like the mothers of her school friends. [...] She began to bore me. And I sensed her disapproval" (MT, 51/52).

To put it in a nutshell, Claudia rejects (stereo-)typical gender roles which could possibly restrict her. She therefore distances herself from roles defining or even reducing her as a mother or wife solely. Claudia rejects a prototypical or stereotypical female identity which patriarchal society considers not only suitable but desirable for women. Instead, she finds personal fulfilment in her job as a historian which helps her to define and reach an identity of her own, so that she can eventually gain control of the self.

Already as a child Claudia is remarkably intelligent, a quality that is not encouraged or promoted in a girl at the time she grows up because it is considered to be a rather masculine feature and not appropriate or necessary for women. As she has to find out, her intelligence surely enriches her life but makes it more complicated and uncomfortable as well. She dares to ask questions and to voice her opinion and thus causes resistance and rejection, even condemnation. Claudia rejects the idea of getting married and decides to leave home for college instead. Since she prefers career over family she studies history at Oxford and begins to publish articles which are in the years to come to be followed by several popular and rather successful historical works, including biographies. She thus manages to make her way into this formerly male dominated area of history and historiography and stands her ground there. In contrast to her mother and her sister-in-law, Sylvia, Claudia Hampton does not want to stay away or retire from history but rather be in the midst of it. By choosing a job as a war correspondent in Egypt she actively seeks involvement in history, wants to be a "front-liner" (MT, 21). As a war correspondent Claudia is one of only a few women in that predominantly male domain and thus once more rejects the typical, traditional female and passive role society requires from her. As a historian she knows what she wants to avoid: being "lost in the forgetfulness that deprives women of their history" (Anderson, 129). She is aware that "the official story – the version that passes into history – is the one written by male writers" (Anderson, vii), but with *Moon Tiger*, which is indeed *her* history of the world,

she intends to overthrow these stereotypes and comes up with something revolutionary – a personalized version of public history as seen by a woman. Claudia has chosen the highly personal form of autobiography to replace the conventional, objective forms of history. And moreover, she has dared to title her very own autobiography “a history of the world”. Thus she opposes the traditionally male picture of history by becoming herself the main character of history, at a time when women’s place was usually “outside history” (Raschke, 117). This attempt of a woman to write herself into history can indeed be regarded as a “subversive attack on established assumptions” (Moran 1993, 125) of patriarchal society.

Female history used to be connected to the personal and the trivial area of life, thus standing “in a direct contrast to the more significant public history” (Raschke, 118). This public history has so far been dominated by men, as Seyla Benhabib rightly points out: “Wenn das Subjekt der westlichen intellektuellen Tradition für gewöhnlich der weiße, wohlhabende, christliche, männliche Hausvorstand war, dann war die Geschichte der Menschheit, so wie sie bisher festgehalten und erzählt wurde, die Geschichte dieses Mannes: history in der Tat als *his* story” (Benhabib, 233). By telling the individual history of a woman and by showing how tightly it can in fact be connected to public history, Claudia Hampton is courageous enough to escape this stereotype and help female history to finally occupy the place it deserves – as a part of public history. Hence she emphasises that women are indeed not an unimportant historical fringe group.

Claudia’s connection of public and private history which stresses the non-objectivity of history and historiography can also be regarded as a feminist attack on the male assumption that history should be objective. Her history of the world is instead composed of “fact and fiction, myth and evidence” (MT, 1) and thus points to a potential fictionality in historiography her male fellow historians deny. Her integration of myth into history certainly disturbs many a historian since myth is strangely connected with the female gender and thus, of course, seen as something that does not belong to historiography. Myths, indeed, seem to belong to the realm of fantasy and hence to a space where women and their stories have often been relegated to as well.

It has already been stated that “Lively employs the memoir as her narrative device to represent the facts and emotions and horrors of war” (Dukes, 85/86). A memoir is often regarded a non-scientific piece of historiography in which truth and fiction undeniably mix, but despite this fact, this narrative form allows Lively to stress the characters’ direct

connection to history and allows to give an immediate and intimate insight into the impact a historical event can have on the individual. Historical events are therefore told by an experiencing first person narrator, a device which emphasises the subjectivity and the personal bias underlying seemingly objective historical occurrences.

The way Claudia tells her history can be regarded as a feminist challenge of male, patriarchal assumptions of narrative patterns. With her kaleidoscopic way of narrating history she rejects conventional discourse and thus creates a female counterpart to male historiography. Claudia does not use a chronological or linear way of telling history since she regards this mode as distinctively male. For her a linear notion of time (time's arrow) has associations with the male and patriarchal and is as such inappropriate to the female experience. Thus *Moon Tiger*, a fictional autobiography, stands in line with the women's tradition in autobiography. Already early autobiographies by women show that their creators have begun to deny the conventional narrative forms practiced by men, the linear and progressive, and instead have legitimized not only subjective but also "disjunctive or discontinuous narratives, often interrupting the chronological order with flashbacks, anecdotes, and character sketches" (Jelinek, 88). Claudia Hampton's device to include many voices to tell the story has to be considered feminist as well because it points to the specifically female fragmentation of identity and the sense of self-in-relationship women experience when it comes to the formation of their identity. As I shall discuss in the following chapter on *Moon Tiger*, Claudia Hampton is aware of the rather typical attitude of women to define themselves through their relationships with others. In her essay on Lively's *Moon Tiger* Debrah Raschke summarizes the novel's feminist implications: "*Moon Tiger* thus not only provides a space for a woman in a discourse from which she has been previously excluded, but also confronts through its use of language and narrative frame the ideological structures that have made such an exclusion possible" (Raschke, 117).

#### **4.1.2 *Moon Tiger* as Historical Bildungsroman**

As has been suggested in the last chapter, *Moon Tiger* is frequently concerned with the interrogation of gender issues such as women and marriage, motherhood, the possibilities of a successful career for women as well as with the female participation in political and historical events. These topics feature prominently in the female Bildungsroman which

traditionally concentrates upon a heroine who is on a journey towards self-discovery. Considering these main concerns of the female Bildungsroman it becomes obvious that identity, especially a female one, “is shaped by an amalgam of contexts that range from the personal through to the social, historical, and ideological” (Wojcik-Andrews, 9).

Ian Wojcik-Andrews even stresses that the female Bildungsroman differs from its male equivalent by a foregrounding of community rather than individuality, implying that friendships and relationships are more important to women than to men. What Wojcik-Andrews calls a “sense of connectedness” (Wojcik-Andrews, 14) is described by Marion Gymnich as a “sense of self-in-relationship”<sup>32</sup> (Gymnich 2005, 278) which separates female from male identity. Gymnich explains this “sense of self-in-relationship” by stating that “[b]ei Frauenfiguren in feministischer Literatur wird oft die zentrale Bedeutung von Beziehungen (zu Partnern, Kindern, Freunden oder Eltern) für weibliche Identitätsentwicklung dargestellt” (Gymnich 2005, 278). Claudia Hampton also observes and acknowledges this importance of relationships concerning the formation of a personal identity. She knows that her story is forever connected with the histories of those others (her mother, her brother, her lovers, and her child) that have influenced her life. However, Claudia is also aware that in order to achieve her individual identity she has, at least partly, to overcome this sense of self-in-relationship which might not only enrich her identity but might also restrict her self-discovery and independence. She furthermore tries to avoid being defined by the stereotypical assumptions and standards regarding women of her time and society because she senses how restricting they can be when it comes to the definition of her self. It is not enough for Claudia to be just a mother or a historian or a writer or a lover. Instead she strives to be a “myriad Claudias” (MT, 2), a multitude of Claudias. Just as she has certain pictures of herself in her mind, other people do as well: Lisa’s Claudia is not Laszlo’s, nor is Jasper’s view on Claudia the same as Tom’s. There is no definite Claudia, but her identity is fractured. Furthermore, her many identities help her to escape those fixed identities a patriarchal society has created to entrap women.

Indeed, the question Claudia has to ask herself while on her quest for identity is whether there can ever be a whole person, a unified identity, in a world thus fragmented. At the end of her life she can finally answer this question. She is a whole person simply because her identity is so fragmented: “All I can think, when I hear your voice, is that the past is true,

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<sup>32</sup> Nancy Chodorow has introduced and explained this term in her *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978).

which both appals and uplifts me. I need it; I need you, Gordon, Jasper, Lisa, all of them. And I can only explain this need by extravagance: my history and the world's. Because unless I am part of everything I am nothing" (MT, 207).

This decentring of an identity is emphasized by the way Claudia retells history – a history that consists of many voices, views and opinions. Neither history nor a woman's journey to self-definition (her personal history) can be told in a linear or chronological way. Therefore, old Claudia Hampton, who is now forced to a hospital bed by a fatal cancerous disease, vividly recalls the events of her life in a "series of memories and flashbacks" (Moran 1993, 112) and thus gives the reader of *Moon Tiger* a recollection of her personal development and her quest for identity in unruly times. Memory thus proves to be of central importance to human identity: personal memories only allow the construction of an individual identity.

Claudia's history of the world starts at the end of her life when her journey is presumably over. Thus, the convention of the male Bildungsroman which usually begins with the childhood of the hero, continuing with a description of the youth's journey to adulthood, is contradicted. The typical male Bildungsroman includes the journey of the young hero who goes out into the world to eventually find a place of his own and to discover himself as he discovers the world. Claudia's Bildung has included in fact many a journey, which has not always been easy for a woman at the time she grew up when society did not expect her to spread her wings and see the world. Claudia has nevertheless had her will. Ironically, she now has to tell the story of her education and development restricted to a hospital bed; her journeys are only happening in her mind, in her head. Comparable to women of the centuries before her, Claudia is bound to one place and it is only her mind that is free to go out into the world. In a way, she is thus once again restricted to the female and private sphere of life. *Moon Tiger* thus seems to play with the conventions of the male as well as the female Bildungsroman.

It is said that people close to death once more re-live their past, their history, and so does Claudia. As special memories come to her mind she begins to connect these flashbacks of her private history with her memories of public history. One word is often enough to trigger a chain of memories and emotions since "all knowledge is stored, to be summoned up at the flick of a key" (MT, 2), and suddenly the old lady finds herself taken back in time, experiencing what had happened back then. When Sylvia visits her sister-in-law in the

hospital she brings with her a bright poinsettia as a gift for Claudia. Looking at the flower Claudia travels back in time and reminisces her time in Egypt where “trails of brilliant blue morning glory and a lace-work of scarlett poinsettia flowers” cover ruined houses “with swarming growth” (MT, 100). Those flashbacks create “an impression of the immediacy and vividness of the events recalled” (Moran 1993, 119) and perfectly convey a certain sense of the ever-persisting presence of the past and that “nothing is ever lost, that everything can be retrieved” (MT, 68). Consequently, Claudia Hampton resolves that her history of the world cannot be told in a chronological manner since her memories do not come to her in an ordered or linear way. Instead, she has to jump from one period in her life to another thus leaving gaps in time she later on comes back to fill with information.

Furthermore, childhood memories displayed in the female Bildungsroman “rest deep within the novel, covered by layers of adolescent and adult experiences that must be uncovered before the strange power of those childhood memories can be released” (Wojcik-Andrews, 127). Since this uncovering demands the decline of the use of a fairly straight line to tell the story, the female Bildungsroman, in this case *Moon Tiger*, cannot follow the typical narrative structure of its male counterpart. Instead, it tends to start in media res, which is, as Wojcik-Andrews notes, “one of the many ways in which contemporary women’s fiction revises classical epics” (Wojcik-Andrews, 27). The narrative structure thus proves to be a feminist attack on patriarchal assumptions. Penelope Lively herself must have considered the problems and questionability of telling history chronologically when writing *Oleander, Jacaranda*, her first autobiography. Recalling, collecting, and analysing her childhood memories she considers that “[o]ne of the problems with this assemblage of slides in the head is that they cannot be sorted chronologically. All habits are geared towards the linear, the sequential, but memory refuses such orderliness” (OJ, 36/37).

Female development generally seems to deny a linear orderliness so that Marianne Hirsch even describes it as “fragmented and discontinuous” (Hirsch, 44). This discontinuity and fragmentation is also clearly mirrored in Claudia’s chosen narrative pattern. A female Bildungsroman can hardly be told in a chronological way and Claudia resolves that she has to write her history in a non-chronological, a kaleidoscopic way because “[c]hronology irritates me. There is no chronology inside my head. [...] The pack of cards I carry around is forever shuffled and re-shuffled; there is no sequence, everything happens at once” (MT, 2). She stresses that history, “that a lifetime is not linear but instant. That, inside the head,

everything happens at once" (MT, 68). Presenting her history of the world in that non-linear manner also mirrors the course of history which is never smooth as well. Indeed, it emphasizes that history is "disorder [...], death and muddle and waste" (MT, 152) and not as tidy and linear as presented in conventional history books that reduce it to names and dates. "History conventionally has been a linear story, has manifested a drive for closure and control – it has meant getting the story and the facts straight" (Raschke, 124). But Claudia Hampton has overthrown these, in her opinion, outdated and restricting conventions. She, on the contrary, underlines that history, just like memory, has no fixed form and no logic. Thus, Claudia adds to history writing her very own "concept of time" which is "personal and semantic" (MT, 3) and allows her to tell how it really was.

The historical novel serves as a medium to preserve cultural memory as well as collective identity, but *Moon Tiger* as a postmodern historical novel has shifted the emphasis from the collective to the individual, thus decentering the common public history into private fragments. In *Moon Tiger*, her autobiography, Claudia's private history collides with public history, and one has to be aware that public history is indeed subordinated to the personal one. Claudia Hampton's approach towards history has therefore to be regarded as being to a certain degree narcissistic. She regards herself not only as a part but even as a vital component of world history. By linking her identity with history she struggles to avoid meaninglessness.

Claudia even assumes that the world history is indeed hidden in every human being since we carry not only our own history with us but also that of the universe, the world, our nation and of our ancestors. This collision of public and private history is in her opinion recorded in the human body which serves as an important record of evolution and progress:

My body records certain events; an autopsy would show that I have had a child, broken some ribs, lost my appendix. [...] My body records also a more impersonal history; it remembers Java Man and Australopithecus and the first mammals and strange creatures that flapped and crawled and swam. Its ancestries account, perhaps, for my passion for climbing trees when I was ten and my predilection for floating in warm seas. It has memories I share but cannot apprehend. (MT, 166/167)

With every new birth a new history is added to the whole and the history of the world "[f]rom the mud to the stars" (MT, 3) is re-born again. We all share a collective past and are therefore "conditioned by and embodying all that has come before" (Moran 1993, 121) us.

Nobody can or should detach him- or herself from the past or even deny it since the history of our forefathers is also our own:

Claudia shrugs. 'You can't dismiss ancestry.'  
 'I am what I make myself,' says Jasper [...].  
 'Plus,' she says, 'what you have been endowed with. Sasha has endowed you with a rather dramatic past. [...]'  
 'It has nothing to do with me,' says Jasper. 'And you're being portentous.'  
 'I do not see,' says Claudia, [...] 'how you can be so majestically egotistical as to place yourself in total detachment from your antecedents just because you find your father inadequate'. (MT, 63/64)

In Claudia's daughter Lisa, for instance, public Russian history lives on as well – although she is totally indifferent to that or might not even know about it: "Somewhere within and behind this quintessentially middle-class middle-England figure in her Jaeger suit and floppy-bowed silk shirt and her neat polished shoes lies the most tormented people in the history of the world" (MT, 61).

This awareness and knowledge of history enlarges Claudia and helps her to find her own place in the whole of history. It seems very important for her to make clear that the past is indeed never really over but rather continues to be alive in us. Tom's diary is another example how the past can be kept alive: even though Tom is long gone he will survive, brought back to life whenever his words are read. The past is always present if only somebody remembers it. Then it can broaden our mind and enrich our personal history which seems to be the reason for Claudia Hampton to write her biographical works on historical characters and her numerous articles on historical events. They help to increase her awareness of the liveliness of history and to notice its presence in herself and her life: "And what, you may ask, does that moment in history have to do with me, Claudia, except that I wrote a book about it? [...] Like everything else: it enlarges me, it frees me from the prison of my experience; it also resounds within that experience" (MT, 158/159).

Personal history intertwines with public history in that every single individual is endowed with a similar past, not only with that of one's forefathers or one's nation but also with something everybody shares: the history of the human race, the collective past. Private history is not at all only passively but also actively affected by the public one as Claudia states: "I've grown old with the century; there's not much left of either of us. The century of war. All history, of course, is the history of wars, but this hundred years has excelled itself. How many million shot, maimed, burned, frozen, starved, drowned?" (MT, 66) Her own first

personal contact with history was the death of her father in World War I. History “summoned Father and took him away for ever” (MT, 66), “history killed Father” (MT, 6), a fact that clearly influences her for the rest of her life. Growing up with a father might have led to a different development concerning her education, her relationship with her brother, her behaviour towards men in general, and towards her daughter Lisa. Therefore, the death of her father is the first example in her life of how powerful history can be and how easily it can influence and change one’s life.

In fact, it seems as if almost all people important to Claudia and influential in her life are introduced to her by history. She meets her one true love, Tom, in Egypt while World War II shakes the world. And, only a few years later, she gets to know Jasper, the father of her daughter Lisa, while working on her book on Tito. Ten years later, Claudia’s life becomes again “entangled with historical events” (Moran 1993, 113): in 1956 she publishes an article on the revolt in Hungary which is read by a Hungarian whose son currently stays in England “and, inferring rightly that Claudia is a sympathetic liberal, telephones from Budapest begging her to look up his son and warn him against returning home” (Moran 1993, 115). Meeting Laszlo, the young Hungarian, again changes Claudia’s life and shows once more how public and private history interfere since it is most of all his life that is undeniably influenced and changed by public history: “You poor little sod, she thinks. You poor little wretch, you’re one of those for whom history really pulls out the stops. You are indeed someone who cannot call his life his own. Free will, right now, must have a hollow sound” (MT, 174).

Yet, Claudia’s own life is probably most shaken by history while witnessing World War II from first row in Egypt. Pushed not only by her interest in history but also by her will to always outdo her brother Gordon she applies for the job as a war correspondent in Egypt. And there, “at the cutting edge of history” (Moran 1993, 113), she experiences not only one of the most intense events of public history but also “the most intensive period of her own personal history” (Moran 1993, 113). It is in the North African desert that she happens to meet Tom Southern, a young British tank commander stationed there, and for the first and last time in her life she falls in love. Their love affair represents the “core”, the “centre” (MT, 70) of her life and of her private history. The love affair also features prominently in the centre of the novel *Moon Tiger*, thus emphasizing at once its significance as well as its commonness: there was a life before Tom and there will be a life after Tom is gone. However, it is again public history that not only unites but also separates the two lovers.

Tom, just like Claudia's father, is "picked off by history" (MT, 7) and throughout the rest of her life she cannot forget this one true love. Tom's loss has left a deep scar which represents Claudia's "war wound" (MT, 71). The war she endured was certainly different than that experienced by men, but it nevertheless left its traces.

Although the Tom-Claudia episode forms the core of her life, the romance plot is not the most important element in the narrative. Lively departs from the traditional romance pattern that includes either a happy marriage or the tragic death of the heroine as a result of the loss of love and emphasizes instead Claudia's will to survive. In the years after Tom's death Claudia is able to lead a fulfilled life, to enjoy her interests and her career. This dismissal of the traditional romance pattern can indeed be regarded as another attack on patriarchal assumptions and conventions and thus as a feminist device. However, it is important to Penelope Lively to stress that she is not the kind of feminist writer who is concerned with feminist or women's issues only. She does not want her writing to be judged by her gender and "[i]n fact, she takes issue with the view upheld by some feminists that gender is the ultimate divide" (Moran 1993, 6). Yet, with its fascinating and strong main character being a woman struggling with the powers of history, the novel invites a feminist reading.

*Moon Tiger* is what Ansgar Nünning calls a feminist instance of historiographic metafiction. This implies that it deals with historiographic issues from a feminist point of view. In *Moon Tiger* the postmodern historical novel uniquely combines with the female Bildungsroman and autobiographical conventions. Despite its toying with ideas and assumptions concerning the writing of history and the curious mixture of fact and fiction, the novel also includes a central quest motif concerned with the search for a specific female identity. Claudia Hampton's intense preoccupation with history and historiography shows that she has developed an identity which is based on the combination of individuality and integration of the self into the whole of society and history: "Damit gelingt es Claudia, in ihrem flexiblen Identitätskonzept die beiden Aspekte zu vereinigen, die oft im Frauenroman des 20. Jahrhunderts als gegensätzliche Pole weiblicher Selbstdefinition erscheinen: die Individualität einerseits und der *sense of self-in-relationship* andererseits" (Gymnich 2000, 219).

The next work I am going to deal with is Penelope Lively's *Making It Up*, which denies a clear genre classification as either historical novel, female Bildungsroman, or autobiography. It is a bit of all and thus an interesting example of the mixture of fact and fiction, truth and fabulation, in what can generally be called historical writing.

## **4.2 Making It Up**

Published in 2005, *Making It Up* proves to be yet another fascinatingly innovative piece of writing of the successful author. To call it a collection of short stories does not quite give the full impression of *Making It Up's* complexity. It is instead a fragmented metafictional autobiography which focuses on several episodes of Penelope Lively's own history. The novelist occupies herself with questions of how to write autobiography as a woman. As she has already pointed out in *Moon Tiger*, female identity is fragmented, an aspect she has considered in her autobiography *Oleander, Jacaranda* as well and which she examines in *Making It Up*, too. The fragmentation of identity and of the self is a topic often discussed in postmodern writing as postmodernism required a new definition of identity. Hence, the construction of identity also became a central concern in postmodern autobiography. The writers of autobiographies came to see that the definition of the self "has to take into cognizance that self-narration is no more a mere retrieval of the past, where the past may be fixed archaeological sites, easily delved into and recounted in anecdotal, linear narrative form. Any attempt at autobiography today has to deal with the fragmented self, of not one self but a number of selves" (Nanda, 245). In this context Lively apparently agrees with Estelle C. Jelinek, who has studied women's autobiography from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and states: "In contrast to the self-confident, one-dimensional self-image that men usually project, women often depict a multi-dimensional, fragmented self-image" (Jelinek, 14). Lively has further used this fracturing of her history into episodes to hint at the possible fictionalisation of autobiography. Autobiography, like historiography, is in fact concerned with the negotiation of fact and fiction as well as with the questions of how to select and arrange pieces of a life story in order to create a certain picture of the individual. Furthermore,

autobiography – in its various guises – can capture and address many contemporary concerns, for example the status of the subject, the relations and representations of ethnicity and gender, and perhaps most importantly

questions the individual's relationship with the past. Autobiographical writing can thereby reflect some of the main preoccupations of postmodernism, which has often been defined in terms of questions about our knowledge of the past and the difficulty of articulating our relationship to it. (Gudmundsdóttir, 1)

*Making It Up* is Penelope Lively's attempt to imagine those other directions her life could have taken. She asks herself *what if ... ?* and answers this question by creating parallel worlds to explore a history that could have been hers. She therefore uses her own life as a prompt for the eight stories *Making It Up* consists of. Autobiography, as a construction of the self, is always partly fictitious and thus a process not only of discovery (of one's self and one's past) but also a process of invention of a self. Vital to these processes is the site of memory where autobiographical facts and imagination mingle. Therefore Lively stresses the creative aspect of autobiography as self-narration and points out that the alternative stories she creates have indeed been inspired by her own past but are nevertheless definitely fiction. "If anything", she states, this book "is an anti-memoir" (MIU, 2). A human being's life is constructed of numerous memories and as these come to the author's mind she reconsiders and examines them. At 73 it seems natural that Lively takes a look back at her life and asks herself what would have gone differently had she chosen to take another path when standing at the crossroads. One single decision could have changed not only the rest of her life but consequently the development of her identity. This topic has already occupied her mind when writing her second autobiography *A House Unlocked*, eventually published in 2001, as the following quotation shows: "Had the coin fallen differently – had we not gone to that particular gathering, taken that job, got talking to that stranger – the rest of life could have spun off in other directions" (HU, 175/176).

What if?-narrative is not new to the genre of the historical novel and has manifested itself also as counterfactual histories. Jerome de Groot explains that "[c]ounterfactual history allows an alternative historical space to be imagined, suggesting that actual time might be in a state of flux. The counterfactual gestures towards the idea that history is about a set of individual, personal choices" (de Groot, 172). History, it becomes clear, can be used, recycled, and created, which is also the case with personal history and autobiography. In her revealing preface to *Making It Up* Lively expresses her continuing fascination with this subject and states that she has again taken it up: "Somehow choice and contingency have landed you where you are, as the person that you are, and the whole process seems so

precarious that you look back at those climatic moments when things might have gone entirely differently, when life might have spun off in some other direction, and wonder at this apparently arbitrary outcome” (MIU, 1/2).

#### 4.2.1 History as Biography – According to Penelope<sup>33</sup>

Calling *Making It Up* an anti-memoir, the author points once again to the distinction between fact and fiction in historical writing which also figures as a prominent topic in auto-/biographical writing. “Anti-memoir” is indeed a paradoxical term expressing that a piece of writing is at once factual and fictional. This problematic relationship between fact and fiction in autobiographical writing has been taken up and analysed by Ruth Klüger who stresses the vicinity of autobiography and historiography:

Autobiographie ist Geschichte in der Ich-Form. Weil sie dank ihrer Subjektivität Dinge enthält die nicht nachprüfbar sind – Gefühle und Gedanken –, wird sie öfters und leicht mit dem Roman verwechselt. Sie ist sicherlich in einem Grenzdorf angesiedelt, wo man beide Sprachen spricht, die der Geschichte und die der Belletristik. Aber jedes Grenzdorf gehört dem einen oder anderen Staat an: und die Autobiographie gehört eindeutig zur Geschichte. Auf der anderen Seite liegen der autobiographische Roman und das historische Drama. Man kann zu Fuß von einem Dorf ins andere spazieren, sehr weit ist es nicht, und doch geht man von einem Land ins andere, und die Bewohner haben unterschiedliche Ausweise. (Klüger, 86)

Penelope Lively is conscious of this closeness of autobiography, fiction, and historiography as her novel *Moon Tiger* shows, which playfully depicts, contradicts and questions the conventions of these literary genres. *Making It Up* also stretches the already blurred borders between these genres and thus constructs a “response to that oft-asked question ‘How much of what you write comes from your own life?’” (MIU, blurb). The answer might be that her life, her history and her memories serve as prompts for Lively’s writings but are in the case of her fiction indeed nothing more than that. Quite similarly to historiographic

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<sup>33</sup> I have chosen this headline in imitation of the title of Lively’s novel *According to Mark* (1984), a novel that deals with the problems of a literary biographer who is in due course faced with the problem of how to write a factual biography after finding out that there is no definite version of a life. Instead, fact and fiction collide in biography: “Perhaps this accounts for the peculiarly diverse picture of him that we get from friends and acquaintances. Certainly it makes the biographer’s task a hard one – a point noted by Strong himself in his well-known essay: ‘After all, we lie about one another with as much alacrity as we lie about ourselves – lies not of malice but of incompetence. We look at each other square – head-on – we seldom trouble to walk around behind and take another view’” (ATM, 210). Lively most probably faced this same problem when writing her autobiographies and consequently played with these assumptions in *Making It Up*.

metafiction which questions the objectivity of historiography, Lively's metafictional autobiography emphasizes autobiographical subjectivity, interrogates and doubts the accuracy or faithfulness of the autobiographical account. *Making It Up* hence forms a synthesis of three genres – the autobiographical, the historical, and the fictional.

To stress *Making It Up's* fictional character I consider it helpful to first take a closer look at Lively's autobiographies, which are highly readable examples of the intermingling of public and private history as well as illustrations of how close fact and fiction, autobiography and the historical novel, can be.

An autobiography is an immensely personal piece of historical writing. Yet, as Penelope Lively emphasizes, these private histories are also always connected with public history. The connection of public and private history is not only a widely discussed topic featuring in her novels such as *Moon Tiger* but it also figures prominently in her memoirs. Whereas Lively's first autobiography *Oleander, Jacaranda* (1994) deals with the author's childhood in Egypt and the influences World War II had on it, her second autobiography displays this intermingling of public and private even more openly. Gudmundsdóttir accordingly also stresses that the "attempts at connecting the public and the private show that autobiography can be a fertile ground for writing on the individual and history, and that how one views one's connection to public events can be a creative force in life-writing" (Gudmundsdóttir, 54). With *A House Unlocked* (2001) Lively extends an autobiographical work by means of adding to it a family biography and in the context she intends to write a history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She does not only afford an insight into her own past as well as into her own mind but also into that of her grandmother and her Aunt Rachel. Lively furthermore mixes those private facts of her family life with those of public history and bolsters personal knowledge with figures, numbers, and stories taken from historical accounts or memoirs as the bibliographic appendix of *A House Unlocked* mirrors. Penelope Lively's mixture of private and public history closely resembles *Moon Tiger's* Claudia Hampton's attempt to write a history of the world which is in the context also her own.

Lively's approach towards writing her history even outdoes that of Claudia Hampton since Penelope Lively has chosen to project her own history, her family's history as well as the century's history onto the history of a house – Golsoncott, the family home of many

years. In the preface to *A House Unlocked* she explains her intention to regard Golsoncott a mirror of the times:

[...] the entire place – its furnishings, its functions – seemed like a set of coded allusions to a complex sequence of social change and historical clamour. Objects had proved more tenacious than people – the photograph albums, the baffling contents of the silver cupboard, the children on my grandmother’s sampler of the house – but from each object there spun a shining thread of reference, if you knew how to follow it. I thought that I would see if the private life of a house could be made to bear witness to the public traumas of a century. (HU, xi)

As Lively considers her history and that of her family she also embraces the general history of a whole country, of England. By doing so she furthermore intends to compare and contrast life then and life now – two different worlds she has inhabited and still does. This comparison only allows her to grasp the real impact public history has on private history – and especially on her individual history.

Although she considers her life relatively unshaken by the political turbulences and upheavals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the great historical events of this eventful century, she admits that cultural and social changes often gone unnoticed have deeply affected her whole life as she remarks:

When I take the central event of my own life, significantly placed in the middle of the century, I realize that right there is a potent indicator of a much more seismic disturbance. Marriage. Quite simply, the marriage of two people who could never have met in a previous age. In 1957 I married Jack Lively; a girl from the southern gentry, a young man from the northern working class. We met in Oxford, in the clear blue air of higher education, both of us freed from the assumptions and expectations of our backgrounds. At the time, it all seemed a purely private and personal matter; only subsequently can I see what we owed to a stealthy revolution, and be grateful. (HU, 221)

Despite its emphasis on the relationship between public and private history, this memoir also deals with the perception of memory just as its predecessor does. Penelope Lively’s first autobiography *Oleander, Jacaranda*, is indeed a theoretical treatise of that topic as well.

The title *A House Unlocked* does obviously not only refer to the actual house, Golsoncott, as such but rather serves as a synonym for Penelope Lively’s memories which she describes as a “mansion in the mind, with its many rooms, each complete with

furnishings – pictures and vases and pin-trays and the contents of drawers” (HU, ix).<sup>34</sup> Just as an actual house can be entered and its rooms be visited, Lively can unlock and enter her memory house and discover memories stored away and well hidden in the corners of the house.<sup>35</sup>

To write *Oleander, Jacaranda* Penelope Lively had to enter the rooms of her “mansion in the mind” (HU, ix) containing her childhood memories. But reconsidering and reliving the memories of her childhood she notices that those are “already dangerously distorted by the wisdoms of maturity” (OJ, vii) and have thus lost their originality. Her adult mind has obviously altered her childhood memories.

A child generally perceives the world differently than an adult. Its experiences remain therefore “immediate and personal. It is only much later that the dark forces at work become apparent” (HU, 107). As a child one sees a great deal but does often not understand; connections between private and public history are not made since everything seems to be personal. Until reaching a certain age, children seem to inhabit a world of their own thus naturally perceiving the world outside, or the world of adults, differently. Experiences and events of childhood thus appear in retrospect, when looking at them from an adult point of view, often in another light: “Memory is always a product of circumstances, experience, the passing of time, memory’s public aspects, its connection to other people, and the changing perspective of the remembering self” (Gudmundsdóttir, 54). The innocence of the child is replaced by life experience and gained knowledge, what the child has seen now “requires explanation and discussion” (OJ, viii). Therefore the past, even the

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<sup>34</sup> In her essay “Sich verlieren, um sich wiederzufinden: Weibliche Identitätssuche in Doris Lessings ‘To Room Nineteen’” Annemarie Döhner examines Lessing’s short story and points to the notion of the house as a symbol of memory and the female psyche. In this context Döhner mentions Sigmund Freud and states that “[d]ie Innenräume können im Sinne Freuds interpretiert werden, der eine Korrelation zwischen dem Symbol Haus und der weiblichen Psyche entwickelt hat. Bei Lessing besteht beinahe immer eine Verbindung zwischen dem Seelenleben ihrer Charaktere und den sie umgebenden Räumen, die man als „Seelenräume“ bezeichnen kann. Erlebnissubjekt und Raumobjekt bilden eine Einheit. Die Raumsymbole korrespondieren mit den Ebenen intrapersonaler (Zimmer), interpersonaler (Haus) und sozialer (Stadt) Erfahrung” (Döhner, 141). These analogies can be drawn between Lively, Golsoncott and the author’s house of memory as well. The same interrelation between a house and the concept of memory becomes obvious in Esther Freud’s novel *Summer at Gaglow* which I am going to examine in the conclusion.

<sup>35</sup> In her novel *Family Album* (2009) Lively once more occupies herself with the concept of memory and how the view of the past changes with the individual looking at it. And again the memories and the history of a family centers around a house, a family home. “And the smell takes her to a more intimate Allersmeade, to the Allersmeade-in-the-head, to a raft of private moments that come swimming up from the long darkness of the years, the strange assortment of glimpses that are known as memory. All of these are tacked to Allersmead; in all of them Allersmeade is the backdrop – its rooms, its stairs, its furnishings, the deeply known places in its garden, the secrets of the cellar, where presumably the Daleks still roam.” (FA, 256)

personal past, can suddenly be regarded in a totally different light. Lively consequently states that the true “experience of childhood is irretrievable” (OJ, vii).

With *Oleander, Jacaranda* Penelope Lively nevertheless tries to uncover the experience of her childhood. She reconsiders her memories and examines them very closely to strip them of their strata and eventually find their core – the “raw stuff” (OJ, ix), the “anarchic vision of childhood” (OJ, vii). To this core and her “childcentred perception” she adds what she calls “the reality” (OJ, viii) – the historical facts and her adult knowledge on Egypt, Palestine and the Sudan (comp. OJ, viii) and generally on the times she grew up in. With her autobiography she therefore creates not only a picture of Penelope Lively as a whole by seeing herself as both child and adult, by combining her fractured identities, but also gives a picture of history that is both public and private. Penelope Lively furthermore suggests that memories are always subjective. Memoirs and autobiographies, both expressions of a personal history, can therefore not completely be trusted or relied upon since they were filtered by an individual’s mind. What really happened in the life of an individual can hardly be judged. Memory’s verifiability is therefore doubtful. Fact and fiction are consequently a topic in autobiographical writing just as they are in all historical writing. Doris Lessing, when writing the first volume of her autobiography, even concluded “that fiction is better at “the truth” than a factual record” (Lessing 1993, intro, ix). And Penelope Lively suggests a similar attitude when pointing out that novelists, in contrast to historians or biographers, “have absolute control over their material – what to put in, what to leave out, how people are to behave, what is to happen. [...] the writer is able to impose order upon chaos, to impose a pattern. Real life is quite out of control” (MIU, 2).

#### **4.2.2 *Making It Up* as an Alternative History**

Penelope Lively uses her own life as a prompt for those alternative stories *Making It Up* consists of. As she has already done in her two memoirs, Lively again visits the memory house of her mind where several of her memories are stored away. She then relives these memories and realizes that everything could have had a different outcome had she made another choice or had fate chosen another destiny for her.

Lively herself describes *Making It Up* as “a form of confabulation”, a term referring to “the creation of imaginary remembered experiences which replace the gaps left by disorders

of the memory” (MIU, 2).<sup>36</sup> She is nevertheless eager to point out that her “memory is not yet disordered” but that “this exercise in confabulation is a piece of fictional license” (MIU, 2), an interesting remark again hinting at the possible fictionality underlying the nature of memory. Indeed, in *Making It Up* Lively plays with this intermingling of fact and fiction that is so typical for the processes of memory. *Making It Up* is highly aware of and openly expresses its status as fiction so that it can be regarded a metafictional autobiography as well as an alternative (personal) history. One of the major motifs of the book even seems to be its own composition as the inclusion of the fore- and afterwords to every story suggest. The writer’s imagination and the inclusion of fictional elements are used to rewrite history, or autobiography, so that a possible different course of events can be created. Lively fictionalizes her own history, thus distancing herself from her experiences and creating a new version (or versions) of her self.

The author has apparently toyed with the idea of writing an alternative history for quite a while since she already lets *Moon Tiger’s* Claudia Hampton ponder the question whether to write her history of the world as an alternative history. There must be an alternative to “manifest destiny” (MT, 36), Claudia Hampton believes, an alternative to all those choices already made. And her brother Gordon invents a game which closely resembles Lively’s approach towards history taken in *Making It Up*: “I’ve thought of a new game, says Gordon [...]. We each admit Bad Choices and then the other invents an alternative. You concede Jasper and I deal you instead ... um, let me see ... I deal you Adlai Stevenson [...]. By whom you became the mother of a fine son presently running for Governor of Massachusetts” (MT, 39).

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<sup>36</sup> A similar discussion of biography as confabulation can already be found in Anthony Burgess’ novel *Earthly Powers* from 1980. This novel serves as a chronicle of six decades of historical, cultural, and political events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its author also considers questions of literary theory such as metafictional problems concerning fact and fiction. One of its protagonists, the writer Toomey, is to compose the biography of a rather famous clergyman and in the process of this work ponders the discrepancy between experience, memory and the actual writing process. In this context he also considers the unavoidable mixture of fact and fiction to be found in biographical writing. He equates biography with confabulation, a term he explains and applies to biographical writing as well: “In psychiatry, according to this dictionary here, it means the replacement of the gaps left by a disordered memory with imaginary remembered experiences believed to be true. Not that I see the difference. All memories are disordered. The truth, if not mathematical, is what we think we remember” (Burgess, 645).

#### 4.2.2.1 Story complements Reality

An alternative history, though based on facts, is a product of fantasy. How facts and fiction mix in alternative history is emphasized by Lively who frames her stories with a fore- and an afterword explaining the reality that has prompted the story.

“The Mozambique Channel”, the first story of *Making It Up*, appropriately takes the author’s childhood as its prompt. Lively remembers how World War II changed especially the life of those Europeans living and working in Egypt. As the war drew near Cairo and became more and more threatening most Europeans began to leave the country. Penelope, her mother and her nanny left Egypt for Palestine but could have chosen to take the ship to South Africa instead as many others have and as alternative history suggests.

The main protagonist of “The Mozambique Channel” is not an alter ego of Penelope Lively but instead an English nanny that flees from Egypt to South Africa with her young charge and her mother. This nanny, called Shirley Manson, surely resembles Lively’s own nanny Lucy who stayed with her during her childhood in Egypt. Lucy was closer to Penelope than her own mother and, as her memoirs suggest, was the one person her whole world turned around. This close relationship between a nanny and a very young girl resembles a mother-daughter relationship and is also displayed in this first story of *Making It Up*. Lively clearly allows her own feelings and experiences to surface. However, she also emphasizes that what she has created may be inspired by her memories and by historical events but that the outcome is truly fictional. She reaffirms to her readers that “[t]his has never happened. Or rather, it did not happen to me – to us, to the triumvirate of my mother, my nanny, and myself, who did indeed flee Egypt during the run-up to the battle of El Alamein, but not to go to South Africa” (MIU, 37).

Lively creates nevertheless an atmosphere of reality, the story she tells could have happened. It is just not hers. She gives life to a nanny of whom only the nickname, Film Star, has survived in Lively’s own memories<sup>37</sup> and thus allows the fictional reincarnation of a real, a historical, person to “speak for a time, and a place, and a climate of opinion and of behavior” (MIU, 37). Public and private history once more intertwine, but the private history is in this case truly fictional though inspired by reality.

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<sup>37</sup> “[...]; but there was a girl in Cairo in the early 1940s whom the other nannies called Film Star, and by some perverse quirk of memory I know this still, though I don’t remember her at all.” (MIU, 37)

“The Battle of Imjin River” deals with this mixture of public and private history as well by emphasizing the influence public events have on the individual and on personal life. This story is devoted to Lively’s late husband Jack who, being in the national service, was called up to serve in the Korean War. Luckily “[h]e had applied for a place at a Cambridge college” and “[t]hree weeks before the regiment was due to embark, he heard that he had been accepted by St. John’s, and was thus reprieved” (MIU, 98). The young man of the alternative history is indeed not that lucky, he has to serve in the war and, as the end of the story suggests, will never come back home again.

The terms ‘alternative history’ and ‘story’ are truly interchangeable: alternative history is a story, is fiction. Historical facts are reduced to a minimum. And yet, these stories seem just as true as reality. Indeed, fiction appears at times to be even more real than life and history themselves. Lively is able to explain this apparent contradiction in her introduction to the story “Transatlantic”:

To write fiction is to make a succession of choices, to send the narrative and the characters in one direction rather than another. Story is navigation; successful story is the triumphant progress down exactly the right paths, avoiding the dead ends, the unsatisfactory turns. Life, of course, is not at all like that. There is no shrewd navigator, just a person’s own haphazard lurching from one decision to another. Which is why life so often seems to lack the authenticity of fiction. (MIU, 117)

Historiography often seems to lack this authenticity of fiction, too. This is why Lively’s historian alter ego in “Number Twelve Sheep Street”, who is doing extensive research to write the history of a small English town, often wishes that one “could make things up when the surviving evidence is either too thin or too dull” (MIU, 198). This statement in mind, the title of *Making It Up* truly speaks for itself. It can therefore be assumed that Lively would agree with Nobel Prizer winner Doris Lessing who in the 1993 introduction to her *Golden Notebook* states:

I hear that the book is being assigned in history classes and politics classes in schools and universities. This pleases me, since one of the reasons I wrote the novel was that I felt there are blank spaces where novels ought to be [...]. I think *The Golden Notebook* is a useful testament to its time [...]. Novels give you the matrix of emotions, give you the flavour of a time in a way formal history cannot. (Lessing 1993, viii)

Lively’s passion for “enlisting story to complement reality” (MIU, 215) is also expressed in the last story of *Making It Up* called “Penelope”, this title refers not only to

herself but also to her namesake of Greek mythology, thus displaying a perfect combination of fact and fiction by blurring the borders between the real and the mythological Penelope. As a child Lively loved to read and especially enjoyed stories from Greek mythology because “here the most compelling attraction was that I was right in there anyway, with a leading role: Penelope” (MIU, 202). The ancient world of Greece became as real to her as her own and her “mind was happy to confuse fact with fiction” (MIU, 202). However, young Penelope soon notices that “the story [is] not entirely satisfactory. [...] Some reconstruction [is] in order [...]” (MIU, 202).<sup>38</sup> And so she invents a new story, constructs an alternative history with a more beautiful Penelope who now centers as the myth’s main character. The story “Penelope” is divided into two parts, two different stories of which the first presumably resembles the child’s attempt to create a picture of herself as the new Penelope. Penelope in this case is very pretty, gets rid of the ugly Ulysses, marries beautiful Achilles and eventually settles with him in Egypt. Young Penelope’s world and ancient mythology collide and uneasily mix: “So they were married that day and Penelope wore a dress of pink tussore silk from Cicurel and afterwards they feasted on dates and ripe mangoes and persimmons and chocolate ice cream from Groppi’s” (MIU, 203).

The second attempt to reconstruct Penelope’s story is more subtle. The setting is contemporary, the view not solipsistic anymore. Since the names of the characters as well as the general story line have been changed it is not obvious at first glance that the reader is faced with a reconstruction of the Penelope myth. Instead of using *The Odyssey* as her prompt, Lively focuses on “off-stage versions” for the story of Penelope and Ulysses, thus considering “the more unacceptable elements of the story” (MIU, 202) and creates with these elements an alternative myth. Alternative histories are, as this reconstruction of the Penelope myth shows, also a perfect tool to place those long neglected stories and hidden

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<sup>38</sup> A similar approach has been undertaken by the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood whose *Penelopiad* (2005) is a re-writing of the Ulysses-myth seen from a feminist angle. The main protagonist is now Penelope whereas men are reduced to minor figures. Indeed, more than thirty international publishing companies are currently working together on a project that focuses on a re-writing of ancient myths and legends. Several noted authors, such as Chinua Achebe or A.S. Byatt, have already agreed to write their modern version of an ancient myth. For further information, consider Moritz Schuller, “Man kann die Story auch anders sehen”, in *Literaturen* 03/06 (März 2006): 26 – 31. With *Ragnarok: The End of Gods* (2011), A.S. Byatt chose to re-tell the Norse saga of *Asgard and the Gods* because this was indeed one of the first books she read as a child. Her personal memories of this reading-experience are hence connected with her own version of the legend. She turns autobiographical memories as well as personal experiences, which, as she explains, shaped the formation of her identity, thus into fiction and combines them with another story that is part of cultural (public) heritage/memory.

histories of women at the focus of attention. Herstories are therefore often alternative histories, creating a parallel history to the one dominated by men.

### 4.2.3 Re-Shaping Identity

Already *Moon Tiger* expresses the idea that there is no definite version of a life. With *Making It Up* Lively takes this thought a step further and suggests that life is indeed fractured and identity consequently fragmented. By imagining alternative histories she furthermore constructs versions of how her life could have been and thus, in a sense, deconstructs her identity. Just like Claudia Hampton, the main protagonist of *Moon Tiger*, Penelope Lively comes to the conclusion that there is no unified identity but that identity is instead fractured.

This fragmentation has already been pointed out by the author in her autobiographies when realizing that childhood memories seem to be the memories of a totally different person instead of one's own. Lively separates herself now from herself then, from herself as a child. Consequently, she considers her childhood self to be an alien within: "She is myself, but a self which is unreachable except by means of such miraculously surviving moments of being: an alien within" (OJ, 1). This notion of the deconstructed identity consisting of various selves is also a topic of the story "Comet" in *Making It Up* which emphasizes in its introduction: "What I feel is curiosity, not nostalgia. The girl in the bat-wing sweater [...] is not so much an alter ego as another person. I am not she, because of all that has happened since, she is an ancestor, it seems, and I am just one of many possible descendants. I wonder what she would feel about me" (MIU, 142/143).

Lively's attempt to split up her identity into various identities mirrors the assumption that a specific female identity distinguishes itself from the male one by a tendency to be fragmented. Women, as has been stated before, tend to define themselves and their identity not only through their relationships and interactions with other people but also through (stereo)typical roles suggested to women by society.<sup>39</sup> Autobiographies by women

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<sup>39</sup> Susanne Schmid stresses in her work *Jungfrau und Monster – Frauenmythen im Englischen Roman der Gegenwart* (1996) these gender roles typically imposed on women by society: "Wenn Byatt, Carter, Tennant und Winterson typisch weibliche Grundsituationen schildern, befassen sie sich immer wieder mit den gleichen Archetypen: der Jungfrau, der Liebhaberin und Geliebten, der Mutter und der Schwester" (Schmid, 58). In the previous chapter on *Moon Tiger*, I have already pointed out that Claudia Hampton objects to conforming to the typical mother role expected of her from society and instead seeks to define herself through her work. For her, the definition of identity is highly individual. In the upcoming chapters on works by Margaret Drabble and A.S.

often display this fragmentation and serve as journals of the odyssey towards self-knowledge and self-affirmation. Therefore, female autobiographical writing is mainly connected with the author's striving for a definition of identity. Autobiographies of women serve as a means of self-questioning and also describe a leap into the unknown. Therefore, autobiographies can easily be allied with experimentation and with a conscious, yet playful, awareness of the self as fiction. In fact, as Reinhold Viehoff suggests, "[...] people construct identities – however multiple and changing – by furnishing their world with stories" (Viehoff, 185), thus pointing to the close relationship between identity formation, (auto)biographical writing and fiction. *Making It Up* exaggerates this thesis by creating multiple fictitious reflections of an identity. Lively attempts to remake herself by creating a new, yet fictional, self and thus playfully points once again to the ambiguous nature of truth and identity in biographical writing.

Whilst Penelope Lively calls *Making It Up* an anti-memoir, it seems to be more appropriate to call it a metafictional autobiography. Patricia Waugh has given a detailed explanation of the term 'metafiction' which may not only be applied to Lively's bestselling novel *Moon Tiger* but also to the experimental 'quasi-autobiography' *Making It Up*:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (Waugh, 2)

By pointing out that story indeed complements reality, Penelope Lively's autobiographical fiction suggests that literature and history are the twin children of memory.

This combination of (auto-)biography, fiction and history can also be noticed in the works of Margaret Drabble which I am going to examine in the following chapter. With her autobiographical work *The Pattern in the Carpet – A Personal History With Jigsaws*, published in 2009, Drabble has also created what she herself calls a "hybrid" (PC, foreword ix) – a curious mixture of memoir and history of the jigsaw puzzle. It becomes obvious that she uses the jigsaw as a metaphor for the fragmentation of memory and identity as she explains that

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Byatt it will become obvious that both authors also deal with these gender roles, their possible restrictions and how these restrictions can be overcome.

[a] fragmented view of personality and consciousness has been widely held since the days of Locke and Berkeley and their successor David Hartley, and neuroscientists today nudge us even further towards the notion that memory, character and consciousness itself are made up of small, discrete, neurological events, events that build up a mosaic, a jigsaw, a pattern, which we may take for a whole. A pointillist self, made up of tesserae. (PC, 269)

Just like Lively, Drabble places special emphasis on the quest for a female identity and by employing auto-/biographical modes she examines how women on a journey of development and self-discovery eventually reach if not a synchronization then at least an acceptance of their (fragmented) identity. Once again, the jigsaw can be used as a metaphor for the “concept of life as a journey, a pilgrimage, a quest” since in “the larger pattern, all the solitary journeys combine, and we arrive together. [...] The jigsaw, with its frame, is a simulacrum of meaning, order and design. As Nick Tucker said, if you try hard enough, you can complete it. The galactic scatter of inert and inept fragments of wood or cardboard will come together and make a picture” (PC, 338).

In her novels *The Peppered Moth* and *The Red Queen*, which I am going to discuss next, Margaret Drabble tries to create the complete picture by combining fragments of the past and the present and public as well as private history.

## 5. Margaret Drabble – Motherhood and Feminism

Born in 1939, Margaret Drabble grew up at a time when traditional gender roles still seemed to constrict women to “the domestic world of the home” (Gilbert/Gubar, 212) and rather denied them a professional life. Having both a career and a family was a very unlikely combination. This oppressive attitude of a patriarchal society which restrained women’s ambitions certainly caused many a problem for independent-minded women. Drabble had to witness the resulting frustration and unhappiness in her own mother, who, once an aspiring Cambridge student, gave up her dreams of a profession when getting married.<sup>40</sup> It was not explicitly forbidden for women to strive for success in a career, but nevertheless, they were somehow expected to remain in their traditional sphere – and most women gave in to those demands imposed on them by society.

Drabble’s mother, like most women of her generation, thus restricted herself to “a traditional gender role, which placed her in a dependent and therefore socially inferior position to her husband” (Bokat, 102).<sup>41</sup> As Nicole Suzanne Bokat suggests, Drabble’s mother apparently considered herself a victim of the gender inequality fostered by society and often regretted to have sacrificed her education, knowledge and potential for a family life. Soon her frustrated ambitions turned into depression.<sup>42</sup> In the psychoanalytical analysis of the

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<sup>40</sup> Margaret Drabble openly talks about her mother’s depression in her work *The Pattern in the Carpet – A Personal History with Jigsaws* (2009) while also admitting that somehow depression seems to run in the family since her father as well as Margaret herself had to deal with this illness. And so the writer states that her “mother’s angry depression seemed to [her] to be clearly related to her [mother’s] inertia and frustration, which afflicted so many educated and half-educated women of her generation; if she’d had more to do, if she hadn’t had so much domestic help, if she’d been able to pursue a career, if she’d been more active, if she’d gone out for walks, things might have been different” (PC, 172). In *The Peppered Moth*, Margaret Drabble projects these depressed feelings of her mother onto Bessie Bawtry whose husband tries to understand her frustration and withdrawal: “She had indeed had a hard war, on the domestic front. A single mother, alone, in a strange town. An educated woman, with a Cambridge degree, living lonely in a council house, teaching three days a week, turning the mangle two days a week, and reading Victorian novels and country-house detective stories and Arthur Ransome tales by night, night after night after night, in the long blackout” (PM, 171). But no matter what her father and the novel’s Joe Barron tried, Drabble’s mother and Bessie Bawtry became more and more unsatisfied with her life.

<sup>41</sup> Susan J. Leonardi also examines the problems educated women were faced with in such a patriarchal and tradition-oriented society in her study *Dangerous by Degrees: Women at Oxford and the Somerville College Novelists* (1989). She stresses that education was indeed regarded to subvert a woman’s nature or even her purpose in life, that is becoming a wife and mother. With a wink, Leonardi furthermore points out that a woman’s education is a possible threat for both men and women: “Women’s learning becomes a dangerous thing, dangerous to the learned women because it will either make them dissatisfied with their limited role or unfit them for that role altogether, and dangerous to men because it questions their monopoly on production, threatens to undermine their support system, and, worst of all, casts doubt on their necessity” (Leonardi, 2).

<sup>42</sup> In an essay called “Generations”, Margaret Drabble’s daughter Rebecca Swift ponders the development of feminism in her own family. While her mother has been a high achiever who wrote herself to fame, her grandmother “went into depressive flight” because she had not been able to “become somebody in her own

author Margaret Drabble and her novels, Bokot continues this thought by stating that the “mother’s anger at being a housewife” eventually “took its toll on her [Margaret Drabble] and her siblings” (Bokat, 102). Since she has not been able to fulfill her dreams, Kathleen Marie Drabble therefore expected her children to do so and become someone great or do, as Margaret Drabble explains, “something spectacular” (Bokat, 104). All Drabble children were accordingly “brought up with the belief that women should be educated and should have a career” (Bokat, 104) and Margaret put this wish into practice by going to Newnham College, Cambridge, on a scholarship. She graduated with honors in 1960.

However, Drabble’s mother must have watched in agony how her daughter, soon after graduation, chose a path of life so similar to her own. Margaret married and became pregnant. Although she was an aspiring actress at this point of time, Drabble had to notice that there were only few and minor roles for pregnant women available and she thus decided to quit. Unemployed and pregnant, in a way constricted to her home, Margaret Drabble then began to revive a childhood pastime she had always enjoyed – writing. There seems to be a creative and rewarding connection between motherhood and writing as Nora Bartlett describes in words Margaret Drabble would surely agree with: “In one way the connection between motherhood and writing was a simple one: for years I’d been running in several directions at once, and suddenly I had to keep still, so I sat down and started writing” (Bartlett, 10/11). And for Drabble, writing was also her way to stay in touch with the world outside as she emphasizes in an article from 1977: “I was writing my fourth novel by the time I had three children of pre-school age, partly because I had to communicate with the world somehow, partly because I am no good at doing nothing” (Drabble 1977, 1).

The publication of her first novel *A Summer Bird-Cage* in 1963 marks Margaret Drabble’s rise as a successful and prolific writer. This first book was consequently followed by others and many of her novels deal with similar topics such as the restrictions of and the eventual escape from “the bird-cage<sup>43</sup> of female identity” (Creighton, 38). As a child Drabble

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right” (Swift). Swift explains that “somewhere between being a particularly beautiful and promising young woman and having children, Grandma had become a severe hypochondriac and depressive. She had married a local boy [...] and yet domestic life had not, to put it mildly, brought her the satisfaction it was supposed to have done” (ibid.). Her education would have allowed her to make a different life choice but she did not take the chance, as Rebecca Swift regrets. Yet, Swift comes to the conclusion that her grandmother’s and her mother’s fights have eventually helped to set her free: “How many F words are there in Feminism? Failure. Flight. Fire. Fight. Fame. Finally, for my generation, thanks to our mothers and grandmothers: a kind of Freedom?” (ibid.) Rebecca Swift successfully runs a literary consulting firm in London.

<sup>43</sup> Lines of John Webster’s tragedy *The White Devil* (1612) inspired Drabble not only to use them as the title of her first novel but also as a metaphor for the feelings she and many women of her generation, somehow forced

saw her mother suffer imprisoned in the golden cage of family life without having the chance to find complete expression of herself in the combination of family and career. Now, being a wife and mother, Margaret Drabble somehow went through the same. Although she wanted both a family and a career, she still somehow found herself adjusting to stereotypical gender roles. As Drabble had to experience, women in the 1960s and 1970s were only theoretically free to have it all – to go to college, realize their talents, fulfill their dreams, pursue a career, have a job, marry and have children. In reality, the situation of women her age had not much changed compared to that of her mother's generation. In an interview with Olga Kenyon, Drabble is therefore eager to point out that she started writing not only because she was bored and lonely and needed money, but also because she was so astonished how difficult it really was “to be free and a mother” (Kenyon 1989, 45). She was indeed among the first writers to uncover in her novels “the oppressiveness of the role of ‘housewife-heroine’ which denied them [women] a life of their own” and thus mirrored “how a woman's life is restricted by her own and society's attitude towards her” (Kenyon 1988, 85). Drabble therefore used her writing as a means to protest and to voice her anger:

My first three novels were written during my three pregnancies. Being a writer was a good compromise, you could stay at home and be professional. There were undercurrents of rage, though they are veiled compared to later writing. My protests were mild, but I felt I had to express them. This was the first time women novelists dealt frankly with subjects not considered ‘polite’, such as breastfeeding, hysterectomy, wanting too much. Later in the sixties our expectations were lowered, the wit grew sourer. Men traditionally can have both a domestic life and outside work; our greed for both had been awakened and was not being satisfied. (Kenyon 1989, 45)

This statement points out that with her writing Drabble intended to break new grounds for women. In her novels she addresses the fact that women now and then have been faced with the dilemma of how to combine family life with a job and in the context attacks patriarchal society, demanding a change. Drabble's novels not only give women a voice but shed light on the general concept of ‘womanhood’. Women are the main characters of her novels and as such all aspects of a woman's life can be touched upon. Margaret Drabble therefore does not shy away from including in her novels the whole circle of what it means to be a woman. What has long been considered trivial is now important. She openly

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to decide between family and career, still had to experience: “ ‘Tis just like a summer bird cage in a garden: the birds that are without despair to get in, and the birds that are within despair and are in a consumption for fear they shall never get out” (White Devil, I.ii).

discusses topics such as menstruation, sex, pregnancy, birth, menopause, and thus expands the genre of the historical novel and the Bildungsroman by an intimate insight into female history. This (usually very) private aspect of history is also to be found in A.S. Byatt's novels and will again be discussed in the Frederica Quartet.

Thus putting the focus on women seems to suggest a feminist background. However, Drabble is eager to stress that she did not start off as a conscious feminist and did not plan to become the voice of the feminist movement or use her books as instruments of feminism. On the contrary, she emphasizes that she was writing about her own experiences and that her "belief in the necessity of justice for women [...] is so basic that [she] never think[s] of using it as a subject. It is part of a whole" (Drabble in Kenyon 1988, 85). What she was writing was "realism, not feminism" (Johnson, A. 2011) Drabble insisted. Looking back at her early work, she nevertheless had to notice that her novels were indeed "quite feminist and I was a bit surprised because I hadn't thought they were. I thought that was what everybody was thinking. And in fact, everybody was. Women were thinking like that, it wasn't just me" (ibid.). Margaret Drabble might therefore be regarded a natural feminist whose upbringing and education have not only allowed her to notice the injustices done to women but have also given her enough strength to voice and oppose them. But like Penelope Lively, Drabble tries to avoid being one-sidedly categorized as a feminist writer solely. She has nevertheless gained the reputation of being a 'women's novelist' whose work, which often deals with the daily lives of British middle-class women, is considered insignificant and compared to women's magazines or TV soap-operas. This categorization and devaluation<sup>44</sup> of Margaret Drabble's work mirrors a general attitude to belittle an interest in women's life or as Elaine Showalter puts it: "Feminine, feminist, or female, the woman's novel has always had to struggle against the cultural and historical forces that relegated women's experience to the second rank" (Showalter 1988, 36). Indeed, the writing about specific female issues has often been considered trifling so that it is no wonder that female histories have been denied their rightful place in the whole of history. In order to change this standpoint, "it is so enormously important for women to write fiction *as* women – it is part of the slow process

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<sup>44</sup> Drabble's contributions to literature were eventually recognized and in 2008 she was made a DBE. Her literary work can best be described as documents of social history and in an interview she accordingly emphasizes that "[t]he job of the kind of writer I am is to interrogate society, reflect it, jog it along a bit and engage with it" (Johnson, 2011).

of decolonialising our language and our basic thought” (Carter, 75).<sup>45</sup> Drabble agrees and in an attempt to avoid being pigeon-holed, she makes clear that

[t]here is no point in sneering at women writers for writing of problems of sexual behavior, of maternity, or gynecology – those who feel the need to do it are actively engaged in creating a new pattern, a new blueprint. This area constantly verges on the political: it is not a narrow backwater of introversion, it is the main current which is changing the daily quality of our lives. (Drabble in Creighton, 38)

As it becomes obvious in this statement, Drabble regards herself rather a social historian or social chronicler than a voice of feminism, but nevertheless acknowledges the fact that feminism and women’s issues are integral parts of social change. By examining “with subtlety and moral acuity the very tissue and structure of women’s lives” (Creighton in Todd 1989, 193), she brings feminism to the forefront. However, the socio-political undertone of her novels should not be dismissed. Most of her novels are indeed layered with social, political, historical and literary references and even chronicle the spirit of the age<sup>46</sup> they have been composed in. In a *New York Times* review, Phyllis Rose said about the author that she is “the novelist people will turn to a hundred years from now to find out how things were, the person who will have done for late-20<sup>th</sup>-century London what Dickens did for Victorian London, what Balzac did for Paris” (Rose 1980). Margaret Drabble is interested in social issues as well as global awareness and as such enlarges the scope of her novels by considering public as well as private life. The author is keen on raising women from the obscure to the light. This is not only evident in her fiction but is also mirrored in her work as editor of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*.

Drabble started with the editorship of the fifth edition of *The Oxford Companion*, which was published in 1985. She furthermore oversaw the following two revisions in 1995 and 1998. In 1982, the writer published an article in *The New York Post* called “Gone But Not Quite Forgotten” in which she outlined what work had to be done in order to eventually

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<sup>45</sup> Even in 2009 the term ‘women’s writing’ was still under discussion as Rachel Cusk ponders in her article “Shakespeare’s Daughters” (*The Guardian*, 12 Dec 2009). Cusk states that “‘women’s writing’ by nature would not seek equivalence in the male world. It would be a writing that sought to express a distinction, not deny it” (ibid.). Yet, she continues, some women prefer to feel rather sexless when it comes to their writing and “even nurture a certain hostility towards the concept of ‘women’s writing’. Why should she be politicized when she doesn’t feel politicized” (ibid.)? A.S. Byatt also deals with the term and concept ‘women’s writing’ as shall be seen in the chapter on her Frederica Quartet.

<sup>46</sup> Especially the novels of Drabble’s trilogy consisting of *The Radiant Way* (1987), *A Natural Curiosity* (1989), and *The Gates of Ivory* (1992), are known as state-of-the-nation-novels which mirror the progress and resulting status quo of England, hence exemplifying Drabble’s achievements as social historian.

complete *The Oxford Companion*. Again, Drabble is eager to point out that she does not intend to produce “a feminist version of this volume” (ibid.) although she is to add biographical information and analyses of works of certain women writers who have long been buried in obscurity. As a woman and a writer who admits and embraces the literary tradition she comes from, Drabble wants to include at least part of this (female) tradition into the literary canon. She hopes that the times have eventually changed as much as to accept that women have over the centuries been writing for their lives and have indeed done a good job.

However, what apparently contradicts Margaret Drabble’s reputation as a feminist and socio-critical writer is her highlighting of the enjoyment of maternity as Mary Hurley Moran stresses in her study: “While her novels delineate the bitterness and sense of injustice felt by many women living in a patriarchal society, they at the same time dwell on the joys of motherhood, family life, and romantic love” (Moran 1983, 7). Valerie Myer Grosvenor points in the same direction by stating that “[t]he area she has made her own is that of motherhood: pregnancy, birth, lactation and maternal care. [...] Motherhood is a central experience in the life of Margaret Drabble’s characters and maternal love a means to salvation” (Grosvenor 1974, 14). Several critics have therefore labeled Drabble the ‘novelist of maternity’ and the author herself reveals in one of her many interviews that “[she] see[s] motherhood in such positive terms that [she] feel[s] almost embarrassed to state it. [Drabble] think[s] it is the greatest joy in the world” (Drabble in Creighton, 24). And yet, for Margaret Drabble, the depiction of both the joys of maternity and at the same time the oppressive role of the angel-in-the-house, is only on the surface a contradiction. By deliberately dealing with both issues in her novels, she demands a re-consideration of the mother’s role in society and thus follows an “increasing impulse of [mid-twentieth century] women writers to historicize and analyze what Rich calls ‘motherhood as experience and institution’” (Gilbert/Gubar, 378). Mary Jane Elkins points out that Drabble combines her thoughts on motherhood with social criticism:

In these later novels, social criticism is increasingly foregrounded, as children and husbands slip into the background. Drabble seems to be implying that, for some women at least, the problems entailed in mothering are less pressing than in the past, and that women have taken their rightful places in the world and now can turn their attention to other issues. A closer reading, however, reveals that society’s expectations remain – these women are the nurturers, the caretakers of personal relationships, the self-sacrificers. And however

glamorous their work, they remain on the periphery of the larger power structure. (Elkins, 111)

In Gilbert's and Gubar's words, Drabble's novels may therefore function as examples of the intersection between maternal stories and patriarchal history.

Another reason for Drabble to focus on motherhood might also be her own problematic relationship with her mother. In fact, as Bokot emphasizes, "[t]he most powerful force in Drabble's early life was naturally enough her mother who influenced much of her fiction" (Bokat, 12). And Drabble herself adds to this: "One's relationships with one's siblings<sup>47</sup> and parents is something that you're going to write about again and again, in different forms" (Drabble in Creighton, 20). Margaret Drabble believes that in order to fully comprehend a writer's work one should consider his or her biographical background. Several critics have consequently pointed to the autobiographical elements featuring prominently in her novels. Afaf Jamil Khogeer, for instance, states that there are indeed striking similarities between the author herself and the heroine of *Jerusalem the Golden* (1967), "especially in their respective social and familial backgrounds" (Khogeer, 74). Furthermore, the mother of Clara Maugham in *Jerusalem the Golden* is apparently modeled on Margaret Drabble's grandmother, but in many of her other novels the reader stumbles across unsympathetic mother figures who are imitations of Drabble's own mother whom she describes in *The Peppered Moth* (2000) as a "highly intelligent, angry, deeply disappointed and manipulative woman" (PM, 390).

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<sup>47</sup> There has in fact been much talk about the rivalry between the sisters Margaret Drabble and A.S. Byatt. They not only share the same profession as successful and popular writers but also use their common family background as a source and inspiration for their novels. Byatt as well as Drabble have admitted that their relationship can at least be described as difficult. Nicole S. Bokot has even dedicated a whole chapter of her *The Novels of Margaret Drabble: "this Freudian family nexus"* to the "Symbiosis and Rivalry in the Bond between Sisters and Sister Substitutes" (ibid. 55-100), examining Drabble's relationship with her own sister as well as analyzing the sisterly ties of the novelist's literary protagonists. The tension between Byatt and Drabble has once again received attention when Byatt voiced her reservations about the publication of *The Peppered Moth* stating that she "would rather people didn't read someone else's version of my mother" (Walsh). In her half-memoir *The Pattern in the Carpet – A Personal History with Jigsaws*, Drabble consequently brings up this problematic issue of sharing a past. In its foreword Margaret Drabble explains that as she embarked on a journey back into her childhood and wove her memories into a book, she was aware of thus entering dangerous terrain. "I told myself that there was nothing dangerous in my relationship with my aunt, and that my thoughts about her could offend nobody, but this was stupid of me. Any small thing may cause offence. My sister Susan, more widely known as the writer A.S. Byatt, said in an interview somewhere that she was distressed when she found that I had written (many decades ago) about a particular teaset [sic] that our family possessed, because she had always wanted to use it herself. She felt I had appropriated something that was not mine. [...] Writers are territorial, and they resent intruders" (PC, foreword xiii).

In *The Peppered Moth*, the central character is also modeled on Drabble's mother and the novel examines the life and history of this woman by fictionalizing her biography. A central concern of this and several other novels by Margaret Drabble is the question in how far an individual can shape or determine one's future by overcoming heredity. It is therefore a tale of how the past connects with the present and public with private history – topics it has in common with the historical novel *The Red Queen*, published in 2004. *The Red Queen* furthermore shares with *The Peppered Moth* the interest in maternity and mother figures. Both novels show how such seemingly unrelated topics as motherhood and history are connected. The “powerful story of motherhood”, Gilbert and Gubar even stress, “underlies and, albeit secretly, transforms history” (Gilbert/Gubar, 386).

### 5.1 *The Peppered Moth*

“After her death several friends – mostly novelist friends – suggested that I should try to write about her. Use your mother's blood for ink, one of them urged me. So, I tried, but it wasn't easy” (PM, 390).<sup>48</sup>

The author's relationship to her mother has always been a difficult and complex one. In the just as personal as revealing afterword to *The Peppered Moth*, Margaret Drabble explains the problems she consequently experienced while trying to write about her mother. Drabble was neither certain about the narrative form<sup>49</sup> she should use to tell her mother's life nor about the content, really. When it comes to form, *The Peppered Moth* can therefore

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<sup>48</sup> In her autobiographical short story “Sugar” (1987), Drabble's sister A.S. Byatt also occupies herself with family history and versions of it that have been handed down. She writes about her mother and her father contrasting them as father truth and mother lie. In an interview Byatt summarizes it like that: “The story had great formal coherence, because it was about the nature of truth and about the nature of lies, and thus about the nature of fiction. It opens with a description of my mother, who loved telling stories, and told a great many lies – some of them conscious, some of them unconscious – and my father, who was a rigorously truthful person, a judge and a judge of evidence. [...] The whole of that story is based around this contrast between my parents – the lying, fictive one and the totally truthful one, who was dying, and with him all the truth about what my family history had been. [...] And although I loved my mother much less simply and much less straightforwardly than my father, in some curious way she's become the heroine of that story, with all her attempts to retell everybody's life in the way most favorable to her. She is the ground of the fiction” (Byatt in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel 1991, 89).

<sup>49</sup> In *Passions of the Mind* (1990), a collection of essays, A.S. Byatt once again remarks on her short story “Sugar” and describes that she, too, was not able to find an appropriate form for her thoughts on life and death and families, aroused by her father's death: “The formal patterns of ‘Sugar’ rose up before me, seductively elegant, some years after my father's death, when I had spent much time rearranging my thoughts about life, death, families and time. It seems important to say that it was the formal element that came first. I did not find an ‘appropriate form’, to quote Coleridge, in which to apprehend my father's death. Rather, I found I had used his dying – and secretly, my mother's later death also – in order to think about the nature of truth and writing” (PoM, 21).

not clearly be labeled. It is a hybrid, a mixture of biography, autobiography, history and novel, or, as Leeming names it, a “fictionalized semi-biography” (Leeming, 100). Fact and fiction are inseparably intertwined. Being thus an amalgam, *The Peppered Moth* serves as an example of late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century literature where a considerable amount of this cross-fertilization between fiction and non-fiction can be found. This transgression of generic boundaries also points to the metafictional aspect of *The Peppered Moth*. To write *The Peppered Moth*, the author has, in order to give factual evidence, drawn on her own memories, used letters from her father, and done some research, regarding the private history of her family as well as England’s public history. Yet, Drabble makes clear that “my descriptions of those early years are backed up by documentary evidence and by some research, though I have also filled out the record with invention” (PM, 391) and she furthermore states that “[t]he later parts of the story are entirely fictitious” (PM, 390). As a metafictional text, the novel thus draws attention to the ways in which illusion is not only created in fiction but at the same time broken again. Drabble consequently ponders the relationship between fiction and reality pointing to a typical metafictional preoccupation with the real and the imaginary and the possible blurring of those two.

*The Peppered Moth* as a creative genre in-between, which combines (auto-)biography with novel and memoir, cannot easily be attached to one genre or literary form. And it is equally complicated to reduce its content to a common denominator. Margaret Drabble wrote it in order to understand her mother better (comp. PM, 392) and to come to terms with her own complex feelings towards her. In fact, “[t]he relationship with the mother is a theme handled in many autobiographies by women.” Often because “[t]he main obstacle on the road to freedom the woman desires, is her mother and her feelings toward her mother” (Gudmundsdóttir, 118). But, as Drabble points out, her intentions of getting to understand her mother and find peace of mind for herself, failed. In *The Pattern in the Carpet*, she states that: “I had hoped that writing about her would make me feel better about her. But it didn’t. It made me feel worse” (PC, foreword xv). *The Peppered Moth* is a novel about a daughter’s quest to get to know her mother better by finding out where she came from and what life has made of her. It is partly a memoir, yet a fictionalized one. It is also partly a historical novel which deals with the history of a certain geographical area in England (namely the coal fields and the industrial belt of Yorkshire). And it is also a Bildungsroman which centers on the quest for a specific female identity: while the protagonists of the novel try to find “one’s

personal identity through a recognition of one's membership in a family" (Elkins, 119), Drabble does just the same. The autobiographical feature of the novel therefore cannot be dismissed. By pointing to the self-quest that is connected to the biographer's quest for another person, *The Peppered Moth* thus also displays a trademark of biographical writing in general. As a writer and daughter she not only wants to find out who her mother was but who she really is herself and so Margaret Drabble has to ask herself if we are indeed doomed to become our mothers or if we are capable of change. *The Peppered Moth* is a "novel about how we can make sense of our own history by telling stories that need to be revisited and revised" (Conradi).

### **5.1.1 *The Peppered Moth* as a Fictionalized Memoir**

Being such a generic crossover, *The Peppered Moth* clearly displays the problems Drabble had with finding an appropriate way of telling her mother's story. Her internal conflicts can be noticed as well as the "discernible pressure on Drabble's literary control" which raises "questions about the limits of creative license" (Merkin 2001). As Daphne Merkin further enlightens, "[o]n one side are the imperious dictates of artistic intention; on the other are the tempering considerations of responsibility to the truth and of real people's very real feelings" (ibid.). Hence, being personally so involved, and knowing so much and yet too little about the woman her mother was, the author could not have written a factual biography. She could not begin at the beginning and go straight to the end – since she did not know where to begin and where to end. Drabble was apparently not able to gain a complete picture of her mother, but instead her version of her as a whole remained somewhat blurred: "I wrote this book to understand my mother better. I went down into the underworld to look for my mother, but I couldn't find her" (PM, 392).

#### **5.1.1.1 (Auto-)Biography and the Novel**

Writing a factual memoir was therefore not possible. Instead, she re-invented her mother as a fictional character, less hindered by the facts and the extensive research a biography would have demanded, as her sister has rightly pointed out: "The writer of fiction is at

liberty to invent – as the historian and the biographer are not” (Byatt 2001, 52).<sup>50</sup> Already Virginia Woolf noticed the fine line between both genres as Michael Holroyd – who is not only Drabble’s second husband but also a popular biographer – observes:

The biographer wants the best of both worlds – the artistic freedom to invent and the reliance on authenticated fact – to make a book ‘that was not only a biography but also a work of art’, she [Virginia Woolf] wrote. But ‘fact and fiction refused to mix’ because biography, needing facts provided by people other than the writer, imposed conditions in which they destroyed each other. (Holroyd, 37)

It has nevertheless to be noted that the border between biography as fact and novels as representatives of fiction becomes more and more blurry and often even vanishes altogether. Auto-/biographical elements feature prominently in postmodern historical fiction. Postmodern literature questions not only traditional concepts and (genre) definitions but plays with them or even causes a break with what has been accepted and expected before. Postmodernism demanded a “creative response to a set of rigorously considered theoretical and artistic imperatives” (Denman Flanery). It is no longer fact versus fiction or biography versus novel but a combination of both. Ansgar Nünning confirms that both genres, historical novel and biography, have started to fraternize and to complement one another thus creating the sub-genre of fictitious biography. He points out that the historical novel and the fictitious biography share a certain hybridity and an obvious mixture of fact with fiction. Nünning explains that

[d]er hybride Charakter dieser dem historischen Roman nahestehenden Gattung beruht darauf, dass der künstlerische Entwurf eines historischen Persönlichkeitsbildes eindeutig als Fiktion gekennzeichnet ist, aber zugleich auf das Geschichtswissen des Lesers bezogen bleibt. Aufgrund der fiktionalen Privilegien des Romans bei der Darstellung von Geschichte kann das gesicherte Datenmaterial frei ergänzt und literarisch umgeformt werden. (Nünning 1998, 175)

Margaret Drabble is obviously very aware of the differences between fiction and biography since she has not only published numerous novels but also two biographies. Already in 1974 her biography on Arnold Bennett, a writer she deeply admires, appeared. In a review, this biographical work is described as “one of those exercises in chronology of

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<sup>50</sup> After the publication of her novel *The Children’s Book* in 2009, Byatt once again stated her opinion that the line between fact and fiction should remain: “I am also afraid of the increasing appearance of ‘faction’ – mixtures of biography and fiction, journalism and invention. It feels like the appropriation of others’ lives and privacy” (A.S. Byatt on *The Children’s Book* – The Impact of Writing on Families. <http://www.themanbookerprize.com/perspective/articles/1264>)

which the English are so fond – one of those records compiled on the dogged assumption that a writer’s life is the sum of his days and nights, and his days and nights the sum of the meals and drinks consumed, friends well met, and words committed to paper” (Lehmann-Haupt). However, Margaret Drabble is so excited about Bennett that she frequently breaks the strict chronology by including personal aspects of his life and clearly allows her enthusiasm to brim over (ibid.). She wants to add life and colour, flesh and blood, to an otherwise rather dry genre. This is the novelist in her – the story-teller. In her second biography, a work on Angus Wilson, which came out in 1995, Margaret Drabble uses her novelistic skills to “bring a real solidity to the fascinating story of Wilson’s background and early career” (Parker 1996). Yet, as the biography progresses, it may be noticed that Drabble gets bogged down in detail. This is indeed a problem many a biographer faces as Michael Holroyd acknowledges, too. He stresses how demanding it is to write biography and feel the pressure to verify all the facts. When asked by Olga Kenyon if she enjoys writing biography, Drabble therefore answers in the negative. She even points out that the writing of biography is “like hard work. It’s a demanding, specialized task” (Kenyon 1989, 44). Also, she makes clear that she prefers fiction over biography since for her “a novel is a kind of exploration of an unknown goal, so [she] allow[s] [her]self to change direction quite frequently” (ibid., 46).

Keeping this in mind, it seems that, by composing a fictional biography of her mother, Drabble has deliberately taken a step back. Fictionalizing helped her to regard her mother with different eyes and from a different point of view. She could thus approach her “unknown goal”, her unknown mother, from different directions and change those directions whenever she felt like stumbling on quicksand. In this point Drabble agrees with Thomas Jones who said in a review on J.M.Coetzee’s novel *Summertime* (2009) that Coetzee uses the form of fictionalized memoir because “fiction helps to resist the pretence that there are easy answers to difficult questions, if, indeed, there are any answers at all” (Jones).

#### **5.1.1.1.1 The Metafictional Aspect of *The Peppered Moth***

Julijana Nadj examines the recent development of biographical writing and points to several characteristics of contemporary biographical writing which can also be applied to *The Peppered Moth*. Nadj concludes for instance that:

Auch für die Biographie, die als Subgenre der Historiographie aufgefasst wird und die *per definitionem* ein hybrides Genre ist, lassen sich in den letzten

Jahrzehnten meta-isierende [sic] Tendenzen feststellen. Mit dem Typus der fiktionalen Metabiographie hat sie eine neue Erscheinungsform hervorgebracht, die die Ebene der biographischen (Re)Konstruktion in den Vordergrund stellt. Nicht die Darstellung eines vergangenen Lebens, sondern die Probleme des Biographen bei der Suche, der `quest`, bilden den Fokus metabiographischer Romane. (Nadj, 211)

Usually, the biographer, who is on the quest to (re)construct a life, is the main protagonist of the fictional metabiography. In novels like Penelope Lively's *According to Mark* (1984) or A.S. Byatt's *The Biographer's Tale*<sup>51</sup> (2000), the fictional biographers and other characters of the novel often discuss and examine biography as a genre. While trying to come to terms not only with their subject but with the composing of biography, the fictional biographers ponder questions of fact and fiction in biographical and historical writing and understand that they can never fully grasp the whole identity of a human being. They come to consider life a construct, or, as Nadj explains: "Der postmodernen Theorie von der 'Auflösung des Subjekts' kommt daher besondere Bedeutung für fiktionale Metabiographien zu. [...] In fiktionalen Metabiographien gelingt es dem (fiktiven) Biographen nicht, seine Biographie tatsächlich zu einem Ende zu bringen, d.h. es gelingt ihm nicht, ein kohärentes und stimmiges Bild eines Menschen zu erzeugen" (Nadj, 221). In *The Peppered Moth* this same conclusion is discernible. Yet, none of the central characters is a biographer who voices these thoughts but it is indeed the author herself who is the biographer on a quest. It is the afterword which turns *The Peppered Moth* from a novel with slightly biographic background to a fictional metabiography. In the afterword Drabble indeed lays open the structure of biographical writing by pointing to and commenting on the processes of selection and construction.

In the afterword to *The Peppered Moth* Drabble confesses not only her problems with finding an appropriate narrative form to tell her mother's story but also admits her failure in doing so. She thus highlights her own quest to capture a complete picture of her mother and voices her doubts that it is possible at all to really reconstruct a life. Considering this, Margaret Drabble agrees with Nadj who resolves that

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<sup>51</sup> In this context it is interesting to note how similar a set of mind the sisters A.S. Byatt and Margaret Drabble have as their novels frequently share motifs and topics. Byatt, too, has used moths and other insects as metaphors (e.g. in *Angels and Insects*, 1993) and in *The Biographer's Tale*, just like in Drabble's *The Pattern in the Carpet*, the metaphor of the mosaic plays a prominent role. Both writers use mosaic-making in variations throughout their novels – as an image of the structure of the text itself as well as an image of the fragmented structure of life and (female) identity.

Metabiographien betonen die Tatsache, dass Biographien narrative strukturierte und subjektive retrospektive Konstrukte sind. Die 'Unüberbrückbarkeit' (Nünning 2000:30) zwischen dem tatsächlich gelebten Leben und seiner literarischen Aufarbeitung ist ein wichtiges Thema metabiographischer Texte" (Nadj, 213) and "im Laufe dieser Suche [wird] anerkannt, dass es einen solchen ‚ultimativen‘, ‚letzten‘ Sinn (im Sinne einer letzten ‚Wahrheit‘) über einen Menschen nicht geben kann. (ibid., 214)

The inclusion of the afterword points to the metafictionality of this novel and underlines an awareness of the text as construct. The author considers and plays with different literary genres (fiction and non-fiction) and tries to get to the bottom of all the possibilities the medium text offers. In her analysis of metafiction as self-conscious fiction, Patricia Waugh notes that "in providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (Waugh, 20).

This metafictional aspect of *The Peppered Moth* is further stressed by a narrator who at times interrupts the text and its illusion of reality when setting out:

If this story were merely a fiction, it would be possible to fill in these gaps with plausible incidents, but the narrator here has to admit to considerable difficulty, indeed to failure. I have tried – I apologize for that intrusive authorial 'I', which I have done my best to avoid – I have tried to understand why Joe and Bessie married, and I have tried to invent a plausible dialogue for them that might explain it. (PM, 129)

The narrator can certainly be identified as a metafictional tool when we consider Nünning's explanation: "Metafiktional sind selbstreflexive Aussagen und Elemente einer Erzählung, die nicht auf Inhaltliches als scheinbare Wirklichkeit zielen, sondern den Rezipienten Textualität und >Fiktionalität< – im Sinne von >Künstlichkeit, Gemachtheit< oder >Erfundenheit< – und damit zusammenhängende Phänomene zu Bewusstsein bringen" (Nünning 2001, 429). There is indeed a focus on form, fictionality, and reflexive self-examination to be found in metafictional writing which can be expressed with the help of an intrusive narrator. Introducing a narrator who provides comments and causes disruptions sheds light on the process of fiction-making just as well as revealing the text's self-reflexive awareness.

Since Margaret Drabble has already in her earlier novels habitually deployed comparable narrators who try to reach out to the reader and tell of their loss of omniscience, Olga Kenyon asked her in an interview if she deliberately uses this 19<sup>th</sup>-century

literary device to build a bridge between herself and the great writers she admires.<sup>52</sup> Though Drabble certainly acknowledges her literary predecessors, she denies this and explains:

It's now called post-modernism [...]. A lot of novelists do it today; John Fowles, Malcolm Bradbury, David Lodge.<sup>53</sup> What we are doing is assuming that the reader is as intelligent as we are, knows what we are doing and is able to dissent. There's a sort of dialogue going on. The omniscient narrator is disappearing. Yet many people prefer the idea that the novel sprang from nowhere and is completely self-contained, so that you can suspend your disbelief, and believe it's a true story. Even Tolstoy, quoted as the great realist, was always lecturing you, great pages about his theories on history, about Napoleon, about politics. (Kenyon 1989, 34)

Drabble thus uses this literary instrument to uncover the fictionality, self-reflexivity, and constructedness of her novels. Annegret Maack links metafictionality and this sort of narrator not only to postmodernism but specifically to fictional biography. In her essay "Das Leben der toten Dichter: Fiktive Biographien" she resolves that

[d]ie Romane bekommen poetologischen Charakter, da sie literaturtheoretische Fragen nach der Funktion des Künstlers und dem Verhältnis von Wirklichkeit und Literatur thematisieren. Sie stellen historische Charaktere in den Mittelpunkt und demonstrieren gleichzeitig die Unmöglichkeit realistischer Darstellung. Im Rückgriff auf Historie und mit Mitteln des postmodernen Romans, etwa des Palimpsests, der Duplizierung des Schreibaktes, der Betonung der Reflexivität, des Einbezugs von Intertexten und der Adresse an den Leser konstruieren sie auf neue Weise biographische Romane. (Maack 1993b, 171)

But not only the narrator of *The Peppered Moth* admits her lack of knowledge but indeed so does the author herself by questioning the conditions of reality and fiction in biographical writing. By openly acknowledging this lack of omniscience, the narrator breaks and at the same time examines the barriers dividing fact and fiction. Directly addressing the reader,

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<sup>52</sup> In this context, a line can be drawn between Drabble and Maria Edgeworth, whose *Castle Rackrent* (1800) is not only considered to be one of the first historical novels but also the first novel to use an unreliable, observing, and disrupting narrator. Margaret Drabble has thus put into practice what she did when editing *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, too, and deliberately put an emphasis on the connection between women writing then and women writing now. In her *Englische Literaturgeschichte. Eine neue Darstellung aus der Sicht der Geschlechterforschung* (1997) Ina Schabert calls attention to this bond as well when referring to Virginia Woolf who exclaims in *A Room of One's Own* that "[w]e think back through our mothers if we are women". And Schabert goes on by stating that there are "spezifische weibliche Traditionslinien [...], in denen schreibende Frauen über die Generationen hinweg miteinander in Verbindung stünden" (Schabert 1997, 10).

<sup>53</sup> Considering that there are female writers using the same device (comp. my previous footnote), it is striking that Drabble here places herself in a tradition of popular male writers. This seems to suggest that she not only tries to avoid being judged by her gender solely but also that she intends to distance herself from what might be regarded a rather female continuous flow of narration and instead turns to a male experimental and disruptive style of narration.

Drabble's narrator – who is not, as we have to be aware, the author herself – declares his/her ignorance and hence questions in a rather postmodernist manner the conditions of reality and fiction. Through her narrator, Drabble thus stresses the fact-fiction-dichotomy to be noticed not only in *The Peppered Moth* but in almost any biographical writing. She is intent on making obvious that biography depends on the one writing it and that it is consequently open to interpretation, individual opinion, and partial commentaries. As a metabiographical novel, *The Peppered Moth* not only includes theoretical discussion on the problems of writing biography but also suggests a strong connection of the generic conventions of biography and fiction.

### 5.1.2 Public and Private History in *The Peppered Moth*

Drabble, like many other female writers, turns her attention to the importance of the past for the individual. In *The Peppered Moth*, she thus sheds light on the female and private sphere of history. History, collective as well as individual, is important to stabilize and mould not only the identity of society but also of oneself. This combination of both private and public history can almost be regarded a trademark of Margaret Drabble's novels. She is consequently often described a chronicler of the world who vividly documents English history and whose fictional characters "live in terms of their times: her novels can be read [...] as private records of those times" (Plante).<sup>54</sup>

Still, Drabble's *The Peppered Moth* is, like Lively's *Moon Tiger*, not a historical novel per se. Yet, in both novels history is somehow the stage on which the characters act. It influences, shapes, and interacts with the protagonists' lives as Drabble's narrator communicates: "[...] Bessie, like million others around the world, nearly died of the Spanish flu in the autumn of 1918. [...] As this was the first moment in which her private history clocks in with that of public recorded time, we may spend a paragraph or two upon the topic

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<sup>54</sup> And David Plante adds that "more than any other contemporary writer, Maggie has created a London we recognize simply by opening one of her books" (Plante). In *The Peppered Moth*, however, London is not the main scenery, but instead it is South Yorkshire. As in other of Drabble's books the city shapes the protagonists, it is in this case the rural landscape and its history which are directly connected to Bessie and her family. In fact, there is a close tie between geographical area and individual history, and as such between public and private history. Early on Bessie is aware that her personal and family history is linked to the history of the village she comes from. For generations her ancestors have lived there and apparently, there is no escape: "The Bawtrys had stuck in Hammervale for millennia, mother and daughter, through the long mitochondrial matriarchy. Already Bessie sensed this, and already she feared it. She sensed the inertia in the Bawtry marrowbone. [...] The Bawtrys had stuck here through the ages. Cautious and slow, they had not even crossed the grimy brook" (PM, 6).

of the outbreak of what was known as Spanish flu" (PM, 19; 23). What follows are almost two pages of historical facts on the Spanish flu (PM, 23ff). Throughout *The Peppered Moth* Drabble continually relates to historical events and her narrator thus is both a story-teller and a chronicler of world history:

But, in the early years of the twentieth century, things were at last beginning to speed up. Machinery had begun to click and whizz, and in the wake of the industrial revolution came movement, displacement for its own sake and global travel. One short generation took the industrialized world from horse and cart and pony and trap to railroad and steamship, and from that point we had galloped onwards, to bicycle and motorcycle and trolley bus and tram car, to motorcoach, motorcar, airship and aeroplane. (PM, 59)

However, both novels are interested in addressing and questioning issues of how to write history and thus share features of historiographic metafiction (although they are more marked in *Moon Tiger*). Metabiography as well as historiographic metafiction convey the sense that neither biography nor historiography has claims on objectivity, truth, or completeness. Both, being subjective and selective, depend on the one writing it. In *The Peppered Moth* Drabble thus emphasizes on the one hand the intermingling of fact and fiction and on the other that memory, identity, historiography, and biography are only constructs. Ansgar Nünning's description of historiographic metafiction can therefore be applied to metabiographical fiction as well and thus suits *The Peppered Moth* in which those generic conventions come together:

Im Gegensatz zu der Annahme, dass Quellen einen direkten Zugang zu Fakten liefern und ein transparentes Medium sind, das einen unverzerrten Blick auf die Vergangenheit ermöglicht, betonen Romane, die zum Genre der historiographischen Metafiction zu zählen sind, dass Historiker durch die Auswahl und narrative Anordnung des Materials ihre Objekte selbst konstruieren und dass auch historiographische Werke sprachliche Konstrukte sind, die narrative Darstellungsmuster verwenden. (Nünning 1999, 37)

With *The Peppered Moth*, Drabble has constructed a picture of a time. To create this picture she has combined historical fact with invention. She used historical documents, pictures and letters of that time, noted what she remembered and what other people told her. These facts (although we have to be aware that memory can never be reliable) build the frame of the novel and are encased by fiction. In an Interview with Elfrieda Abbe Drabble explains how she mixes fact with fiction:

Sometimes you've done a bit of research, and you can't resist putting it in. That particular bit where Faro [...] and her friend Steve go to the industrial

museum in Yorkshire was based very much on a couple of local history books with [coal-mining] photographs that an old college friend of mine sent me. I was captivated by those photographs. I wanted to use the material, so I wove it in. There isn't a real museum. I invented the museum [because] I wanted to describe some of the images in these photographs. (Abbe)

Drabble also used newspaper articles to fix the historical setting and fuse fact with fiction as the following paragraph shows: "The *Breaseborough Times* published aerial views of collieries and reports of accidents. A 75-year-old man, injured in a fall on a night shift at Bednerby Main, had died in Wardale Hospital. [...] Did Bessie think it odd that a man of seventy-five should be working underground in the middle of the night? [...] Even women died at the pit. On 25 June, a Mrs S.A. Harrison was killed while working at Denvers Main. What was her job there? We do not know" (PM, 124/125).

Drabble structured *The Peppered Moth* as an alternative history and she explains that writing fiction "is a way of exploring things that might have happened and perhaps should have happened but didn't happen. Things that other people might have done and didn't do. I think a lot of fiction is concerned with alternative stories, the paths not taken and how it could have been" (Abbe). Margaret Drabble tries to make sense of the past to better understand her mother and herself as well and in the context exaggerates how the past influences present and future. Turning her into a novel's character allowed Margaret Drabble not only to take possession of her mother but free herself from her at the same time. In an interview Drabble confided that in *The Peppered Moth*, she "was able to see her [mother] very much in context, as somebody who wasn't just a single eccentric, bad-tempered woman, but as someone who suffered the disappointments of a whole generation" (Gussow). In that sense, *The Peppered Moth* even shows traits of what Nünning labeled metahistorical and Elizabeth Wesseling self-reflexive historical novels. For her, such a novel "relates a series of events that have taken place in the past, but focuses on the ways in which these events are grasped and explained in retrospect" (Wesseling 1991, 90). Drabble indeed tries to make sense of the past in order to understand that what happened turned her mother into the person she was. She is also aware that the past influences the present and emphasizes "die sinnstiftenden Funktionen des Geschichtenerzählens" (Nünning 1999, 36). In metahistorical novels, the sense that memory, identity and historiography are only constructs (ibid.) is exposed and "[d]adurch wird die vermeintliche Rekonstruktion

historischen Geschehens als eine Konstruktion von individuellen Geschichten entlarvt, die auf dem Phänomen der retrospektiven Sinnstiftung beruhen“ (ibid.).

Usually, Nünning states, metahistorical novels serve as “Echokammer[n] der englischen Kulturgeschichte” (Nünning 1999, 36) which means that the presented historical events have more meaning to the broad public than the individual. Although *The Peppered Moth* seems to focus more on an individual past and its weight on the private present, we can also draw a connection to the public since Bessie Bawtry’s story is in fact that of a whole generation of women. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the analysis of the past was used to define a nation’s general identity whereas the 20<sup>th</sup> century noticed a shift towards an increasing interest in the individual and personal. Women suddenly began to take centre stage. In *The Peppered Moth*, Drabble turns her attention to the private and female side of history by reflecting on and representing her mother’s history. By fictionalizing her mother’s life and character, Margaret Drabble is able to conglomerate in the figure of Bessie Bawtry the fears, problems, and aspirations of her own mother and those of a whole generation of women facing the same dilemmas. The author can thus chronicle aspects of public British history. While she is eager to give a broader view on British society she knows how to significantly connect it with private and individual history. Hence, *The Peppered Moth* is not only a biographical but also a historical novel, which makes sense considering that biography is indeed individual historiography. Rather than choosing a public historical event to exemplify the development – or the Bildung – of a specifically female identity, Margaret Drabble has turned her eye on the private. Taking a closer look on the private and female side of history and stressing the past’s importance on the individual’s present it comes as no surprise that Drabble’s *The Peppered Moth* consequently also shows characteristics of the revisionist historical novel, a genre often used by female authors to tell her/story and as such the counter story to patriarchal history. Nünning<sup>55</sup> explains:

Zum anderen verdeutlichen viele Romane von Autorinnen, die die ungeschriebene Geschichte von Frauen zumeist aus deren Sicht darstellen, dass revisionistische historische Romane primär als ein didaktisches Medium der Geschichts-, Gesellschafts- und Zeitkritik fungieren. Indem Autorinnen [...] den geschichtlichen Erfahrungsbereich der Frau in den Mittelpunkt stellen,

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<sup>55</sup> In my introduction to 20<sup>th</sup> century historical fiction I have already stated that Ansgar Nünning’s categorization of the postmodern historical novel is comprehensive yet to some extent inflexible. Instead, a hybrid novel such as *The Peppered Moth* proves to be a conglomerate of several of Nünning’s classifications. Generally, in *The Peppered Moth*, history is represented by new and innovative means of fiction which points to an altered, possibly female, view of history, memory, and time.

nutzen sie das Genre des historischen Romans als Medium revisionistischer Geschichtsdarstellung [und] feministischer Gesellschaftskritik“. (Nünning 1999, 35)

The revisionist historical novel tells alternative histories and a counter history to what is accepted as general (male) history. Not only do forgotten or suppressed facets of the past come to light but traditional views and opinions, even the present as such, are questioned and analyzed: “Im Gegensatz zur unkritischen Affirmation vorgegebener Formen von historischer Sinnstiftung [...] zielen revisionistische historische Romane insgesamt auf eine Überprüfung, Zurückweisung und Veränderung vorherrschender Geschichtsbilder und Kontinuitätsvorstellungen ab” (ibid.).

To sum it up, especially women writers of historical fiction have made use of (auto-)biographical elements. Just like *Moon Tiger's* Claudia Hampton, these women are keen on re-writing a history of the world which is in fact a female and private one. This intention might have sprung from a desire to eventually tear down the wall that has once separated public, and as such male, history and historiography from female autobiographical memory (e.g. diaries) as a way of telling and recording private history. Women writers want to neutralize this separation between public and private history and combine both spheres. *The Peppered Moth* is a story of mothers and daughters and a history of mothers and daughters which traces on one plane Bessie's history and connects it to that of her daughter and her granddaughter and on another level alludes to the uncut matrilineal line to be found in life, history, and literature. Yi-Lin Yu also suggests that this “[m]atrilineal thinking provides a family line for feminism and consolidates female strength and solidarity. It is a feminist quest for recovering women's knowledge, history, and culture” (Yu, 26).

### 5.1.2.1 The Feminist Aspect of *The Peppered Moth*

An important feminist aspect of this novel is obviously Drabble's interest in private female history which she brings to light. “Bessie was determined to occupy the centre of the story” (PM, 19) so that the main protagonists of *The Peppered Moth* are women. Men are therefore indeed reduced to bystanders. By denying men a voice in this story, the author ironically attacks and subverts traditional, patriarchal biographical and historical writing as the narrator aptly summarizes: “Christine Flora Barron is of more interest to us and to geneticist Dr Hawthorne than her brother Robert, for she is in the direct matrilineal line of descent.

Robert is consigned (or will consign himself) to a minor role: almost to a non-speaking part” (PM, 131). Furthermore, it is explained that “[h]er son Robert was not much use to her, socially: he had turned into a reclusive academic, a historian rather than a lawyer [...]. Mothers are expected to favour their sons, but Robert had not allowed her to favour him” (PM, 256). Instead, leaving out fathers and sons and happy, fulfilling love stories (except for Faro falling in love and starting a relationship towards the end of the novel), Margaret Drabble here deals mainly with mother-daughter-relationships and thus takes up an essential theme in feminist writing. The author hence turns away from the centrality of the paternal and towards the maternal instead. The figures of father, husband, or son diminish and are replaced by matrilineal family figures. Often a distinct grandmother-mother-daughter-triad is formed which allows to tell the stories and histories of several generations. Yi-Lin Yu therefore proposes that Drabble’s *The Peppered Moth* is an example of this “new feminist family romance” which “builds a female-dominated world founded on women’s mothering activities and experiences” (Yu, 66).

But Drabble also points to a rejection of traditional gender roles and attacks male assumptions, for instance by creating an ill-natured mother figure (Bessie) that shows no deep love for either her husband or her children or her life as a housewife. When it comes to form or literary classification, *The Peppered Moth* is indeed a piece of unorthodox writing and I would therefore agree with Ina Schabert who emphasizes: “Frauen erkämpfen sich durch Umformungen der männlichen Literatur, die ihnen eigentlich Objektfunktionen zuweist, eigene Sprechpositionen. Sie erzählen ihre andere Geschichte, indem sie die von männlichen Autoren entwickelten Erzählmuster durch Verstöße gegen die vorgegebene narrative Grammatik überfremden” (Schabert 1997, 13). Drabble uses (fictional) biography to point to and rediscover female experiences by placing women at the centre of history. Michael Holroyd explains that this focus on female experiences became part of biographical writing with Samuel Johnson who turned away from Ecclesiasticus’ doctrine to dedicate biography to “famous men” and instead advised biographers to “lead the thoughts into domestic privacies, and to display the minute details of daily life – more [...] in the feminine than the masculine tradition” (Holroyd, 22). The same is true for historiography and historical fiction which in due course turned its attention from an interest in great men to a more private and as such female side of history. Exploring Bessie’s childhood, adolescence and adult life, and diving into Chrissie Barron’s and Faro Gaulden’s biographies, Drabble not

only narrates a personal, a family story but roots it in the context to contemporary history and zeitgeist. Following the lives and stories of these women is therefore female history and also shows the development of feminism from the beginnings with Bessie to its culmination in Faro.

From an early age on Bessie Bawtry has striven to enter the male world of education and knowledge, thus breaking free from the roles her sex imposed on her. Already as a little girl she made it clear that she was not one for knitting or sewing – considered to be activities appropriate and necessary for girls and women – but that she wanted instead to broaden her horizon: “[...] Bessie had been a failure as a knitter of socks and a turner of seams, but had mastered the names of the Books of the Bible and the Rivers of Europe, and was good at reciting by role” (PM, 20). She was keen on using her intelligence and feed her hunger for knowledge:

She had, by the age of ten, exhausted the limited supply of reading matter in the Morley Girls Library, and had read over and over again the small collection of books in Slotton Road [...]. Bessie, at the age of eleven, felt herself ready for stronger fare. And at Breaseborough Secondary School, before she fell ill of the influenza, she was beginning to find it. She had been introduced to English Language and Literature, Reading and Recitation, History, Geography, French, Arithmetic, Algebra, Science, Scripture, Art, Needlework and Nature Study. Riches of learning spread themselves before her. [...] Bessie was entranced by this brave new world of adult study. (PM, 20ff.)

Drabble emphasizes the power and importance of knowledge and education for identity formation and female selfhood. At the time when Bessie grew up, this notion was revolutionary when one keeps in mind that the general (male) opinion was still that “the health of the female is not suited to higher education” (PM, 77). Therefore it does not come as a surprise that for some women “it was often safer to seem stupid” (PM, 82) and hide their intelligence. Bessie nevertheless does not care but aims to adopt her teacher’s, Miss Heald’s, credo who urged her pupils to believe in themselves and their ability to reach higher goals: “They must move on, they must gain a better world, they must never slip through the cracks into the slough, the pit, the trenches. They must march into glory” (PM, 35). Miss Heald, born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, seems to be Drabble’s well chosen counterpart to her mother. In an alternative (his)story, this is how Bessie Bawtry would ideally have turned out to be. Since history took away her love – “The Great War and the Spanish influenza had murdered the lovers of Miss Heald and her generation”(PM, 34) – the teacher is now intent

on changing and opening the world (of education) for young girls. She is the perfect and contented example for independence and success who has created a rather solely female world in which men are left outside:

She was happy single. She had a good job, and a position of power and influence. She had worked hard and travelled far to acquire superior qualifications, certificates and diplomas, and was in receipt of a more than adequate income. [...] What would she want with a man? If she married, she would have to give up her job. [...] She was independent. [...] She was modern, and she favoured the masculine, because she was a feminist. [...] On the whole, Miss Heald tended to shy away from the romantic and ladylike, and to go for the strong. (PM, 35-37)

First, Bessie follows that lead and ventures into her “paradise” (PM, 77), Cambridge. Drabble contrasts Bessie Bawtry’s triumphal entrance into the male dominated world of education with the destiny of her friend and future husband Joe Barron whose family does not support his plans to go to university and instead pushes him into family business and the career of a travelling salesman: “No such halfway fate is in store or indeed on offer for Bessie. Nor will she be claimed, as will many of her female classmates, by a future of ‘Home Duties’. For her, it is college or death” (PM, 73). Ironically, Bessie fails to grasp the chance given to her and fails to find the way into a bright future and her last resort is marriage, after all. Pioneering bravely into college and being a representative of her sex is Bessie’s contribution to the feminist cause whereas becoming actively engaged has not been on her list:

She thought of Women’s Suffrage, and almost attended a rally in Barnsley in favour of its extension to all women over twenty-one. (Married women and property-owning women over thirty had won the vote in 1918, when Bessie was still a child.) Bessie was to call herself a feminist for the rest of her life [...]. She was to read, on publication, Shaw’s *The Intelligent Women’s Guide to Socialism*, the first of the Penguin Pelicans, and always claimed that it had affected her profoundly. (PM, 123/124)

And rather grimly, the narrator adds: “There had not been much evidence of feminism in her decision to marry Joe Barron. Perhaps she was biding her time and waiting for the right moment to express herself fully as feminist” (PM, 163).

Bessie’s daughter Chrissie rejects her mother and in fact, her biggest fear is for a long time to turn into her mother (PM, 186/187). And so she rebels, does everything to set herself apart:

There was a perverse, wicked, rebellious streak in Chrissie, which was to lead her to a kind of liberation. She was a shrewd little thing, and she had seen

what was happening. What good did it do you, to work so hard, to pass your exams, to go to university like a good girl? You ended up miserable, cooped up, trapped, just the same. With all your education, you ended up washing dishes, baking tarts, moaning on about the mangle [...]. You might as well have some fun now, as you were going to pay later anyway. And there was fun to be had, in Holderfield, in the 1950s, when Chrissie was a girl. (PM, 173/174)

Chrissie grew up more like a boy, passionate, bold, and reckless (PM, 174), and not like a proper girl of the 1950s, a time when “[m]any of the contradictions of the nineteenth century were still in place” (PM, 187).<sup>56</sup> Getting older, Chrissie however discovers her sexuality and fully embraces and lives her femininity. Ironically though, Chrissie chooses not a college degree, education and eventually a career as her last possibility to flee her mother and escape into a life of her own but she decides to marry Nick Gaulden and have a child: “Chrissie felt, during this wild heyday, that she had truly escaped Bessie at last. She had burned her boats. Goodbye, Mother. For how could Nick and Bessie possibly get on?” (PM, 255) But Chrissie failed in cutting the cord completely and finally, with her divorce, her mother came back into her life.

Feminism now seems to culminate in modern day Faro who grows up and lives at a time when all roads are seemingly open for women: “Faro is a feminist, as women of her class and education are these days. She is not a sentimental feminist, and does not hold the view that all women are good, all men are bad, all mothers good, all fathers bad [...]” (PM, 160). *The Peppered Moth* also deals with heredity and “mitochondrial DNA and the recovery of genetic information” (PC, 299). This scientific dimension of the novel goes hand in hand with a feminist thought since the author addresses “the subject of mitochondrial DNA and matrilineal descent” (PM, 2), pointing to the importance of the female line in genealogy and stating that “[t]he womanly traits live on” (PC, 299). Drabble thus rather wittily combines two areas of research which are often distinctively set apart – feminism and science. This aspect is embodied by one of the novel’s characters: Faro Gaulden whose field is “the History of Science” (PM, 145) and who now works as a writer “for a scientific magazine called *Prometheus*, once a weekly periodical of distinction, but recently transformed, she

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<sup>56</sup> Niamh Baker compares the perception of women of the 1950s with the one of women from the Victorian era and states: “The period immediately following the Second World War, especially the decade of the 1950’s, produced an image of Woman [sic] almost as enduring [...] as that powerful image of the Victorian lady palely reclining on her couch, smelling-salts held delicately to her nostrils. The postwar British woman was more robust than her Victorian grandmother, but she was still the Angel in the house” (Baker). Chrissie Barron surely consciously contradicts that neo-Victorian female ideal.

had to own, into a popular rag” (ibid.). Faro even has her own “Women’s Section called, with a marked lack of originality, *Pandora’s Box*” (ibid.). Thus, Faro is an example for an emancipated woman striving to find a room of her own in a field traditionally considered a male domain. This becomes evident in the topics she considers suitable for her section, such as “[w]omen and transport, women and motoring, women and lead-free patrol, women and waste” (PM, 143). And yet, as feminist and as strong Faro is, she still feels “tied to the table leg” (PM, 142) and restricted by a man who claims rights in her (PM, 141/142). But Faro wants to free herself from such constraints; after all she is, as she assures herself, “a free woman” (PM, 142).

Faro is, like her mother and grandmother have been before her, on the quest to become a free woman. She seeks self-definition and a place in history. In the following paragraph I will deal with her search for a female identity as well as with Bessie’s and Chrissie’s efforts. This personal quest is naturally another feminist aspect of *The Peppered Moth*. In Faro, Drabble combines two of the motifs she frequently copes with in her novels – the need to escape and the journey home.

### 5.1.3 *The Peppered Moth* as Bildungsroman – The Quest for Identity

The topics of mothers and daughters and their relationship with one another make important contributions to the female Bildungsroman. The different developments of different generations are contrasted, compared and set in relation to one another. Comparable to the hero of the male Bildungsroman the questing heroine also intends to ascertain her identity in the whole of family and of public history. She does not need to break free from these bonds but has to or wants to become an integral part of historical continuity.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Aleida Assmann notices these traits of the female Bildungsroman in what she calls generation or family novels, too. She sets those novels in contrast to “Väterliteratur” (Assmann 2007, 73), which are basically male Bildungsromane, and describes the differences as such: “Während die Väterliteratur im Zeichen der Individuierung und des *Bruchs* stand [...], steht der Familienroman eher im Zeichen der *Kontinuität*. [...] Die Identitätssuche der schreibenden Person(a) gewinnt damit eine historische Tiefe und Komplexität, die in der Väterliteratur so noch nicht angelegt war. Das schlägt sich auch in der Schreibweise der Texte nieder, die im Falle des Familienromans stärker von Recherchen angetrieben und mit Materialien aus dem Familienarchiv und anderen Dokumenten durchsetzt sind. Diese Mischung von Stimmen und Textsorten ist ein neues literarisches Moment, das den Familienroman zu einer hybriden Gattung macht, welche die klaren Grenzen von Fiktion durch Dokumentation unterläuft. [...] Entscheidend an diesen Erzählerfiguren [des Familienromans] ist, dass sie erkennen, dass ein wichtiger Teil ihrer Identität mit der nicht selbst erlebten Geschichte ihrer Familie

The fact that “female development is so fragmented and discontinuous” (Hirsch, 44) is often mirrored in the form of the female Bildungsroman. The intrusive narrator not only interrupts the text and its flow but furthermore deconstructs it into fragments. The multiple issues discussed in *The Peppered Moth* in combination with this narrator add to a feeling of deconstruction displayed in the novel which proves indeed to be an assembly of fragments, stories, views and topics not rendered into a final and fixed narrative form. This impression is strengthened by the different time levels of *The Peppered Moth*. The narration jumps continually back and forth between past and present, present and past. Thus, Drabble puts an emphasis on the direct connection and intermingling of past and present as well as pointing out that this is how memory works: memory cannot be structured or told in a linear way. The emphasis on memory as a construct is furthermore a trademark characteristic of fictional metabiographies in which it is often stressed that memories are not stored in the brain in a chronological or alphabetical order – or in any other order. In her latest work, *The Pattern in the Carpet*, Drabble even compares the mind to a jigsaw puzzle and voices her opinion that memory, like a puzzle or mosaic, consists of little bits and pieces, which, in the end, form a whole:

As he spoke, little brightly coloured particles of memory began to scatter and glitter and connect in the back of my brain. Tesserae, tesserae. Click, click, click. Mosaic, patterns, kaleidoscopes, tapestries, pictures. Dispersion, cohesion, mastic, gum, glue. [...] The jigsaw model of experience and of the universe. The model in which scattered pieces from the first dispersal are reunited at the end of time. (PC, 152)

*The Peppered Moth* as such a fragmented text therefore resembles Drabble’s picture of her mother which is built from memories (Drabble’s own, her family’s, and those of her mother’s friends) and glued together by invention and fiction. The breaking up of the novel’s narration and its “complexly conceived disorder” (Merkin 2001) furthermore mirror the concept of fragmented identity as explained by deconstructionist theories:

Der Dekonstruktivismus wirkt sich auch auf die Sicht des menschlichen Subjekts aus, dem nicht mehr eine einheitliche Identität zukommt, sondern das bereits bei S.Freud ein *mixtum compositum* verschiedener Antriebskräfte und Selbstbilder ist, die oft im Konflikt zueinander stehen. Unsere ‚Identität‘ ist so eine plurale Identität; sie ist keine zentrierte Struktur, sondern ein Ort des Spiels verschiedener Bilder des Selbsts ohne festen Grund und ohne festes Zentrum. (Nünning 2001, 103/104)

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verbunden ist“ (ibid.). Applying these characteristics to *The Peppered Moth*, we can see that it is furthermore a family novel.

Putting an emphasis on the fragmentation of the self, Drabble thus “portrays the individual’s struggle for self-creation and self-definition within culturally shared fantasies, ideologies, definitions, and values” (Creighton 1985, 35).

Mary Hurley Moran has pointed out that Margaret Drabble believes “that one’s identity is in good part constituted by inherited family traits and early childhood environment. Therefore, a fuller understanding of oneself results from a recognition of these factors” (Moran 1983, 66). Moran continues and explains that Drabble has consequently sent many of the female protagonists of her novels on a quest to find, examine, and eventually accept their roots. In several of her novels, Drabble demonstrates indeed “the protagonists’ growing awareness of the significance of their heritage” in “an episode toward the end of the novel in which the protagonist pays a visit to her family home and embarks upon a profoundly affecting psychological journey into the past, either her own childhood or the family past” (Moran 1983, 65). Moran already emphasized this special Drabblian concern as early as in 1983. Yet, it becomes obvious that the novelist still occupies herself with the same topic almost 30 years later and it has even been placed at the centre of attention in several of her recent publications. In *The Peppered Moth*, the engagement with one’s own past and the coming to terms with it feature naturally as a main theme. Both the author herself and her novel’s protagonists want to come to a fuller understanding of themselves by occupying themselves with their own and their family’s history. It is obvious that “Drabble thus leans toward an evolutionary view of the individual, believing that people are not as far removed from their ancestral pasts as they usually think” (Moran 1983, 63). In an interview Margaret Drabble confirms that “[w]e are not free from our past, we are never free of the claims of others, and we ought not wish to be [...]. We are all part of a long inheritance, a human community in which we must play our proper part” (Drabble in Creighton 1985, 28).

The formation of identity depends on the acceptance of the connection of oneself to the past and of oneself to those relevant others – family, friends, lovers or even, in Drabble’s own case, literary predecessors. The quest for identity can be described as a process of “coming to terms with one’s past as well as finding a balance between one’s need for personal integrity and a sense of responsibility for others” (Lauritzen Manheimer in Jamil Khogeer, 72). This assumption resembles Penelope Lively’s observation of the fragmented female self that tries to find fulfillment in the awareness of the importance of individuality combined with an acceptance of the self defined by relationships. Margaret Drabble’s novels

also display this attempt to achieve an integrated self and a sense of one's own identity. Hence, especially, but not exclusively, female identity defines itself through the approval of a certain sense of self in relationship accompanied by a sense of self in history. The female protagonists of Drabble's novels usually try to achieve a complete self instead of continuing to live as fragmented beings. The author suggests that some women find the ultimate answer in marriage and motherhood. Although she is thus considering motherhood and marriage a tool for self-realization, Drabble does not want to suggest a return to a traditional female role or "that they [women] are squelching their own identities" (Moran 1983, 80) but rather considers it the onset of maturity when "her characters become less concerned with themselves as individuals and more involved in their family roles" (ibid.). She furthermore suggests that "a more balanced sense of identity" can be achieved if a woman is able to connect and "include the biological as well as the cerebral sides of [her]self" (ibid., 43). And Moran continues to explain that the "acknowledgement of their maternal impulses changes the way in which the protagonists perceive their identity and relationship to the world. Each protagonist moves toward a fuller understanding of herself by recognizing the nonrational, biological part of her identity" (Moran 1983, 43). Yet, other protagonists of Drabble's novels regard husband and children a hindrance and strive for completion of the self in education or a career. For them, economic independence eventually leads to self-assertion as Jamil Khogeer expresses: "These women, attempting to find an identity for themselves, come to the conclusion that self-esteem can be elevated also by education, which they pursue to gain confidence and self-actualization" (Jamil Khogeer, 179). While Drabble emphasizes the importance of motherhood for identity formation and becoming a whole in *The Red Queen*, she points out the importance of relationships and family ties for self-realization in *The Peppered Moth*. Babs Halliwell in *The Red Queen* finds fulfillment in being something like a godmother to a little girl. This relationship to the child and its mother helps Dr. Halliwell to overcome her insecurities regarding herself and her life and lead her on a way to eventually get to know herself. Faro Gaulden of *The Peppered Moth* on the other hand accepts her place in the history of her family and starts a healthy relationship with Steve: "For he is even more what she needs than she had been imagining" (PM, 370). Both women, educated and independent, apparently have achieved a complete self in relationship to others and in the context of (family) history.

This sense of self in history and in relationship to others can be sensed throughout *The Peppered Moth* which not only tells the story of Faro Gauden but the connected stories of past and present, the histories of three generations of women: grandmother, mother, and daughter. Three histories, three fragments, eventually submit to a whole.

### 5.1.3.1 As long as one is travelling – Journeys to the Self

On their quest for identity, the protagonists of the Bildungsroman venture on journeys. They travel inward and outward in order to learn more about and eventually find themselves. For Faro, travelling furthermore serves as a means to free her from limitations and commitment. It is only in the course of her journey to her own and familial past that Faro finds freedom and is able to form a new identity. Marion Gymnich considers this side of identity formation as well and comes to the conclusion: “Eine Korrelation zwischen einer Veränderung des Handlungsortes und Phasen der Identitätsentwicklung von literarischen Figuren ist oft weitaus mehr als ein ästhetisches Prinzip; vielmehr verweist sie auf die Erkenntnis der Identitätstheorie, dass eine Veränderung des sozialen Umfelds und der Interaktionsmuster ein neues Aushandeln der Identität zur Folge hat“ (Gymnich 2003, 45).

Doing research for *The Peppered Moth*, Margaret Drabble returned to the places of her childhood and to those of her mother’s as well. Naturally, the author’s journeys are mirrored in those of her protagonists who travel to places relevant to their own and their family’s history. Irmgard Maassen even refers to this as a typical Drabble device and notices that “a trip to the scenes of her childhood in North England becomes, in habitual Drabble fashion, an exercise in self-discovery” (Maassen 1997, 30). Accordingly, the novel begins with Faro’s visit to Breaseborough<sup>58</sup>, her grandmother Bessie Barron’s hometown, where Faro is not only to encounter details of her family history but will also start the quest for her own identity. It is here that Faro becomes aware of her own connection to history. She is indeed no “changeling” (PM, 139) who has no roots and springs from nowhere, but is part of a line of women connected by their DNA as well as history. The female genes survive and live on as Faro Gauden finds out: “She is indeed a direct descendant of Cotterhall Man, as were

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<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, the novel starts in media res with a prologue set in the present, which is a device often used in the female Bildungsroman and “incidentally, one of the many ways in which contemporary women’s fiction revises classical epics” (Wojcik-Andrew, 27). The male Bildungsroman rather follows a chronological order from early childhood to adult experiences whereas the female Bildungsroman instead consists of layers in no chronological order.

Ellen Bawtry, Bessie Barron and Chrissie Sinclair before her. [...] Her genes had dwelled in Hammervale since the Ice Age” (PM, 358). This evolutionary view of Drabble points to the importance of the connection between oneself and others as well as between oneself and the past. Her view also suggests in a rather Darwinian notion that only the strong (women and genes) live on. But only those who understand and accept their bond with the past and are nevertheless able to live a life of their own and do not allow history to weigh them down, can move forward to a room of their own. Those who have “small, domestic dreams” (PM, 75), like Bessie’s sister Dora, “descend into obscurity” (PM, 125). Dora somehow stands outside the realm of history. Untouched. Faro considers this when asking about Dora’s connection to the matrilineage: “Some of the samples, unlike hers, had not been of Quality, Excellent. Now Faro wants to know who else is directly descended [...]. Auntie Dora must be, insists Faro, and Tom brings up Dora’s name, but Dora’s swab is one of those labeled Poor, and its result is not clear” (PM, 358). Although this total separation from history is not advocated, the total identification with and giving in to history are neither. An example for this negative and “unhealthy” (PM, 162) obsession with the past can be seen in Anna, Faro’s distant cousin’s wife who eventually could not bear the weight of history and her connection to it and committed suicide: “Anna, he wrote, had become obsessed by the history of the holocaust, and had taken to reading nothing but holocaust literature, [...]. She had read her way through histories and diaries, through novels and poems, through Primo Levi and Hannah Arendt and Albert Speer and Gitta Sereny. She had read Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, and convinced herself she came from evil stock” (PM, 380). Drabble certainly suggests that then and now are connected and that you should accept your familial past as well as that of your country in order to know where you come from. But you should make use of the past to choose the right path through your present and into the future. After all, you are free to define yourself and go your own way.

The interrelation between then and now is also reflected in the novel’s construction. The author has chosen a discontinuous form of narration which again points to the fragmentation of identity. Drabble frequently switches between times and places, between Faro’s and Chrissie’s now and then and Bessie’s history. The reader thus gradually gains a deeper insight into the intermingling stories and histories of grandmother, mother, and daughter. Although Chrissie, Faro, and Bessie wish and try to cut themselves off from family bonds and heredity, they become aware – as Drabble does, too – of the everlasting

connection with family (even if it is only through shared genes). Faro, striving to be unique, ponders: “Pity she has to take after any of them. The weight of flesh, the breeding in the bone. Pity one cannot spring from nowhere, or from fire or wind, like a phoenix or a flower” (PM, 64/65). But there seems to be no escape and she thus embodies Drabble’s view that “the individual is not free: one’s identity, perceptions, and actions are in good part shaped by forces beyond one’s own will. The individual is intricately embedded in larger structures, fate, nature, and the family” (Moran 1983, 115). In *The Peppered Moth*, Drabble highlights these bonds and links “reaching backwards into the cavernous recesses of time itself, into the limestone, into the potholes, into the caverns” (PM, 159). Irmgard Maassen also points out that the Drabble heroine on her way to self-realization has to accept that family bonds are like a fate and stresses that “what these patterns of quest-for-the-truth in Drabble’s fiction have in common is that they usually point back to the family, more specifically to mother-child relationships, as source of meaning and values” (Maassen, 35).

And yet, Drabble’s heroines in *The Peppered Moth* all try to break free from their familial past and escape “the straitjacket of heredity” (Leeming, 100) which restricts and denies individuality. At first, it seems, Bessie Bawtry is able to abscond, able to defy genetic encoding and start a new life in a new environment. An ambitious, intelligent and educated young girl, she leaves her sullen hometown Breaseborough to go to Cambridge on a scholarship. The world opens up for her because something in her genes “had set her apart, had implanted in her needs and desires beyond her station” (PM, 7). And yet, Bessie fails to make her way into this new world just as she does once again at the end of her life when she dies on a cruise to the US. After graduating, Bessie comes back to Breaseborough “with her tail between her legs” (PM, 128) and starts “teaching at her own old school, and living home again with Ellen and Bert. She had not travelled far” (ibid.). Apparently, Bessie is just not able to reach new shores. It is not in her genes. Her cells have been programmed to make her unable to leave her hereditary habitat since “[t]he Bawtrys had stuck in Hammervale for millennia, mother and daughter, through the long mitochondrial matriarchy” (PM, 6). Yet, the narrator as well as Drabble herself cannot find satisfying reasons for Bessie’s unsuccessfulness to adjust to a new environment since Bessie from an early age on was determined to escape: at “whatever the cost, she must escape or die” (PM, 6). But like the peppered moth of the novel’s title, Bessie Bawtry is not able to “mutate” (PM, 115) and defy her genetic encoding as Glenda Leeming aptly summarizes:

The peppered moth, which in its Latin name *Biston betularia*, shares its initials with Bessie Bawtry, is a moth which in the south of England is light coloured, and in the northern industrial areas is dark, because the light moths are unable to camouflage themselves against the uniformly sooty surfaces of the north and are picked off by predators, leaving only fortuitously dark siblings to perpetuate their dark genes. A moth is unable to change its spots by will-power alone, and so the efforts of the characters in this novel are unlikely to succeed without help. (Leeming, 101/102)

Drabble herself also comments on the moth metaphor and explains:

The story of the moth seemed to tie in with the industrial world that Bessie [...] grew out of, which was very black and dirty, and how she would want to escape from that. But the sad thing was she could never settle anywhere else. I knew I wanted to use the evolutionary metaphor as soon as I began the book. But it was when I thought of *The Peppered Moth* being the title that I realized I could use it as a running motif. I'd written one bit from the past and a bit from the future. I wasn't sure how to weave it all together. It was actually the discovery of the peppered moth as a link that gave the novel its shape. (Abbe, 2)<sup>59</sup>

Because Bessie fails to break away from the destiny her heredity imposes on her, she relies on her friend Joe Barron to take her away with him: "Perhaps she married Joe to get out of Breaseborough" (PM, 130). She thus chooses a path of life she not really wanted to set foot on. Whereas her just as smart friend Ada still back at school announces that she has plans to marry and have a family (PM, 44/45), Bessie intends to emulate her teacher and idol Miss Heald. In fact, Miss Heald is one of the exceptions standing out from male history – a lightly coloured female moth which outshines the dark male ones. Maybe, if there had been more like her, Bessie would have been strong enough to mutate into a similarly light one as well. Bessie's story can consequently be called a negative Bildungsroman which sees the heroine try and eventually fail to accomplish her quest for identity as her journey can never be completed. In the early Bildungsroman, marriage was still accepted and expected as the heroine's destiny and goal of her quest (think of the novels of Jane Austen or even Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*), yet, for Bessie Bawtry marriage seems to be a failure and an unsatisfying end. Her daughter Chrissie also rushes into marriage with Nick Gaulden, somehow believing it could be an escape from her family and heritage – which, of course, proves wrong. Her

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<sup>59</sup> Considering this importance of the moth metaphor, it appears relatively late in the novel. Yet, the moment when Faro and Seb talk about the peppered moth (PM, 268f.) is comparable to an epiphany of sudden comprehension. A missing piece to the mosaic has been found and Faro, as well as the reader, now see the whole picture.

quest does however not end with this marriage but is revived with her divorce and her journey then continues.

In the previous chapter dealing with the feminist aspect of *The Peppered Moth*, I have already described Chrissie's wish and attempt to break free from family ties. In her youth this desire is suppressed despite her rebellious streak. Her father, though intent on giving her the best education – "Not for her the second-rate female role" (PM, 185) – does not send her to boarding school but to a day school close by. "And perhaps, at the back of his mind, Joe thought that if Chrissie wasn't sent away to school, she could keep an eye on Bessie, who was becoming increasingly neurotic and withdrawn. Let the daughter watch over the mother" (ibid.). It therefore does not come as a surprise that Chrissie's plan after school was to get away as fast and as far as possible and to cut all ties to her past and especially to that of her family. Ironically, to accomplish this she chooses the way her mother had chosen: education. Chrissie applies

to the University of Cambridge to read a degree in Archeology and Anthropology. [...] She thought she was exercising the freedom of the will. She thought she was breaking with the past by choosing the past. After all, nobody in the family had ever been interested in Archeology and Anthropology, had they? It was a new departure, a new beginning. [...] Chrissie thought she was breaking the pattern by refusing to study matrilineal English Literature or patrilineal Law. (PM, 212/213)

In reality she was "programmed to follow in her parents's footsteps" (PM, 213) and so she does. Her next step is to drop out from college, flee into marriage and parenthood. But even these moves cannot free her from her mother but instead confirm that she is not able to break the pattern but is to follow what she was programmed to do. Faro, Chrissie however hopes, should be able to get away: "Faro was young and beautiful. Faro would go far. Faro had no clogs on her feet, no chains round her ankles. She would not stick fast. Would she? The Bawtrys would not claim her" (PM, 318).

Indeed, for Faro the Bawtrys are at first far away, she has nothing to do with them. Faro as a journalist is travelling incessantly and so she asks herself at one point, considering her hectic life: "How many bedrooms had she slept in already this year? Quite a few. Twenty? Thirty? Faro liked to be on the move. Her job took her about a bit" (PM, 137). And Gerda Leeming adds to this that it often appears in Drabble's novels that "some members of the younger generation seem to have escaped from the hereditary or environmental doom that afflicted their elders" (Leeming, 98). Having written a thesis on evolutionary

determinism, Faro wants to believe that “one could rediscover an argument that would reinstate the freedom of the will and the adaptability of the species. [...] How could one, asked Faro, believe that everything was genetically or environmentally determined, and at the same time that all mutation was random” (PM, 146)? Faro thinks that she is a free woman and that her genes do not decide who she is. Coming to Breaseborough, however, changes her mind: “Breaseborough, to young Faro Gaulden from London, was disquieting. Breaseborough jerked one from the banal to the surreal, from the ancient to the postmodern, without a warning. A visit to Breaseborough could blow the mind” (PM, 135). She suddenly discovers her own connection to history. Being part of the matrilineal continuity, Faro even has the feeling that there is more than related DNA, for she feels that she has also inherited a shared family memory: “A memory, just beyond retrieval, like a shadow of an unremembered dream is nagging at Faro. But it is not her memory. The memory is not hers, so she cannot remember it. It is not in reach. It hovers and flickers, with a faint colouring, a rustling, an inarticulate appeal” (PM, 147). For a long time, Faro seems to have lost her way but with the return to Breaseborough the pieces come back together. She knows now where she comes from but is still able to go away and find her own way into the future. Past and present are connected again. Drabble expresses this thought beautifully in the metaphor of one clock that stands still at the beginning of the novel (PM, 3) and another that starts working again upon its discovery by Faro: “Bert Bawtry’s round solid-silver watch is more robust. [...] She shakes the watch, holds it to her ear, and to her astonishment hears that it begins to tick. Its second hand moves. It lives again. It has waited patiently through all this time for her to come to discover it and reawaken it” (PM, 388).

As a writer and daughter, the literary occupation with her mother has proved to be not only an attempt of liberation but also an effort to create and confirm Drabble’s own female identity. *The Peppered Moth* does therefore not only display several fictional characters’ quests for a specific female identity but serves its author as a touchstone on her own quest for identity. Although Drabble could not reach her goal to get to know or understand her mother any better – “I went down into the underworld to look for my mother, but I couldn’t find her. She wasn’t there” (PM, 392) – the novelist was able to come to terms with her family history and accept her mother for what she was. By inventing if not a happy then at least a peaceful ending to her/story, Drabble can finally let go and look forward to a future

not freed from but in union with the past. The pattern of heredity gradually alters in upcoming generations and new possibilities open up: "I cannot sing, my mother could not sing, and her mother before her could not sing. But Faro can sing, and her clear voice floods the valley" (PM, 392).<sup>60</sup>

## 5.2 *The Red Queen*

"The dead weep with joy when their books are reprinted." Margaret Drabble has chosen this quotation from Alexander Sokurov's critically acclaimed film *Russian Ark* (2002) as an epigraph and introduction to her novel *The Red Queen*. And indeed there are several similarities between movie and book. The first-person narrator of the movie implies that after he had died in an accident his ghost now haunts Saint Petersburg's Winter Palace (which is at the end of the film seen as an ark preserving Russian history). Throughout the film the spirit remains unseen. Accompanied by a man called 'the European', it encounters in each room of the palace various real as well as fictional characters of Russian history and the ghost and the living man subsequently discuss Russian history and culture, a talk ebbing between criticism and defense. 'The European' is modeled on a 19<sup>th</sup> century French aristocrat, the Marquis de Custine, who really visited Russia in 1839 and published a rather popular book about his travels.

*The Red Queen* as a metafictional novel takes interest in intertextuality and also in intermediality which is expressed by the parallels between book and film. Drabble, too, has picked a ghost who gives a first-person narration of history and who interacts with a living human being to demonstrate the influence and importance of the past. Drabble and film maker Sokurov alike thence point to the inseparability of space and time.

But the quotation not only functions as an intermedial reference but also summarizes the novel's concern. Like *The Peppered Moth*, it is a novel which deals with memory and what it means to be remembered. Memory is the ark that preserves history, public as well as private. The Red Queen herself needs to be remembered in order to live on. She wants new generations to read her story and help her achieve and keep her place in history. The novel therefore asks "questions about the nature of survival, and about the possibility of the

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<sup>60</sup> A.S. Byatt shares this image of the clear singing voice with her sister Margaret Drabble. In her novels *Babel Tower* and *A Whistling Woman*, Byatt introduces Mary as the only musical person in the Potter family: "They hear Mary pass, singing, singing in tune and clearly, as no Potter ever has" (BT, 469).

existence of universal transcultural human characteristics” (RQ, ix), thus accentuating the influence of the past on the present: “Time past arches over and then threads its way beneath time present. The ancient and the modern coexist and bypass one another, like the curving spirals of a double helix, but they do not touch. They are simultaneous but discontinuous. The path is a metaphor of memory, of the interweaving of disparate strands” (RQ, 337). That past and present stand on two different planes is also mirrored in the novel’s subdivision into two parts. The first part, titled *Ancient Times*, is the narration of the Crown Princess’s history which stretches out its fingers to *Modern* and *Postmodern Times* (part two of the novel). In this second part a different narrator<sup>61</sup> tells the story of Babs Halliwell, her encounter with the past and how she eventually accepts that the past lives on in the present. During her quest, Babs not only develops a new sense of herself but also “the gradual sense that the past must be integrated with new pursuits and the lessons of the past can only be applied by living more actively” (Leeming, 113).

The different stories of ancient and modern times indeed mirror each other and are interconnected as the lives of the two women merge and overlap and Drabble is eager to point out the parallels between time then and time now. Not only is this exemplified in the similar life stories of the Red Queen and Babs Halliwell – both lost a baby-son to an incurable illness and both lost their husband to a mental disease – but also in all of the main female characters’ and also the novelist’s desire for a piece of red clothing. In the afterword to *The Red Queen*, Drabble addresses this (red) thread which connects past and present: “When I was a child, I had a little red velvet dress. [...] If the Crown Princess had not mentioned her longing for a red silk skirt, I do not think I would have responded to her story as I did” (RQ, 353). The two stories of ancient and modern times show how much some things have changed whereas others have hardly changed, or as Guilianna Giobbi phrases it: “The facts of the past are not important in themselves, but in the influence they have upon us, in what we can learn from them, both in the negative and in the positive sense” (Giobbi 1994, 52). In an interview Drabble therefore adds: “This little domestic female detail [...] seemed so

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<sup>61</sup> The different narrators of part one and two elucidate the separation of past and present. Although the past definitely influences the present and in a way lives on, Drabble did not want both narratives to interweave as happens in *The Peppered Moth* where the various times levels and voices merge. *The Red Queen* is therefore a much more straightforward narrative. History is told (*Ancient Times*) and then looked back at and contemplated in *Modern Times*. This second part of the novel, although containing a story of its own, is really a fictional analysis of the past and its parallels and opposites in regard to the present. The distinct separation of past and present narrative also sets *The Red Queen* apart from A.S. Byatt’s popular *Possession*, which ties together a Victorian and a 20<sup>th</sup> century plot.

important to me. I thought it was a clue running through the centuries about women's vanity, their frailty and their toughness" (Abbe). The womanly traits live on, from generation to generation and so "[n]o story is ever finished" (RQ, 165), as the Red Queen aptly states and points out that one survives as long as one is remembered. This is indeed her wish and she wants and needs to be heard so that the past can live on. But her declaration also already hints at Drabble's own opinion that the past depends on the one looking at it. Everyone and every generation interpret it probably differently and consequently a life-story like that of the red queen will never be told in the same way. Hence, *The Red Queen* also occupies itself not only with memory but with history, historiography, and (auto-) biography.

### 5.2.1 History and Metafiction in *The Red Queen*

However, "[t]his is not an historical novel" (RQ, ix),<sup>62</sup> Drabble declares in the prologue to *The Red Queen* and the Crown Princess voices this concern as well when saying about her memoir that "[t]his is not a history book [...]" (RQ, 69). Drabble did not, as she continues to explain, intend to reconstruct a "real historical voice" (RQ, ix) or turn her attention to a real historical setting. To distance herself from a 'traditional' historical novel, Drabble chose the Crown Princess's ghost, who exists in the present, to narrate her life-story. I have already shortly pointed to a comparison between Drabble's *The Red Queen* and A.S. Byatt's *Possession*. Both novels depict the two different levels of past and present, but whereas Byatt merges these two narrative strands, Drabble sets them apart. The novels also differ in that Byatt's Victorian past features prominent ventriloquism, while Drabble does not attempt to resurrect the voices of the dead by imitating them. She does not want to recreate a voice of the past using 'real' 18<sup>th</sup> century language, vocabulary, or style. A.S. Byatt has once stated that "any writer, when reading, starts a kind of ghostly parody" and asks him-/herself

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<sup>62</sup> A similar statement can also be found in John Fowles' *A Maggot* (1985) of which its author insists that it is no historical novel. Like Margaret Drabble, he apparently rejects the older or traditional sense of historical fiction fearing to slip down into triviality. In fact, Fowles' novel is an early example of historiographic metafiction which poses questions on the narrative form of historical knowledge and examines the nature of history and historiography. It can be regarded a historical novel that re-defines the genre by re-conceiving historiography as a critical practice concerned not only with addressing social and/or political issues of the present but also with offering an objective depiction of the past. In her Yale University Talk, Penelope Lively also stresses that she does not consider her novel *Moon Tiger* a historical novel. She explains this by pointing out that the main section of the book is not set in the past and that a general emphasis is put on the present. Lively is also eager, as Drabble seems to be as well, to set herself apart from "full-blown historical novels" such as Georgette Heyer's which not only gave the historical novel a bad name but are in fact not really about the past. Historical fiction should be concerned with a serious consideration of the past and Lively names John Fowles' *French Lieutenant's Woman* as an example of such great and approvable historical fiction.

“can I do this kind of sentence?” (Reynolds/Noakes, 19) Drabble, who read the red queen’s accounts and various other books about her and her life and times, came to the conclusion that she would not be able to speak in the queen’s voice but had to use her own. However, the use of this ghostly narrator nevertheless exemplifies how a reader can be haunted by what he/she reads: “[o]ne is haunted by the rhythms of the speech, and therefore of the thought of dead people. And the rhythms get into your blood and this is the way a ghost would get into your body” (Reynolds/Noakes, 28). Having chosen a ghost who exists in modern times as a narrator thus cleverly hints at ventriloquism and at the same time serves as a pun on it. By resurrecting an indeed dead voice to tell her story, Margaret Drabble has taken the term ‘ventriloquism’ quite literally.

What seemed to be important to Drabble was to emphasize the influence of the past on the present, an intention that corresponds with what her sister A.S. Byatt once said of Margaret: “My sister, Margaret Drabble, in an address to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, spoke out against the ‘nostalgia/heritage/fancy dress/costume drama industry’. She believes passionately that it is the novelist’s duty to write about the present [...]” (Byatt 2000, 9). This suggests that, when Drabble is confronted with the term ‘historical novel’, she might, like many others, “think of a loosely defined, outmoded genre practiced by Sir Walter Scott, Leo Tolstoy, and Barbara Cartland: a product of romanticism, nationalism, and the nineteenth century’s enthusiasm for history” (Scanlan, 3). Shying away from this, Drabble has nevertheless created an “other historical novel”, as Scanlan describes it, a historical novel that is “skeptical, ironic, and ‘discontinuous’, seeking to exploit rather than cover up the boundaries between history and fiction” (ibid.).

*The Red Queen* was therefore indeed a departure for Drabble who has never before written a story set so far back in time. Admitting that, although she has done research to learn more about that particular time in history and about Korean culture, she has made intentional but also inadvertent mistakes concerning her historical material (RQ, viii), Margaret Drabble denies that she has composed a documentary historical novel.<sup>63</sup> Yet, at

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<sup>63</sup> Nünning names certain characteristics which distinguish the documentary historical novel: “Der Typus des dokumentarischen historischen Romans zeichnet sich dadurch aus, dass quellenmässig belegbare geschichtliche Ereignisse und Personen im Zentrum stehen. [...] Hauptkennzeichen sind eine sehr hohe Zahl und Streubreite von Realitätsreferenzen, die den Akzent auf die Darstellung einer außertextuellen Wirklichkeit legen. Damit geht eine Tendenz zur Verschleierung der Fiktionalität einher“ (Nünning 1999, 26). Although Lady Hyegyong is a real historical person, Drabble does not conform with the documentary historical novel’s tendency to masquerade its fictionality. As we shall see later on in this chapter, it is quite to the contrary in *The Red Queen*.

least the first part of *The Red Queen* is undeniably an historical narrative and, taking a closer look at various definitions of the term 'historical novel', Drabble's declaration can in fact not stand its ground. David Cowart, for instance, explains: "I myself prefer to define historical fiction simply and broadly as fiction in which the past figures with some prominence. [...] Thus I count as historical fiction any novel in which a historical consciousness manifests itself strongly in either the characters or the action" (Cowart, 6). Amy Elias goes into more detail and summarizes three primary characteristics of the historical novel:

- a) specific historical detail, featured prominently, is crucial to plot or character development or some experimental representation of these narrative attributes;
- b) a *sense* of history informs all facets of the fictional construct (from authorial perspective to character development to selection of place); and
- c) this sense of history emerges from and is constructed by the text itself and requires the text to participate in and differentiate itself from other discourses of various generic kinds that attempt to give a name to history. (Elias 2001, 415)

*The Red Queen*, embodying several of the genre's characteristics, is indeed a historical novel. It is, with the words of Richard Todd, one of those novels "that take place in an historical period juxtaposed with the 'present', and write back into history (thus *augmenting* it) those voices, often but not exclusively those of women, that have been excluded by patriarchal, societal and colonial tradition, literary tradition and interpretation" (Todd 1996, 204/205).

### 5.2.1.1 History and Her/Story in *The Red Queen*

*The Red Queen* features a prominent feminist subtext. Having chosen to retell the memoirs of a woman, Drabble once again pays attention to the private and female side of history. She has plucked the Crown Princess from obscurity and given her a name, thus allocating her a place in history. "In its treatment of women, our society and our civilization resembled most that the world has known. These days, women sift through the sands of the past time for cultures when women were learned and held power, but they have not yet discovered much" (RQ, 35/36), explains the Crown Princess and gives a reason why her life should not be forgotten.

Yet, Margaret Drabble, although positioning female characters at the centre of her story, wants to distance herself again from conscious feminism. Through her ghostly narrator

we can hear Drabble's own voice stating that she is indeed no fan of the term 'her/story': "I am not [...] modern enough to adopt the word 'her-story', in place of 'his-tory'" (RQ, 4) and she keeps on rambling that it is a "false, whimsical, and, to my ear, ugly etymology" (ibid.). Yet, she has to admit that it is suitable in this case since the Red Queen is "a prime and occasionally quoted example of the new '*her-story*'" (ibid.). The Red Queen recounts her life by enriching public with private history. She thus gives details of Korean court life as well as an insight into her own "imprisoned and privileged life" (RQ, 30). During her lifetime, the Korean Crown Princess was restricted by the palace walls and cut off from the rest of her country and the world. In her afterlife she therefore tries to connect herself to world history by comparing herself with other royals and even competing with them. Especially Marie Antoinette is her chosen touchstone: "Oh yes, alas, we compete beyond the grave" (RQ, 107).

Not only does the Crown Princess want to be remembered but she also wants her offspring (her grandson, whom she directly addresses, seems of special importance to her) and the broad public to know her real story – how it really was and not what the history books tell. In fact, she finds fault with historiography which tends to recount only facts or reduce events to short and empty paragraphs. "[...] some historians have reduced the whole of this period to this single sentence [...]" (RQ, 148), she consequently accuses historiographers: "'A power struggle for the succession.' 'The tragic story of a succession dispute.' That is how the history books and the *Encyclopedia Britannica* calmly describe these confused events" (RQ, 123). But history is not calm, there is fear, anger, passion, tumult, chaos; therefore "[...] – how can history keep a reliable account" (RQ, 124)?

The ghost of the Red Queen admits that her account, although unique, is not always reliable for her memory has been infused and confused by newly acquired knowledge. The Crown Princess's view of the past is nevertheless her own, and differs from others just as all accounts of what happened always do. History has indeed been re-written, re-shaped, and edited into many versions. Is there an ultimate truth, the Crown Princess therefore asks, or are there many truths?

### 5.2.1.2 *The Red Queen* as Historiographic Metafiction

Not only is *The Red Queen* a historical novel, but its occupation with the truth in historical writing already points to a metafictional level as well. Margaret Drabble has added an afterword to *The Peppered Moth* in order to explain why she wrote this book and why she composed it the way it is. She does the same in a prologue to *The Red Queen*. And again the author points out that she has not written a factual memoir but instead took her novelistic liberties with the genre of (auto-)biography. “Novelists”, the narrator of the second part of the novel entrusts to the reader and thus mirrors Drabble’s own view, “[...] are not to be trusted. They steal; they borrow; they appropriate” (RQ, 351). As a novelist, Margaret Drabble has taken up the Red Queen’s story and given a new form to it. She has read the real Korean Crown Princess’s (for, in fact, Lady Hyegyong has never been queen of her country) memoirs and by adding invention and interpretation she turned them into a novel. Drabble has indeed turned history into fiction and thus deliberately questions if there is an ultimate truth in historiography and biography. Or, is it all story-telling? The author is therefore eager to point to the fact-fiction-dichotomy in historical writing and to admit her own, the novelist’s, voice in this story: “I do not know whether the Crown Princess loved her children, her husband or her father-in-law. I can only speculate. We know what custom dictated, but we do not know how fully custom was followed” (RQ, x). There are historical facts and there are gaps which can only be filled with fiction. Drabble voices in her prologue that she has done some research regarding Korean history in order to place the Crown Princess in a more or less correct setting of time and place. This is emphasized by the inclusion of a bibliography. Yet, Drabble is also ready to point out that “Professor Haboush, whose work first introduced me to this material, does not endorse my interpretation” (RQ, viii) and that Haboush as a historian wishes “to dissociate herself [...] from this work of fiction and fancy” (ibid.). Margaret Drabble’s inclusion of this bibliography and her various references to the books she herself has read as well as naming books her protagonists and the ghost have consulted<sup>64</sup> point to an important aspect of metafiction – paratextuality. Texts illuminate each other and the given text can thus be related to other literary texts or

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<sup>64</sup> Drabble’s is therefore a prime example of a historical novel considering that “[h]istorical novels are obsessed with paratexts: footnotes, additions, acknowledgements, bibliographies, author information, maps” (de Groot, 63). And Jerome de Groot adds that “[f]rom these materials we can garner a huge amount of information about the text itself, how it is being presented and represented” (ibid). Thus the work – a fictional account completed with historical information – conveys a certain authenticity while at the same time being self-conscious about its artificiality.

generic conventions or social discourses. Reading and writing are of considerable importance to the characters of *The Red Queen* just as they are to the author of the novel. Since Babs reads the Crown Princess's memoirs, tells Margaret Drabble about them who eventually writes about them, the relationship between past and present is indeed experienced through reading and writing, a notion which points again to the quotation from *The Russian Ark* at the beginning of the novel. A.S. Byatt further points out that "the genre of the ghost story" is "an embodiment of the relations between readers and writers, between the living words of dead men and the modern conjurers of their spirits" (HS, 43). The novel also refers to a film and thus draws parallels between film and text as well. Historiography and auto-/biography clearly depend on the one writing them, especially the latter, since memory is always subjective and mirrors one person's mind. But Drabble also suggests that they rely on the one reading and at times, re-telling, them for "there are (and have been) many possible interpretations of the story, and mine is only one of them" (RQ, viii). The emphasis on the reader as well as on the act of reading is also a feature of metafictionality since in metafictional texts the reader is often directly (as in *The Peppered Moth*) or indirectly addressed and thus been made part of the whole process of fiction-making. In metafictional writing the relationship between writer, character, plot and reader is put to the forefront. Drabble has therefore included herself as a reader and a writer while thus emphasizing how historiography and fiction is interpreted and constructed. Metafiction, it has to be noted, simultaneously creates fiction and makes a statement about the creation of that fiction (comp. Hutcheon 1983, 6).

Historiography is never complete nor its composer omniscient. Instead it is open to individual opinion and interpretation. This is also emphasized by the ghost of the Crown Princess, who functions as the narrator of the first part of *The Red Queen*, titled "Ancient Times": "I will narrate what I take to be the facts, as I have been told them, and I will add some of my memories, though I am well aware that personal memories may be reinforced or undermined to the point of disbelief by family memory. None of us has full access to even our own stories" (RQ, 7). This disembodied spirit of the Red Queen exists in our times, reads newspapers and books, and surfs the internet. She uses all of these sources to refurbish her life-story, draw comparisons and explain in retrospect (e.g. RQ, 12; 20; 46), just as historiographers and also novelists do. However, she is, as Gerda Leeming summarizes, not "able to see hidden events or personal motives, so her account remains, as the real author in

the prologue says, merely one of many possible interpretations” (Leeming, 110). To stress the unreliability of the historiographer/biographer, Drabble has chosen a ghost as the narrator of Lady Hyegyong’s memoir. The ghost’s narrative is moreover told from the first person’s point of view and is hence “preoccupied with the desirability and impossibility of objectivity and truthfulness” (HS, 102). Drabble thus also turns away from a claim to truthfulness in historical narrative and instead once again emphasizes its fictionality. The author further explains that “by making her [the Red Queen] able to comment posthumously on her own life, [Drabble] was able to explore the modern world too. One of the books [the author] read while writing this novel was Mark Twain’s brilliant and extraordinary fantasy, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, which explores similar questions of cultural relativism and cultural identity, and uses time travel to satirize the United States in the nineteenth century” (interview with Drabble: [www.harcourtbooks.com/authorinterviews/booksinterview\\_Drabble.asp](http://www.harcourtbooks.com/authorinterviews/booksinterview_Drabble.asp)). In combination with the prologue, the afterword, and the bibliography, this narrator pinpoints *The Red Queen’s* metafictional aspect. Considering once again Ansgar Nünning’s introduction to historiographic metafiction, it becomes clear that *The Red Queen* follows along those lines and sets itself apart from the documentary historical novel:

Ebenso wie im Zuge der von Arthur Danto, Michel Foucault, Dominick LaCapra, Hayden White u.a. initiierten Debatten das Objektivitätsideal des Historismus durch die Einsicht in die Subjektabhängigkeit, Theoriegebundenheit und Konstruktivität der Historiographie ersetzt worden ist, schärfen auch die für historiographic metafiction kennzeichnenden metahistoriographischen Reflexionen das Bewusstsein dafür, dass die geschichtliche Welt dem Historiker nicht direkt zugänglich ist, sondern nur in sprachlich vermittelter Form von Beschreibungen. Im Gegensatz zu der Annahme, dass Quellen einen direkten Zugang zu Fakten liefern und ein transparentes Medium sind, das einen unverzerrten Blick auf die Vergangenheit ermöglicht, betonen [solche] Romane [...], dass Historiker durch die Auswahl und narrative Anordnung des Materials ihre Objekte selbst konstruieren und dass auch historiographische Werke sprachliche Konstrukte sind, die narrative Darstellungsmuster verwenden. (Nünning 1999, 37)

Drabble has chosen two different narrators for the two distinct parts of her novel. Whereas the ghost tells the Red Queen’s story in the past tense, the third-person narrator of the second part aptly uses present tense. Besides these two narrators, Drabble has also included her own voice, that of the real author, to narrate the prologue and the afterword. She furthermore introduces herself as a character towards the end of the novel (RQ, 349),

inhabiting a sort of “cameo role” (Leeming, 111). Drabble’s character befriends Barbara Halliwell and gets introduced by her to the story of the Red Queen: “The novelist had dutifully read the memoirs of the Crown Princess, and had professed herself as struck by them as Babs herself had been. In a way, Babs now feels she has handed over the Crown Princess to a suitable recipient and can forget about her” (RQ, 350).<sup>65</sup> Deciding to write about her, Drabble indeed functions as the Red Queen’s ghost-writer. Consequently, as Kathleen Coyne Kelly points out, “[i]n this novel, [...] the author – or the text, if you prefer – challenges us to rethink our expectations about texts and textuality and to contemplate the very nature of making fiction” (Kelly, xii). With its focus on form, fictionality, and reflexive self-examination, *The Red Queen* uncovers the process of creation and construction of an artifact.

### 5.2.2 The Quest for Identity in *The Red Queen*

As has been noted, *The Red Queen* is a novel which cross-breeds various narrative modes, forms, genres, and techniques thus being an example of the contemporary novel which cannot be easily classified anymore (comp. Gasiorek, 19). As much as Margaret Drabble plays with metafictionality, intertextuality, and different literary forms, she always seems to come back to the same topics so frequently found in her writings, one of them being motherhood. In most of Drabble’s novels motherhood is an influential aspect of female identity, or as Olga Kenyon stresses: “For her [Drabble] the great discovery of self comes through the complex reactions of being a mother” (Kenyon 1988, 88). It therefore does not come as a surprise that Barbara Halliwell’s life seems to crumble into pieces with the death of her son. Furthermore, she is deprived of her husband by a mental illness that requires institutionalization. She was once a mother and a wife, but both roles have been taken away from her. What remains is her scholarly life and her career, which seem to fulfill her and allot her a place in the world. Barbara is both an independent and capable woman in her forties.

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<sup>65</sup> In an interview Drabble describes how she accidentally came across the memoirs of the real Red Queen and how this woman’s life story haunted her: “I was invited to speak at a literary conference in Seoul, South Korea, in 2000, and so before I went I visited the British Museum to look at the Korean antiquities and to talk to one of the experts there. She happened to tell me about the memoirs, and I bought a copy through Amazon and was completely gripped by this extraordinary story. [...] this recommendation had a very great impact on me and obsessed me for years of my life. I read everything I could find about the crown princess and her period, including other versions of her memoirs, and I found I could not get story out of my head” ([http://www.harcourtbooks.com/authorinterviews/bookinterview\\_Drabble.asp](http://www.harcourtbooks.com/authorinterviews/bookinterview_Drabble.asp)).

It is only when the Red Queen, or her ghost, enters Babs' life that she begins to question who she is, where she stands and what she wants in life. With the ghost, that takes hold of her, comes confusion in Barbara's life and she is put to test. Gerda Leeming further explains that Babs now has to pursue "meaning amid a confused mass of accidents" (Leeming, 112) and coincidences which are in fact part of the comic side of *The Red Queen*, subtitled *A Transcultural Tragicomedy* by its author.

The life-story of the Red Queen herself is the rather tragic counterpart. Restricted by her time and culture, she never had the chance to find an identity of her own. Instead it was somehow allocated to her. Being married as a child and removed from her family, she had to struggle to find her place in the royal palace where affairs and intrigue made life dangerous. Her first son died as a baby, her husband, feeling suppressed and tortured by his father, became mentally ill and was eventually sentenced to death by his own father. The way he died, locked up in a rice-chest and damned to starvation, was gruesome. The Crown Princess, without allies, but also somewhat independent and brave, afterwards tried to find refuge and fulfillment in motherhood and later on in the role of grandmother.

It is again a journey which marks the first stage of Dr Barbara Halliwell's quest for identity. For Babs it is a journey into the unknown, whereas for the ghost of the Red Queen it is a journey home. Being possessed by the Crown Princess's ghost, Babs follows her steps into the past and discovers its direct influence on the present. Her fascination with the past also brings back love and sex into her life and Babs Halliwell once again feels like a woman, a role she hasn't assumed in a while hiding in her scholarly life and under a veil of grief. While in Korea Babs meets Jan van Jost, shares with him her attraction to the Red Queen and her life, and begins a passionate love affair with Jan, which ends with his unexpected death. Yet, this strange encounter is a revelation to Babs since Jan has told her about his and his wife's wish to adopt a Chinese baby. He confides in Barbara that he has already, unbeknownst to his wife, spent some money to make the adoption possible. After his sudden death, Babs is the only one who knows about this baby and back in England she not only changes everything about her former life but eventually contacts Viveca van Jost to tell her about her late husband's plans. Between these two different women a functional comradeship develops and together they are able to finally adopt the little Chinese girl, which eventually seems to balance the loss of Barbara's and the Crown Princess's infants. Above all of this lingers the

ghost of the Red Queen who not only finds a new envoy in the toddler but is in a sense reborn for she knows that this girl will carry her history on: "She is imperial in her demeanor, and queenly in her expectations. The Crown Princess observes her new heir with satisfaction. Her interests will be safe with her" (RQ, 343). Thus, through a mixture of coincidence, fate and luck, Babs once again finds fulfillment in motherhood. Her life seems to be complete and is hers alone once again. The Red Queen is appeased, too, for she knows that the female line will continue and her story will live on. The ark of memory will continue its journey.

Drabble's novels clearly emphasize the influence of the past on the present. Discovering history and accepting one's roots is an essential step on the road towards the development of identity.

In the following chapter I will take a closer look at selected novels by A.S. Byatt. Since she is Margaret Drabble's sister and a main representative of contemporary British literature, her work and her literary views have already made an entrance in this chapter on *The Peppered Moth* and *The Red Queen*. Byatt, too, holds the opinion "that we cannot understand the present if we do not understand the past that preceded and produced it" (HS, 11), thus pointing to an important aspect of her own novels. Memory and history, historiography and biography are also topics she frequently deals with. In 2001, A.S. Byatt even published a collection of essays in which she further examines these subjects and their relationship in literature. The gathering of these selected essays is aptly named *On Histories and Stories*, already pointing at the combination of fact and fiction in historical writing.

## 6. A. S. Byatt – Independence and Creativity

From an early age on, Antonia Susan Byatt, born in August 1936, developed a profound passion for literature and a life-long fascination with language. Growing up in a very well-read family – her mother a teacher of English and her father an amateur writer – Byatt and her siblings (she has two sisters and one brother) spent a childhood filled with reading and writing, nurtured on their parents' library. Introducing her sister Margaret Drabble in the previous chapter, I have already stated that intellectual achievement was indeed highly valued in the Drabble household. Byatt's interest in literature and books, but also in art and music, was consequently encouraged and promoted. The more she read, A.S. Byatt soon noticed, the more she also wanted to write: "From my early childhood, reading and writing seemed to me to be points on a circle. Greedy reading made me want to write, as if this were the only adequate response to the pleasure and power of books" (PoM, xiii). This desire to tell a story of one's own and make one's voice heard is also expressed by Penelope Lively and Esther Freud whose early reading experiences prompted a similar strife to write.

For Byatt, who went to Newnham College, Cambridge, to study English and who eventually graduated with honours, teaching became another point on the circle built of reading and writing. She emphasizes the close relationship of these three aspects when stating that she has "always felt that reading and writing and teaching were all part of some whole that it was dangerous to disintegrate" (HS, 93). Byatt's own deep emotions concerning reading, writing and teaching are also embodied in the main character of the *Frederica Quartet*, Frederica Potter, who in a moment of epiphany, of almost mythical revelation, discovers what really is the essence of her life:

She felt something she had always supposed was mythical, the fine hairs on the back of her neck rising and pricking in a primitive response to a civilised perfection, body recognising mind. [...] And at that moment, she knew what she should do was teach, for what she understood – the thing she was both by accident and by inheritance constructed to understand – was the setting of words in order, to make worlds, to make ideas. (WW, 269/270)

However, before A.S. Byatt ventured into teaching, she started working on a Ph.D. thesis, occupying herself with religious imagery in 17<sup>th</sup> century poetry.<sup>66</sup> She even left for the USA to do postgraduate work at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. On her return to England, Byatt

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<sup>66</sup> Frederica Potter, too, has the idea to work on a Ph.D. thesis and write "something elegant and subtle on the use of the metaphor in seventeenth-century religious narrative" (SL, 343).

intended to complete her work at Somerville College, Oxford, but had to leave it unfinished when getting married in 1959.<sup>67</sup> When her novel *The Shadow of the Sun* was republished in 1991, Byatt reveals in an introduction now added to the new edition, why she abandoned her dissertation project. She explains that she would indeed have liked to go on with her academic research but lost all her grants when getting married. Married women, Byatt points out, were at this point of time generally not considered eligible for financial aid. She is also eager to stress and condemn that men in an equal position were on the other hand provided with increased grants to support their household (Byatt 1991, intro to SoS, ix). This was the time, Byatt confessed in a short autobiographical account from 2011, she considers her “moment of pure feminist rage” (Byatt 2011, 33) and she continues that looking back “[t]here are incidents in my life that I think of together – times when I was stopped suddenly short by blank, unexpected and obvious reminders of the disadvantages of my sex” (ibid.). Once again our attention is thus drawn to the difficulties this time of the 20<sup>th</sup> century imposed on women who strove for a combination of both career and family life. Just like her sister Margaret, A.S. Byatt also mentions how watching her mother’s rage and frustration over society’s neglect to help women to unite jobs and family only strengthened her wish to strive for both “work and love” (Byatt 1991, intro to SoS, ix). She wanted not only to work, write and think and thus fulfil her desire for “singlemindedness, art, vision” (ibid.) but also to have a family. Therefore, Juliet A. Dusinberre points out, Byatt, although belonging “to that post-war generation which was urged back into domestic life”, nevertheless “struggled with part-time work while bringing up her children” (Dusinberre, 182). Helen Gardner, who supervised Byatt’s dissertation project, however told her quite frequently that she believed “that a woman had to be dedicated like a nun, to achieve anything as a mind” (Byatt 1991, intro to SoS, ix). In her work *Portraits in Fiction* (2001), Byatt confirms Gardner’s opinion when admitting that she “had been obsessed since childhood with the figure of the solitary clever woman, who avoided her mother’s fate by using her wits and remaining single, separate, a virgin” (Byatt 2001b, 4). In her novels *The Virgin in the Garden* and its sequels as well as in *Possession*, she toys with the idea of separateness and with the fate of women (artists) as sexual beings. Separateness for Byatt means that her identity as a woman and her identity as a writer run on two different levels. She frequently uses the word ‘lamination’ in

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<sup>67</sup> Ten years later, in 1969, Byatt and her first husband, Sir Ian Byatt, an economist and government official, were divorced. It is said that Byatt and her second husband met at a lecture she gave on Iris Murdoch. She married Peter Duffy, who is an investment analyst, later that same year.

this context implying that her identity indeed consists of several layers. *The Encarta World Dictionary* offers several definitions of the term 'lamination'. It can accordingly define a "bonding together of thin layers of materials to form a composite material", a "formation of layers in sth.", a "thin layer in sth.", or a "structure composed of thin layers" (ibid., 1056). A.S. Byatt uses and transfers this expression to the formation of individual identity which also consists of different layers or fragments. In an interview she once explained her concept of lamination and states that as a young woman in the 1950s she wanted to manage "to be both at once, a passionate woman and a passionate intellectual, and efficient, if you 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, 69). Separating body and mind in order to meet both their desires,<sup>68</sup> Byatt has then been able to contradict Gardner's notion as she "didn't want to be, and wasn't capable of being, an unsexed mind"<sup>69</sup> (Byatt 1991, intro to SoS, ix). And she has proven her point by successfully combining the raising of her children with giving lectures in English literature and writing various novels, short stories, essays, as well as critically acclaimed works on Iris Murdoch, Coleridge and Wordsworth.<sup>70</sup> Writing fiercely, A.S. Byatt opposed and finally extinguished a deeply implanted "fear that marriage will preclude creativity, which is a fear [she] used to have, a terror that you can't do both" (Dusinberre, 185). Her creativity and her passion have been means for her as a woman to achieve independence. "Literature", Byatt therefore

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<sup>68</sup> Body and mind are both longing forces and the question of how to connect them while not giving in to only one of these urges has occupied Byatt throughout her literary work. Body *versus* mind or on the other hand the combination of body *and* mind feature prominently as topics in her novels – especially in the Frederica Quartet – and in her critical works as well which is underlined by the witty title of one of her collections of essays called *Passions of the Mind* (1991).

<sup>69</sup> As shall be seen later on in this chapter, A.S. Byatt deals with the subject of female sexuality and its connection to creativity and art extensively in the Frederica-Quartet. Frederica's *Bildung* is in fact a combination of education, the broadening of her mind, her writing and her career life with her sexual development from virgin to lover to wife to mother. In Frederica's sister Stephanie, Byatt further mirrors this relationship and shows how disastrous an end the educated angel-in-the-house can find. Both characters mirror Byatt's idea of lamination – but while Frederica succeeds in a layering of identity, Steph fails and falls victim to an intermingling of laminations resulting in a loss of her/self.

<sup>70</sup> *Degrees of Freedom: The Novels of Iris Murdoch* was published as early as in 1965. *Wordsworth and Coleridge in Their Time* appeared in 1970 and was re-printed as *Unruly Times: Wordsworth and Coleridge in Their Time* in 1989. Especially Byatt's studies on Iris Murdoch have been widely appreciated. Critics even noted that both writers share certain similarities and preoccupations in their works. Roger Lewis even goes so far as to state that "Margaret Drabble may be her biological sibling, but Iris Murdoch is her creative one" (Lewis, 29). In her introduction to the writer A.S. Byatt in Janet Todd's *British Women Writers*, Gabriele Griffin also draws a parallel between both authors and states that they, "although almost a generation apart, underwent similar experiences, being students, scholars, and novelists as well as women in post-war Oxbridge and London. Both have academic and novelistic interests in an intellectual world dominated by men, and both have a very intellectual, ideas-based approach to their fiction" (Todd 1989, 117).

emphasizes, “has always been my way out, my escape from the limits of being female” (Dusinberre, 186).

Considering these statements by Byatt, it would be easy to use her, her determination and fighting spirit for the feminist cause. Yet, she, like Penelope Lively and Margaret Drabble, does not want to be labelled under a certain category or even be reduced to one (literary) branch alone. She admits that she does indeed write about the problems of art and thought specifically experienced by women as well as about the female quest for independence and identity, yet she denies conforming to a feminist agenda. Byatt uses literature to break boundaries; so naturally she does not like the term ‘woman writer’ as it denies her individuality, belittles her talent and furthermore, by implying a restriction to gender, it forces her back into those limits of being female she wants to escape. In an interview Byatt consequently stresses that “[i]t does women a disservice to elevate them as women rather than as writers because it prevents their being judged on merit” (Dusinberre, 187).<sup>71</sup> In that context, Elaine Showalter poses the interesting question whether contemporary women novelists by moving “beyond the female tradition into a seamless participation in the literary mainstream” (Showalter 1977, 35/36) strive not for equality but assimilation. This assimilation would nevertheless lead to an extinction of women’s writing as a distinct literary form and even promote a disintegration of female identity itself. Female authors like Byatt do not want to be judged or defined by their gender (especially not after struggling to separate body from mind) but by their talent. Yet, gender is part of identity and can as such not be dismissed. Assimilation would also encourage that women writers imitate men and neglect their own nature or the distinct differences between the sexes. Examining contemporary women’s writing, Rachel Cusk even emphasizes that “[a] woman writer, then, loses her integrity – and her chance of greatness – in the attempt to join male literary culture” (Cusk). And she once again turns to Virginia Woolf as a role model for women’s writing when alluding to *A Room of One’s Own* in which

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<sup>71</sup> Several critics have pointed out that Byatt consequently hides her gender behind the initials A.S. in order to avoid being judged as a woman but instead build a reputation based on her skills alone. Karin Westman comes to the conclusion that Byatt thus not only seeks a “Coleridgian artistic androgyny” but rather a “T.S. Eliot-like masculine presence” (Westman, 77). Disguising her gender, A.S. Byatt further refers to what might be called a tradition by popular and successful female writers of the past and places herself in line with George Eliot whom she deeply admires. Her concern with her name becomes also obvious when considering that she kept her first husband’s last name instead of writing under her maiden name or that of her second husband – she is conscious that as a writer the name Drabble would be equated with that of her sister just as Duffy would be connected with the author Maureen Duffy (who is also of the same generation as Byatt and her sister).

Woolf asserts two things: first, that the world – and hence its representations in art – is demonstrably male; and second, that a woman cannot create art out of male reality. Literature, for most of its history, was a male reality. The form and structure of the novel, the perceptual framework, the very size and character of the literary sentence: these were tools shaped by men for their own uses. The woman of the future, Woolf says, will devise her own kind of sentence, her own form, and she'll use it to write about her own reality. (ibid.)

Byatt, however, might not agree in all points with Rachel Cusk or Virginia Woolf as she likes to consider literature somehow gender-neutral. While she does not totally reject feminism she remains cautious. She explains her view in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel who asks her if she does not agree that women (writers) have been treated unfairly by literary scholarship. Byatt's answer is indeed enlightening:

Literary scholarship has treated women unfairly for many generations. But some of the attempts by feminist critics to put this right have caused two things to happen that I don't like: one is that a lot of women students read nothing but writing by women – and I think one should always read writing by both sexes – and another is that they are discovering not very good writers and saying these are forebears, we must say they were very good writers. It is no good, I think, trying to claim that Elizabeth Barrett Browning is anywhere near as good a poet as Robert. It distorts our literary judgement to be driven into a corner and to have to do that. (Wachtel, 85)

Neither does A.S. Byatt want assimilation nor rejection but instead her feminism operates, as I have to agree with Richard Todd,

*as an augmentation of a total discourse*, rather than as a simplistic replacement of what has been traditionally privileged by what has been traditionally marginalized. Lest it be feared that this is token political correctness – a “soft” feminism – the claim needs pressing that such feminism is nevertheless prepared to be confrontational, that is to recognize and value the voices of confrontation, and allow them, where necessary to be heard. Such voices are not by any means to be excluded from the total discourse. (Todd 1994, 99)

I have titled this chapter on A.S. Byatt and her work “Independence and Creativity” thus pointing out that independence is indeed her fuel for creativity. Byatt has further developed her early thoughts on separateness and has come to the conclusion that “I don't want to be part of a school or movement, I have to hang on to my individuality, my lone voice, because that is the source of my identity as an artist. For me being part of a group would be the death of creativity, because I need to be separate from other people. I still believe in the liberal concept of the individual” (Dusinberre, 186). She consequently concerns herself with

the definition of autonomy, personal as well as artistic. Giuliana Giobbi voices A.S. Byatt's attempts in this direction by stating that "[a]ccepting Austen's heritage, Byatt expresses women's moral struggles and imposes a female aesthetic, while 'trying to unify the fragments of female experience through artistic vision' and defining the autonomy of the woman writer" (Giobbi 1992, 246). Keeping this in mind, Byatt seems to be an embodiment of T.S. Eliot's belief in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and at the same time of Ezra Pound's demand to "Make It New"<sup>72</sup> - while she accepts and even embraces where she comes from as a writer, she also wants to express her individuality.

In the chapter following this introduction I will take a closer look at the feminist context of the Frederica Quartet and will consequently get back to Byatt's feminism in more detail as well as dealing with the body/mind issue and her concept of lamination. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" will also come to focus again as its topic is already introduced on the first pages of *The Virgin in the Garden*.

A.S. Byatt's first novel was published in 1964. Agreeing with an editor's suggestion it was named *Shadow of a Sun*, although Byatt originally intended a slightly different title. After the great success of *Possession*, several of the writer's older novels were re-published and her first novel eventually appeared with the title A.S. Byatt had wanted from the beginning – *The Shadow of the Sun*.<sup>73</sup> The author explains that the first draft of her first novel was already composed between 1954 and 1957 whilst still a student at Cambridge. She scribbled down the novel's outline and her ideas "in libraries and lectures, between essays and love affairs" and eventually finished the book years later at a time when she was

a very desperate faculty wife in Durham. I had two children in two years – I was 25, and thought I was old, 'past it'. [...] I was lonely and frightened and Cambridge, with its equal talk, and its flirtations, and above all its library and

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<sup>72</sup> In *Still Life* it is obviously the author herself who takes over the voice of the narrator to convey her own opinions and concerns regarding the composition of a novel. Byatt explains that she, like any other artist, is connected to those who created pieces of art and literature before her but is nevertheless separate as she might remake/rewrite 'things' but does that in her very own way and words: "Art is not the recovery of the innocent eye, which is inaccessible. 'Make it new' cannot mean, see it free of all learned frames and names, for paradoxically it is only a precise use of learned comparison and the signs we have made to distinguish things seen or recognized that can give the illusion of newness. I had the idea that this novel could be written innocently, without recourse to reference to other people's thoughts, without, as far as possible, recourse to simile or metaphor. This turned out to be impossible: one cannot think at all without recognition and realignment of ways of thinking and seeing we have learned over time. We all remake the world as we see it, as we look at it" (SL, 131).

<sup>73</sup> In the introduction to the novel, Byatt explains why it was so important for her to restore the original title which more aptly emphasizes the novel's overall concern: "The sun has no shadow, that is the point. You have to be the sun or nothing." (Byatt 1991, intro to SoS, xiii/xiv)

work seemed like a dream of the earthly Paradise. I began contriving – I sat rocking my son with one hand in a plastic chair on the table, and wrote with the other. I had a cleaning-lady, and ran across the Palace Green to the University Library for the hour she was there to write, fiercely, with a new desperation. (Byatt 1991, intro to SoS, viii/xiii)

*The Shadow of the Sun* deals with the female struggle for independence, the quest for identity and creativity and, keeping the novel's origin in mind, it becomes obvious that it mirrors Byatt's own "fear of a disastrous, irreversible loss of autonomy and creative potential through the demands of the prototypical woman's lot as a housewife and mother" (Neumeier, 13). The autobiographical background is therefore not to be dismissed and features indeed not only in her first novel but surfaces in several others as well. Yet, Byatt has always emphasized that she is critical of this "tendency of fiction to be parasitic on life" (Campbell 2004, 27) and in her introduction to the re-edition of *The Shadow of the Sun* she explains further that she "didn't want to write a 'me-novel' as we scornfully labelled them then, literary sophisticates, inexperienced human beings" (Byatt 1991, intro to SoS, viii). Nevertheless, she admits that she "had the eternal first novelist's problem. I didn't know anything – about life, at least" (ibid.). Her thoughts on autobiography and the novel form have gradually developed over the years. While analysing Margaret Drabble's *The Peppered Moth* and its autobiographical context, I have already referred to A.S. Byatt's short story "Sugar", in which she openly and obviously autobiographically deals with family history. Yet, she has stated that this was an exception and has even criticised her sister for using too much of that family history. In her essay "Sugar/Le Sucre" Byatt discusses her own short story "Sugar" and confesses her fear of how much a toll autobiographical novels can have on human relationships: "I have known, personally, human beings whose lives have been wrecked or mutilated by being made the object of other people's fictive attention. And if fiction does not eat up life, reality, truth, it rearranges it so that it is forever unrecognisable except in terms of the fixed form, the set arrangement" (PoM, 22). This impact of fiction on life is a central concern of Byatt's second novel, *The Game* (1967), in which one character kills herself after her sister has used her life as a source of inspiration for a novel. Growing as a woman and writer, Byatt has eventually come to the conclusion that she might use her own life as a source but not as a topic of her fiction<sup>74</sup> which she stresses in an interview with

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<sup>74</sup> In her re-telling of the Norse myth about the doom of gods, *Ragnarok* (2011), Byatt even introduces her childhood self. Yet, she is able to distance her contemporary self from the "thin child" mentioned in *Ragnarok* and thus is able to re-create a part of herself and a distant memory. In the epilogue (which was also published

Richard Todd by pointing again to the importance of keeping things separate: “I think you *must* use your own life as a source for a novel. But if you can’t make other people *out of* yourself, then the novel becomes a very dangerous and tiresome form” and she proceeds that “[a] character for me only comes alive when it manages, as a metaphor links two separate things, to link two separate things I’ve observed, of which only one must be part of myself, the other must be somebody else, or something else, or some other book, and the situation or the character will draw life from this [...]” (Todd 1994, 100). Considering this statement of hers it becomes clear that in Byatt’s fiction her academic background blends with that of the novelist as she has drawn inspiration from Marcel Proust for this approach towards autobiography and the novel. In “Sugar/Le Sucre” she illustrates how Proust has taught her

that it was possible for a text to be supremely mimetic, ‘true to life’ in the Balzacien sense, and at the same time to think about form, its own form, its own formation, about perceiving and inventing the world. Proust could narrate what was his own life, *beside* his life, more truthfully and more exactly than any autobiographer, biographer or historian, because what he wrote contained its own precise study of the nature of language, of perception, of memory, of what limits and constitutes our vision of things. (PoM, 22/23)

In this quotation, Byatt not only sums up some of Proust’s literary achievements but also refers to her own topics dealt with in her writing. She studies not only the nature of language and with the subject of memory, but also with history, historiography, and metafiction as well as with the constitution of the self and the quest for identity. Indeed, most of Byatt’s works make intellectual demands since they are often full of issues, thoughts, theories and knowledge not easily to be digested by or of interest to a broad reading public. One critic consequently aptly introduces A.S. Byatt by stating: “As a voracious reader, an eminent academic, and a philosopher and critic, Byatt’s work gives us access to an astonishing breadth of reference and systems of thought. Nothing is too large for her, and nothing too small. But everything is connected and inclusive. One idea will always lead on to another as nothing comes to her singly” (Reynolds & Noakes, 5). Considering this, I strongly

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as an article in *The Guardian*) to her contribution to the Canongate series of myth, Byatt hence explains: “I tried once or twice to find a way of telling the myth that preserved its distance and difference, and finally realized that I was writing for my childhood self, and the way I had found the myths and thought about the world when I first read *Asgard and the Gods*. So I introduced the figure of the ‘thin child in wartime’. This is not a story about this thin child – she is thin partly because she *was* thin, but also because what is described of her world is thin and bright, the inside of her reading and thinking head, and the ways in which she related the worlds of *Asgard* and *Pilgrim’s Progress* to the world and the life she inhabited.” (Byatt 2011, 166)

agree with Kathleen Coyne Kelly who introduces Byatt as a “meta-writer” and explains that she is indeed “a writer whose fiction is both self-reflexive and consciously crafted. She continually provides a commentary on her own reading and writing and asks us to pay attention to her doing so” (Kelly, 1). As a meta-writer, Byatt also connects autobiography with meta-autobiography as well as interweaving fiction with meta-fiction. Pointing to the mimetic, the realist, component of a text and at the same time at its self-consciousness and self-reflexivity, Byatt also hints at her own concerns regarding a (narrative) exploration of reality and art. Most of her fiction indeed displays aspects of self-consciousness about the act of writing somehow hidden behind veils of realism. Byatt herself therefore calls her novels “self-consciously realist” (PoM, 22), but they can also be labelled postmodern metafiction. According to Linda Hutcheon this self-consciousness of fiction is a characteristic of metafiction which crosses not only the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction but thus also between art and life (comp. Hutcheon 1988, 10). Byatt occupies herself with the dilemma of art and life in terms of imagination versus reality and fiction against fact. In her (historical) fiction she accordingly also deals with the matters of fact and fiction (as shall be further discussed in the following) and frequently asks herself – and demands the same attention from her readers – “What’s this then, which proves good, yet seems untrue? / Is fiction, which makes fact alive, fact too?”<sup>75</sup> (Byatt 1992, “Precipice-Encurled”, 185). Byatt can thus serve as a representative of postmodern fiction as the “postmodern novel asks us to stop believing in a distinction between fiction and reality. Postmodern fiction is ambiguous, open-ended, big enough for multiple and conflicting interpretations” (Kelly, xii). And Tim Gauthier adds to this that in Byatt’s writing “fact and fiction can be combined to arrive at some other kind of truth” (Gauthier, 52).

Maybe it was these subjects’ complexity that prevented Byatt’s immediate success as a novelist and instead grounded her standing as literary critic and scholar. It was only her bestselling novel *Possession: A Romance* (1990) which led to her worldwide breakthrough. Regarded as her crowning achievement, *Possession* earned its author not only the prestigious Booker Prize and other prizes but culminated in Byatt’s nomination for the Nobel

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<sup>75</sup> Jane Campbell explains how Byatt has taken these lines from Browning’s *The Ring and the Book* (1868/1869) but has made omissions and changed punctuation. She added a comma where none used to be and thus suggests “that fiction making is inevitable whenever the imagination is at work on facts” (Campbell 2004, 97). Campbell has further examined this thought in an interesting and detailed article on Byatt’s “Sugar” and “its use of literary history and biography and its formulation of the problems of confecting” (Campbell, “The Somehow may be Thishow”: Fact, Fiction, and Intertextuality in Antonia Byatt’s “Precipice-Encurled”, 115).

Prize of Literature in 1993.<sup>76</sup> Her contribution to literature was eventually recognized with a CBE in 1990 and a DBE in 1999. Although *Possession* is no easy read and filled with Byatt's favourite topics including numerous literary allusions and historiographical discussions, it proved an enormous success with literary critics and the broad reading public alike. The relation of past and present which features so dominantly in *Possession* is also to be discovered in many of her other novels and several short stories. Byatt has further been able to establish a ventriloquism centring on once unheard female voices. She recognizes and values them, emphasizing thus their inclusion into the total discourse and placing them in relation to history and culture. Her fiction consequently features strong, independent women who have long been neglected by history. Sabine Hotho-Jackson aptly summarizes the concerns of Byatt's historical fiction in general when commenting on *Possession*:

In *Possession: A Romance*, A.S. Byatt rewrites history from the female perspective, simply by shifting emphasis and reallocating meaning to a human being, La Motte, whom retrospective – male – history has denied a place in literary history. She does not, however, intend to replace one gender-specific reading of history by another but to give a fuller picture of history, thus refusing to be categorized under a fashionable label. (Hotho-Jackson, 118)

*Possession* is indeed a prime example of contemporary historical fiction composed by a woman writer and would as such fit perfectly in my analysis. Yet, as there has already been so much writing on this novel, I want to focus on Byatt's other work instead. For A.S. Byatt has, well before the publication of her bestseller, already placed women at the centre of her attention and thus put an emphasis on the private side of history. The female voice of history speaks out loud from her Frederica Quartet on which I intend to concentrate in the following. The Quartet is a sequence of ambitious novels starting with *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) and (supposedly) ending with *A Whistling Woman* (2002).<sup>77</sup> Although Byatt herself remarks that “[a]ll these novels stand alone and can be read separately” (Byatt on *Babel Tower*, [www.asbyatt.com](http://www.asbyatt.com)), I will examine the novels as a whole. To come back to

<sup>76</sup> The Nobel Prize winner of 1993 eventually was not A.S. Byatt but Toni Morrison.

<sup>77</sup> As *A Whistling Woman* ends on an open note, one can get the impression that the story is not yet over, that there is more to be told. However, in this novel Byatt has occupied herself extensively with storytelling, beginnings and especially endings. This already becomes obvious on the first pages of *A Whistling Woman* as the novel itself starts with the end of another story. For two years Agatha has been telling the adventures of Prince Artegall and his friends which now – with the onset of the novel's plot – come to a sudden and unexpected end. For Agatha as the storyteller the quest, and as such the story, is finished while for her listener's this ending is rather unsatisfying and somehow wrong which is voiced by Leo who exclaims: “That isn't the end. We don't know everything” (WW, 10). The ending of the fourth part of the Frederica Quartet is similarly frustrating, especially since the prologue to *Still Life*, set in 1980 (ten years after the narrative of *A Whistling Woman* ends) suggests a continuation of Frederica's story.

Byatt's concept of laminations, each volume of the Quartet is like stratum which put one upon another is still distinct but forms a whole. Therefore, instead of separating them and looking at each novel respectively, as I have done with the novels of *Lively* and *Drabble*, I will analyse the complete Quartet as one piece of historical fiction and as one Bildungsroman, showing how national history mingles with personal histories and how fact and fiction are interwoven.

### **6.1 On Histories and Stories – The Frederica Quartet as Historical Fiction**

For A.S. Byatt 'then and now' always count (comp. Reynolds/Noakes, 9) as she takes interest in the impact of the past on the present. She acknowledges that her own past and that of her family have shaped her just like the more general past of her country has. Byatt is furthermore engaged with the influence of literary history that has an undeniable weight on her. Literature is in fact one of the most important aspects of history, of the past, that has formed her, not only as a writer but as a woman. She transfers her passion for literature and the belief that it helps defining one's identity on most of her protagonists. In the Frederica Quartet literature consequently features prominently as its main characters are avid writers and readers. Intertextuality, as shall be analysed in the following chapter, is hence a distinguishing characteristic of Byatt's work as she enriches the historical context with literary allusions and echoes. She frequently alludes to, plays with, and re-creates texts of the past.

It is therefore no wonder that she has occupied herself intensely with the genre of the historical novel, not only as a writer of fiction but also as a scholar and literary critic. In 2000 *On Histories and Stories*, a collection of several of her essays, was published, which deals with the genesis and development of historical fiction and attempts to explain its appeal to contemporary writers. The title is indeed meaningful as it already pinpoints the interrelationship of fact and fiction in historical writing and thus hints at Byatt's concern with truth and fabrication (history and stories) in her own (historical) writing. In my previous analyses of historical novels by women writers I have already pointed to the coalition of the macrocosm of public history and the microcosm of private history that forms a basis of these novels. These writers have not only given voice to female protagonists and shown their participation in history, but have also expanded the traditional genre of the historical novel

with a new emphasis on culture, imagination, memory, and personal identity. The connection between historiography, the historical novel, auto-/biography and the Bildungsroman is highlighted and it becomes clear that writers like Lively, Drabble and Byatt have fused these literary genres, with both fictional and factual backgrounds, to tell personal histories. As the development of personal histories and identities became a new focal point of the historical novel, a discussion of the impact of memory on the construction of both identity and history was started. One came to consider that public as well as private history, when noted down, depends indeed on the one who remembers it and on how it is remembered. History hence becomes subjective, as the novels of Byatt, Lively, Drabble and Esther Freud suggest. Making history subjective and stressing the subjectivity of historiography can be called a trademark of these historical novels which, often rooted in a postmodern tradition, put an emphasis on revealing this subjectivity and the impact of the narrator by pointing to the process of fictionalisation of history. Especially for writers of historical novels which centre on female protagonists and which attempt giving women a voice in history the fact-fiction-dichotomy is of interest as women and their life stories have not been included in the historiographical canon. Women's history therefore has to be reconstructed and gaps have to be filled in with invention. The female histories to be known are mainly personal as they were noted down in autobiographies, diaries, and letters. As these depend so much on their individual narrator, their truth and reliability are questioned. Fiction and fabrication have therefore always been a topic in historical writing by and about women.

Byatt's thoughts concerning the combination of fact and fabrication in the historical novel can best be explained by a little scene to be found in *The Virgin in the Garden*. Frederica here tries to get away from the travelling salesman who wants to keep in touch. Too young and inexperienced to tell him off, she fabricates an address to give him which consists of true bits and pieces but becomes in their connection a lie: "Frederica reiterated Miss Plaskett's surname and recited a fictitious address, composed of the number of Jennifer's house with the name of Daniel's street, and a telephone number composed of half the school's number added to half the doctor's. *This fictive tissue of true facts had a plausibility pure invention could not have had [...]*" (ViG, 273; italics my own). Just like Frederica confects her address from fact and fiction, Byatt does something similar with her quartet of novels where she mixes historical facts with invention and turns autobiographical

(personal) memories into something more general. Her self-conscious realism is here at work as she accurately represents the past (a certain time in British history) and at the same time self-reflexively questions its very representation and its possibilities or impossibilities as a text by pointing to its fictionality.

Byatt accordingly comes to the same conclusion as Lively and Drabble when asserting that all narratives, including historiography, somehow “select and distort” as truth becomes a rather “meaningless concept” (HS, 11). This is especially true for historical writing, including biography and autobiography, which displays a mixture of historical fact enriched with invention and speculation (HS, 10). Byatt self-consciously addresses these issues of fact and fiction in her novel *The Biographer’s Tale* (1999) which is, as she explains, “about these riddling links between autobiography, biography, fact and fiction (and lies). [...] It is a study of the aesthetics of inventing, or re-inventing, or combining real and imaginary human beings” (HS, 10). These topics also feature in her quartet of historical novels which give a vivid and ‘real’ picture of England from 1953 to 1970 (and prospective views to the years before and beyond) by allowing fictive characters to mingle with historical personalities in a world that is true to historical detail. In *Still Life*, for instance, this becomes evident when Frederica Potter in 1955 attends, together with her university friends, a “tea party at which E.M. Forster would be present” and “a meeting of the Literary Society to be addressed by Kingsley Amis” (SL, 145). In *Babel Tower* it is the writer Anthony Burgess who makes an entrance in order to defend Jude’s *Babbletower* at court (BT, 539 ff.). Fact and fiction thus connect intricately giving the novel *Babel Tower* as well as the novel within the novel, *Babbletower*, an impression of truth. While fiction and fact can hardly be separated anymore, Byatt points out that the apparent truth in realist novels is indeed to be questioned. In her essay “People in Paper Houses” she accordingly notices that “there is now, amongst some novelists, an almost obsessive concern with the nature of truth and lies, with the problems of veracity” (PoM, 30). She herself skilfully toys around with the conventions of truth and realism while at the same time exposing the fictitiousness of fiction. Byatt adds in fact another dimension to the fact-fiction-interplay in her own writing when revealing the autobiographical layer of her Frederica Quartet. Byatt not only stated that she had now “lived long enough to have lived in something [she] experienced as ‘history’” (HS, 12), which eventually served her as a prompt for *The Virgin in the Garden*, but further explains in her *Portraits in Fiction* that “Antonia Fraser took me to hear Flora Robson

perform a verbal portrait of Elizabeth I in front of the Darnley Portrait. [...] The Darnley Portrait dazzled and then obsessed me. I used the performance as a prologue to my 1953 novel” (Byatt 2001, 2/3). Lived and imagined history hence mix in *The Virgin in the Garden* and in the other three novels of the Quartet as well which are in fact fusions of historical fact, autobiographical memories, and fiction. This interplay between fact and fabrication is already discernible in the title *The Virgin in the Garden* as it refers to the ‘real’ Virgin Queen Elizabeth I and the fictitious Frederica Potter who is quite literally that virgin in the garden. While Byatt worked on her novel, she had another title in mind: *A Fugitive Virtue*, which now serves as the heading of *The Virgin in the Garden’s* first part. In due course, Byatt however “changed the title to something more iconic and more substantial” and she explains: “My heroine already had her [Queen Elizabeth’s] narrow face and red hair – but that was also rooted in secret family portraiture. Many women in my family have that narrow face, that red hair. Nothing has only one original in fiction” (Byatt 2001, 5). This statement clarifies Byatt’s use of personal family history and autobiography as an enlargement of historical fact (Elizabeth’s appearance). The writer’s attitude towards fact and fiction in writing seems indeed implied in her description of the Darnley Portrait of Queen Elizabeth which is “a clear powerful image” of “someone real” (ViG, 12) but yet, everyone contemplating the picture sees something different, has a different image of the queen in mind. The real person however denies to be fully grasped and is turned into myth instead:

She stood and stared with the stillness and energy of a young girl. The frozen lassitude of the long white hands exhibited their fineness: they dangled, or gripped, it was hard to tell which, a circular feathery fan whose harsh whirl of darker colours suggested a passion, a fury movement suppressed in the figure. There were other ambiguities in the portrait, the longer one stared, doubleness that went beyond the obvious one of woman and ruler. The bright-blanché face was young and arrogant. Or it was chalky, bleak, bony, any age at all, the black eyes under heavy lids knowing and distant. (ViG, 12)

For Byatt, it seems, this portrait exemplifies history, and especially women’s history, as in both fact is enriched with fabrication.

Byatt’s fictional characters not only interact with people of the real world but also with the author herself who is described through Alexander’s eyes in the prologues to *The Virgin in the Garden* and its sequel *Still Life*. In the first novel of the Quartet, Byatt introduces herself by recounting her own experiences at the National Portrait Gallery mentioned above: “There also was Lady Antonia Fraser, accompanied by a dumpy woman in a raincoat, and

wearing a St Laurent skirt, a pair of high soft suede boots and a jerkin and hat [...]. She was considering the Darnley Portrait, which hung above the dais, with a firmly courteous if critical gaze” (ViG, 11/12). While Byatt here links herself to and contrasts herself with Frederica by her attire resembling that of a huntress, the connection between both is made more obvious in *Still Life* as author and protagonist are introduced to each other: “John House,<sup>78</sup> who had organised the exhibition, came almost leaping down the stairs accompanied by a smallish woman in a pine-green tent-like coat. He also kissed Frederica and introduced the woman [...]” (SL, 3/4). Byatt’s interplay of fact and fiction can again be best described in her own words as she points to the interweaving of history and stories in *The Virgin in the Garden*: “The speech was a soliloquy by the young Princess, thrust into the Tower by Mary Tudor, a moment of history, and fiction, that Frederica had lived often enough, since she had grown up on the heady romantic emotion of Margaret Irwin’s *Young Bess*” (ViG, 129). The introduction of historical personage indeed helps to place the novels in a specific time of history as does the inclusion of historical events and thought.

*The Virgin in the Garden*, like its sequels, is filled through and through with history. There are in fact several different planes of history to be found in this complex novel. The novel’s action takes place in 1953, yet the prologue, which introduces the characters Frederica, Alexander and Daniel and serves as a preamble to the story while also hinting at important topics of the whole Quartet, is set in 1968. Alexander, Frederica and Daniel meet at the National Portrait Gallery in London “to come and hear Flora Robson do Queen Elizabeth” (ViG, 7). This event brings back memories of a distant time when Frederica played the young Queen Elizabeth I in Alexander’s play *Astraea*. The story told in *The Virgin in the Garden* is thence comparable to a memoir as these characters take a look back at their lives in 1953 as that was the point of time which marks the beginning of their relationships with each other: Frederica, a young school girl, fell in love with Alexander, a teacher at her school and Daniel entered their lives as Frederica’s sister’s love interest and eventual husband. Their paths, one can guess from the prologue, have ever since been connected. *The Virgin in the Garden* is consequently a personal history and, as the focus is put on Frederica, a memoir of her life. A dialogue between Frederica and Alexander nevertheless makes clear that memory is always individual, that Frederica’s view of the past differs remarkably from

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<sup>78</sup> The art historian John House is, like Byatt, a personality from ‘real’ life and obviously an acquaintance of her whom she thanks in her acknowledgments to *Still Life*.

Alexander's. History thus depends on the one looking at it and on his or her perspective or opinions:

'You always could do it again.'

'Oh no.' Alexander had a strongly linear sense of time.<sup>79</sup> Chances did not come round again, they went, and stayed, past. He had sometime thought of more modern, more artificial ways of rendering that matter, the virgin and the garden, now and England, without undue sentiment or heavy irony. But he would not try.

'It was good the first time, though,' Frederica was saying. 'In the first place. All the singing and dancing. Funny, the fifties. Everybody thinks of it as a kind of no-time, an unreal time, just now. But we were there, it was rather beautiful, the Play, and the Coronation and all that.'

'A false beginning,' said Alexander.

'All the beginning there was,' she said. 'My beginning, anyway. That was what did happen.' (ViG, 15)

"That was what did happen," (ibid.) says Frederica and emphasises that her point of view is the right one – in her eyes. But memory is not only personal but also selective. Looking back, the past appears unreal and already almost like fiction; the question of the truthfulness of personal histories consequently arises again since the reliability of their narrator is to be doubted.

The historical event which is at the centre of attention in *The Virgin in the Garden* is the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on June 2, 1953. The whole of chapter 27 of the novel is dedicated to the event itself and thence titled "Coronation" (ViG, 313ff.). Byatt, however, puts a further emphasis on its broadcasting on TV since this was almost as interesting as the act itself. In 1953, television was still something new, special and exciting as not many owned a TV set of their own. Television helped to turn a public historical event into something personal, many were now able to take part in the Coronation and while watching it from afar this episode of history became somehow more real as journalists back then emphasized:

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<sup>79</sup> Alexander's linear sense of time is a particularly male approach towards time and also narration. Frederica on the other hand has a sense of time which is not so straightforward, can probably even be considered circular. This is also expressed through narration as her story is told with inclusions from past, present and future. Things from the past are indeed not past but still influence the present. Gayle Greene further enlightens by pointing out that "[i]n some sense women's quests have always been circular. [...] While cyclic and linear notions of time ('time's circle' and 'time's arrow') have associations not only with female and male, but with east and west [sic], archaic and modern, myth and history, nonrational and rational modes of apprehension, nevertheless, circles and cycles remain resonant symbols for things female, for women's physiology, their sexual and psychosocial experience, and their experience of time" (Greene, 14/15).

Most of the Press was democratically statistically ecstatic. 'The Coronation brings the tiny screen into its own, turns it into a window on Westminster for 125,000,000 people ... All these millions from Hamburg to Hollywood will see her coach jingle through rejoicing London *this very day* ... 800 microphones are ready for 140 broadcasters to tell the world Elizabeth is crowned. But today is television's day. For it is television, reaching out to the Queen's subjects, which will give a new truth to the Recognition of the Monarch on her Coronation Day ...'. (ViG, 314/315)

A.S. Byatt is in fact very interested in the history of television which is also expressed in *Babel Tower* and especially in *A Whistling Woman*.<sup>80</sup> She considered TV a new creation of media and as an addition to the traditional newspaper to 'speak' to the people, to educate and to entertain them. Television and its development is a part of cultural history and Byatt's interest in it is embodied in Frederica who in 1967 already owns a colour TV and "cannot stop watching" (BT, 600).<sup>81</sup> Frederica's life is also professionally linked with television since she starts off with writing "a small TV column in a woman's magazine" (ibid.) and eventually turns into a host of a talk show called *Through the Looking Glass*, thus hinting at her even greater passion for literature and its prevailing importance in her life.

Byatt describes the coronation with a somehow detached view; she is not so much interested in the historical event as such but rather in how it is received by the people either watching it on TV, listening on the radio or reading about it in the newspaper. Her focal point is hence not history as such but how it can be told and how it is regarded differently and reconsidered when looking back. *The Virgin in the Garden*, as this makes clear, does indeed display features of the metahistorical novel which is described in some detail by Ansgar Nünning:

In solchen selbstreflexiven historischen Romanen tritt die Ebene der Figuren und der Handlung zugunsten der erzählerischen Vermittlungsebene in den Hintergrund, auf der ein vergangenes Geschehen rekonstruiert oder als Bewusstseinsinhalt dargestellt wird. Die Bezeichnung 'metahistorischer Roman' für diesen Typus von selbstreflexiver Geschichtsfiktion signalisiert, dass sich die Aufmerksamkeit in solchen Romanen von geschichtlichen

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<sup>80</sup> In her acknowledgements to *A Whistling Woman*, Byatt points out that her "interest in the possibilities of television was aroused in the late 1960s by Julian Jebb" (WW, 422). The inspiration for Frederica's interest is hence autobiographical.

<sup>81</sup> A.S. Byatt seems to have forgotten how connected Frederica's life was with TV already in the spring of 1967 as the author states in *A Whistling Woman* that in the summer of 1968 "Frederica didn't have a television. She was beginning to see that this was an impossible state of affairs, for Leo wept with rage that his friends could see *Batman* and *Dr Who*, and he could not. [...] She did not consider television to be *important* [...]. She had a vague idea that it was sinful to spend one's evenings passively staring, whether at news, satire, discussion or whatever" (WW, 40).

Personen und Ereignissen auf die Metaebene der nachträglichen historiographischen Beschäftigung mit Geschichte, der Rekonstruktion der Vergangenheit vom Standpunkt des Hier und Jetzt sowie der retrospektiven Sinnstiftung verlagert. (Nünning 1999a, 29)

Byatt does not use her own voice through her narrator to tell about the Coronation event but quotes actual newspaper articles which have used literary allusions to describe the glory of this special day (comp. ViG, 316). Thus she turns the rendition of a historical event into a pastiche composed of her own thoughts and these newspaper articles referring to English literature. She then connects this with an analysis of language and the use of vocabulary and rhetoric. Byatt further dwells on the coronation as a historical event to illustrate how memory works and how looking back at an occasion can change its reception and meaning. The omniscient narrator, who is not bound by time but rather hovers over it, frequently juxtaposes Frederica's opinions of the past with those of the future thus suggesting that nothing remains the same, and that people change with growing experience and knowledge:

The haberdashery had always been a favourite haunt. They had come here in their early days for lace collars for party dresses, ribbons for hair, tape, elastic, buttons and press-studs. Frederica in 1953 was disposed to see these visits as tedious rituals, although she saw that it might be possible to see them otherwise, with a kind of Dickensian nostalgia for the details of a vanished life, which was in fact, how in 1973 she came to see them. (ViG, 251)

The narrator also serves as a means to question the reliability of historical narration and its truth. The past changes along with the present as Frederica's adult thoughts in 1973 on the coronation event from twenty years ago show. Frederica reconsiders her feelings and reaction towards the coronation ceremony of Elizabeth II and has to notice that what she thinks and believes in 1973 differs fundamentally from her views held in 1953:

She did not think this at the time, in 1953. Then she largely agreed with Wilkie's girl's 'What a farce', sensing immediately that this was the 'right' response. It was what contemporary people would say and feel about these events. 'Contemporary' was in those days synonymous with 'modern' as it had not been before and is not now (1977). Contemporary was what she wanted then, to be, and she was quite clever enough to see that the Coronation was not only the inauguration of a new era, it was not even a contemporary event. (ViG, 318)

The author, by allowing her narrator to take a look at the future (comp. ViG, 317/318), also emphasises that only when looking back history becomes more true than while experiencing it. The ongoing discussion of the novel's characters on this historical event leads away from

the realist context and makes way for revisionist thoughts. Ansgar Nünning points out that this discussion, a dialogue between past and present, is a characteristic of the revisionist historical novel which emphasizes the “Darstellung von und Auseinandersetzung mit Geschichte [...] als Mittel der Geschichts- und Zeitkritik. Durch das Erzählen von Gegengeschichten thematisiert dieser Typus nicht nur vergessene oder unterdrückte Aspekte der Vergangenheit, sondern stellt auch gegenwärtige Verhältnisse, überkommene Traditionen und etablierte Deutungsmuster in Frage“ (Nünning 1999a, 34). Frederica’s contrasting thoughts aged 17 and 37 are an example of this:

Frederica in 1973, thought he oversimplified. What he said was part of the media’s pervasive receding narcissism, mirror on mirror mirrored and their peripheries endlessly commented on by commentators. In 1953 Alexander tried to write, to discourse, in verse, about history and truth. In 1973 he criticised, in prose, modes of communication. There were other truths. There had been, Frederica considered, some sort of innocence about the rejoicing at that time (when she was a sharp but unobservant seventeen). There was no duplicity, only a truly aimless and thwarted nostalgia, about the pious enthusiasms of commentators. And the people had simply hoped, because the time was after the effort of war and the rigour of austerity, and the hope, despite the spasmodic construction of pleasure gardens and festival halls, had had, alas, like Hamlet’s despair, no objective correlative. (ViG, 318)

The coronation of Elizabeth II marks the onset of the so-called New Elizabethan Age – a comparison between this age and the first Elizabethan Age and the iconographic Virgin Queen Elizabeth I is hence invited. This historical era is remembered and brought back into life, even re-lived in a sense, by a play called *Astraea*, written by Alexander to celebrate the new hopefully Golden Age. Time then and time now are connected by contemporary actors who take over the roles of historical characters. For one summer both ages intermingle, as do fact and fiction. *Astraea* is a play and hence fiction about a real historical person; it has further to be noted that it is a play within a novel. The fact-fiction-dichotomy displayed and indirectly discussed and pointed to is therefore truly intricate especially considering that *Astraea* is disguised as a real play which is included into the English literary canon and faces critical attention:

In the fifties they wrote critical articles on ‘Blood and Stone Imagery in Wedderburn’s *Astraea*’. In the early sixties helpful lists of these images were published in Educational Aids to help weak A-level candidates. In the seventies the whole thing was dismissed as a petrified final paroxysm of a decadent individualist modernism, full of irrelevant and damaging cultural nostalgia, cluttered, blown. A *cul-de-sac*, the verse drama revival, as should have been seen in the beginning. (ViG, 134)

Byatt thus gives the impression of a realist novel which is mimetic to life whilst at the same time this realism and the whole concept of realist literature are questioned. When she describes her novels consequently as “self-consciously realist” (PoM, 22), attention is drawn to Byatt’s dual impulses towards tradition and experimentation, realism and self-reflexivity. Janet Todd aptly summarizes that a novel like *The Virgin in the Garden* is not only “in a tradition of realist fiction which goes back to George Eliot, but draws on modernist images and on contemporary interest in the novel as mirror of itself” (Todd 1983, 182). Beate Neumeier further clarifies that the

[t]he term self-conscious realism also points towards Byatt’s involvement with the past, particularly with the 19th century, her main area of teaching and research during her academic career. Nineteenth-century historical and literary figures, images, motifs, texts, and genres (from realism to romance, fairy tale and ghost-story) are interwoven into her highly intertextual fictions. Thus the nineteenth-century interest in crossing boundaries and the ensuing uncertainties, the crisis of faith, are evoked and set into relation to the postmodern world. (Neumeier, 12)

Byatt not only chooses realistic narration to make an intertextual as well as historical reference to the 19<sup>th</sup> century but as she decides on the form of the historical novel to convey the untold story/history of women she also makes use of realism as “a major literary form for oppressed groups, a means of defining problems of self and cultural identity” (Greene, 22). Talking about *Babel Tower*, A.S. Byatt states that she wanted this novel to be rather experimental instead of realist. She wanted to “take apart the fabric of language and feeling and thought” (Byatt on *Babel Tower*, [www.asbyatt.com](http://www.asbyatt.com)) and thus lie bare the scaffolding of a novel. This aspect of stripping away the fabric is attached to the question of fact versus fiction in historical novels and shows how metafiction can expose the narrative artefact as a construct. “In showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds”, Maria Koundoura even analyses, “metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly written” (Koundoura, 58). In her essay collection *On Histories and Stories*, Byatt also focuses on the theoretical context of the historical novel as a postmodern literary genre. She points out how inventive and rather playful postmodern historical novels can be and how they thus often overcome generic boundaries or literary concepts, styles and forms while at the same time pinpointing and discussing these subjects. There is indeed no obligatory or fixed form to the historical novel anymore as Byatt outlines in an essay called “Forefathers”:

There are many current forms of historical fiction – parodic and pastiche forms, forms which fake documents or incorporate real ones, mixtures of past and present, haunting and ventriloquism, historical versions of genre fictions – Roman and medieval and Restoration detective stories and thrillers, both in popular literature and serious writing. The purpose of the writer can be incantatory, analytic, romantic, or stylistic. Or playful, or extravagant, or allegorical. Even the ones apparently innocently realist [...] do not choose realism unthinkingly, but almost as an act of shocking rebellion against current orthodoxies. (HS, 38/39)

Byatt has certainly not chosen the realist framework of *The Virgin in the Garden* or *Still Life* without further thought. She uses it as a counterpoint to experimentalism but also to show that realism is not an old-fashioned and outdated mode. It is further used as an echo of 19<sup>th</sup> century literature and thus emphasises on yet another level the author's intricate occupation with history. Her novels are in fact not only set in history but rather are about history. Byatt adds intertextuality and metafictionality to her realism, which proves an adequate way of narrating history. History or specific historical events can, in a realist novel, be used to fix the story in time and setting, to give it an adequate background. In the postmodern and self-conscious historical novel the presence of the past further leads to "a critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society" (Hutcheon 1988, 4) thus making ground for the "rethinking and reworking of the past" (ibid., 5). A confrontation of the present with the past is hence aspired. Considering Nünning's classifications of the postmodern historical novel, it is obvious that Byatt's historical novels that form the Quartet cannot be ascribed to only one of his five subdivisions but are hybrid forms instead. The novels display trademarks of the realist historical fiction in that their fictive action is set in a believable, realist historical environment as Nünning describes: "Realistische historische Romane schildern ein weitgehend fiktives Geschehen in einem raum-zeitlich präzise ausgestalteten Milieu" (Nünning 1999a, 27).

This historically realistic environment is also evident in *Still Life*, *Babel Tower* and *A Whistling Woman*. While in *The Virgin in the Garden* the coronation of Queen Elizabeth is an historical event at the centre of attention which ultimately causes the comparison between past and present and leads to a dialogue between times and ages, the other three novels of the Quartet are impregnated by a sense of history, so much so that they can be labelled Condition-of-England-novels which display society and culture of a specific time in English history. In *Still Life*, Frederica feels in a way cut off from history as she secludes herself from the world outside and hides in her ivory tower which is Cambridge. She is unaware of so

many historical events that are happening outside, in the real world, although at this point of time history really was in an upheaval which demanded a new definition of national identity. Even Frederica cannot close her eyes any longer to history as it finds its way into her life:

In the year of Suez, which was also the year of Hungary, the outer world intruded not as telegrams and anger but as troop movements, sunk ships, men gunned down, a sudden urgent need to think about national identity, fears of violence, responsibility. It was not of course truly new, but Frederica, like many of her politically placid contemporaries, was unaware of revolt in East Berlin or rumblings in Poland. The Hungarian revolution, like Suez, was news, in every sense of that word. They were – we were – a generation who had characteristically [...] innocently and unwittingly lived through a convulsive and exhausting piece of history. (SL, 339)

For Frederica the public has not yet become private because until she notices the importance of history and its effects on society and culture,<sup>82</sup> she has restricted her view of history as derived from literature, for instance from Kipling's *Passage to India*: "She had learned from *Passage to India* that the British Empire, even if narrowly and locally just, was insensitive, overweening and wicked through its lack of imagination and vision. She had learned that the First World War was a product between gentlemanly ideals of honour, courage and patriotism, and the realities of the big guns, mud and the slaughter of conscripts" (SL, 341). It is only when the reality of the Suez crisis and its effects creep into her life that she concerns herself with history. In *Babel Tower*, Frederica's life is not only determined by personal problems but like the whole of her generation she is haunted by nuclear fear as a result of the Cuban missile crisis (comp. BT, 55). History and culture are again united in the *Babbletower* trial for obscenity which mirrors that of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* which took place in 1960 in London. Just as in the real trial, Byatt introduces literary personalities and experts, men of the church and other personalities to defend or condemn Jude Mason's novel. Yet, while the publishers of *Lady Chatterley* win the trial for obscenity and thus gain a victory for freedom of speech, the defenders of *Babbletower* have to suffer a defeat. This loss, too, has a model in literary history – the trial of Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, published in 1964. Selby's and Jude Mason's works resemble each other in their bold and simple representation of horrors and violent sexuality. In 1968 *Last Exit to Brooklyn* was hence forbidden in England and classified as pornography. However, the publishers of *Babbletower* lodge an appeal since they are not willing to allow

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<sup>82</sup> To stress the relationship between history and culture Byatt has titled chapter 25 of *Still Life* "Culture" and the subsequent one "History".

not only the freedom of speech but art in general to be restricted like that. They eventually win. As Byatt is very interested in language, vocabulary and rhetoric, she describes the trial in all detail by reporting every question and answer from the prosecuting party as well as the defendants. She thus opposes the matter-of-fact language of the court with the prose of the novel. *Babel Tower* is hence also a novel about language – which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

The historical and cultural events happening in the late 1960s form the background of *Babel Tower* and *A Whistling Woman*. The sixties are a time of change and upheaval, during which national as well as individual identity was questioned. Music, literature, TV, and politics were all changing and becoming more experimental as Byatt describes:

Homosexual behaviour (in private) and abortion are made legal. The world explodes in colour: the Beatles produce *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, with its Peter Blake cover on which the four moustachioed majordomos in brilliant satin uniforms stand beside their suited waxwork selves of 1963, under the cardboard eyes of Karl Marx, Laurel and Hardy, Alistair Crowley, Cassius Clay, Mona Lisa, W.C. Fields and Tarzan. The songs are full of brilliance, 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds', tangerine trees and marmalade skies. BBC2 begins to transmit in colour. (BT, 599/600)

This colourful world of art and culture is contrasted with the rather neutral world of science coming to attention in the fourth instalment of the Quartet. *A Whistling Woman* is set in 1968, the year which was marked by the groundbreaking discovery of the structure of DNA. Old beliefs and traditions were questioned as doubts on heredity as well as history were fuelled. It was a time of progress and also revolution. History here repeats itself as the discovery of DNA and the study of its function already created a great stir in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Past and present intertwine as the past keeps its influence on modern life. Science then and now led to changes in people's conceptions of human nature and life. Byatt further emphasises the impact these scientific discoveries also had on literature as they changed "our sense of the nature of time and the nature of human relations" and thus gave "rise to changes in form, as well as subjects, of fiction" (HS, 65/66). As the concept of history was challenged as well, Byatt comes to the conclusion that a "new kind of historical novel might be possible" because "[h]istory is neither the working out of the divine plan, nor simply the history of political progress and destruction" (ibid.). History is, on the contrary, more personal and connected to individual lives. In Byatt's opinion it is indeed each individual's

acquisition of the past that matters. Frederica's life is also subject to these changes as at these times public history turned private for almost everyone.

Like the other writers I have already discussed, A.S. Byatt intends to show the continuity of past and present which is stressed by her treatment of history and memory. As the narrator looks back and forward in time, Byatt follows the example of Marcel Proust: "Proust provides another way of seeing time, he looks backwards and forwards, like Byatt, from a present they are partially in and partially outside. Time (and art) help humans not only to define themselves, but create" (Kenyon 1988, 69). Her four novels consequently easily span several decades, in their setting as well as their production. Byatt stated that it took her over ten years to complete *The Virgin in the Garden*, which was eventually published in 1978. It thus mirrors the views and opinions as well as the knowledge of a mind living in the times of its creation. Tess Cosslett therefore rightly points out that "any experience is necessarily mediated by the cultural frameworks within which it takes place" (Cosslett 1989, 263). "In literature," she concludes, "there can never be an 'authentic' voice that is not constituted by contemporary ideologies" (ibid.). This is also to be noticed in *Still Life*, set in the 1950s but composed in the 1980s. The voice of a woman of these modern times is evident in the description of Stephanie's childbirth and the treatment of the newborn baby which is elaborated on in some detail by Cosslett who states that Byatt not only uses "the language of 'natural childbirth' (a concept pioneered by a man, Grantly Dick-Read, in the 1930s)" but that she is also "necessarily affected by the institutional practices and beliefs current in [her] times, as well as by contemporary assumptions about what it is to be a woman, what opportunities are offered or closed to her by motherhood" (Cosslett 1989, 264). Byatt agrees with that when commenting on *Babel Tower* that this is indeed a novel "about the 1960s, which was planned, more or less, in the 1960s, and not written until the 1990s. The result is that it is both a novel about my own time and a historical novel; it combines observation and research" (Byatt on *Babel Tower*, [www.asbyatt.com](http://www.asbyatt.com)). By pointing to the aspect of research, Byatt stresses that she has considered the documentary and realist aspect of a serious historical novel which has a factual framework.

The historical novel, Byatt illustrates in *On Histories and Stories*, has for quite a while been neglected and disapproved of as a serious literary genre. Academics and reviewers, or as Byatt labels them "literary sophisticates" (HS, 9), dismissed the historical novel as banal escapist literature and condemned its triviality which linked it to "cloaks, daggers, crinolined

ladies, ripped bodices, sailing ships in bloody battles" (ibid.). Historical fiction was equated with adventure stories on the one hand and love and heartbreak on the other as pretty damsels in distress were in need of a brave hero to come for their rescue. Jerome de Groot consequently also points out that the historical novel has for a long time been subdivided into male and female forms, stereotypically differing in content. While it "is immediately striking that historical fiction for men tends to be more based in adventure and concerned in the main with warfare" (de Groot, 78), historical fiction for and by women deals with love, sex, relationships and family – topics generally considered to be even more trivial than adventure stories and thus to be taken anything but serious by literary critics. Even today, the inclusion of these 'female' subjects and specific female experiences into (serious) historical fiction is still regarded suspiciously. Rosalind Miles therefore rightly stresses that "[t]here is also much work for women writers still to do in continuing to explore the intimate aspects of their lives as women; as daughters, as mothers, in sexual relations with men, and with each other, or as women alone: beside the ongoing challenge of mapping those areas of experience still under patriarchal taboo" (Miles, ix/x).

However, Byatt continues explaining that over the years the attitude towards historical fiction has gradually changed as the impact of the past on the present gained more and more attention. Historians and novelists alike suddenly noticed "historical paradigms for contemporary situations" (HS, 11) and admitted that "we cannot understand the present if we do not understand the past that preceded and produced it" (ibid.). Especially for women the notion and acceptance of this connection between past and present is essential as their stories and their history have been neglected. Women, too, are cultural agents and historical personalities and should as such be noticed. A genre like the historical novel which is so translucent and fluid in its form and content therefore proves to be the perfect tool to re-create female history and in the context support the quest for a female identity. Female identity is, as the previous chapters on *Lively* and *Drabble* have shown, often fragmented, a view Byatt expresses in her concept of lamination as well. Women take on different roles or personae and try to come to an understanding of the Self. During their quest, *Lively's* and *Drabble's* protagonists have come to see that they are not only parts of a mosaic but that they are in themselves comparable to a mosaic consisting of bits and pieces eventually forming a unitary whole. Accordingly, Byatt comes to the conclusion "that postmodern writers are returning to historical fiction because the idea of writing about the Self is felt to

be worked out, or precarious, or because these writers are attracted to the idea that perhaps we have no such thing as an organic, discoverable, single Self. We are perhaps no more than a series of disjunct self-impressions, remembered incidents, shifting bits of knowledge, opinion, ideology and stock responses" (HS, 31). In her Frederica Quartet Byatt therefore occupies herself with the affirmation of the fragmented and multidimensional women as the following chapter is to show.

## **6.2 The Quest for Identity – The Frederica Quartet as Bildungsroman**

The Frederica Quartet displays not only trademarks of the historical novel but also of the Bildungsroman as it follows the private histories of several characters whilst at the same time giving a vivid picture of British history. As is to be examined, the Quartet shows several of this genre's characteristics. Private histories, or life narratives, connected with the quest for identity are usually mediated in the Bildungsroman and in the case of Byatt's quartet of novels these elements of the Bildungsroman are further expanded by topics of the historical novel. The standing of history and the past in an individual's story is thus emphasized. As so often, public and private history are connected and this interplay is elucidated by a display of the novels' protagonists' character traits which are fed by contemporary culture and history and highly influenced by zeitgeist. The Frederica Quartet is hence at once a family saga and the portrait of an age. While for many a Bildungsroman and historical novel, wars, economics and political issues in general form a basis of the hero's development, Frederica's growth is fostered by cultural concerns and especially by art and literature, but also by fashion. A.S. Byatt supports the influential significance of literature, visual arts, music, fashion etc. on the individual and sums up: "And yet my sense of my own identity is bound up with the past, with what I read and with the way my ancestors, genetic and literary, read, in the worlds in which they lived. A preoccupation with ancestors has always been part of human make-up, and still, I think, comes naturally" (HS, 93).

The interaction of public and private history is especially exemplified by Frederica's life story which comes to the fore as an example of the connection between prevailing culture and the formation and shaping of identity. The specific British culture and history, but also language, literature, art, and fashion are all threads which are indeed knotted together in Frederica's identity. As a human being she carries in her the whole of history, a

thought which sounds familiar as it is also voiced by Penelope Lively in *Moon Tiger* where Claudia Hampton concludes that every individual is endowed with world history and is thus at once a vessel for personal as well as public memories. Both individual and a culture's memory are in fact very important to the heroine of the Bildungsroman and historical novel alike as only the knowledge and acknowledgment of the past help to shape identity. Byatt addresses her interest in history and its effect on national and individual identity already on the very first page of *The Virgin in the Garden*. The prologue is set in the National Portrait Gallery in London, where Alexander finds himself not only intrigued by the Darnley Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I. but also by the words 'national' and 'portrait' which, Byatt explains, were in the late 1960s regarded suspiciously (comp. Byatt 2001b, 2-3) as they somehow had lost their meaning in a time when everything from culture to personal identity was to be questioned and the influence of public history and society on the individual was to be denied. Alexander, too, "considered those words, once powerful, at present defunct, national and portrait. They were both to do with identity: the identity of a culture (place, language and history), the identity of a human being as an object for mimetic representation" (ViG, 7). This quotation points to Byatt's own concern with identity and the questionability of (self-)portraits, originality and origins. It also hints at her considerations of historical reality and fiction. By referring to the mimetic representation of an individual, Alexander already questions the possibility of this task and thus points to the construction of identity. Indeed, the Darnley portrait of Elizabeth I "illustrates how she became an iconic figurehead open to multiple interpretations" (Byatt 1998, 63). Byatt consequently suggests that the Virgin Queen's identity can never be fully grasped (comp. ViG, 12f.) but is instead changeable as well as adaptable. Especially in retrospect identity is in fact constructed.

### **6.2.1 Tradition and the Individual Talent – Private History in the Frederica Quartet**

The Frederica Quartet as a Bildungsroman follows its namesake's journey of development<sup>83</sup> from teenager to mature woman. The complex time frame of the novels allows the reader to get to know Frederica from a seventeen year old girl to a woman in her mid-fifties in 1980.

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<sup>83</sup> Byatt has pointed out that the world of her Quartet is filled with many people and all of them are of importance to her and so should be to the reader. Of course, there are therefore several protagonists' developments and quests for identity followed on in these four novels, but Frederica's is the one at the centre and hence concentrated on in the following.

Her life-story unfolds for the most parts in chronological terms. *The Virgin in the Garden* is set in 1953 and *Still Life* continues the narrative by chronicling the years between December 1953 and 1957. *Babel Tower* then starts again in 1964, after a gap of seven years, and ends in 1967. The major events of these seven years are introduced in retrospect throughout the narrative but the missing years of Frederica's life also suggest that after Stephanie's death, Frederica's life has come to resemble a still life as well. *A Whistling Woman*, then, has its onset in 1968 and ends in 1970. Yet, the prologues to the first and second novel of the Quartet, set in 1968 and 1980, allow views of the future of Frederica and the omniscient narrator at times points to developments in her life which are not part of the story told as this example shows: "She did not know then, that as an ageing woman walking along a London street she could almost with certainty tell herself: I have come to the end of desire. I should like to live alone. Or that, shaken by desire at forty, she could know with a very comfortable despair that desire will always fail, and still shake" (ViG, 430/431).

The titles of the novels mirror Frederica's point of development at the respective moment of time, although *Still Life* rather points to Stephanie's life which is indeed at the centre of attention in this novel. Yet, as 'still life' is set in opposition to Frederica's way of life it is also directly connected to her. Whereas Stephanie's intellectual life stands still in this second novel of the Quartet, Frederica feeds her mind at university where she is able to live her passion for knowledge and learning. Both sisters, however, explore and satisfy the desires of their bodies as Stephanie enjoys marital sexuality and Frederica has various love affairs. She nevertheless regards her sexual encounters with a rather dispassionate eye and chooses to see them as acts of learning, as ways of gaining knowledge. Not only her mind is hence educated at Cambridge but so is her body. Her sister, back home, fails on the other hand to balance the desires of her body with those of her mind, in the end neglecting her intellectual identity. I shall discuss these body-versus-mind-issues in more detail later on. But here it is important to note that Frederica experiences Stephanie's problems in *Babel Tower* for herself as the balance between her biological and intellectual identity is disturbed. A connection of body and mind leads to confusion and eventual failure as the title of the second novel of the Quartet suggests. The Tower of Babel is "according to the Book of Genesis, the overambitious tower that the people on earth started to build causing God to show his anger by making them speak different languages, which led to the collapse of the project and ultimately to the scattering of people across the world" (Encarta, 1973). After

her marriage, Frederica's world has turned into the Tower of Babel as she has to experience that body and mind, men and women, teacher and pupil, parents and children, scientists and artists, society and the individual all speak different languages. Only with great effort and will power is it possible to understand each other.<sup>84</sup> The image of the tower as a world of its own and as a more or less safe haven for its inhabitants runs through *Babel Tower* but is a motif that is already taken up in *Still Life* and highlighted in *A Whistling Woman* again. In *Still Life* and *A Whistling Woman*, the tower image is brought to the forefront in connection with the development of the New University and its architecture as "three buildings were hexagonal heavy towers in a darkish concrete slab" (SL, 331). These towers, set in a rural and isolated area, are not only intertextual references to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954/55) but are equivalents of *Babbletower's* La Tour Bruyarde. Both, the university and La Tour Bruyarde, are planned to be worlds of safety and freedom, where individuality is cherished and its development is encouraged. Yet, as their mission of equality, fraternity and liberty fails, both worlds are exposed as utopias. While the inhabitants of La Tour Bruyarde wanted peace they created anarchy and violence. The New University set out to establish a universe of knowledge where the connection of body and mind, of the Humanities and the sciences was to be promoted, but was eventually doomed when political activists, trying to overthrow old orders and abolish traditions (WW, 365ff.), set fire to the university towers. As the buildings<sup>85</sup> burn and as walls crumble down, Frederica's past as well as her former way of thinking also fall apart. Identity, it is to be noted, is indeed not a fixed state but open to change, to re-arrangement and also to adjustment. Hence, fire not only causes destruction but opens the potential for re-birth and for something new: "The laminations were slipping", Frederica consequently notices, and "[f]ire was re-arranging them in new patterns. She was full of life, and afraid" (WW, 411).

It becomes obvious that Frederica has come a long way, from the innocent virgin of the first novel of the Quartet to the woman who walks whistling into her future in the final one. Her virginity proved to be a restriction to Frederica in *The Virgin in the Garden* and the garden metaphor of the title also points in the direction of a certain confinement. This confinement still holds her back in the other novels and she consequently tries to free herself from it. Presuming she is the whistling woman the title of the final part of the

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<sup>84</sup> Compare also WW, 4ff.

<sup>85</sup> One of the university buildings that is set on fire is Long Royston which features prominently in *The Virgin in the Garden*. Not only is the play staged there but it is also a place of personal education for Frederica – the connecting line between the novels is thus drawn.

Quartet alludes to, her whistling, then, implies not only good mood and a certain ease but also that she has freed herself from those constrictions. Byatt herself explains why she chose the title *A Whistling Woman*: “It was meant to be the last of my quartet. I had an idea that with any luck, the woman, or women, in the book at that stage would be walking free and whistling to herself because she was, as it were, unencumbered and free and able to walk. So it was that sense. A sort of image of a woman walking off into the future, able to whistle” (Reynolds/Noakes, 29/30). The feminist aspect of *A Whistling Woman* is also expressed in this novel’s name as it is derived from a saying of A.S. Byatt’s grandmother who disapproved of a lot of things her granddaughter did and which she thought of as not feminine and inappropriate for a girl: “A Whistling Woman and a Crowing Hen / Is neither good for God nor Men”. Byatt consequently further explains the expressive title by stating that she “wanted to inhabit a world where women did things that men did, and men did things that women did, and there wasn’t a strict differentiation of what women could and couldn’t do” (ibid.). A.S. Byatt has occupied herself with the restrictions posed on women by society and history. Especially as a girl and young woman she had to find out that there were indeed things she could not do or was not allowed to do. But these things slowly began to change as progress entered all areas of life. In her Quartet she therefore wants to deal with the confinement and restrictions women have tried to overcome to eventually become ‘free women’.

### **6.2.1.1 Fashion and Identity**

In *The Virgin in the Garden*, Frederica Potter is introduced to the readers as a young school-girl who has to wear her school uniform, denying her to express her femininity and identity through clothes. Although she already feels like a mature and knowing woman, it is apparent that she is instead still a rather naive and innocent girl whose fingers are “ink-stained to the knuckles. Her ankle-socks [are] not clean” (ViG, 34). Although a child, she already feels confined and restricted in her uniform and tries to break out sensing that clothes can express freedom and individuality. She wants to be more seductive and feminine as the choice of her nightdress shows: “Frederica affected a long white nightdress with full sleeves,

and a yoke of broderie anglaise threaded with black ribbon.<sup>86</sup> She liked to imagine this garment falling about her in folds of fine white lawn” (ViG, 59). She is desperate to appear elegant and cultured, romantic and knowing, but fails since the nightdress “was in fact made of nylon, the only available kind of nightdress, except for vulgar shiny rayon, in Blesford or Calverley. It did not fall, it clung to Frederica’s stick-like and knobby limbs, and she disliked its slippery feel” (ViG, 58). As we can see, Frederica wants and pretends to be something more, or something that she not yet is, but is unable to reach that goal. In an act of sudden self-knowledge she has come to see that she is indeed not “cultured. I just know a bit more literature than most girls my age” (ViG, 389). As Frederica’s life story unfolds and she changes from girl into woman, her clothes mirror this development. So when school and thus an era of her life ends, she frees herself from her uniform and throws it all – “[s]hirt, tie, beret, skirt, ankle socks and gym kit” (SL, 29) – into the canal as if to “perform a rite” and a “kind of oblation” (ibid.) of Blesford Girls’ Grammar. It is as if she sheds her old skin to be reborn again. Her new dress is to emphasize how grown-up she is now as she enters a whole new world: not only the world of university and knowledge, but also of womanhood, independence and sexual experiences as her clothes point out: “She flung open her macintosh and Stephanie saw that she was wearing a skin-tight black sweater, wide elastic belt, long grey pencil skirt” (SL, 29). Throughout the Quartet Frederica’s different stages of life are resembled by her clothes and changing style. In the prologue to *The Virgin in the Garden*, which is set in 1968 and thus at the time of her self-discovery after marriage and divorce, she is dressed “in a kind of brief knitted corselet of dark grey wool with a glitter in it, and boots with a metallic sheen” and thus looks like “Britomart, her hair itself cut into a kind of bronze helmet, more space-age maybe, than Renaissance” (ViG, 12). Byatt dresses her heroine like the modern version of the Minoan goddess Britomartis who also made an entrance into Greek mythology, often referred to as Diktyнна. The author thus creates an image of Frederica at once as a free and powerful huntress and on the other hand as a girl

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<sup>86</sup> As Daniel gives his wife a “beautiful nightdress, creamy and ruffled” (SL, 57) as a Christmas present, the nightgown becomes the symbol of female biological identity. As the passions of the body are contrasted with those of the mind, books become a metaphor for intellect. This is probably why Frederica’s nightdress does not fit her and fails to look good and feminine on her, the emphasis being on her mind. Stephanie, on the other hand, has chosen marriage and is, at the time of Christmas, pregnant with her first child. But all she longs for is to have her life of the mind back: “He wished now he had not given her what he believed to be a very beautiful nightdress, creamy and ruffled: he had seen her look at Frederica’s books and had understood what he had half-sensed on the occasion of Frederica’s telegrams, her sense of loss” (SL, 57). The nightdress is indeed also a thread which connects the novels of the Quartet as it reappears again in *Babel Tower*. It is once again Frederica who wears the “white lawn nightdress with long sleeves and a yoke and collar” (BT, 119). And the metaphor is again used to hint at the despair of a woman who is forced to neglect her intellectual identity.

which is entrapped and entangled in a net made by a patriarchal society that feared her female powers and strength. Byatt indeed not only compares the 1960s with a “fishing-net” (WW, 50) but also makes clear that Frederica in her marriage and its aftermath feels trapped in a net which wraps tightly around her. Frederica’s attire nevertheless also points to her will to fight as her time challenges her with trials. Not only does she have to make a living as a single mother but she also has to handle the demands of an age in which everything, including gender roles, was questioned and often overthrown. Being dressed like a warrior, Frederica shows that she is willing to fight for her place in this world. The reference to Britomart is furthermore an intertextual one which connects the time of the prologue (1968) with the time the novel is set in (1953) and also with the first Elizabethan age which is brought to life in Alexander’s play. Britomart features indeed in Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590/96) where she, as the virgin Knight of Chastity, represents England’s virtues and especially military powers, hence serving as an allegory on the Virgin Queen Elizabeth I. herself. A similar reference to Britomart is made again at the end of *A Whistling Woman* when Frederica links herself to “Britomart the female knight, who saw her lover in the magic glass sphere made by Merlin, which was also a tower” (WW, 420). Thus, Byatt connects her fourth novel of the Quartet with its first one. Furthermore, the tower image is again drawn upon suggesting that Luk is, at this point of time, still shut in his tower, his very own world. Frederica can see him through the glass but not reach him without his help.

Frederica’s attire at this moment in time has nevertheless dramatically changed and she has developed from school girl in uniform to the young Elizabeth, from pretended lady, huntress (BT, 4) and Britomart eventually to “an absurd shepherdess” (WW, 421) dressed in a Laura Ashley dress, “which she had put on simply because it was made of heavy cotton and had no waist, fanning out from below the breast. It was cream-coloured, sprigged with pink flowers, and olive-green leaves. It had long sleeves, and a kind of ruffle round her long neck” (WW, 421). One cannot help but get the feeling that Frederica is in disguise as this feminine and romantic dress does not mirror her style and self. It can be assumed that her quest for identity has therefore not yet come to an end. This thought is supported by the clothes she wears in 1980 and which are described in the prologue to *Still Life*. These clothes are in fact more elegant, simple and straight forward (SL, 5), thus mirroring the character of the woman Frederica has eventually become in her fifties. Byatt often considers history and historiography amongst other things in terms of parody and pastiche. “Parody and pastiche”,

she concludes, “are particularly literary ways of pointing to the fictiveness of fiction, gloomily or gleefully” (PoM, 30). These terms, it becomes clear, can not only be applied to literary history but to fashion history as well. Books, clothes, styles and trends (in writing and fashion) seem to repeat themselves or are imitated by newer generations as Alexander notices in the prologue to *Still Life*. Once again it is pointed out that he is a “connoisseur of garments” (SL, 5) who realizes not only that the schoolgirls at the exhibition wear “a parody of the clothes Frederica had worn at their age” (ibid.) but who also notices that Frederica’s new style is in fact a parody of her old style back in 1954. While the young girls are dressed in “[p]encil skirts and batwing sweaters and spiky stilettos, tottering with their hard little behinds sticking out, and all that red *lipstick*” (SL, 6) like Frederica used to (comp. also ViG, 125), she is herself clothed in a mature and more expensive version of an outfit she wore in the Fifties and thus becomes herself a parody of her younger self. When she went to France shortly after finishing school it is explained that “[s]he dressed carefully, green herring-bone tweed suit, pinchwaisted, court shoes, very plain [...]. She had a sort of velvet cap, from which she had snipped a bit of veiling” (SL, 63). In 1980 Alexander sees her like this: “There she was in a conventional two-piece suit, fine dark wool, muted geometrical pattern in greens and unexpected straw browns, caught in at the waist – still very thin – to give the effect of a bustle, the skirt long and straight to the knee. She had ruffles (not swashbuckling) at the neck and the small velvet hat that could, but did not, support a veil” (SL, 5). This displays how the past strongly influences the present and is not something that is long gone and forgotten or even dead. Time past and present interconnect and repeat themselves. There is indeed a certain continuity of time. The connection between past and present is pointed out by Alexander Wedderburn who notices that Frederica’s hair-do is a “reminiscent of one of Toulouse-Lautrec’s fine-drawn café habitués. Fifties *and* post-impressionist, thought Alexander, connecting” (SL, 5). Frederica (like the Quartet as well) hence becomes a sort of pastiche, a composition which draws on different works, yet managing to be unique.

By describing the outfits of her protagonists, especially Frederica’s, Byatt draws attention to a side of history which is both private and public as fashion often mirrors not only personal taste but that of society at a certain time and age. In Alexander Wedderburn’s opinion – and in Byatt’s presumably as well – clothing can even be compared to literature since both reflect their times, traditions and also an individual’s inclinations as the allusions to Britomart and furthermore to T.S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent” suggest:

“Alexander himself had considerable knowledge about the history of clothing, could place a shift of seam or change of cut in relation to tradition and the individual talent almost as well as he could a verse-form or a vocabulary. He watched his own clothes and his own poetry in the light of these delicate shifts of subdued innovation. But he was apprehensive that at this time there was no real life in either” (ViG, 9). Alexander here voices again A.S. Byatt’s own opinion towards the 1960s, a time she deeply dislikes. Both Alexander and Byatt regard the Sixties as a time which implanted in people the wish to be different, to set themselves apart, but ironically this was drowned in uniformity. Individuals thus turn into a crowd, “variously uniformed, uniformly various” (ViG, 8). A dress code can in fact suppress individuality and personality, especially when it comes to women’s clothing. In *A Whistling Woman* Frederica’s femininity is indeed disguised. Instead of being dressed like grown up women, Frederica and the female guests of her TV show are made up like “girl-women”:

It was in the air, at that time. Penny Komuves had a small, square, slightly puppy-like face, with large eyes under a Quant schoolgirl fringe and bob. Julia Corbett, a generation older, [...] wore a large number of pretty silver rings and bracelets, and a necklace of silver and enamel hearts and flowers. But her dress was girlish – a pale flame-coloured shift, tied prettily under the breasts and cut above the knee. Her make-up was elaborate and faintly doll-like [...]. Penny Komuves [...] wore a skinny jumper under something resembling the gym-slip of Frederica’s school-days [...]. Frederica herself wore a semi-transparent indigo shirt with a severe white collar and cuffs – also imitation schoolgirl, also half provocative [...]. (WW, 146/147)

As Byatt suggests (and as shall be discussed in further detail later on), women in the 1960s were theoretically ‘free women’ (which is also the title of Frederica’s second show of *Through the Looking Glass*; comp. WW, 139) but were in fact confined to gender roles and stereotypes. While the introduction of the Pill allowed women a new freedom to explore their sexuality, the way they dressed like seemingly innocent girls displays a certain ambiguity and confusion and also an uncertainty of identity. Frederica hence speaks for the women of her generation when she quotes King Lear and asks herself: “Who is it that can tell me who I am?” (BT, 520)

### 6.2.1.2 The Link Between Past and Present – Memory and Intertextuality

The Frederica Quartet is, as we have come to see, filled with echoes of the past: literature, art, fashion, language, religion, history, culture have all found their way into these four novels thus mirroring their creator's vast knowledge which is further embodied in her fictional characters who read and write or think about reading and writing just as enthusiastically as their creator. Literature, for Byatt, is a means to connect past and present and thus the continuity of time is stressed. Again, we have to come back to "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and its emphasis on the bond between times – past, present and future. Byatt has taken up Eliot's thought in her own essay "Identity and the Writer" (1987) and expresses her belief that "[t]hings go through us – the genetic code, the history of our nation, the language or language we speak, the food we eat [...], the constraints that are put upon us, the people who are around us. And if we are an individual, it's because these threads are knotted together in this particular place and hold. [...] We are connected, and we also are a connection which is a separate and unrepeated object" (Byatt 1987, 26). This last sentence sums up Byatt's notion of separateness and connectedness which means that you have to accept your heritage but nevertheless become an individual, which is not, as for instance Katharina Uhsadel in her examination of Byatt's Quartet claims (comp. Uhsadel, 121 ff.; 166), a contradiction in itself. Byatt's heroines, such as Frederica, do not give up separateness to 'only connect' but consider themselves as one lamination, or layer, in the unit of laminations. If we consider the geological picture the term lamination produces, we can imagine the different strata the earth consists of and it becomes clear that while each stratum is separate it is also connected to the rest in order to form a consistent whole. Sarah Heinz, who analyses the concept of identity in A.S. Byatt's novels, hence proposes: "Angestrebt wird eine immer vorläufige Ganzheit, in der die verschiedenen Anteile der Persönlichkeit nicht-hierarchisch nebeneinander liegen können und in der Identität Kohärenz bedeutet und nicht differenzlose Gleichheit" (Heinz, 152).

The idea of connectedness and separateness is expressed stylistically in the construction of the novels, all of them individual and yet together they form a Quartet. They are adjoined by recollections of the protagonists and also, actively, by the readers' memories. The prologue to *The Virgin in the Garden*, for instance, links the first novel of the Quartet with its fourth and final as it is only in *A Whistling Woman* that the reader gets to

know who the mysterious man is whom Frederica kisses goodbye before meeting up with Alexander (ViG, 10). This moment in time is taken up again in *A Whistling Woman*: “They had a minor quarrel over Flora Robson and Elizabeth I. John said he was there for so little time, she didn’t need to go. [...] Frederica said, don’t be silly, I want to see *Elizabeth*” (WW, 149). This example displays perfectly Byatt’s concept of the continuity of time as this event, first described in *The Virgin in the Garden* which is actually set in 1953, happens in the future (the prologue is set in 1968) and once again takes place in the present of *A Whistling Woman*. Past, present, and future are indeed connected. Byatt expresses her thoughts on this topic in an interview with Juliet A. Dusinberre when stating that “[t]he present only becomes a real point in time when time has moved on and made it past” (Todd 1983, 185). The connecting link between times and eras is, as Byatt stresses, memory. Memory is in fact, Bill Potter tells his daughter in a conversation about literature, “our link with our kind” and he emphasizes that a good memory is “a priceless possession, an essential part of human culture” (SL, 320). Literature, a cultural heritage and formed into a canon, is consequently connected to memory as Byatt expresses in her introduction to *Memory. An Anthology* (2008) of which she was the editor: “Memory, or Mnemosyne, was, the Greeks believed, the mother of the Muses. Art is all, at some level, both a mnemonic and a form of memory” (Byatt 2008, xvi). The novels of the Quartet with their numerous intertextual references thus function as literary memories pointing to their connection with the past and the individual present. For Byatt and the protagonists of her novels literary memories are in fact as important as personal memories and, as the intertextual elements show, are often even tied together.

Just as literature and identity are closely connected so are identity and memory. This becomes obvious in the long sentence I have quoted at the beginning of this chapter as it is not only Byatt and Frederica remembering the literary past but it serves in fact also as a personal memory of Frederica looking back as a grown-up woman on her seventeen year old self. As she remembers her younger self she makes associations with literature thus transforming what once has been she herself into some sort of literary figure as well. There is indeed, one comes to see, a close connection between memory and fiction making. In general, the human ability to shape memories does make a great contribution to the formation of identity which Byatt comments on in her essay “Memory and the Making of Fiction” (1998): “Human beings [...] differ from (most) other creatures because we can form images, in memory, of what was, but is not, there, and can use those images to make an idea

of our continuous selves, a self-consciousness made of coherent memory images [...]. We plan and imagine the future because we remember and form images of the past” (Byatt 1998, 71). Ignês Sodr  points in the same direction when stating that “[i]n normal functioning, the present is fully itself and at the same time illuminated by relevant bits of the past; one’s sense of identity is dependent on one’s autobiographical self: my being who I am depends on experiencing an emotionally connected ‘now’ whilst being who I was at all different stages throughout my life” (Sodr , 41). This assumption is mirrored in Frederica whose identity is described in ‘then’ and ‘now’. Memories of how she was then shape her present and future self which is exemplified by Alexander’s thoughts on her younger self:

She was no longer in the habit of being late: her life had schooled her to temporal accuracy, perhaps to being considerate. He himself, at sixty-two, felt, not quite accurately, that he was now too old, too settled, to be put out, by her or by anyone else. He thought with warmth of her certain approach. There had been a pattern, an only too discernible repetition in the events and relationships of his life into which she had ruggedly refused to fit. She had been a nuisance, a threat, a torment and was now a friend. (SL, 1/2)

Individual identity is consequently not only dependent on one’s own memories and views of oneself, but is also formed by others and their opinions and reminiscences.

Memories are not stable but tend to change over the years and with growing knowledge. Identity is accordingly also always in a flux. This thought is expressed by Frederica when remembering her first trip to France:

Later, travelling knowledgeably south at thirty, at forty, full of accrued wisdom about good little places, local food and wine, Caf s Routiers and long-vanished sand dunes she tried to remember the surprises, only half-experienced that day, of that land to her unexpecting eyes. [...] In later years, say 1964, 1974, 1984, the first vision of Nozi res took on its perfection and primacy, as it is only after the mind has cleared itself of the flow of daily preoccupation, planning, expectation, that the moment of a death can be known for what it is, and one’s life mapped, prospectively and retrospectively, to that threshold. (SL, 64/65)

It is often only through memory and retrospect that things begin to make sense. Thus, Byatt points once again to the importance of the past on the present and their connection. Furthermore, she hints at a fragmentation of identity which consists of images of oneself from then and now. Ann Spangenberg further enlightens:

Ein weiteres zentrales Element f r die traditionelle Identit tskonstruktion ist au erdem die Erinnerung, weil sich die Pers nlichkeit, die Selbsteinsch tzung und das daraus resultierende Verhalten wesentlich durch die gesammelten, in

der Erinnerung gespeicherten Erfahrungen bestimmt. Während mit dem traditionellen Identitätsbild die Annahme einhergeht, dass Erinnerungen objektiv und statisch sind und das Gehirn Ereignisse wie ein Computer neutral speichert, wird in der Gegenwart der Erinnerungsprozess als selektiv und kreativ angesehen. (Spangenberg, 34)

This multiplicity of identity is not only expressed by these personal memories but also by intertextual references. Yet, Byatt not only discusses the concept of memory in literary terms but also refers to the scientific approach towards memory. Science and art should not be separated, the author seems to suggest and consequently introduces various characters who examine the concept of memory from a scientific point of view. One of them is Frederica's brother Marcus who works on the neuroscience of the brain and on memory in particular (BT, 53).

Again, I have to point out the reference to T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) in the prologue to *The Virgin in the Garden* and stress the impact of his credo on Byatt. She accordingly emphasises her own belief that "[w]e must *learn from* tradition" (PoM, 20) and further explains that "[a]s a writer I know very well that a text is all the words that are in it, and not only those words, but the other words that precede it, haunt it, and are echoed in it [...]" (HS, 46). She thus sets the tone for her novels, how they are at once connected to literary history and yet stand alone, how she accepts – and insists on – her literary inheritance and how she elaborates it. The reference to Eliot's essay suggests Byatt's ongoing evaluation of the novel form and its contents. Her historical novels of the Frederica Quartet therefore prove to be an "experiment with narratives and forms that consciously interrogate the action of reading and writing" (de Groot, 118). Byatt also points to the connection of past and present through her numerous allusions to literature of the past in her own books: literature is for her indeed a connective tissue which attaches her writing to that of literary classics and thus links present times with those that came before. Literature is an important aspect of history and intertextuality thus becomes a central part of contemporary historical fiction which alludes frequently to the literary heritage. Ansgar Nünning accordingly comes to the conclusion that intertextuality is a trademark of the metahistorical novel, its use emphasizing "den für postmoderne Literatur generell charakteristischen Eindruck der gleichzeitige Präsenz aller Texte der Weltliteratur, die als 'Material' für den postmodernen Roman verfügbar sind" (Nünning 1999, 37) and

Spangenberg adds that postmodern novels “positionieren sich explizit in einem Netz anderer Texte, indem sie solche Texte in hoher Quantität zitieren und nicht nur auf sie verweisen, sondern sich mit ihnen auseinandersetzen, indem sie z.B. die in ihnen dominanten Prämissen hinterfragen“ (Spangenberg, 13).

Juliette Dusinberre then singles out a particular sentence from *The Virgin in the Garden* which is so full of literary references that it serves as a perfect example not only of Byatt’s extensive reading but also of her use of intertextuality:

Disembarrassed, in the sixties, of the awkwardness of being seventeen, a virgin, and snubbed, she was able to fill her memory theatre with a brightly solid scene which she polished and gilded as it receded, burnishing the image of Marina Yeo’s genius, after Marina Yeo’s slow and painful death from throat cancer, seeing the Bevy, as they developed into housewives, gym mistresses, social workers, boutique assistants, an alcoholic and another dead actress, as having been indeed golden girls, with a golden bloom still on them, seeing the lawns, the avenues, the lanterns in the branches and the light winking on half-obscured singing bottles, in the still eternal light through which we see infinite unchanging vistas we make, from the height of one year old, out of suburban gardens or municipal parks in summer, endless grassy horizons and alleys which we always hope to revisit, rediscover, inhabit in real life, whatever that is. (ViG, 420)

A.S. Byatt herself sums up her literary predecessors that inspired this long, long sentence: “That sentence echoes Proust’s at the end of Part II of *Du côté de chez Swann*, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, both in the vistas and in its way of going back to an experience through literature and through childhood. Everything is seen from the height of a child. The Bevy is in *The Faerie Queene*. “Golden girls” is *Cymbeline*: “Golden lads and girls all must, / As chimney-sweepers come to dust.” The “memory theatre” is the title of Frances Yates’s book on the Elizabethan theatre” (Byatt in Dusinberre, 184). While Proust is an all-time favourite of Byatt and hence finds his way into many of her works, the literary allusions in *The Virgin in the Garden* are also from 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century (for instance Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Donne), stressing the connection to the first Elizabethan age as well as setting the tone for a comparison with the New Elizabethan Age of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. References to T.S. Eliot are also to be found as are some to George Eliot. Another author who figures prominently in *The Virgin in the Garden* and also in *Babel Tower* is D.H. Lawrence. On the one hand he is introduced as Frederica’s teacher when it comes to sexual education and, on the other hand, the *Lady Chatterley* trials are reflected in *Babbletower’s* trial for obscenity. Stephanie is linked to Keats in *The Virgin in the Garden* and obsessed with

Wordsworth in *Still Life*. In *Babel Tower* modernist writers such as E.M. Foster make an entrance, and in *A Whistling Woman*, Darwin and Freud and their research are considered while Lewis Carroll's *Alice* comes to the forefront. While Frederica tries to find her own literary way, Doris Lessing and her *Golden Notebook* are mentioned to exemplify how Byatt's heroine takes over the approach of Lessing's Anna who tries to record the strands of her life in four different notebooks and eventually tie all of these knots together in one final golden notebook. Frederica accordingly collects her thoughts and cut-ups, her laminations, in a golden notebook as well (BT, 380). These are only some of the writers A.S. Byatt has digested in the Frederica Quartet but it is enough to notice that Byatt herself is possessed by books and that for her, literature shapes women's life and also their imagining of themselves.

Indeed, there lies a whole world in literature to be discovered. The protagonists of the Bildungsroman generally stress the importance of a good education since knowledge and learning open ways to the world and are thus essential for growth and development. Literature is hence regarded a tool for identity formation. Books are consequently the basis of Frederica's thoughts, knowledge, and views on seeing the world. Literature serves as her guideline for life as it does for many others, particularly women, as Rachel Brownstein suggests: "Innumerable women have bought, borrowed, and read novels, and novels in return have determined women's lives. [...] Girls have learned from novels about the most important things in their lives, sexual and personal relations [...]" (Brownstein, xviii).<sup>87</sup> Frederica, too, has most of her knowledge from books and "[h]er ideas about good manners were derived from Jane Austen, Trollope, Forster, Rosamond Lehmann, Angela Thirkell, Waugh, Lawrence and many other useful and nugatory sources" (SL, 135). The aspect of sexual education via books is also discussed in *The Virgin in the Garden*. Frederica is allowed to read Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley*, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* by her somewhat free-thinking father who does not believe in condemning books and discriminating literature (although he burns his daughter's romance novels!) and thus she can get a hint at desire and

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<sup>87</sup> In her novel *How It All Began* (2011) Penelope Lively stresses the influential educational and informative aspect of literature as well and points to its inseparable intertwining with the life of a literate mind: "For ever, reading has been central, the necessary fix, the support system. Her life has been informed by reading. She has read not just for distraction, sustenance, to pass the time, but she has read in a state of primal innocence, reading for enlightenment, for instruction, even. She has read to find out how sex works, how babies are born; she has read to discover what it is to be good, or bad; she has read to find out if things are the same for others as they are for her – then, discovering that frequently they are not, she has read to find out what it is that other people experience that she is missing. [...] Thus has reading wound in with living, each a complement to the other." (Lively 2011, 39/40)

sexual adventures. She nevertheless despises Lawrence's restricted view on women and their desires just as much as she rejects the recommended book supposed to tell young girls about the bees and the birds: *The Glorious Moment or How a Baby is Born*:

All right, it's a pretty useless book. Full of diagrams you can get out of any Tampax box anyway. And a lot of stuff about supreme bliss and deep loving trust, and opening the virgin treasure – honestly what a daft metaphor, there's nothing in there. [...] If you want to know what I really think, I really think *Women in Love* is just as corrupting and damaging to all our tender blossoming as *The Glorious Moment or How a Baby is Born*. If I thought I'd really got to live the sort of life that book holds up for my admiration I'd drown myself in the Bilge Pond now. I don't want the immemorial magnificence of mystic palpable real otherness, you can keep it. If you've got it. I hope to God Lawrence is lying, tho' I don't know how you expect me to tell, tho' you make me read him. (ViG, 40/41)

When it comes then to her first, rather weird and awkward, sexual encounter with the traveller in dolls, a total stranger, Frederica indeed thinks about what she has read about sex in her books. And has to notice that it does not help her in this situation, partly because most of the literature she consumes was written by men. The language of those books is accordingly male and thus proves to be limited and unsuitable to describe, or help to describe, a young girl's feelings. Olga Kenyon further explains: "Byatt indicates that sexism in language is not simply *man-made*: it is a wider reflection of the power-balance in our society, where until recently men have done most of the *naming*. Frederica had no idea what it was to be a woman nor had she many ideas to help her understand men" (Kenyon 1988, 75). Frederica has further never been part of a group and did not have close female friends from whom she could have learnt about sex so that her literary education left her well-read but also "vulgar and clever and arrogant and frightened, uncertain of tone and well-meaning" (SL, 139). However, as a grown-up woman, Frederica is able to make the connection between literature and sex, between body and mind when she thinks about Blake and Donne while sleeping with her husband Nigel (BT, 40). This connection displays Byatt's and her heroine's indeed sensual pleasure in literature and shows how the passions of the mind are similar to those of the body.

This opposition between 'man-made' language and female experiences is also made by Stephanie who reads Wordsworth at the Ante-Natal Clinic. As Byatt points out, "Wordsworth was a man speaking to men. He had said so" (SL, 17) and yet, Steph chose him and his work to accompany her throughout her pregnancy because she can make a

connection between his words and her female biological identity. It is also Wordsworth who makes her think about memory and time (SL, 187). Thus, one of Byatt's main subjects is also brought to the fore: the continuity of time and the importance of memory in the process of identity formation. Her occupation with Wordsworth causes Stephanie to think about confinement and freedom, bodily as well as of the mind. But while she experiences freedom in thinking, in using her intellect, her body calls her back and takes the lead: "She felt a moment of freedom, looked at her watch, saw that there was no more time to write this down or work it out. Indeed, even as she looked, what had seemed a vision of truth settled into a banal, easy insight" (SL, 188). Yet, the power of literature becomes obvious in that it can tell you something about yourself or help to form a picture of yourself.

Bill, Frederica, and Stephanie but also Alexander think in terms of books which are in fact their religion. This becomes evident in the first meeting and collision of Bill Potter and Daniel: "There is more truth in *King Lear* as far as I know than in all the gospels put together. I want people to have life and have it abundantly, Mr Orton. You're in the way" (ViG, 46). Her protagonists are as greedy readers as Byatt is herself and Frederica and her literate mind is a good example of this. During the bus ride which takes her to her first sexual encounter, Frederica loses herself in literature and considers Racine, Shakespeare and Shaw as well as the Alexandrine verse. It is as if the narrator who looks into Frederica's mind speaks directly from Byatt's own experiences and conveys her thoughts as a literary critic and teacher: "Whereas what struck one, meeting Shakespeare and Racine, was the difference, in the whole frame of the work. There ought to be a way of describing the difference. Compare and contrast Phèdre and Cleopatra as portrayals of passionate women. No, no. It was not really to do with the unities either, which felt like a red herring. It was to do with the Alexandrine" (ViG, 264). Stephanie resembles her sister strongly in that literate mind. Her greatest fear of marriage is consequently the loss of that, her love and passion for literature which has to be fulfilled in order for her to exist. Reading is as necessary and vital to her as breathing. This becomes evident in the dream she has shortly before her wedding (ViG, 327ff.) and which is filled with literary allusions she analyses herself after waking. Milton, Keats, Wordsworth and others all make an entrance into this dream and so she comes to the conclusion:

What she thought she thought, weeping a little, consciously and decorously, was that she should not marry, she had lost, or buried, a world in agreeing to marry, she should go back to Cambridge and write a thesis on Wordsworth's fear of drowning books. [...] Then she thought she herself was afraid of being in the same place as her attention, body and imagination at once, and that

Daniel would require this of her, and there would be no place for urn or landscape in their own terms. But if it was death to hide them, it was, it surely was, death to immerse oneself with them. She had no answer, so would do what came easiest, what was already well-fixed, and marry. (ViG, 332)

A.S. Byatt, with a mind as fixed on literature as Frederica's and Stephanie's, consequently stresses in an interview that "my books are thick with the presence of other books, but I feel that out there in the world must be other people who read as passionately as I do and actually know that books constantly interweave themselves with other books and the world" (Wachtel, 77/78).

Frederica's love for the written word is strengthened in Cambridge, where she studies, of course, literature. But it is already in the summer before her entrance to university that she decides to become a writer which "was almost inevitable, given the excessive respect paid in the Potter house to the written word, and given Frederica's own mastery of, and intense pleasure in, the school essay" (SL, 71). Although she would like to write fiction and her readings as well as her father have taught her that the novel is the highest and most satisfying form of literature (SL, 73), she has to notice that her strength lies in criticism. Later on literature therefore somehow naturally becomes her profession as she reads unsolicited manuscripts, writes reports on them and starts teaching as well. Frederica, accepting that she cannot write a novel, does nevertheless make attempts at writing. Eventually, her book *Laminations* is even successfully published and well received by the public as it serves as a mirror of its time displaying the fractured zeitgeist of the 1960s. For Frederica Potter writing is a means of defining herself and finding a meaning in her life. As her life and her time appear to be fractured and she herself feels incomplete in this fragmentation, this becomes naturally evident in her book which is expressed with its title: "She had had the word, *Laminations*, before the object. It referred to her attempts, to live her life in separated strata, which did not run into each other. Sex, literature, the kitchen, teaching, the newspaper, *objets trouvés*" (WW, 39). *Laminations* is furthermore an example of how public and private interfere as Frederica tries to connect both private texts (thoughts, feelings, memories, diary excerpts, letters) with public texts (literary quotations, instructions to the Pill). These public texts have become private to her, have a meaning that is special to her and yet they can also appeal to everyone else. *Laminations* is a work that consists of bits and pieces thus resembling its creator who perceives of herself as a mosaic that consists of several single fragments.

During her marriage with Nigel Frederica becomes indeed lost, books do not seem to help her anymore and refuse being guidelines. Foster's "Only connect" causes her problems as she is not able to achieve the requested oneness:

Only connect, she thinks contemptuously, only connect, the prose and the passion, the beast and the monk. It can't be done and isn't worth doing, she thinks on a long repetitive whine, she has been there so often before. She thinks of Mr Wilcox in *Howards End*, thinks of him with hatred, that stuffed man, that painted scarecrow. Margaret Schlegel was a fool in ways Forster had no idea of, because he wasn't a woman, because he supposed connecting was desirable, because he had no idea what it meant. (BT, 33/34)

Her life and world is at this moment in time fragmented and she cannot deal with linear patriarchal narration which her own work, aptly named *Laminations*, proves. Frederica has already as a young girl of seventeen thought about laminations as she intended to keep the desires of her mind separated from those of her body. After her marriage, in which she unsuccessfully tried to 'only connect' both passions, she comes back to her idea once again. As her divorce trial nears, her lawyer wants her to narrate the story of her marriage and tell what happened between her and Nigel. But she cannot find the right words and the right form to put it down. Her narration remains fragmented instead and it is eventually her lawyer who puts it together in some form of rather male narration. While she works on the tale of her marriage and fails to put it down on paper in a such coherent structure, she occupies herself with E.M. Forster and his demand to 'only connect' (BT, 306ff.). In contrast to this she comes up again with laminations, a concept which suits her well: "She thinks of Forster and Lawrence, only connect, the mystic Oneness, and her word comes back to her again, more insistently: laminations. Laminations. Keeping things separate. Not linked by metaphor or sex or desire, but separate objects of knowledge, systems of work, or discovery" (BT, 359). And it comes to her mind that she could use this as an art-form which is "constructed brick by brick, layer by layer" (ibid.). Her book *Laminations* is therefore made of cut-ups and of a rearrangement of "things that already exist" (BT, 384) thus once again pointing to Byatt's concern with "Tradition and the Individual Talent": while using texts/sentences/words that have already been used, Frederica expresses herself and creates something new. Her cut-up technique mirrors her view of herself as a mosaic and she consequently considers her many roles as a woman: "[S]he is many women in one – a mother, a wife, a lover, a watcher" (BT, 462). And she senses that these different women should have different voices, different rhythms of speech and a different vocabulary which

help them to express themselves. We come to see that Frederica's struggle for creativity is indeed connected to her struggle for independence.

Byatt's concept of lamination is strongly connected to the postmodern idea of fragmentation which is further mirrored in the structure and construction of her Quartet. I have already expressed my opinion that the four books of the Quartet are like laminations in themselves as all can be read separately but together form a whole. While every novel is in itself a layer of something bigger, the novels are built of different layers as well. This fragmentation is accentuated by Byatt's use of time or her breaking up of a conventional time frame. Reynolds and Noakes hence stress that "[t]ime – as in her quartet of novels or even in *Possession* – has no relevance, because it weaves in and out and around, and resists shaping, sorting, ordering, cataloguing, listing. Byatt's imagination 'includes' everything and isn't limited by finite boundaries" (Reynolds/Noakes, 10). *The Virgin in the Garden* and *Still Life* are introduced by prologues which allow an insight into the main character's life in the future and serve as introduction to the actions of the past dealt with in the novels. The prologues are furthermore means to connect the novels with each other and Jane Campbell adds that the prologue "introduces a postmodern project containing gaps, broken lines, fragmented experience, and open endings, at the same time as it gestures towards linearity" (Campbell 2004, 68). The prologues thus already display and play with A.S. Byatt's thoughts on fragmentation/separation and connectedness. As there is no prologue to introduce *Babel Tower*, the four different beginnings of this novel point to the idea of oneness and separateness as a unit.

The first opening to the novel depicts a seemingly innocent nature scene with a singing thrush hence connecting it to *A Whistling Woman* which is filled with bird metaphors and also uses the thrush as a starting motif. As the thrush acts like a predator killing its prey, Byatt already hints at the cruelty and acts of violence portrayed in *Babel Tower*. It has to be noted that Byatt makes frequent use of the bird metaphor in connection to women.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> The comparison between Frederica and a bird is already drawn in *The Virgin in the Garden* when Wilkie, upon discovering her tone-deafness, likens her and her flatness of speaking-tone to a peacock (ViG, 414). This early reference to a peacock and its relevance for Frederica is taken up again in the fourth installment of the Quartet as Luk Lysgaard-Peacock gains more and more importance in her life as her lover and father of her second child. Their connection is thus already hinted at in the very first novel of the Frederica Quartet and taken up again in *Babel Tower* when Frederica's and Luk's similarities are noticed (BT, 358) but it becomes most obvious in *A Whistling Woman* as their love affair starts. Luk does his name indeed credit as he points out his very own bird-like behavior. Especially when it comes to love and sex and his desire for Jacqueline, the bird-references and comparisons are heavily drawn upon (WW, 175/176). This link between a man and birds is, however, rare in the Quartet as mainly women are compared to birds. The associations we have with birds are quite various

Birds/women are often held in cages but also have wings to fly away. This little bird on the other hand is of male sex and 'he' can therefore be linked to Nigel and his brutality towards Frederica. Throughout the novel Frederica has to ask herself why she fell for Nigel and why she married him considering his limited use of language which differs so much from her own passion for words. This is again foreshadowed by the thrush: "The thrush sings his limited lovely notes. He stands on the stone, which we call his anvil or altar, and repeats his song. Why does his song give us such pleasure?" (BT, 1) This is indeed a central question of *Babel Tower* and of *Babbletower* alike – how can one find pleasure in pain? Jane Campbell, who has occupied herself intensely with A.S. Byatt and her work, has analysed this first opening of *Babel Tower* in detail and she has noticed that not only is the thrush a recurring motif in the Quartet but so are snails. Snails are the bird's prey and thus serve as an embodiment of the "sacrificial victim" (Campbell 2004, 232) in *Babbeltower*. The abused girl Felicitas is compared to a snail when curling herself up like a shell trying to find shelter from the other children's cruelty. When her mother jumps to death from the tower, she "came down like a great bird [...]. And her head hit a sharp rock, like a snail dropped by a thrush [...]" (BT, 275). "Visually, the snail motif introduces each of the sections of *Babbletower*," Campbell adds and continues, "the snail itself is a text" as Jacqueline and Luk have found out that one "can

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and even contradictory as they can both be fragile, little beings as well as mighty kings of the air. Birds can be caged, their wings cut, or they can be free and able to fly to wherever and whenever they want to. Their claws and talons can be threatening just like their pecking can cause hurt and pain. These winged creatures can hence be symbols of freedom and re-birth (Phoenix) or regarded as bad omen connected with darkness, despair and death. This ambiguity is transferred to the Whistlers which feature in Agatha's story *Flight North* and are introduced in the first chapter of *A Whistling Woman*. These Whistlers, a cross-breed between birds and women, are considered to be killers, cold and without emotions. Their voices, a shrill shriek, are unbearable for all creatures (WW, 1/2). The truth is, however, that they are only deadly because they cannot be understood. Nobody seems to understand their language, a curious mixture between human (female!) and bird speech: "their language, like their bodies, was a dreadful hybrid, feather-words and skin-words grown into each other, beak-words and tongue-teeth-words fused" (WW, 4). Byatt hence turns again to a problem she has already discussed in *Babel Tower* where Frederica fears to speak a language nobody else can understand. Only if her language can be interpreted can she herself be understood. To understand the bird-women, one has to separate and connect at the same time as only Artegal is able to: "He could hear it, he could even construct it, by some terrible operation inside his own skull of simultaneous separation and stitching, so that he was, as it were, dividing the two fronts of a leather jerkin and then, between the two parts of his brain, threading them together, with a thong of thought" (WW, 4/5). Then, as he can understand what the Whistlers say, he can understand their story and how and why they became what they are now. Women, as they also seem to speak a different language, are in a similar way exiled from society. The link between the title of Byatt's fourth novel of the Quartet and the bird-women of the story inside the story becomes obvious as both the whistling woman and the Whistler-woman strive for freedom. For freedom to come and go as they like, for freedom to do as they please and for freedom to make choices of their own. This freedom however often comes with rejection and isolation. But time and progress will eventually bring acceptance and understanding: "And she said, no, she could never forgo the wind in the wings, and the free racing through the stormskies. But she would like to be welcome in Veralden, to drink wine again, with her kinsfolk" (WW, 6/7).

read the snails' DNA on their shells" (Campbell 2004, 233).<sup>89</sup> Byatt thus presents a topic that prevails in *Babel Tower* and *Babbletower*: the world of texts, the world of language. As the author herself is occupied with the creation and construction of narratives, so are her characters. Life stories intertwine with history and with the literary canon. Byatt sees the world as a text.

The second beginning of the novel is the continuation of the Frederica story and thus the connection between the first, second and fourth part of the Quartet. Frederica's change in life and character is immediately brought to the forefront as she is "dressed for hunting. But she no longer looks like a huntress" (BT, 4). In *The Virgin in the Garden* and *Still Life* Frederica was on a constant hunt for not only knowledge but men as well. The image of the huntress mirrors her power, independence and greed for something more. The hunt was her quest. Now, this role is reversed as she becomes the prey.

*Babel Tower's* third beginning proceeds with Daniel's story and is hence in line with the preceding two novels where Daniel is featured in the prologues as well. Although he and Frederica do not really like each other they are close and remain to stay in touch as the years after Stephanie's death go by. At the end of *Still Life* Daniel abandons his children of which the reader is reminded as he listens to a woman telling him about how she, too, has left her children and disappeared. This beginning furthermore brings memories of Stephanie's cruel death when Daniel is informed of his daughter Mary's accident. As he imagines this accident and fears she is to die as well, not only the motif of the thrush that kills the snail is taken up again but Felicita's and her mother's death are foreshadowed: "And now it is as though he has hurled a rock at his small daughter, or pushed her from a high place" (BT, 25). This already sets the tone for *Babbletower* and leads to its first chapter which is in fact the fourth beginning of the third novel of the Quartet. Moreover, the Daniel-beginning has also introduced the author of the novel within the novel – Jude Mason, or Steelwire.

Naturally, it is no sheer incident that there are four beginnings to *Babel Tower* but rather in accordance to the four novels which form the Quartet. They also serve as an intertextual play as they are a reference to T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* which are already mentioned in *The Virgin in the Garden*. Frederica is already as a young girl obsessed with the *Four Quartets* but can only as a mature women understand its connection with the Coronation and "with the Coronation's gestures towards England, history and continuity"

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<sup>89</sup> Comp. BT, 357 and WW, 18

(ViG, 319). The influence of the past on the present and the continuity of time are therefore mirrored in these four beginnings. As each novel stands on its own, each beginning could also introduce an individual story. Yet, as they are all connected, like the novels, they eventually form a whole. Byatt thus draws attention to the fragmentation and constructedness of fictional works and also to Frederica's fragmented state of being. The world in *Babel Tower* is in itself fragmented and thus mirrors the time it is set in. The 1960s were a time when things were out of joint and had to be sorted out again. It was also a time when identity was questioned and especially women tried to find meaning and an identity of their own in a world that was changing. *Babel Tower's* remarkable construction hence points to Byatt's concept of identity which can best be described in the following words: "A person may make use of diversity in order to create a distinctive self-identity which positively incorporates elements from different settings into an integrative narrative" (Giddens, 190). What Byatt suggests in her Frederica Quartet, then, is that identity is indeed fragmented and even fragile. It is not fixed but open to metamorphosis. Especially women have 'multiple identities' which adjust to their life's circumstances, hence the references to birds and also to snakes when it comes to the discussion of female identity. As snakes shed their skin, women can change shape as well. This thought is expressed in one of the epigraphs to *A Whistling Woman*, taken from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*<sup>90</sup>: "[...] 'But I'm *not* a serpent, I tell you!' said Alice. 'I'm a – I'm a – ' 'Well! *What* are you?' said the Pigeon. 'I can see you're trying to invent something!' 'I – I'm a little girl,' said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through that day. [...]" The image of the snake brings with it associations of an animal that is potentially dangerous and threatening, that coils, is slippery and cannot be easily caught. The same is true for identity which can similarly not easily be grasped. Accordingly, Frederica has "an image of her several selves, the child, the woman, the mother, the lover, the solitary, tangled like coiling snakes in a clay pot, turmoiling" (WW, 14/15).

Frederica's identity is as fractured (comp. BT, 379/380) as the identity of many a woman of her generation in fact was. Women at this point of time were often forced to make a decision between a life of the intellect and love. It was difficult to combine the

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<sup>90</sup> There are indeed various intertextual references to *Alice* in *A Whistling Woman*. Not only is Frederica herself compared and linked to Alice (comp. WW, 134; 137) but her TV show alludes to Carroll's work as well as its title *Through the Looking Glass* suggests. The set of the show is furthermore constructed like "Lewis Carroll's chess-board" with "a precise and arbitrary schema that could contain and proliferate thoughts, images, and connections" (WW, 134).

desires of both body and mind. Yet, Byatt is eager to point out that, as times were progressing, this combination became more and more possible. She exemplifies this by contrasting Frederica's development intertextually with that of Virginia Woolf's Rachel from *The Voyage Out* (1915). Both protagonists recite Milton's *Comus* during a fever attack and Frederica is seen struggling between her intellectual and the passions of her body: on the one hand, she desperately wants to belong to the male world of knowledge, of Cambridge, and "to be let into its closed courts", on the other hand she knows that this could mean a loss of future motherhood for her as she felt to be "strangled with her waste fertility" (SL, 322/323). As yet, times were not right to allow women to be the equal to men and enjoy both family and career. Women were instead forced to suppress one of their passions and desires. Katharina Uhsadel has given a detailed analysis of and comparison between Woolf's passive heroine and Byatt's fierce and fiery one (Uhsadel, 54; 106/107) and she comes to the following conclusion:

Hier zeigt sich also der Fortschritt im Erwerb und aktiven Umgang mit Bildungsgut. Während Rachels Dilemma bei Woolf recht offen gehalten ist, was auch die Interpretation ihres Todes erschwert, wird Fredericas innerer Konflikt durch Miltons Verse explizit benannt. [...] Dies weist darauf hin, dass trotz der deutlichen Fortschritte durch die Eröffnung neuer Bildungschancen und eines bisher ungekannten Handlungsspielraums die Grundkonflikte der Protagonistin ungelöst bleiben [...]. (Uhsadel, 107)

This conflict between body and mind is considered in all four novels of the Quartet but is obviously at the heart of *Still Life* where it comes to an unsatisfying solution with Stephanie's death and Frederica's unlucky decision to marry Nigel. This marriage forces Frederica to eventually ask herself once again and thence consider Freud's question: "What do women want?" (comp. WW, 148) and what does she want for herself?

### 6.2.2 The Quest for Identity

As Frederica thus ponders her life and questions her identity, another aspect of the Bildungsroman is touched upon. This reflection upon one's own identity is an important part of the genre and perfectly embodied by ambitious, intelligent, and critical Frederica who is used to making decisions on her own regarding her future. The actual quest for identity is finally the major concern of the Bildungsroman in general and is especially in the case of the female Bildungsroman accompanied by the heroine's pursuit of a fulfilled and satisfying

(career and family) life. The quest is actively started with the onset of a journey or a move of the protagonist from an often rural community to the city or to a foreign country or from school to college. One of the characteristics of the Bildungsroman is therefore indeed a childhood in provincial surroundings from which the heroine tries to flee and free herself. This wish to escape can be triggered and intensified by family conflicts, especially by stressful collisions with a tyrannical father and the feeling to have no connection to a mother who somehow chooses to stay in the background. Frederica and her mother are in fact alienated from each other, apparently do not speak the same language and thus do not understand each other. Frederica has always been the child who was least in need of her mother; there has never been a feeling of connectedness (comp. ViG, 41 and SL, 319/320) between Winifred and her daughter. And although Frederica and her father frequently fight and she desperately wants to get away from him, it is Bill whom she resembles more than any other in the family as Winifred points out fairly early on in *The Virgin in the Garden*: “Winifred wondered, as she often wondered, why Bill found it compulsively necessary to quarrel so disastrously, to argue, for him so crudely, with the one child who had inherited his indiscriminate and gleefully analytic greed for the printed word” (ViG, 41). Even Frederica has to admit her father’s inheritance and influence on her as she “had inherited greed for learning, greed for knowledge and information as surely as she had inherited red hair, sharpness and something that could euphemistically be called impatience, from him” (SL, 320). Yet, she intends to cut the cord by leaving her home, going to France for a summer and then to Cambridge to lead a life of her own and also come to an understanding of her/self. For young Frederica identity and its definition have to do with separation and demarcation. As she grows older she nevertheless has to accept that she is connected, that she cannot be wholly separate. She is indeed connected to her family which she can only fully comprehend when she has a child of her own. Leo is a part of her as she is a part of her father with whom she shares those marked similarities. Like a Drabble heroine, for instance like Faro in *The Peppered Moth*, Frederica Potter has to acknowledge her heritage and where she comes from to eventually define and recognize herself and her unique identity. One’s role in family as well as in society, indeed one’s connection to the world (and as such to history), plays an important part in the development of identity. Frederica can only come to this conclusion after freeing herself from a disastrous and harmful (to both body and mind) marriage.

While Frederica's story of development starts with the impulse to revolt, to be separate and to quite literally break free, Stephanie's reaction is passivity, a denial of taking action. Like her younger sister, she opposes her father and denies doing what he wants her to do or wants her to become. From an early age on Bill Potter has promoted her talents and demanded from her to use the gift of her intelligence and mind. Yet, by being so ambitious he ruins Stephanie's own ambitions so that she decides to come back home after her successes at Cambridge and teach at Blesford's Girl Grammar, thus throwing herself away as her father thinks:

She was here as an extreme act of passive defiance. The one thing Bill did not want was that she should 'throw herself away' on Blesford Girls Grammar. So here she was. In his house, asserting her independence by refusing to leave it, refusing to inhabit his ambition for her, which would be a worse prison than his house. He had been a careful tutor, and she had, by nature and through art, the gifts he desired for her, and because the ambition was his, not hers, she would not use them. [...] He wanted her to be a Fellow of Somerville, the literary editor of a worthy weekly, a provincial professor. If he had not wanted it, she might have. (ViG, 89)

Stephanie's behaviour is, although understandable, childish and what she does not realize is that it probably would have saved her life to fulfil the passions of her mind instead of those of her body. Being a wife and mother, restricted in her bodily, earthly world, she desires a life of the mind and it is only then that she fully notices the consequences of her decisions.

In earlier novels of female development the ultimate goal of the protagonist's journey and quest was, however, marriage. This is not the case in the Frederica Quartet as marriage does not offer a happily ever after for most of the novels' characters but rather proves to be a dead end. While the male characters of the Quartet mainly seem to be content in their marriages, married life appears to be a cage for the female ones, and their weddings indeed resemble surrender. Especially in the first two volumes of the Quartet, *The Virgin in the Garden* and *Still Life*, matrimony is described in bleak terms. Winifred married Bill because he promised her a different future than that of her mother of which she had been most afraid: "too many children, too little money, mastered by a house and husband which were peremptory moral imperatives and steady physical wreckers" (ViG, 111). Bill on the other hand "had lent her *Lady Chatterley* and preached about freedom: he was in flight from a more harshly defined version of the house, man, woman, she herself meant to step beyond"

(ViG, 112). However, soon Winifred has to notice that things had indeed not changed and her life differs not so much from that of her mother; she is neither free nor Bill's equal partner nor satisfied in general and so her hopes finally die and "[q]uiet spread over more and more areas where hope had been" (ibid.). Bill does not physically harm his wife, but he is loud, harsh, opinionated, tyrannical and has a bad temper. In *Babel Tower* and especially in *A Whistling Woman*, Byatt's tone concerning Bill's and Winifred's marriage somehow softens as their life becomes unexpectedly more harmonious after his retirement and Winifred eventually manages to liberate herself in old age. Although they have to overcome many an obstacle, sadness and despair and have to raise their grandchildren after Steph's death, they use the end of life as they knew it to start all over again. Growth and development, Byatt seems to suggest, is never over if only you dare to move forward.

This progress is denied to Stephanie, the oldest daughter of Winifred and Bill. She is the intelligent and gifted one, probably even more so than Frederica. But unlike Frederica Steph decides to come back home after her graduation at Cambridge and teach at the little village school. She is described as a passive and slightly lazy but pretty and very feminine young woman and as such as the exact opposite of her sister Frederica who is frequently labelled "aggressive" (comp. ViG, 41 and 102) and even "possessed by a demon" (ViG, 41). Whereas Frederica wants to go on and get out of school and her home town, Stephanie lingers on not knowing where to go and what to do with her life: " 'Why don't you go away from here, Steph? *You* could.' 'I suppose I will. I'm just taking a little time to think.' She bent her head over the kittens again, unwilling to contemplate that question" (ViG, 60). As she herself is passive and still, so is her life. The fatal consequences of her character traits and life choices are intertextually emphasized by a reference to one of John Keats' darkest odes. Byatt has even titled a whole chapter – dedicated to Stephanie and hinting at her potential downfall – after Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (chapter 8 in ViG, 98ff). This chapter shows not only what a talented teacher Stephanie is, but also how strong the influence of literature on her is as she seems to embody the ode. Already the first lines of Keats' work can easily be applied to Stephanie who resembles that "unravish'd bride of quietness: / Thou foster child of silence and slow times" (lines 1-2) and she might even be one of the women who is pictured on the urn and who tries to get away from a group of men pursuing her (lines 8-9). Her return to her hometown has also been a flight from her pursuers at Cambridge but even there she is not safe as she is unable to escape Daniel's advances and she cannot put up any

resistance against his sheer force of willpower (comp. ViG, 103ff.). On the contrary, his passion eventually fuels her own. Keats, however, suggests in *Ode on a Grecian Urn* that human passions and especially their sexual expressions are transient and fulfilling those desires consequently causes pain: “All breathing human passion far above, / That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy’d, / A burning forehead, and a parching tongue” (lines 28-30). Stephanie’s relationship with Daniel hence appears to be doomed and the “parching tongue” (line 30) foreshadows her loss of language and diminished vocabulary in her marriage. Keats’ general emphasis on human transience might thus point to Stephanie Potter’s death which mirrors the paradox of life versus lifelessness displayed in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

A prospective view on Stephanie’s marriage as some sort of trap is given with the introduction of Jenny, a young wife and mother who has an affair with Alexander and who is one of those unhappy “energetic young married women, bored, lonely and unemployed in a small male community” (ViG, 52). And Bill even thinks that his daughter throws her life away when marrying Daniel because she is “totally unfitted for that sort of non-existence. Like a race-horse in a milk-float. You’ll go crazy in a week if you aren’t, as I said, already. [...] You’ll become a cow. A cow and a slave and tweedy tea-pourer” (ViG, 258/259). Jenny, too, makes this cow comparison and points out the inevitable death of the mind which is connected to marriage and motherhood: “ [...] don’t suppose that the death of the mind can be avoided by a little rushed reading between two lots of nappies and dishes, because it can’t” (ViG, 507). Marriage for Stephanie is indeed to become some sort of imprisonment as is hinted at fairly early on in the beginning relationship between Daniel and Steph. While she is the golden child, dressed in light colours and with blonde, soft hair, he is a heavy man always dressed in black thus somehow sucking in the light which surrounds her: “The peering literary child watched them bump off uncertainly together, through the dusky bushes, the fat dark back and heavy piston legs obscuring her view of the captured green and gold” (ViG, 104). Byatt’s emphasis on clothes and their colours in *The Virgin in the Garden* is also a reminiscence of the first Elizabethan era which spreads its fingers to the new Elizabethan age of the 1950s. And it is Stephanie who is lectured to on “colour symbolism in Elizabethan dress” (ViG, 144) and how even “the shapes of clothes, in those days, were full of significance” (ibid.). Byatt’s description of Stephanie’s clothes and attire has indeed a sexual connotation which points to Steph’s neglect of her mind in favour of her body and its passions: “Her skirts – she was wearing the obligatory layers of stiffened net petticoat –

rustled. Her shirt-dress was dark rose-pink. Her falling hair on her gold cheek was curved and full" (ViG, 146). During their relationship Daniel has to notice that Stephanie's liveliness and her colours fade away and that she is not only "drifting away" but "going grey" (ViG, 293). Again her impending death is foreshadowed when she states: "He – Daddy – might come round. You – might decide it wasn't a good thing. I might feel less dead. [...] Oh, Daniel. Maybe it's all your own, the energy. Maybe you did it all. Maybe I've had the life knocked out of me before I was old enough to know." (ibid.)

Frederica regards Stephanie's life as wife and mother as a confinement (SL, 156) because she senses that her sister's life as general caretaker (of her children, her mother-in-law, Marcus) is unfulfilling for the mind. To Frederica it is hence necessarily a contradiction that in the moment Stephanie feels finally and for once unconfined, she conceives her second child (SL, 156). Yet, as much as Frederica fears this confinement and restriction of her intellect, she still believes "unquestioningly, with part of herself, for instance, that a woman was unfulfilled without marriage, that marriage was the end of every good story. She was looking for a husband, partly because she was afraid no one might want her, partly because she couldn't decide what to do with herself until that problem was solved, partly because everyone else was looking for a husband" (SL, 153). Byatt obviously voices her own fears when describing wedlock as a deadlock for educated women and yet women were so caught in the stereotypical gender roles society expected from them that marriage seemed to be not only demanded and desired but natural. Even Frederica, herself a free-thinker and deterred by her parents' life together, believes that she is to marry one day, partly because it is still the expected thing to do as a woman and partly because she wants to have everything, career and family, as a dialogue with Nigel shows: " 'And then what?' [...] 'I dunno. Sometimes I think I'll stay here. And do a Ph.D. I've got a topic. I've applied. I also did the *Vogue* Talent contest, just for fun.' 'And what do you hope to do eventually?' 'I don't know.' She would not say the word, marry, and would not, perhaps could not, think of a convincing future without it." (SL, 353).

Aged 17, married life is a whole new and distant world for Frederica which she only considers to be an option as a life choice after her sister tells her she wants to marry Daniel. Frederica's view on this topic is somewhat ambiguous as she believes that married life is at once a loss of freedom and at the same time a new, exciting world. Byatt expresses Frederica's thoughts by describing a rather ridiculous scene in which a herd of brides-to-be

all try to find the perfect veil (ViG, 252/253). Yet, as silly as this ritual appears to be, Frederica can also see the hopes and dreams in the young faces and fetches a glance of the potential happiness marriage, love, motherhood can bring:

There was an occasional smirk of embarrassment, or grimace of distaste, but most of these faces, revealed with a classical gesture of a hot damp hand suddenly taking on a produced, shy grace, composed themselves into a remote and reverential expression, round faces, horsy faces, prim faces, anaemic faces, faces with steel-rimmed glasses, all with parted lips and eyes stretched in a kind of ritual amazement at an as yet unachieved new self, new world. Frederica thought it was touching and absurd, and looked at their legs, stumping, thumping, jostling on the muddy floor. (ViG, 253)

After Stephanie's death, Frederica feels completely cut off and separated from her family, she is lost and confused and can consequently be lured into marriage by Nigel whom she romanticises as a Byronic character or an attractive Don Juan (BT, 98) thus mistaking the real man for a literary hero. She does not know what she is doing and mistakes their sexual connection for something more which is nevertheless not there. Nigel takes her away from her family and friends and into confinement and seclusion. Seclusion is to be taken quite literal once she moves with her husband to the family countryside estate Bran House – a castle which becomes her prison, surrounded by fields, meadows, deep woods and, fittingly, by a moat. Frederica is absolutely cut off from her former life, and it is made almost impossible for her to get in touch with civilization, friends and family. Even language is different and alien to her as the Reiver family uses a different vocabulary. Frederica feels as if words and meanings have changed, as if her own language has been cut and her vocabulary is reduced and restricted. In Bran House she hardly ever speaks with her real voice. This tragically reminds one of Stephanie who has literally always felt at a loss for words in her marriage as she cannot hide from Daniel anymore towards the end of her life:

'I've been thinking. I suffer from having to use a limited vocabulary. All the time. How big do you suppose the average used vocabulary is? 1000 words? 2000? Will can't know that many and Mary even fewer. And the people I see – in the shops – 'And my poor old Mum – 'And your poor old Mum,' she said steadily, 'and most of the people in this parish, wouldn't understand most of the words I really care about if I were suddenly to say them, right out, out of the blue. So the words become ghosts. They haunt me'. (SL, 370)

Stephanie has felt this loss of language already during her first pregnancy when biology took over her mind, motherhood being for her indeed the death of the mind: " [...] her world seemed narrowed to her own biology. She observed her own actions with a lazy, impersonal

curiosity. She noticed, for instance, that she had trouble to conclude a sentence, written, spoken, or simply said. The moment she had even a hazily shaped idea of what she meant to say, or might have said, that seemed enough, and she let the words trail away into blank and silence" (ViG, 478).

Frederica's isolation is mirrored in *Babbletower*, the novel within the novel, and Bran House can indeed be compared to La Tour Bruyarde. Comparable to the characters of *Babbletower* who try to flee from violence and upheaval and find shelter in a new and peaceful, secluded world, Frederica has tried to escape from the hurt and desperation Stephanie's death left her with. Nigel and his marriage proposal provided this protection she sought. But just like the inhabitants of La Tour Bruyard experience violence which harms body and mind and are faced with death, Frederica is confronted with cruelty and also faces death when she realizes what her husband, who eventually shows his true face, is capable of. As a trained soldier he knows how to hurt and torture her and when she attempts to escape Bluebeard's Castle, Nigel throws an axe at her, wounding her badly. Under cover of the night Frederica can finally run away and flee suppression and wedlock (which is a term I quite like in this context as it strangely seems to refer to being locked up). By describing Nigel as a "dark man" (BT, 34) and Bran House as his castle, Byatt ironically refers to the romance novel, a literary genre generally considered to be created for the female mind. A.S. Byatt has indeed expanded the historical novel by adding themes from the romance novel such as love, sex, seduction, relationships, marriage, and even by other experiences of womanhood from first menstruation (WW, 234) to first love to first sex (there is a whole chapter dedicated to this relevant episode of Frederica's life as a woman titled "Seas of Blood", ViG, 554ff) to pregnancy and birth (SL, 107-13) and even miscarriage (WW, 184). Like her sister Margaret Drabble, Byatt, too, regards these occurrences in a woman's life important for self-development and essential to the formation of a specific female identity. And as such they should not be considered trivial or even taboo but part of female private history. By adding her realistic descriptions of female experiences, which are at times bloody and painful, Byatt lifts the veil of romantic love described in romance novels and instead gives plain facts as Sue Sorensen emphasizes as well:

Byatt's determination to tell death plainly is similar to the way she handles birth, and in *Still Life* she employs many of the same strategies for these fundamental personal experiences. Stephanie Potter's experience in giving birth is written with the same precise attention that her death scene will later be given. Byatt removes much of the figurative language from the scene, is

careful to avoid stereotypical and gendered formulations, and attempts a direct relation of body and mind experience, in defiance of traditions that construct death as a spiritual event. (Sorensen 2002, 117)

Her heroines are therefore often disillusioned so much so that Byatt states in an interview with Jonathan Noakes: “I found [...] that young male British novelists have a deep nostalgia for romantic love, whereas the women don’t at all. If you read the novels of Julian Barnes and Ian McEwan, the heroes are desperate to re-establish a context in which romantic love has meaning. I think the women have completely given up, and in a sense the people who really feel love in my novels are, on the whole, men!” (Reynolds/Noakes, 26)

As the author alludes to Nigel Reiver as a sort of aristocrat and to Frederica as a commoner from a rural background, Byatt mirrors the content of the Mills & Boone novels Bill Potter so despises (comp. ViG, 41). While married with Nigel and imprisoned in Bran House, Frederica’s life resembles such a novel. Although she can live out her sexuality and bodily passions, her mind and its passions are starved. Since Frederica always had a “too tough and inflexible” (SL, 152) sense of her own identity it becomes clear that she cannot submit to Nigel’s expectations of her as his wife. She feels she has to dress up and disguise herself while with him. She is not allowed to be herself any more but has to pretend. Consequently, Frederica’s journey and quest for identity has not ended with marriage but starts all over once again with her escape from the unreal gothic romance plot that her life has been turned into at Bran House. As she has to find a new place for herself and her son, Frederica also has to reconsider her role in society, even become a part of society once again. Her life story and her process of development are mirrored in Agatha’s tale *Flight North* which resembles a tale of Bildung as well. To emphasize the interrelationship of fairy tale and real life, Ellen Cronan Rose cites Bruno Bettelheim who explains: “Fairy tales depict in imaginary and symbolic form the essential steps in growing up and achieving an independent existence” (Rose 1983, 209).

This independent existence can only be realised in connection with other people as Agatha’s tale implies as well. As Artegall, Mark, and Dol Throstle can only survive and reach the goal of their quest because they have each other, Frederica recognizes that she needs other people in her life to find completion of her/self. Nicole Bokar rightly remarks that “[t]he heroine begins her journey of self-identification, then, through comparison with a sister who threatens her sense of individuality” and that she has to observe “that one’s essential self – either seen through a sibling’s eye or compared with that person – remains a

major reference point for personal identity throughout one's life [...]" (Bokat, 64). Although Steph and her younger sister Frederica are so different in character and looks – one is the curvy, feminine and soft blonde and the other the fiery, bony and aggressive redhead – they are close to each other in sharing their passion for literature and even for the same man, Alexander Wedderburn: "There was no rivalry, only a curious complicity, about their love for him, probably because both in different ways were convinced that the love was hopeless" (ViG, 58). Frederica and Stephanie do not always agree or even understand one another, yet, they are close, which explains why her sister's death turns Frederica's world upside down. Her identity was closer connected to Steph's than she ever could have known or accepted. Already as a young girl Frederica was not part of a group or formed close friendships with other girls. She was, on the contrary, somewhat isolated, partly because girls did not like her, her sharp wit and tongue, and partly because she wanted this separateness. She stays away from fellow female students in Cambridge as well and only makes superficial friends with a few. Instead, she is surrounded by men who are her friends, lovers, and mentors. As she learns from them, Frederica broadens her mind and, as she is sexually open and curious, the knowledge of her own body and its desires grows as well.

### **6.2.2.1 Body and/or Mind – Biological versus Intellectual Identity**

After her marriage, Frederica notices the relevance of the relationships between women as she moves in with Agatha to share a house. Agatha, her daughter Saskia, Frederica and her son Leo thus form a new family model, an alternative to the traditional family. Elizabeth Abel states that "[w]omen characters, more psychologically embedded in relationships, sometimes share the formative voyage with friends, sisters, or mothers, who assume equal status as protagonists" (Abel, 12) and so does Frederica whose identity develops in her connection to Agatha and also by comparing and contrasting herself with Jacqueline.

Agatha and Frederica are both single mothers, an experience which certainly connects them. Yet, the foundation of their friendship is really their common love for language and passion for words (comp. BT, 170). They do also bond because they share a similar past as rather lonely children who were caught in their own worlds of language and literature which naturally set them off and separated them from other girls their age. Frederica as well as Agatha have thus learnt to become self-sufficient to an extent which

borders on egotism; both still are as grown-up women. Working as a Principal for the Ministry of Education, Agatha is career-wise very successful and rises indeed fast in the hierarchy of the Civil Service, a world still dominated by men. Frederica looks up to her house-mate as someone who has found her place in the world: “a woman with a solid place in the world, a secretary, a telephone, colleagues, an office” (WW, 10/11). In her eyes Agatha knows where she is positioned and is even defined by her job, something Frederica misses since she feels insecure of herself. Agatha has what Frederica wants – an “outline and architecture” (WW, 38). Agatha, however, considers it a restriction to be defined as such, as a tough business woman. Her success in her job somehow relegates her to a rather male sphere where she feels pressured to restrict her female side. But she wants more, she wants a private life and love as well, she wants a family and a father for her daughter Saskia. Nevertheless, she keeps this desire for herself, does not share her longings with Frederica who has in fact no idea of this side of Agatha. The reader is similarly kept in the dark and it hence comes as quite a surprise that towards the end of *A Whistling Woman*, Agatha has eventually found her missing piece and has a relationship with Gerard Wijn Nobel (WW, 417) who might well be Saskia’s biological father considering that he is a Dutchman and Saskia was named after the Dutch painter Rembrandt’s wife.

While Frederica and Agatha share the passion for language and literature, Frederica and Jacqueline resemble each other in their ambitious greed for knowledge. Both strongly feel the “desire to know the next thing, and then the next, and then the next” (WW, 24), a hunger which is really insatiable. The “inexorable force of her own curiosity” lives in Jacqueline and “like a bright dragon in a cave, it had to be fed, it must not be denied, it would destroy her if she did not feed it” (ibid.). The passions of her mind are strong and overrule those of her female body. Although she had affairs at university, these sexual encounters were mainly caused by curiosity and a feeling that they were somehow expected from her and so she gave in. Deep inside she “still ha[s] a conventional vision of herself, some day or other, meeting the ‘right man’ and being joined to him in a flurry of white veiling and organ music” (WW, 23). However, she decides to deny and neglect these dreams (probably implanted in her by her family and society) to instead “do hard science” (WW, 20) and make ground-breaking discoveries. As she prefers the desires of her mind to those of her body, she ignores Luk Lysgaard-Peacock’s approaches to her and chooses asexual Marcus Potter as her love interest. Being in love with Marcus is safe for her

since she knows that he will not take any sexual interest in her and she is thus able to keep on concentrating on her work. Being in love with Marcus makes her feel like an ordinary woman with ordinary feelings. Marcus is her alibi friend and a disguise for her ambitions: “Marcus was not quite of this world, not quite real, and Jacqueline, as she began to understand the extent of her own ambitions, began to suspect that she had chosen him for this reason” (WW, 24).

However, after having slept with her boss Lyon Bowman, Jacqueline’s body awakens and takes over her mind. The sexual act itself was not that great as to be a revelation but it was more or less Bowman’s behaviour towards her and his belittling her as a “good girl”<sup>91</sup> (WW, 167) that caused Jacque to eventually open her eyes to the passions of her body and ask herself, like Frederica does, “What do women want”? And as Frederica asserts “[t]he body wants to be pregnant” (WW, 148), Jacqueline comes to a similar conclusion. For too long a time, she thinks, she has neglected her female body and only fed her mind. She is indeed not a girl anymore, but “a woman who was heading beyond the natural age for easy child-bearing” (WW, 168). Her body hence develops a life of its own and is not relegated by her mind any longer. Instead of following her intellect and some “abstract idea” (WW, 170), she wants to live and break free from the needs of her mind which she now thinks have restricted her: “Luk, I must be mad, I should have listened to you, I don’t know how I got myself so cocooned in *myself*, I want to be able to do the things – people do – I want to live, not just think” (WW, 169). Knowing that Luk loves her, she turns to him for help, love, sex, a relationship – although she does not share his feelings. As Frederica had tried in her marriage, Jacqueline, too, makes a desperate attempt to “only connect”. Luk turns out to be the wrong partner for her as in their relationship Jacque’s body-mind-balance is out of sync which is symbolized by her miscarriage. Marrying Luk and having his children would just be the wrong thing for her as she has to confess: “I don’t want to get married. I can’t. I want to want to get married, but I don’t. *It was all a mistake*” (WW, 185).

Jacqueline is successful in her scientific work and tries to be content in leading a life of the mind alone. Yet, she still has a nagging feeling that a life of the mind cannot be all there is for her. As a woman, her scientific achievements are not valued as much as those of her male colleagues. In the eyes of society she is regarded suspiciously because she does not

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<sup>91</sup> Jacqueline is not being taken serious by Bowman when he tries to sooth her by calling her a “good girl” and thus belittling her. Frederica has had a similar experience with Nigel who also turned her into a “good girl” and thus made her feel “[a]s though she was a horse, or a laboring sheep” (SL, 353).

conform to gender roles and stereotypes. Giving in to the desire of her body was her attempt to eventually feel “human” (WW, 255) and feel accepted. Because her relationship with Luk failed, she feels like a failure as well when it comes to satisfying her needs as a woman. She cannot think in laminations like Frederica and hence needs to find another way to a balance of body and mind. Jacqueline and Frederica have indeed more in common than they think because both are trying to combine intellectual and biological identity. If only they could have been trusting enough to open up to each other they might have shared their fears and anger: “How hard do you find it, being an obsessed intellectual, and a woman, too, does your own biology bother you?” (WW, 253) Jacqueline’s decision to prefer mind over body has also physically changed her: she has developed from a pretty girl into an attractive woman. The unhappy relationship with Luk and her miscarriage forced her to step out of her comfort zone, to eventually shed her skin, reveal her true self and step up for it. Obviously, her experiences have hurt her and made her harder, but they have also done her good: “She had been a glossy nut-brown girl, and had become a sharp woman who looked somehow emptied out. She had become thin, her mouth was tighter, her bones more pronounced. It suited her. The removal of her comfortable persona made her real intelligence visible” (WW, 245). Her unexpected relationship with Daniel, in whom she finds a confidant, helps her to achieve and settle her personal body-mind-balance. And, as *A Whistling Woman* comes to an optimistic end, Jacqueline and Frederica are eventually “part of a new world of free women, women who had incomes, work they had chosen, a life of the mind, sex as they pleased” (WW, 415).

It is in these women – in Frederica, Agatha, Jacqueline, and Stephanie – that Byatt not only explores specific female experiences and female sexuality, but also ponders the question if there is or has to be a separation between the female body and mind. In an essay for *The Guardian*, Byatt reflects on the body-mind-problem especially intellectual women have been confronted with throughout the centuries. She states that she has already been pondering “the modern female desire to be undissociated” since the 1950s because, in her own experiences, “the body required sex and childbearing” which was then followed “quite likely [by] the death of the mind” (Byatt 2004). A.S. Byatt hence applies the separation and interplay of body and mind to her own life as well. In my introduction to the author I have pointed out that already as a young woman and writer she tried to allocate the passions of her body and those of her mind to two distinct planes. In an interview from 2009 Byatt

admits that she still is a split persona in the sense that she separates her mind from her body and can thus function as a loving wife, mother, and grandmother and at the same time be a writer, a creator of things: “I think of writing simply in terms of pleasure. It’s the most important thing in my life, making things. Much as I love my husband and my children, I love them only because I am the person who makes these things. [...] who I am, is the person that has the project of making a thing. Well, that’s putting it pompously – but constructing. I do see it in sort of three-dimensional structures. And because that person does that all the time, that person is able to love all these people” (Leith). Frederica is the embodiment of Byatt’s love of literature and for her, too, literature is indeed the glue which connects her biological and intellectual identity: “When Frederica had finished writing these reports she feels a kind of complicated glee. It has many components: she has enjoyed the act of writing, of watching language run black out of the end of her pen: this has in turn made her feel that she is herself again, and has made her body real to her, because her mind is alive” (BT, 155).

Byatt here clearly voices how important it is for her to use her mind just as it is necessary for Frederica to be more than only a mother and wife which she reminds her husband of during a fight:

You knew what I was when you married me – you knew I was clever and independent and – and ambitious – you seemed to *like* that – God knows I had nothing *else* someone like you might be interested in, no money, no connections. I’m not beautiful – all I was was bright and you can’t marry someone for their brains and their – resourcefulness – and then expect them to behave like – [...] Like that sort of girl you might have expected to marry – but didn’t – one who has always gone hunting and shooting and likes just being in the country. (BT, 37)

Her greed for knowledge and thinking makes it impossible for her to remain restricted and reduced in her marriage with Nigel. Marrying him, she comes to see, has been a decision made by bodily desires and as her sexual greed was fed her mind was starved. Byatt suggests that body and mind should ideally be in a balance. That this combination of body and mind has for quite a long time not been encouraged by society becomes obvious in the divorce trial Frederica has to go through. She is in fact judged for her active mind, for her intelligence and her striving for a career. The court emphasizes that Frederica has neglected her female body and duties by failing to be a devoted wife and mother and thus disregarding conventions which still tried to push her into the role of the Victorian angel-in-the-house. Being an avid reader and greedy for knowledge is regarded as some kind of perversion or

deformity and thus Frederica's whole being and identity are questioned, put onto trial and eventually crushed. As the court stresses her bodily failures and disregards her mind, Frederica feels weightless at court. She is too thin and has no bodily presence in the patriarchal world of justice: "When the judge begins to speak, Frederica thinks again, 'I am too thin'. She *has not enough weight*. She is nothing. The things she knows she cannot say and the things she says are not descriptions of what she thinks was and is what happened or is happening. He has not heard her. He will find against her" (BT, 517). Frederica feels like she is voiceless and once more restricted in her vocabulary as she does not speak the language of the male court. The struggle of body versus mind thus becomes a struggle of female versus male: body representing the female counterpart and mind referring to the male one. Yet, the walls dividing these two spheres crumble down as Byatt suggests in *Babel Tower* and carries out in *A Whistling Woman*.

Both novels are set in the 'Swinging Sixties', a time of change and upheaval, and a time when gender roles were questioned and started to develop into new directions. The introduction of the Pill promised new freedom for women who were now able to explore and live their sexuality as it diminished the fear of unwanted pregnancies. As Frederica's divorce trial proves, society was nevertheless not quite ready for this change and the judges consequently despise her apparent promiscuity. Sexuality, especially female sexuality and homosexuality, was still something that was dubious and potentially dangerous. This is pointed out by the obscenity trial concerning *Babbletower* which is modelled after the real historical trials on Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Even Frederica herself cannot quite comprehend her age's new approach towards sex as she is not sure how she feels about her one-night-stand with Desmond Bull. Although she planned the loss of her virginity in a rather un-romantic way and chose a man she was not in love with to 'do' it (thus putting mind over body) and slept with quite a few men in Cambridge to teach herself more about her body and its desires (again emphasizing mind over body), she is confused by the sudden sexual freedom the pill allows her. In a way, she feels, society, or men, now expect women to be willing sex partners. In her essay "Other Women" (2011) Francine Prose voices a similar opinion when describing the female attitude towards sex in the early 1970s: "And however misused, the word liberation was very much in the air, often to mean having sex with someone because it was more trouble to say no" (Prose, 170). The views concerning sex at this time of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were not only

ambiguous but hypocritical. A freer sexual culture seems indeed utopian. Byatt thus points out that the Pill was on the one hand an instrument of emancipation and liberated women, but, on the other hand, it also restricted them once again. Jane Campbell also comes to this conclusion when explaining that “[n]owhere is the danger of reductiveness more threatening than in the lives of women in the Swinging Sixties, when the availability of the pill and the expectation of sexual liberation for women could mean the restriction rather than the enlargement of their freedom to make choices” (Campbell 2004, 253). Byatt addresses these problematic issues in Jacqueline’s encounter with her boss who not only expects her to have sex with him but who assumes she must be on the Pill, too: “‘I suppose you *are* on the Pill. They all are, these days.’ ‘No,’ she managed to say, ‘I’m not.’” (WW, 166)

But not only is Jacqueline’s body exploited, it is also her mind her boss makes use of when appropriating her work as his own which makes Jackie feel like a worthless thing, a “see-through implement” (WW, 361). The topic of ‘free women’ is therefore a central concern of Byatt which arises in *Babel Tower* and is more pressingly discussed in *A Whistling Woman*. The author as well as her protagonists look at this through the looking-glass, as the title of Frederica’s TV show suggests. How can and do women express and experience their freedom? And how is this freedom limited? After her divorce Frederica is free of Nigel and his restrictions, she eventually also frees herself from the unhealthy relationship with John Ottokar, she is free to choose a new lover, free to have a baby without necessarily getting married and free to take the jobs she wants. At the end of *A Whistling Woman* it seems that Frederica has been able to achieve a harmony between body and mind and fulfil both their desires and passions. However, Byatt is careful to hint that not all that glistens is gold. It is above all Frederica’s TV show which proves that women are not yet free and still conform to gender roles. While Frederica is the host of the show, she feels like a child with her first guests and stages a *kaffee-klatsch* in her second show. Although she is aware of the parodic aspect of this, her and her guests being dressed and made-up like “girl-women” (WW, 146) denies them to be taken seriously as grown-up and free women. This impression is further strengthened by their discussion of George Eliot and the conflict of body and mind in her work. The works of Eliot generally feature strong heroines who want to be “free, and creative, and sexy” (WW, 144) but who also fail in achieving these goals as Eliot’s characters are somehow defeated by life. One can even compare Frederica with George Eliot’s Dorothea, the heroine of *Middlemarch*, since both strive “to break free from the social,

historical, and cultural identities” (de Groot, 37) offered and demanded from them. Women in Frederica’s times wanted the same as Eliot’s heroines: a combination of love and career, and the chance to procreate and to create. Theoretically they are free to do so, but Byatt herself admits that this is not easily to be accomplished. Already *The Virgin in the Garden* points to the problematic conflict Frederica is to consider for almost all of her life, that between body and mind. Frederica regards her virginity as a restriction because she thinks it is the one thing that separates her from womanhood, from being a grown-up, sexually attractive woman. Her greed for knowing includes not only literature but also sex. As she cannot in any case stand being ignorant, she wants to be relieved from the burden of her virginity as soon as possible: “She wished her ignorance part of it, to be dispelled. She wished to become knowledgeable” (ViG, 269). Because it is only then, she thinks, that her life can turn into new directions and she can free herself from childhood.

Stephanie’s restriction also has to do with specific female experiences: pregnancy and birth. As her body takes over her mind during pregnancy she not only loses her language but also her autonomy: “Something was living her life; she was not living” (SL, 103). Byatt already describes Stephanie’s examination at the ante-natal clinic as deprivations of her autonomy and identity as she is treated as a faceless and anonymous thing rather than as a woman. The doctors do not even meet her eye but examine and treat her body only. At the clinic she is completely deprived of her mind since her reading while waiting for the examination is considered suspect and as something that is not quite right (SL, 19). It is only when she can get out of and away from the clinic that her identity is “partly restored” (SL, 20) again. During birth, nurses once again confine Stephanie as they do not allow her to act out instinctively what her body tells her to do. Yet, when she eventually holds her child for the first time it proves to be a revelation. After a long time, her body and mind are finally in balance again mirroring Byatt’s view that biological and intellectual identity can after all be combined: “ ‘There,’ she said to him, and he looked, and the light poured through the window, brighter and brighter, and his eyes saw it, and hers, and she was aware of bliss, a word she didn’t like, but the only one. There was her body, quiet, used, resting: there was her mind, free, clear, shining: there was the boy and his eyes, seeing what? And ecstasy” (SL, 114). Shortly after this blissful moment, described in poetic language, Stephanie’s mind however recedes to the background once again as maternity takes over her life and Will’s “presence confused her: she was becoming used to a female world of endurance, diminished

vocabulary, chattered conventional confidences" (SL, 116). Daniel senses Stephanie's longing for thinking, for books, and for words and therefore "[i]t was agreed that Stephanie should have some time to herself, to work" (SL, 181). Hence, she packs her Wordsworth and other books and sets out for the library. But already on her way there she senses the sudden loss of her motherly duties and misses her child. Her biological identity apparently struggles with her intellectual one: "Stephanie found it physically hard to pedal her bicycle away from the house. She felt held as by a long linen binder, such as mill children had worn to work machinery, to the shape of her son in his woven basket, one fist in his small ear. She seemed to hear, to feel, to smell powerful calling sounds, ruffling of the air, odours, which wanted her back, insisted that she must return" (SL, 181). Although she tries to pull her thoughts together and still dreams about writing her Ph.D. thesis, these hopes all vanish when she comes home to see how Marcus drops her baby boy. Stephanie's destiny thus seems to be sealed. Frederica, too, notices these changes in the balance between mind and body when she becomes a mother. She has "always seemed to be a kind of solitary, one-off creature, fierce and striving" (BT, 15) which changes when she has Leo and she is indeed surprised "by her passion for his small body" (BT, 33): "She knows every hair on his head, every inch of his body, every word, she thinks, of his vocabulary, even though he is constantly proving her wrong" (ibid.). But she also feels, unlike Stephanie, that "he has ruined her life [...], for inside the new docile Frederica the old Frederica still has her histrionic passion-fits. [She] would walk out tomorrow if it were not for Leo, she tells herself hundreds of times each day, with contempt and puzzlement" (SL, 33). For Stephanie, walking away has never been an option. When Frederica decides to leave Bran House and her marriage she intends to leave her son behind believing that she could actually live without him but not without her separateness. It is only when Leo takes things into his own hands and insists on fleeing with his mother that she notices his real importance to her and how much she loves him. Like Stephanie she has to accept the cord which connects her to her son (BT, 143). It is nevertheless years later, when she relives her memory of that point of time, that the impact of this event on her life and its significance for her become finally clear (BT, 128).

Yet, for Frederica motherhood is different as she manages to still remain separate as she stresses: "I am myself, as well as Leo's mother" (BT, 117). Stephanie is not able to keep things separate and in terms of laminations. In her world, everything connects and is thus muddled up. Her failure is mirrored in the naming of her son. She wants to name him

William, thinking of Wordsworth, but forgets that her father's name is William, too: "I was thinking – I was actually thinking of keeping him separate – I was thinking of *Wordsworth*, a separate thing, precisely my own life, nothing to do with Daddy" (SL, 118). Hence, William is already linked to his family and to inheritance.

One of the central characters of the first novel of the Quartet, although only present by means of allusions and references, is Queen Elizabeth I. Byatt chose the Virgin Queen because Elizabeth favoured the mind and neglected the body by her decision to remain unmarried and childless. She even represented herself as virginal and free of sexual desires. Ignoring all rumours of her various love affairs, she denied to have a life of bodily passions and thus created a picture of an untouched and untouchable stateswoman (comp. Valerius, 239ff.). She did not want to be regarded a weak woman and is supposed to have stated: "I will not bleed!" (comp. ViG,420), thus demonstrating her decision for self-determination. Unlike her father Henry VIII and her rival Mary Stuart, she put mind and thought over bodily desires and thus refused to be driven by sex: "Elizabeth preserved her power in the world by not bleeding in any sense – she preserved her virginity, and was not beheaded, like her mother and her great rival, Mary Queen of Scots, both of whom came down the ice mountain and tried to be passionate and powerful simultaneously" (HS, 158). When Frederica takes over Elizabeth's role in Wedderburn's *Astraea*, she identifies with the queen and ponders her decisions while coming to the conclusion that for her it should be all – love, sex and knowledge. As Uhsadel rightly points out: "Die Theateraufführung leistet einen wichtigen Beitrag zu Fredericas Auseinandersetzung mit Fragen der Lebensgestaltung" (Uhsadel, 87).

How difficult this combination of body and mind is to be achieved is mirrored in Stephanie who is caught between both a poet's heart and a woman's body. She tries to express and fulfil both her pleasures at being a mother and her desire to think but cannot manage it and eventually falls victim to "her community's inability to arrive at an equilibrium of body, mind, and spirit, and of its failure to articulate that quest" (Sorensen 2002, 127). Stephanie would have liked to choose a life of the mind but was forced to fly from Cambridge because of the sexual advances men there made to her. She did not want to fulfil their desires as she did not have any of her own. Instead she wanted to be free from those passions of the body and keep still and passive, 'buried' in Blesford: "She had come back, she admitted, partly because of the young men, because she was always so very glad

to get out of their beds. She couldn't have kept up refusing what they seemed to want or need, on the other hand. She felt used, and that if she was, it was her own fault" (ViG, 205). Ironically, it is now in this seemingly safe haven that she meets Daniel who presses her to marry him sensing that it is not easy for her to say 'no' in general and especially to him who awakens her senses as she admits to her sister: " 'I went to bed with him.' 'And was that exciting?' enquired Frederica, in a voice that startlingly combined the lubricious and the acid. 'It was a revelation,' said Stephanie with dignity" (ViG, 246). For brainy Frederica, her sister's wedding announcement is a shock since she now loses her hopes of ever being free of Blesford: "Stephanie had stolen a march on her and simultaneously corrupted the vision of getting out of semi-detached Blesford and Calverley to a more real and necessary world. If Stephanie, having tasted freedom, could settle for domestic bliss with a fat curate, defeat was horribly possible" (ViG, 247).

Byatt herself undergoes that quest of which the Holy Grail was the successful alliance of body and mind. The union of the artist and the woman into one integral figure can be achieved with the help of shifting those two passions of mind and body onto different layers. Byatt believes, as I have pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, in the concept of lamination: dividing her identity into different laminations she can thus be at once a passionate woman and an artist or intellectual. Thus personal freedom and artistic creativity can be lived fully and the quest for a female identity can be triumphant. A.S. Byatt's interest in this topic was not only kindled by her own troubles to find an answer but also by her opposition to F.R. Leavis's evaluation of George Eliot. Leavis, one of Byatt's lecturers at university, apparently applied different standards in his discussion of the works of the influential writers of all centuries as his judgment of Eliot shows. Indeed, he tended to split the personae of women writers separating the woman from the artist as Christien Franken also points out:

Leavis's evaluation of Eliot's work is based on a clear scheme of oppositions: on the one hand, there is the woman writer George Eliot who is feminine, personal, emotional, self-indulgent in her identification with her women characters. On the other hand, there is the genius George Eliot who is intelligent, impersonal, disinterested, and able to transcend her 'femininity' and the accompanying emotional quality which is 'insidious company to her intellect'. (Franken, 23)

Separating femininity from intelligence, Leavis is caught up in stereotypes A.S. Byatt works hard to avoid as she as an author does not want to be judged by her gender. Although Byatt

does not agree with Leavis' diminishing of 'femininity' she still does not like her own work being labelled feminine or feminist. Of course, these terms can nevertheless be applied to Byatt's novels and their content as her work originates in a woman's mind which is open to the problems and experiences of women in general. Byatt thus mirrors her idea of "Only connect" (various references to this notion of E.M Foster in *Babel Tower*: BT, 18; 33; 109) which she explains to Nicolas Tredell: "I think I also have this desire to connect everything I see to everything else I see, which you could take organically, in the sense that everything is part of some monistic universe and that anyway it's all organic and connected because it's in my head [...]" (Tredell, 69). Hence, one can conclude that the formation of identity consists of a reunion of laminations, of body and mind, laminations being "thin plates or layers which lie alongside each other but don't interpenetrate" (Tredell, 68/69) and which taken together help to form an integral personality. For Byatt, the only possible way to connect the passionate woman and the intellectual is to separate these two identities from each other.

Throughout the first three novels of the Quartet, Frederica is keen on being separate and keeping things, thoughts and experiences stored away in compartments. She is in fact the embodiment of laminations. While she tries to achieve oneness in her relationship with Nigel and intends to apply the concept of "Only connect", she has to notice that she loses herself in this attempt. She therefore returns to her idea of lamination which she already considered as a young girl and of which she sensed that it "could provide both a model of conduct and an aesthetic that might suit herself and prove fruitful" (ViG, 275). "Knowledge," Frederica comes to see, "was power, as long as one did not muck it up by confusing one piece of knowledge with another and trying to ingest it and turn it all into blood and feelings. [...] One could let all these facts and things lie alongside each other like laminations, not like growing cells. This laminated knowledge produced a powerful sense of freedom, truthfulness and even selflessness, since the earlier organic and sexual linking by analogy was undoubtedly selfish" (ViG, 274). After her disastrous marriage which bereft her of her identity, individuality and liveliness she returns to her early thoughts on laminations and separateness: "And she, Frederica, had a vision of being able to be all the things she was: language, sex, friendship, thought, just as long as these were kept scrupulously separate, laminated, like geological strata, not seeping and flowing into each other like organic cells boiling to join and divide and join in a seething Oneness. Things were best cool, and clear, and fragmented, if fragmented was what they were" (BT, 312). Already here, Byatt shows

doubts if such a fragmentation can work. As Frederica prefers science (geology) over biology and consequently mind over (female) body (the joining and dividing cells pointing to pregnancy), she neglects her own nature. At the end of *A Whistling Woman*, Byatt accordingly suggests that as the walls between body and mind, male and female, artists and scientists seem to break down, Frederica comes to see that the resulting chaos is frightening but also enlightening as she herself begins to open up. The laminations begin to slip and open up to a new inter-relatedness. Byatt rejects being categorized as either only a passionate woman or fervent artist, and she thus makes obvious that women do not have to make a decision between the passions of body or mind. Yet, the author also points to the difficulties women can have with combining these two passions and asks if the 21<sup>st</sup> century has solved the problems of women. Will it ever be possible for women to be as free in their careers as men have always been? Or will they always be judged as women?

Laminations can be a chance as Frederica emphasizes after her separation from Nigel. She lives indeed a fragmented life, has several jobs in the big city of London which nevertheless feels like different small worlds to her: "This is the glory of London, her present London, which is several small worlds, Daniel's church, Hugh Pink's flat, Rupert Parrot's dusty office, the house in Hamlin Square, the staff room, the great studios of the Samuel Palmer School, Arnold Begbie's office and the extra-mural class" (BT, 326). After her flight from restriction and suppression this finally stimulates her senses again because "she is safe and anonymous here, and everyone is *interesting*" (ibid.). How deeply implanted the concept of lamination and fragmentation is in Frederica is also expressed in her use of the written word. "Women's voices are diverse and contradictory," Jane Campbell clarifies (Campbell 2004, 241) and so is Frederica's. Her history is indeed a fractured tale which she cannot easily put into linear prose as demanded by her lawyer and the divorce court. The prose expected from her is a male one to which she can only succumb.

For Frederica, laminating is a way to survive and to grow. In his essay on *The Virgin in the Garden*, Kuno Schuhmann on the other hand suggests that lamination is synonymous with limitation when pointing out that the fragmented state of many a character in the novel denies a further growth and development. "Each of the characters," Schuhmann states, "lives in a state of fragmentation and only some of them realize their limitations and long for some sort of coherence. The plot of the novel provides numerous occasions for connecting these isolated fragments. More often than not the result is a confirmation of the status quo.

With the exception of Stephanie and Daniel all these characters are imprisoned in their prejudices and limited visions" (Schuhmann, 116). It is highly ironic that Schuhmann selects Stephanie of all people to describe her as not being limited when it is exactly she who limits herself by her passivity and by her marriage to Daniel. Schuhmann's article appeared in 1983 and thus before the publication of *Still Life*. He nevertheless seems to have missed some points as Steph is already linked with death even well before her marriage and her life is described as standing still. One can even say that her life follows a certain pattern of decline and defeat, marked by the two births (comp. Cosslett, 265), and which eventually culminates in her death. Tess Cosslett describes Stephanie's life as gradually darkening and resolves: "We are shown her undergoing three extreme bodily experiences in the novel, two births (the second birth more painful and less triumphant than the first) and a death. Stephanie's life choice seems to lead downwards to a dead-end, as body triumphs over mind" (Cosslett, 267).

Her father introduces Stephanie as some sort of Samaritan who "likes to salvage things. Living, half-dead, preferably against odds. Very much against odds in this case. I'd say. Are they dead yet, Stephanie?" (ViG, 35) Bill's announcement is caused by his daughter's futile attempt to save some premature kittens and is again brought to the forefront in *Still Life* when she once again takes care of a cat and her kittens (SL, 276/277). After Marcus' breakdown she has furthermore taken him under her wings and lets him live with her and Daniel just as she copes with her grumpy and hypochondriac mother-in-law who also stays in their house. Stephanie is a caretaker and furthermore a devoted mother who hardly ever leaves her children alone. As if this was not enough, Steph is somehow pushed into the role of a good curate's wife who minds the people of Daniel's parish and listens to and tries to solve their problems: "Vegetable, animal, human. Stephanie slowly became host to a motley collection of strays, the more helpless and passive of Daniel's misfits, old or weak-minded wanderers who came and sat for hours at the kitchen table, or in armchairs, rumbled at by Daniel's mother, occasionally scowled at by Daniel. Stephanie gave them cups of tea, and small tasks to perform [...]" (SL, 279). And whilst she takes care of others, she forgets herself and gets stuck in a confinement she is unable to get out of. It is eventually one of her Samaritan acts which causes her death. Tragic in its banality. While she tries to free a bird, brought into the house by the cat, she is electrocuted by the fridge under which the bird hides. Her last thoughts are, of course, not of herself but of others: " 'This is it' and then,

with a flashing vision of heads on pillows, 'Oh, what will happen to the children?' And the word, altruism, and surprise at it. And then dark pain, and more pain" (SL, 403). Stephanie has had the potential for growth and development but fails at taking the chance to do so and Byatt already gives hints in *The Virgin in the Garden* that Stephanie's life might soon be very still: " 'The trouble is,' said Stephanie, 'I feel unfit to live.'" (ViG, 262) It is indeed her vision which is limited. To laminate like Frederica does is consequently not a limitation but on the contrary allows her to grow. Laminating her persona and her world proves to be a powerful tool for her, which enables her to manage her various roles as mother, woman, lover and intellectual. Therefore, laminating does not make coherence impossible. For Frederica as well as A.S. Byatt herself to "only connect the passion and the prose" (comp. BT, 33) leads into a mess as one tends to drown the other. Yet, the author and the protagonist of her novels have to find a balance since both the bodily desires and the desires of the mind are the two sides of the medal. Balance and coherence can be achieved by acceptance: a woman does not have to decide to be either a wife and mother or an intellectual. However, even nowadays women still feel pressured to make a choice between body and mind as the combination of career and children remains to be difficult. This fractured sense of oneself and one's identity is therefore not only a topic of women writers of Byatt's generation but is of concern to younger writers as well as my analysis of Esther Freud's *Summer at Gaglow* is to show. How to combine the different roles women have is a question that cannot have a universal answer but depends on the individual. The quest for a specific female identity hence spans the ages. Writers like Esther Freud are consequently in a long line of tradition of which they are very aware, embracing history not only as a topic of their writing but as an important element in the creation of individuality and identity.

A.S. Byatt's Frederica Quartet is indeed an elaborate example of how the historical novel and the female Bildungsroman, which has at its core a quest for identity, can form a coherent whole. True to her concept, the Quartet is structured like a knot that consists of threads from past and present and even from the future. As a piece of literature, Byatt's four novels pay tribute to their literary predecessors, acknowledge current literary trends and point to future ways literature can take. The author is hence traditional as well as experimental, but nevertheless takes care not to muddle the styles up and instead to aim for balance. Intertextuality, metafictionality, and fragmentation are consequently combined with realism

when 20<sup>th</sup> century conventions meet those of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Accordingly, time, history and memory are the main subjects of the Frederica Quartet.

History runs indeed prominently through all four novels as Byatt gives a vivid picture of British culture and society from the 1950s through the 1960s and 1970s while putting a special emphasis on certain historical events and beliefs or thoughts. As A.S. Byatt creates a historical and historically true setting she also takes over the role of an interpreting historiographer when making clear that history is indeed filtered through a contemporary mind with present-day knowledge and opinions. Having lived in the times she writes about and having experienced a lot of what her protagonists go through, Byatt suggests the importance of memory for the writing of history. Memory, she points out, is not only individual but subject to the times. Memories can change, can adjust, are deeply personal and unique and therefore affect history. History thus turns into something private. Even an occasion as public as the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II depends on the one looking back at it; the past is therefore nothing stable. Byatt consequently hints at the potential fictionalization of history and turns to the postmodern notion of historiographic metafiction. As real as the historical background of the Frederica Quartet is, its author nevertheless frequently stresses that her work is indeed a fictional artefact.

For A.S. Byatt, memory and the past belong together. As a writer, remembering her literary heritage is essential and as a woman, her past is what has shaped her. The importance of history and memory can indeed not be dismissed in the formation of one's identity. For that reason, Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" may be regarded a leitmotif for Byatt's work: although she is aware and accepts how the past moulds her, she also acknowledges her ability to make it new and take different turns. This can be transcribed to Frederica Potter as well. Her history, her family background and her personal experiences have turned her into her present self and yet, as the ending of *A Whistling Woman* suggests, as an independent and creative woman she is still capable of creating her future self. History, then, can undeniably be a liberating force in a woman's life.

In Esther Freud's *Summer at Gaglow*, which is to be examined in the following chapter, the main protagonist Sarah also experiences history's impact on her life and on the formation of her individual identity. History liberates her because she re-discovers her self while simultaneously discovering her family history. Her identity is bound up with her ancestors and her familial history and until she finds the missing pieces of her background,

of her past, she feels cut off and lost. In a general sense, it becomes important to eventually liberate women's history in order to liberate women. I will take a closer look at this sentiment in my concluding chapter and by analyzing Esther Freud's novel I hope to point out that the interest in historical writing and in discovering one's connection to the past is not restricted to one generation of women writers. Freud indeed shares this awareness of the liberating force of history with Byatt, Drabble and Lively. In my next chapter I will hence focus on Esther Freud and her historical novel *Summer at Garglow* as an example of the further development of this genre. In a short excursion I also intend to introduce the new directions current historical novels may take by also including and portraying topics such as postcolonialism, the problems of race and ethnicity in a multicultural society, or by dealing with subjects such as gender history and queer theory. This brief discussion is to show that the female historical novel is an ever evolving and expanding genre.

## 7. Conclusion, Excursion and Future Prospects: Liberating Women's History and the Liberating Force of History

*Liberating Women's History* – this is the title of a collection of essays already published in 1976. These essays deal with the problems of and new approaches towards a placement of women in history. Gerda Lerner, who contributed to this collection, states that “[t]he striking fact about the historiography of women is the general neglect of the subject by historians” (Lerner 1976, 349). Women have for a long time been apparently without a history of their own as historiography has denied them any historical significance. In 1976 Ann D. Gordon, Mari Jo Buhle and Nancy Schrom Dye hence still had to notice:

Historians' neglect of women has been a function of their ideas about historical significance. Their categories and periodization have been masculine by definition, for they have defined significance primarily by power, influence, and visible activity in the world of political and economic affairs. Traditionally, wars and politics have always been part of 'history' while those institutions which have affected individuals most immediately – social relationships, marriage, the family – have been outside the scope of historical inquiry. Because most women have lived without access to the means of social definition and have worked outside the spheres of reward and recognition, they have not had a history as historians have defined the term. Men, given the traditional definition of historical significance, have been active; women, passive. (Gordon et al., 75)

Almost forty years later, the assumption that history is predominantly male has finally been overthrown. Women have fought hard to eventually triumph over this neglect that has made them invisible and insisted on their rightful place in history by pointing to their historical importance. Women and their history as well as their stories do not hide in the dark anymore. They have come to the forefront and by liberating their histories women have liberated themselves. The more women know about their history the more they get to know about themselves as well. In my discussion of the historical fictions by Byatt, Drabble, and Lively I was able to show that finding their history has been an important step for women on their quest for identity. The connection between history and identity features indeed prominently in these novels and Byatt's declaration “my sense of my own identity is bound up with the past” (HS, 93) thus perfectly sums this relationship up.

In my thesis, I intended to examine how women have taken over the centre stage of history and eventually found a voice to tell their history. While traditional historiography has mainly disregarded women, fiction and especially the historical novel have proven essential

to fill in these gaps left in women's historiography. Women writers thus make use of the genre of the historical novel to re-imagine and re-write history by including the voices of women to tell their story and in consequence narrate a different version of history.

In this study I have analyzed several chosen novels that display women's history but are, as has to be pointed out, rather selective in portraying this female side of history as they put an emphasis on the histories of white, heterosexual women who seem to have a quintessential British background. To completely liberate women's history it would however be of interest to take a look at the histories of women with a different background, a different sexual orientation, or another skin colour. In my opinion, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and/or religion all contribute to the formation of an individual's identity and are essential parts of it. I have pointed out that identity is fragmented and constructed thus resembling a mosaic that consists of several parts. Being a woman seems to be a central part of the identity mosaic, however, all the female protagonists in the novels discussed have to ask themselves what it means to be a woman and what actually defines them as women.

Postfeminist studies, influenced by Judith Butler, already regard the term 'woman' as problematic as it implies that a female or feminine identity is really a patriarchal construct. Butler hence not only distinctively sets the categories gender and sex apart but even suggests that both are only constricting constructions. For that reason, she considers identity which is based on assumptions of gender and sex a construct, too. Identity would thus be defined by society and culture, by norms and expectations. Being defined as a woman is thus a confinement. Gender and sex are regarded as social categories which focus on the (biological) differences of human beings who are thus declared either man or woman. This differentiation then forces individuals to an allocated place in society. These identities are consequently not naturally given, but the result of a cultural and historical/traditional interpretation of the body. Queer theory, for instance, suggests that gender identity is just as constructed as sexual identity. Sex and gender are not naturally given but shaped by society and prevailing conventions. Society expects women or men to conform to certain behaviors considered appropriate for their sex. Identity, relying on gender and sex, thus turns in Butler's eyes into a performance. Gaja von Sychowski accordingly points out:

Judith Butler dekonstruiert performative Wirkungen auf den Körper, und zwar performative Wirkungen auf das Geschlecht des Körpers. Sie weist auf 'normative Zwänge', genauer auf 'Geschlechtnormen', hin, welche die Wahl

von Geschlechtsidentität prägen. Dabei wendet Butler ihre Dekonstruktion des Performativen nicht nur gegen das soziale Geschlecht (gender), sondern auch gegen die ‚Biologie‘ und die ‚Materialität‘ des Körpers (sex) [...]. (von Sychowski, 135)

When taking this aspect into account, it becomes obvious that historical novels by women writers which deal with the quest for a female identity also have to occupy themselves with the issues of the biological sex and the concept of gender as a socio-cultural construct. Of the authors I have discussed in my thesis, Byatt is the one that engages most noticeably in a discussion of the role of gender and sex in identity formation. Although she discusses how women can act out both the passions of the mind and the passions of the body, she does not yet propose a total disintegration of sex and gender. Womanhood, Byatt however suggests, should not be determined by society or biology. Keeping this thought in mind, it would be of further interest to consider how the history of women has eventually turned into gender history. In my study I have touched the problems of sexual and gendered identities the protagonists of the novels are faced with. All of the female protagonists struggle to free themselves from the demands of a patriarchal society and the roles imposed on them. On their quest for identity they accordingly ask themselves what determines or defines them as women. They ponder their place in history and society and thus challenge the concept of gender by lying bare that it is a construct.

Equally, race is not an easily definable object anymore but seems to be an artificial construct as well. It is a term which implies political and cultural meanings and can thus be compared to the term gender which is just as determined by society and culture, its norms and conventions, as well as its stereotypes. Britain has a history as a colonial empire and is now a multicultural society. This cultural diversity led to a new character of Britishness which has to be explored as it not only questions national identity but ethnic identity as well. Attention has to be paid to the intricacies of history and their essential impact on the creation of (ethnic) identity. The quest for identity hence includes a search for meaning in history. A novel like Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, which was published in 2003, accordingly displays the struggles of a young Bangladeshi woman in London to establish an identity in which her origins, her history, is in accord with the British culture she now lives in. Ali depicts the formation of an identity that exists in-between two cultures. Identity thus is trans-cultural. While the novel shows Nazneen's isolation and eventually her individual growth, it is also a portrayal of British multicultural society and its problems. *Brick Lane* can hence be

called a multicultural Bildungsroman. The search for identity, history and multiculturalism are also topics to be explored in Zadie Smith's bestselling novel *White Teeth* (2000). The female protagonists in Byatt's, Lively's and Drabble's novels I have examined all look into the past in order to define an identity of their own. However, their familial history is British and they hence do not question their ethnicity or race. Being British instead seems to be a given. The protagonists of Ali's or Smith's novels however have to question Britishness and thus engage with cultural and historical concerns. Multiculturalism is connected to unease and uncertainty, to a sense of not belonging. Race and gender are constructions that are not stable. The question 'who am I?' has thus no simple answer as identity remains also unstable as Paula-Irene Villa's statement points out: "»Queeres« politisches Denken bedeutet, sich bewusst zu werden, dass die vermeintliche Kohärenz und Eindeutigkeit einer Identität immer fiktional sind, bedeutet deshalb, darauf zu bestehen, sich nicht durch einen Namen, eine Kategorie, eine Anrufung vereindeutigen zu lassen" (Villa, 106).

Although identity is in its instability thence seemingly indefinable, women writers nevertheless send their female protagonists on quests for their unique and individual identity. The wish to define one's identity is consequently connected with a yearning to belong. Thus the quest for their female identity leads Frederica, Claudia and Faro on a quest for history – familial history as well as women's history. Being part of history gives them a sense of belonging and helps to overcome the insecurities caused by the instability of identity. The aspiration to come to a definition of oneself and find a place in history is not only a prominent topic in the novels of the women writers I have discussed but also in those of younger writers. Penelope Lively, Margaret Drabble, and A.S. Byatt were all born in the 1930s. Being of one generation, this seems to suggest that they naturally share an interest in the same topics, such as history and the quest for identity, in their writings. As the last chapters have confirmed, the novels of these women writers have indeed various themes and concerns in common. Looking at a younger author such as Esther Freud, who was born in 1963, nevertheless proves that these issues are not restricted to one specific generation but rather ageless. Her writing is inspired by history and memory and her characters are often set on a quest for identity, too. Consequently, I would like to view Freud and her work *Summer at Gaglow*<sup>92</sup> (1997) as a future prospect of the historical novel. History is indeed not

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<sup>92</sup> The novel is also published under the title *Gaglow*.

dead but keeps on fascinating generation after generation of writers who choose it as a theme for their work and as a touchstone for the present.

### 7.1 Esther Freud – Memory and Identity

Just like the novels of Drabble, Lively and Byatt feature autobiographical elements, Freud also uses her own life and that of her family as inspiration for her work, so much so that she can even be regarded as the family chronicler. “I like the thought”, Esther Freud once proclaimed, “of being connected to various people in my family whom I never met” (Freud in Abraham). Memories, her own and those of her family, are therefore the motor to her literary production. “I love how useful one’s life can be to a writer”, Freud gushes and it is consequently no wonder that “[h]er family history and her own life are surfacing more and more as source material for her novels” (ibid.). And, in fact, it seems as if Esther Freud has a lot to write about. Her great-grandfather was Sigmund Freud, her grandfather the architect Ernst Freud, her father is the famous artist Lucian Freud, and her sister is the fashion designer Bella Freud. Considering a family like this, the Freud family history surely provides Esther with many more stories to uncover.

Her own life and early experiences, however, also serve as a prompt to Freud’s work as is already discernible in her first novel *Hideous Kinky*, published in 1992. When Esther was only four or five, her mother moved together with her and her sister to Morocco to stay in this foreign country for two years. Freud covers this time period in *Hideous Kinky*, drawing on her own memories (once again it is to be remembered that she was a little child at this point of time in North Africa and her account of memories may not be reliable) and refurbishing them with invention. Fact and fiction intertwine as do autobiography and novel. Esther Freud underlines this in an interview and explains:

Mein erster Roman beruhte auf meinen Kindheitserinnerungen, und ich habe dabei gelernt, wie man seine Geschichte erzählt und zugleich den Mut findet, sie zu verfremden. Ich habe diese Technik dann in meinen folgenden Büchern weiterentwickelt, ich nehme einen festen Bestandteil aus meinem eigenen Leben und ich lasse ihn wachsen. Manchmal bleibe ich stecken und ich erfinde etwas dazu, manchmal fällt mir noch etwas ein, was wirklich passiert ist. Ich benutze meine Biografie als Material, aber kein Leben liefert das perfekte Buch. (Freud in Lieske)

Like the other novelists I have discussed in the previous chapters, Freud describes reading as her favorite childhood pastime. She however states that she only started reading at the age of eleven but has hardly stopped ever since. When Esther Freud was 12, she resolved, after having read Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*, that she wanted to be a writer. Her first trials at writing were rather unsuccessful, as Freud herself claims, and so she eventually turned to acting. But her passion for writing remained. Between acting jobs, Freud consequently used these breaks to write sketches for theatre. And as writing slowly took over acting, her first novel developed "almost by accident" (Abraham). The memories processed into *Hideous Kinky* came to Freud's surprise easily and she ponders: "It was like chipping away at a stone and finding a story underneath. It was there, all the time, waiting to be given a life" (ibid.). She thus already addresses the subject of memory, with which Penelope Lively as well as Margaret Drabble and A.S. Byatt deal, too. Like these writers, Freud also considers the relationship between memory and identity. Astrid Erll, Marion Gymnich and Ansgar Nünning stress by referring to John Locke and his "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" that the human faculties to remember are essential for identity formation: "Erst die Erinnerung an vergangene Erfahrungen ermöglicht ein Bewusstsein von der Kontinuität und Einheit des Ich" (Erll et al. 2003, iii). Memory, they continue, can help to either construct and shape, but also to change and deconstruct identity (ibid.). Penelope Lively repeatedly voices the direct connection between identity and memory in several of her novels. Identity and memory, she concludes, are similarly fragmented and consist of bits and pieces and different images. This is not only expressed by *Moon Tiger's* Claudia Hampton but also by the author herself in her autobiographies. In her novel *How It All Began* from 2011, Lively once more stresses her thoughts and ponders:

Thoughts drift into recollection, as it so often does. But that can indeed be positive. By and large, good memory eclipses bad memory. [...] This thought segues into another, in some mysterious process of free association. [...] Why had these particular moments lodged? Well, lodged they have, and thanks be. Without them, one would be – untethered. What we add up to, in the end, is a handful of images, apparently, unrelated and unselected. Chaos, you would think, except that it is the chaos that makes each of us a person. Identity, it is called in professional speak. (Lively 2011, 203)

In Esther Freud's *Summer at Gaglow*, it is not (only) Sarah's own memory and past which has an impact on her identity but rather that of her family, especially her father's. Family history can indeed be regarded a branch of world history which even opens new access to it.

Whereas *Moon Tiger's* Claudia Hampton wanted to write a history of the world which was also her own, Freud focuses on the cosmos of family history to create an individual's history/identity. If (world) history is an essential part in the formation of a nation's identity, it makes sense that family history does the same for an individual as Esther Freud points out. Furthermore, writing her novels is, as it becomes clear, Esther Freud's way of finding and confirming her very own identity, just as Aleida Assmann says: "Das Schreiben selbst wird zum Medium einer biographisch notwendigen Identitätsarbeit" (Assmann 2007, 76). Celia Wallhead comes to the same conclusion when stating that "it is through writing that one searches for identity [...] for writing can change, develop or confer identity" (Wallhead 2003, 293).

For *Summer at Gaglow*, Esther Freud chipped away at the stone of her father's memory to find a piece of family history that connects herself to the past. This bond with the past eventually supports her in the development of the self as is mirrored in the novel's main protagonist, Sarah.

### **7. 1.1 Family History and Identity in *Summer at Gaglow***

Similar to Drabble's *Red Queen* or A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, Freud's *Summer at Gaglow* is arranged on two time levels – past and present. The past tells the story of a German Jewish family during the First World War and the present the one of their descendants in London. The narration of the past is influenced by Freud's own family history and she was in fact inspired by a handwritten memoir of her maternal great-grandmother which had been preserved over the years by a relative in New York. The story set in modern times seems to be almost straight autobiography and we can clearly discern Esther Freud in Sarah whose father Michael is mirrored after Lucian Freud.

Freud does not set these two stories of past and present apart as individual narrations which are compared in retrospect, as Drabble does, but, on the contrary, merges them. By doing so, Esther Freud follows in A.S. Byatt's footsteps whose *Possession* displays a similar interweaving of past and present. Petra Deistler's analysis of Byatt's novel can therefore also be applied to *Summer at Gaglow*: "In *Possession* entfaltet sich ein fiktionaler Dialog zwischen zwei Zeitwelten, deren historische Distanz und Diskrepanz ebenso spürbar sind wie ihr Ineinanderverwobensein, ein Dialog zwischen einer fragenden Generation der

Gegenwart des späten 20. Jahrhunderts und einem viktorianischen Textnachlass, der Antworten gibt, da er viele der Fragen, die mehr als einhundert Jahre später brisant erscheinen, gleichsam antizipierend aufgreift“ (Deistler, 149). However, in *Gaglow*, the past is not represented by what Deistler calls “Textnachlass” but by a different estate, a house and, in a sense, by oral history as Sarah’s father tells her of the past while she poses for him. Oral history is not always reliable but strongly depends on the one telling it. Oral history consequently depends on memory and is hence not trustworthy as John Kotre explains: “Verändern und hinzuerfinden von Erinnerungen: das ist das, was heutige Psychologen – wie auch schon Bartlett 1932 – Rekonstruktion nennen. Damit ist gemeint, dass Erinnerungen im Gehirn nicht starr gespeichert sind wie auf einem Tonband oder im Bücherregal. Sie werden immer wieder umgebaut“(Kotre, 52/52). It is therefore no wonder that Sarah’s father admits that there might be flaws and fiction in what he told her: “ ‘You’ll be able to tell me what it’s like.’ His voice was almost inaudible and then, slowly, carefully, he warned, ‘I hope you realize that some of what I told you may not actually be true’” (SG, 233). Freud thus also hints at the unreliability of historiography which depends on its composer. She suggests that there is always a narrative component in the writing or telling of history, especially when it comes to family history which is usually enriched by invention, myth, secrets, fiction, own opinion. Hence she also points to the discussion about the relationship of precise scholarship and historical fiction, about the “problems of accuracy and invention of the writing” (HS, 92). Nünning and Erll point out: “Am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts fanden postmoderne fragmentierte Geschichtsbilder und Identitätskonzepte sowie die auf breiter Basis der Erinnerungskultur erfolgte Einsicht in die Konstrukthaftigkeit von Vergangenheitsversionen im Genre der *historiographic metafiction* ihren adäquaten Ausdruck“ (Erll/Nünning 2003, 13). While all of these concerns, from the fragmentation of identity to the constructedness of memory, are discernible in *Summer at Gaglow*, it would still be too much to call it an obvious representative of historiographic metafiction. Literary theoretical discussions are not brought to the forefront but are rather implied and interwoven into the structure of the novel.

From chapter to chapter the story of *Gaglow* alternates between past and present thus emphasizing the impact of the past on nowadays. The link between then and now is Gaglow, the family estate, which was seized during World War II and is, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, to be returned to the family or the heirs. Richter has rightly pointed out that

“[a]uch Phänomene der Außenwelt können zu historischen Symbolen werden, die Anknüpfungspunkte an die Vergangenheit liefern, z.B. Gemälde oder Fotografien, Briefe, Tagebücher oder Manuskripte, Landschaft oder *country house* [sic]“ (Richter, 11). Houses indeed figure prominently in Freud’s writing and express the desire for a home of one’s own. This is only understandable considering that Esther never had a ‘real’ home as a child. She travelled around with her single mother and eventually moved to London by herself when she was only 16. One critic therefore notices that “Esther Freud is obsessed with houses. As a child, she would gaze at the lit-up windows of other people’s houses and peer in at the figures behind, wondering what it was to have a home” (Patterson). Especially old houses like Gaglow furthermore hold memories, are strongly connected with family history and are thus treasure chests for the one looking for a connection to the past and questing for identity. I have already mentioned this bond between houses and memory in the chapter on Penelope Lively, who emphasizes the concept of the house of memory.<sup>93</sup> Centering all the action of the past around Gaglow, Freud points to its importance to the family and its persistence throughout the ages proves the past’s lingering influence on the present. Freud’s longing for a home is mirrored in the novel’s protagonist Eva, the youngest daughter of the Belgard family and Sarah’s grandmother. Eva loves Gaglow with its corridors, passageways and many doors. She is also deeply stirred by the idyllic surroundings and its picturesque peacefulness: “Eva knelt down and placed the back of one hand on a warm flag. Without intending it, and against all orders, she had come to love this house. She walked round to the front and looked down the straight drive to where the red roofs and the church spire of the village nestled in the valley. Apple orchards spread away to each side and the fields at the back were dotted with creamy, brown-faced cows” (SG, 8). Eva’s and with her Esther Freud’s dreams of a house of their own are further expressed in Eva’s letters to her brother Emanuel at the front. Whereas he experiences the terrors of war, she visualizes their common home: “I’ve been going over our plans for the future, and do you think, when the time comes to build our house we could make sure it’s near a forest? [...] Please don’t forget

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<sup>93</sup> Jon Erickson and Marion Gymnich examine Lively’s approach towards memory and its connection to houses in detail in their essay “ ‘First of all, the place’: Formen und Funktionen der Semantisierung des Raumes in den Romanen Penelope Lively’s”. They come to the conclusion that in many of Lively’s novels and in her autobiographies the reconstruction of memories and of the individual past is linked to a “Raumerfahrung des Individuums” (375). Erickson and Gymnich further state that this is already a topic in Lively’s novel *Going Back* from 1975: “Es ist also die Begegnung mit einem Ort, die den Erinnerungsprozess der Protagonistin motiviert und damit zum Schlüssel zu biographischen Erinnerungen wird“ (ibid.). In Esther Freud’s *Gaglow*, the house itself also is the trigger for Michael Linder to remember his and his family’s past. Although he does not visit it in persona, the thought of it is already enough and functions as a key to his locked up memories.

I want a garden with a wooden fence around it and a broad summer tree with a fork in it for a hammock” (SG, 56). Two generations later, Eva’s granddaughter wishes for just the same thing: “ ‘I need a garden,’ I mumbled into the jumble of backyards, and it suddenly occurred to me that we should visit Gaglow. ‘Gaglow, it’s the perfect place,’ [...]” (SG, 170). One dream connects past and present. These domestic dreams are however put in sharp contrast to another prominent topic in Esther Freud’s writing, which also surfaces in *Summer at Gaglow*: the loss of one’s home, indeed even native country, and with it the loss of identity. This loss seems to run in the Freud family as Esther’s father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were forced to leave their homes and start over anew in a foreign country.

The two strands of the story move at different pace. Whereas the insight into the life of the Belgard family covers several years, Sarah’s quest only lasts several months. It starts when she, in a state of advanced pregnancy, poses for her father, the painter. About to enter the journey of motherhood, Sarah also starts a journey into the past as her father slowly reveals more and more about his and his family’s history. A pregnant main protagonist is indeed not unusual for the female historical novel of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed, especially writers like Byatt and Drabble have put a new emphasis on the experience of motherhood. Their historical novels of development display and deal with all aspects of femininity and hence turn formerly private and even taboo subjects into something public and acceptable. Comparable to the hero of the male Bildungsroman the protagonist of the female novel of education experiences sexuality on her journey towards identity formation. The novelists do not shy away from including the full circle of female sexuality and thus consider topics from the first menstruation to the loss of virginity, from problems of contraception to pregnancy and birth. They freed the aspects of love, relationships and sex from a veil of romantic notions and instead gave way to reality.

Unexpectedly pregnant and alone, Sarah Linder feels a bit lost and unstable and is questioning her own identity. Having been raised by a single mother she felt neglected by a father who walked in and out of her life, so that now Sarah feels somehow without roots. This loss or absence of the father figure and the subsequent search for safety and support usually to be found in family bonds, is another theme which frequently emerges in Esther Freud’s novels. The prototype male protagonists of her novels are therefore either absent or men that are often cool, arrogant, or too demanding. Yet, Freud stresses that she does not “set out to write man-bad, woman-good” and she explains her emphasis on female

characters by her growing up with a single mother and “seeing her adventures” with men and relationships: “[t]here’s no doubt that you start to weave stories and it becomes one of the things that interests you” (Patterson). Again, like Lively, Drabble, and Byatt, Freud confirms that she is no conscious feminist, but that feminism is something that comes rather naturally to her, and is influenced or even triggered by her family history. The family bonds Sarah Linder has are therefore mainly with her mother and half-sisters Natasha and Kate, whom she considers her “illegitimate family” (SG, 122). In the novels I have analyzed in the previous chapters, there has also been an emphasis on the mother figure and the topic of motherhood indeed features in all of them. By examining specific female roles, an exploration of female identity can take place. Motherhood and the mother figure, becoming a mother and coming to terms with one’s own mother, have become part of the female historical novel as they are an essential part of the development of a female self and identity. Christiane Alshut has even come to the conclusion that “[i]n the vast majority of texts with female protagonists in them, the figure of the mother or rather a mother/daughter plot of some kind will be a crucial element” (Alshut 1997, 6). Byatt and Freud have taken a turn from mother/daughter plots and included mother/son plots. In general, family bonds and sisterhood are very important for all of the writers I have discussed. In the female historical novel all relationships, to family, friends, lovers, or (business) partners, are essential to the development of the heroine as she often has to acknowledge the connection between herself and others. Yet, it is important that she does not give herself up in these relationships but cherishes her unique individuality and personality. The relationships between women, as for instance between Frederica and Agatha in Byatt’s *Quartet*, show how women can learn from each other or compare themselves with the other. The ties between women, especially family members, are consequently of great concern in *Summer at Gaglow*, too. Sarah enjoys the connection, friendship and sisterhood with Kate and Natasha, just as their respective mothers do, much to the surprise of the daughters: “ ‘Christ.’ It seemed almost incestuous” (SG, 149). Whereas in the present mothers and daughters are united, the past tells of a different story of mothers and daughters. Bina, Martha, and Eva Belgard<sup>94</sup> distance themselves from their

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<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, there are three sisters in the past as there are three sisters in the present. Three is indeed a number with associations of completeness and perfection, but also points out to the union between past, present, and future. Although Esther Freud has once stated that she is not very much interested in her great-grandfather’s psychoanalyses, her occupation with his work is noticeable. It is also interesting to note that Sigmund Freud had three sons just like his son Ernst had three sons. Since *Summer at Gaglow* is indeed (fictive)

mother whom they in a way really despise: “ ‘She is so vulgar,’ she protested, when after dinner Marianna continued to sit at table with the men, drinking beer and beating them at cards. [...] ‘It’s no way to behave,’ Bina hissed, and the others nodded in vigorous agreement, adding solemnly, ‘Poor Papa, poor, poor Papa’” (SG, 1/2). The girls even regard their mother as the “enemy” (SG, 7) no matter how much she tries to get closer to her daughters. The three girls are, however, in love with their kind and caring father who is quite the opposite of Sarah’s father.<sup>95</sup> Sarah has not seen much of her father during her youth but uses the time she is posing for him to get to know him better and it is therefore no wonder that she is keen on making her father tell her more about their family history and thus, in the process, let her know where she comes from, too.

As Margaret Drabble emphasizes in *The Peppered Moth* and *The Red Queen*, the womanly traits do indeed live on and there is something in our genes that connects us to our past and family. Sarah notices this matrilineage in her resemblance to her grandmother and is happy about this connection and her own bond with history: “Until now I’d considered myself the odd one out. I was two years younger, slight and brown, with olive eyes and a lopsided mouth. ‘My little changeling,’ my mother had once called me, but now with my new eye for family traits I saw that this was not the case. It was even possible I was the real

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family history, it makes sense that the novelist hints at the works and thoughts of one of the most popular figures of her family and history. The obvious interest in the number three might derive from an essay by Sigmund Freud dealing with “The Theme of the Three Caskets” (1913). In a letter to a friend Freud supposedly declared that his third child, Anna, was beginning to occupy a new and unique place and importance in his life which eventually triggered the interest in the number three and thus occasioned the essay. In this essay, Freud examines among other writings two plays by Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* with its three metal caskets Bassanio has to choose from in order to gain Portia, and *King Lear* in which the dying king intends to divide his kingdom between his three daughters. Discussing myths, folklore, and literature, Sigmund Freud eventually comes to the conclusion that the three caskets symbolize three women: these are either the three daughters of Fate, the Parcae, or are three guises of the mother of which man has to choose one – the mother who gives birth to him, the mother of his children, and the mother earth who takes him at death. In *Summer at Gaglow*, the man who has to choose and who is beguiled by several women is Emanuel Belgard. Mother, sister, lover all claim him. Whatever he does, it seems, can only be wrong and consequently his final decision for his lover is considered a curse and he is cut off from family history and memory. It is only when Sarah returns to Gaglow, notices its peacefulness and how it has survived throughout the times, that she senses how the curse must have been lifted: “I tried to imagine my great-grandmother living here, alone with her companion, Emanuel’s wife, while Germany boiled up towards another war. [...] They would walk the paths together, not always in their widow’s black, and in the early evening, drink coffee with cream out on the porch. I should tell my father how the curse must have been lifted, when Marianna went to Jerusalem and brought Schu-Schu home and I thought I caught their shadows, playing cards into the night” (SG, 242/243).

<sup>95</sup> Considering these issues and problems of the Belgard family, one is reminded of Sigmund Freud’s essay “Der Familienroman der Neurotiker” (1909) in which he examines the detaching from children and their parents. Sigmund Freud invented the term ‘Familienroman’ to describe a game children play in which they imagine not being their real parents’ offspring but rather those of someone famous or wealthy. Freud furthermore considered the family novel to be the basis of all novels. The term now describes novels which centre on the destiny of a family, often generation after generation. Taking into account *Gaglow’s* focus on family history, the term ‘Familienroman’ can indeed be applied.

Linder. 'You do look like my mother, it's true.' I hummed over my father's words, and it gave me new confidence in his heart" (SG, 50). To define herself and at the same time to be part of a family, of a whole, is the goal for Sarah's quest for identity. Sarah wants bonds and especially after her son Sonny is born, this connection between her own life and (family) history becomes more and more important to her: "I looked down at Sonny and I shivered suddenly for how little we'd been told" (SG, 122). Sarah, in contrast to her father Michael, does not want to dismiss history but needs and approves of the affinity between past, present, and eventually future as this moment of epiphany shows: "I stopped to catch my breath. Ghastly German songs, I thought, and looked at Sonny asleep against my chest, his head rolled sideways, his mouth pressed open like a rose, and thought, But he was German then" (ibid.). Michael Linder, whom Esther Freud has modeled after her own father, the painter Lucian Freud, in opposition to his daughter wants to forget his German past: "But the subject was putting him into a bad mood. 'Oh, endless ridiculous complications.' [...] 'I've said I want nothing more to do with any of it.' I felt a sudden, irrational slump of gloom. It's Sunny's inheritance as well [...]" (SG, 120). Freud explains that her father was only 10 when he and his family left Berlin for London in 1933. Since then he has never returned: "Mein Vater und die Verwandten, die es nach England schafften, haben Deutschland vollständig aus ihrem Gedächtnis gelöscht. Sie würden niemals wieder Deutsch sprechen, sie reden nicht über Deutschland, sie würden nichts kaufen, was in Deutschland hergestellt wurde. Mein Vater würde auch unter keinen Umständen nach Deutschland reisen" (Freud in Hesselmann & Kogelboom). But Esther, and with her Sarah, ask for affiliation. Their identity, they come to see, is connected to the past and to family history. Acknowledging this connection eventually liberates them as it helps to shape an identity they have formerly been unsure of.

The distance between history and present times is pointed out once again by two different narrators. Whereas Drabble has chosen an unusual and experimental approach towards the narration of history by allowing a first-person narration of a ghost who exists in our times, Freud sticks to a rather traditional third-person narrator. The present on the other hand is expressed by a first-person narrator – the main protagonist Sarah Linder – and seems immediate and intimate. However, the flow of the narration of the past is, as has to be noted, at times interrupted by letters from Emmanuel who writes from the war zone, reporting his daily life as a soldier (SG, 65; 103/104) and by the reminiscences of his

captivity, scribbled down on the backs of letters from his sister (SG, 219ff). Esther Freud includes in her words of thanks at the end of the novel a short bibliography of her source materials, one of them being Richard Samson's *The Letters of Carl Heinrich Hertz, Life in Russia, 1915-1917*<sup>96</sup> which Freud used as an inspiration for Emanuel's story. The inclusion of the letters and his memoirs of the captivity as well as the naming of their real-life source, remind of Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger* and the excerpts of Tom's war diary included in Claudia Hampton's history of the world. History, thus turning to the personal and away from the detached narrative of the third-person, also gets an individual voice and a face, reminding us once again that history is no uniform mass but consists of different voices. The objective is "to crack up totalizing History and to recover, instead, history as stories, voices" (Bode, 53). Although the novel's structure suggests the past's influence on the present, it also breaks up the narration into fragments. This is also emphasized by the different narrators, their different points of view and the inclusion of Emanuel's letters and memoirs. This deconstruction can be seen as a "critique of the existing order" that stresses "fragmentation, heterogeneity and plurality, and the feminist project of deconstructing prevailing cultural dichotomies, decentring the unified, rational male subject and affirming multiple differences" (Maasen/Stuby 1997, 8).

Esther Freud's *Summer at Gaglow* is indeed in unbroken succession to the works of Penelope Lively, Margaret Drabble, and A.S. Byatt. Like the historical novels of the older writers, Freud focuses on a character's quest for identity while examining personal as well as collective past. Yet, the emphasis is put on the individual's reflection of the past and its impact on her: "Die Vergangenheit ist ein Spiegel, in dem wir uns über den Augenblick hinaus wahrnehmen und das, was wir das Selbst nennen, in immer neuen Anläufen zusammensetzen" (Assmann 2007, 10). This quotation of Aleida Assmann also points to the connection of history and fiction: the possibility to create one's self and one's identity variously and thus re-create history can most effectively be achieved in fictional form. Indeed, the re-discovery of women's history has mainly taken place with the help of such genres as biography and historical fiction. Fiction, the historical novel, in fact proves to be the perfect tool to convey histories of women since its fictionality allows filling in gaps inevitably to be found in the long neglected history of women. Fiction creates history.

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<sup>96</sup> Carl Heinrich Hertz, nephew of physicist Heinrich Hertz, died in an air battle at Thilloy-Bapaume in 1918. Richard Samson's *Erlebnisse in Rußland: 1915-1917*, to which Esther Freud refers, are to be found in the library of Hamburg's Institut für die Geschichte der deutschen Juden. Freud was apparently in touch with the institute while researching for her novel.

Consequently, the female historical novel, which is by and about women, often hints at its constructedness as fiction. Metafiction is therefore a central part of historical writings by women. The fact-fiction-dichotomy and thus the relationship between historiography and literature are discussed, either by the characters of the novel or the novel itself when it is for instance an alternative history like Lively's *Making It Up* or crosses the boundaries of a genre such as biography in Drabble's *The Peppered Moth*. Women writers of historical fiction, it thus becomes clear, do not limit their writing to generic boundaries but rather put them to a test or merge them. The female historical novel does indeed not restrict itself to any boundaries or conventions which may not only be noticed in its playful handling of genres but also in the variety of the subjects it deals with. The women writers I have discussed look at the large picture of public history but take an even closer look at private histories thus combining family and world history. They occupy themselves with the issues of history and literature, or with topics considered typically female, such as feminism, motherhood and love. But writers like Byatt also stress the importance of non-gendered creativity and independence. They question if there is indeed something like a female way of writing history and if it is necessary to write history as a woman. What might be considered a typical female device in the historical novel is the inclusion of autobiographical elements. The author seems to be much more included in her work than is the case with male writers and "the edge between lived and imagined history" (HS, 12) can clearly be sensed. Own experiences and thoughts find their way into fiction thus turning the historical novel into an even more personal account of history. Linda Anderson remarks that "autobiography in particular, enacts an active appropriation of identity – the laying claim to both a life and a text – even as it provides the means of opening up both the self and writing to questions of difference" (Anderson 1997, 3). Women writers such as Penelope Lively demanded a re-definition of the genre of the historical novel as they not only wanted the female voice in history to be eventually heard but also stressed that the past actively shapes the present and hence has an undeniable influence on identity. Historical events such as wars, historical developments such as the evolving of the Pill, but also family history and where one comes from all have an impact on the individual. History and identity, the public and the personal, are therefore closely connected.

A further common interest of the writers I have analyzed is the quest for a specific female identity and which comes in connection with an occupation with the concept of

memory. History, I have quite frequently pointed out, has always been a medium through which self-definition was sought. History and identity are consequently strongly connected and Yvonne Knibiehler rightly adds: "Wenn die Geschichte Identitätssuche ist, dann muss man zugestehen, dass die Frauen lange auf sie verzichtet haben" (Knibiehler, 88). The female historical novel is hence not only occupied with re-writing women's history and giving women finally a voice in history but also with the quest for a female identity. The formation and stabilization of identity, as well as self-determination and self-realization thus become part of the historical novel. Historical novel and Bildungsroman in fact combine as the reader follows a heroine who needs to come to terms with the past to understand her present and move on to the future. This examination of the past either occurs through a dialogue between past and present and/or a journey to the house of memory. Memory, one's own as well as that of a whole family, is essential to form an identity. Erll, Gymnich and Nünning even stress that "Identität über Erinnerung konstruiert, modelliert, verändert, aber auch destabilisiert werden kann" (Erll et al. 2003, iii). As the events of the past are remembered, the present is shaped. Remembering is, in the works I have examined, described as an active act of looking back: not only do the protagonists look back at their life but the authors often do as well when touching upon subjects of their own past. Besides this individual memory, a more public aspect of memory is mentioned. The memory of the evolution of the homo sapiens lies in us just as the family traits we have inherited or the literature of the centuries before us. As A.S. Byatt suggests, we are in fact a knot tied together of several strings of memory and history, either public or private.

Thus pointing to the construction of memory, another prominent topic of the female historical novel is touched upon – the unreliability of the one who remembers and of the one who narrates. Byatt, Drabble, Lively, and Freud suggest in their writings that narration, no matter if it is seemingly 'true' biography or openly fictitious, depends on the one telling the story. They thus come back again to the truth-lie-dichotomy in (historical) writing in general.

As memory is further broken into fragments, the authors also suggest that female identity is consequently also fragmented. Women's identity is determined by various roles: mother, lover, daughter, sister, wife, writer – just to name a few. The goal on the quest towards a coherent identity is thence if not to unite them but at least to balance these roles, accept one's fragmentation and to not lose oneself in any of these roles. Margaret Drabble

aptly summarizes this quest when asked whether her protagonists try to achieve the complete rather than the fragmented self:

My characters try various things. They try to find the complete person through marriage, through relationships, through work, through children. It is a perpetual pilgrimage, a perpetual quest for wholeness and for identity. What I like to convey is that in life, one has moments of wholeness and a sense of self which is complete today, but which vanishes tomorrow and you have to begin again. One never reaches a stage of completeness. There is a flux. (Drabble in Khogeer, 205)

Byatt, Drabble and Lively have with and in their works tried to construct a new definition of femininity by pointing to the development of a specific female (fragmented or laminated) identity. This identity arises from an occupation with history and the past as their importance for and impact on the present is stressed. Esther Freud's historical novel *Summer at Gaglow* is an example which proves that a younger generation of women is still unsure of where women stand in society and time. The quest for identity hence remains a focal point for contemporary women writers, too, who seek to (re-)define femininity with the help of history.

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