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TRACING EKPHRASIS IN A. S. BYATT'S *THE FREDERICA QUARTET*

PhD Dissertation

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Date.....

TÜRKİYE CUMHURİYETİ

ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ

SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜNE

Bu belge ile, bu tezdeki bütün bilgilerin akademik kurallara ve etik davranış ilkelerine uygun olarak toplanıp sunulduğunu beyan ederim. Bu kural ve ilkelerin gereği olarak, çalışmada bana ait olmayan tüm veri, düşünce ve sonuçları andığımı ve kaynağını gösterdiğimi ayrıca beyan ederim.(……/……/2…..…)

Tezi Hazırlayan Öğrencinin

Adı ve Soyadı

Asya Sakine UÇAR

İmzası

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INTRODUCTION

Literature allows us to see an indefinite number of imaginary worlds. However, the way we perceive literature does not have to be in terms of mere letters as we visualize at the same time. Literary texts have always had close ties with images and different art forms. But whether real or historical, or invented, the imperative that literature seems to feel to picture nonverbal items, to incorporate them into text, to have us picture them along with the writer, the poet, the novelist and their characters, does appear to be simply inescapable (Cunningham 57). When it comes to the question of how literature vividly puts people, scenes, landscapes and actions as though real, the ekphrastic power of texts becomes a central issue for analysis. As the art of describing works of art, ekphrasis presents a panorama of imaginary and real visuals in a poetic and aesthetic way. The relationship between visual and verbal has always provoked debate since ancient times, and ekphrasis is a mutual and intertextual medium that mute visuals and speaking words both feed on, giving voice to or bestowing on one another a form or image.

Ekphrasis is traditionally considered to be the domain of poetry due to its concentrated form and the characteristics of poetic language at large. Although ekphrasis has made no comparable contribution or addition to the novel genre to the same extent as poetry, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or Tracy Chevalier's *The Girl with a Pearl Earring* could be given as important examples that made use of ekphrasis as a literary tool. As a means of taking this further, reading the four novels in *The Frederica Quartet* by A.S. Byatt in the light of ekphrastic tradition may provide a stimulating frame to analyze these novels which offer a reinterpretation of this ancient tradition and thus, propose an innovative way of exploring her works. Byatt shows a tendency for rich visual imagery, facilitating an interpenetrating process of seeing, viewing, thinking and imagining in that the selected

works present a detailed visualization through verbal accounts inviting the readers to make an interpretation that is not only visual but also an intellectual experience entailing critical attention.

Visual arts are an important part of A. S. Byatt's writing and besides an aesthetic enrichment, Byatt turns to paintings, pictures or visual representations as an extension of her preoccupation with language, words and images. The juxtaposition of verbal with visual modes occupies a privileged space in the narrativity of *The Federica Quartet* which traces the fortunes of Frederica Potter and her family. The series consists of *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), *Still Life* (1985), *Babel Tower* (1996), and *A Whistling Woman* (2002) portraying Frederica from her years at Blesford, (*The Virgin in the Garden*) to university at Cambridge (*Still Life*) and, later on, in her struggles as a married and divorced woman (*Babel Tower*), and as a single, working mother in London (*A Whistling Woman*). The first installment of the quartet is set in 1953 and the last volume *A Whistling Woman* ends in 1970, marking a time period of almost twenty years. While the plotlines of the novels are successive, with the exception of two prologues in which the linearity is broken, the fact that Byatt penned the novels with long intervals urges to take into account the influences of the eras they were written.

The whole quartet is a journey forming an identity for Frederica in a society where certain roles are already determined. Byatt focuses on women and the constraints imposed on them especially through the sisters Frederica and Stephanie who represent two contrasting domestic and intellectual lives. While doing this, ekphrasis, an ancient tradition of combining verbal with the visual serves as the vehicle separating Byatt from other writers who deal with the same dichotomy in their works. Rather than a simple render of words, finding verbal equivalents and picturing before the mind's eye enables an interaction and active involvement in the scenes, so that a narrative as sophisticated

as Byatt's could be elucidated and an effective meaning is obtained. In *The Virgin in the Garden,* the fascination with Elizabeth as the icon of power and virginity initiates the quest of identity for Frederica, with a portrait of the queen; some of her connotations like Astraea, Venus, Diana and the Lady of Shallot are turned into narrational cores through ekphrasis as those figures coincide with Frederica, her sister Stephanie and the dilemma they represent about the roles of women. *Still Life* accentuates Stephanie's still life after marriage and the dilemma over the confinements of domestic life and the pursuit of independence and imagination, bracketing Van Gogh, whose numerous works are reflective and inspirational for characters most notably Alexander in terms of plainness, accuracy for his dramatic play *Yellow Chair* and Stephanie through still life and its evocations of death.

Byatt's return to the quartet comes after an interval of more than a decade, bringing about some changes in the visual representations and the fate of the characters, keeping up with modern and postmodern aspects of the 60s and 70s. As the title of *Babel Tower* suggests, the theme of disintegration is felt in the form of the novel with its intertextual narration, the chosen art works of collages, combines or cut-outs and Frederica's own fragmented life after a failed marriage. In completing the quartet with *A Whistling Woman*, Byatt finds a new, modern, interactive ekphrastic medium to discuss the dilemmas of marriage, motherhood and the ability to think and imagine while outlining the social and cultural atmosphere of the period with different sub-narratives giving insight through a foreshadowing ekphrasis that emerges in defining the crucial moments.

Within the theoretical framework of the notion of ekphrasis, this thesis aims to explore the ways in which ekphrastic meditation or ekphrasis as representation play roles in urging both a visual and intellectual reading of words and images, to find out in

what ways this form retained its aesthetic origin in the narrative strategies employed in Byatt's *The Frederica Quartet*, as ekphrasis endows the readers with a gift of turning the subjects of visual representations into narrational essences in constructing the plot. With an inclusion of many images, paintings and pictures that are metamorphosed into the story, Byatt does not just enable her readers with a visual experience prompting imaginations through vivid portrayals and depictions, but she also offers a chance of approaching the characters, their motives and inner world from a different, influential and more indicative perspective and provide a distinctive and initiative narrative tool that heavily draws on the images as points of reference to key moments as a means of unearthing basic ideas while addressing certain dilemmas and dichotomies concerning women that are embedded and hinted at in many of the consciously chosen art works. So it is vital to trace the history, nature, theory and use of ekphrasis, starting from ancient times until the modern age, as it may be useful to give preliminary knowledge of the term in building a bridge to the novels. In that sense, the first chapter of the thesis will comprise the term itself, its definitions, evolution, theoretical framework and notable examples, before introducing and examining the novels and how they could be located within the tradition of ekphrasis, with the contribution of many illustrations. At the beginning of the second chapter, Byatt's habit of using visual arts in her fiction, her familiarity with ekphrasis, is substantiated with a short story "Art Work" from *The Matisse Stories* as an alternative to novels. *The Virgin in the Garden* and *Still Life* are scrutinized in the second chapter, as the plot and events of the first two novels are connected and successive whereas *Babel Tower* and *A Whistling Woman* which are placed in the third chapter could be interpreted together in terms of their time period and focus on Frederica. In the conclusion, drawing some inferences from the preceding chapters, ekphrastic power is asserted to lend an alternative and innovative reading in entering Byatt's world.

CHAPTER I: EKPHRASIS AND THE BEYOND

1.1 Towards a Definition of Ekphrasis

There are so many important scholars, academics, art historians and writers who have provided their own definition of ekphrasis, some of whom bring a different dimension or aspect to that ancient concept. Ekphrasis has a long history that stretches from Homer's *Iliad*, through Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*, to W. H. Auden's "Musée dex Beaux Arts". Consisting of the prefix 'ek' (or 'ec' and even 'ex') meaning 'from' or 'out of', and the root term 'phrasi', a synonym for the Greek *lexis* or *hermeneia*, as well as for the Latin *dictio* and *elocution* (the verb *phrazein* denotes to tell, declare, pronounce), ekphrasis originally meant a full or vivid description (Wagner 12).

As a term, the closest to modern usage of ekphrasis is believed to have been mentioned by Simonides of Ceos who is known for his motto "painting is mute poetry and poetry is speaking picture". The most noteworthy ancient source that will be extensively discussed in this chapter is *Progymnasmata*, a Greek textbook of mostly rhetorics which is crucial for the origins of ekphrasis. In a version of it translated by George Alexander Kennedy, it is possible to find one of the first definitions of ekphrasis which explains the term as "descriptive language, bringing what is portrayed clearly before the sight. There is ecphrasis of persons and events and places and periods of time" (45). So, going back to the roots of the term puts forward describing a wide range of topics as well as bringing before the mind's eye which is visualization in other words.

James Heffernan is one of the foremost writers identified with ekphrasis and in his article "Ekphrasis and Representation", he points out that according to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, the use of the word ekphrasis to denote this kind of description

dates from about the third century A.D. and the OED states that by 1715 the word had entered the English language (297)[1]. Heffernan proposes a definition simple in form but complex in its implications, saying "ekphrasis is the verbal representation of graphic representation" (299). He claims that this definition allows distinguishing ekphrasis from two other ways of mingling literature and visual arts, pictorialism and iconicity. He excludes from ekphrastic canon texts that generate in language effects similar to those created by pictures (which he calls pictorialism) and texts that create a visible resemblance between the arrangement of words and letters on a page and what they signify (which he calls iconicity). He continues as follows: "What distinguishes those two things from ekphrasis is that each one aims primarily to represent natural objects and artifacts rather than works of representational art" (299). Although an ekphrastic poem might use pictorial techniques or can be printed in a shape that resembles the painting it represents, it is different in the sense that it represents representation itself. Ekphrasis uses one medium of representation to represent another. What differentiates Heffernan from other critics is the emphasis he puts on the struggle between image and words. In his book *Museum into Words*, he argues that ekphrasis stages a battle for mastery between the image and the word, incorporating representations from Homer and Virgil to Dante and Ashbery.

Heffernan admits that the most influential attempt to articulate a theory of ekphrasis comes from Murray Krieger in his 1967 essay titled "Ekphrasis and the Still Movement of Poetry; or *Laokoön* Revisited". He brings a broader definition of "any text that aestheticizes language in such a way as to evoke the still moment of art". Krieger treats ekphrasis as a way of freezing time in space, on the point that the picture of a moment in a story presupposes that the viewers know the whole story but ekphrasis

[1] Ekphrasis has a long history and as a term, in the Oxford English dictionary, it is described as "a plain decoration or interpretation of a thing". Later on in the Oxford Classical Dictionary, it is possible to find a broader one: "the rhetorical description of a work of visual art."

actually moves beyond what the picture by itself represents, which is a point with which Heffernan disagrees (302). So, the entailment of narration in ekphrastic literature shows that ekphrasis cannot simply be equivalent to spatialization which in Heffernan's words requires a "special effort of poetic will" (302).

While Nazmi Ağıl attributes ekphrasis to works that get their inspiration from a visual work of art (9), Jean Hagstrum says "the special quality of giving voice and language to the otherwise mute art object drawing attention to *prosopopeia*". On a similar note, Bosveld remarks that in bestowing images with words, ekphrasis is an important rhetorical practice that enables a reader to feel like a participant in the visual experience. As a literary expression, ekphrasis allows the invigoration of the silent image of paintings, sculptures, objects or moments by way of poetic language and presents "two imaginations at work" (9) at the same time. In his analysis "Ode on a Grecian Urn or Content vs. Metagrammar", Leo Spitzer speaks of ekphrasis as 'the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art' (207). Thus, critics like Leo Spitzer or Bosveld focus on the creative and transformative aspects of ekphrasis. For Spitzer, it facilitates the transfer from one work of art to another and Bosveld believes that it alters the visual and brings it back from dead (2).

For all their variety, ekphrasis engages with visual arts but a substantial explanation of it is generally sought in the domain of rhetorics as it was taught and practiced in ancient schools and poetry. Apart from the modern definitions, Ruth Webb makes a direct reference to ancient studies of rhetoric by bringing up "a speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes" (1) that was taught to students in Greek schools. However, in time ekphrasis gained different dimensions and moved from simply giving voice to an object to descriptions that intended to bring a person, place or picture before the mind's eye. As Becker states, ekphrasis encourages us to

think of representation as a function of these two complementary processes [viewer-describer relations]… ekphrasis invites us to consider responses to visual representation, then also, by analogy, to consider our response to literary representation (37).

At this point it might be useful to make some space for the American scholar John Hollander's distinction between actual and notional ekphrasis, categories which will provide frames for the analysis of the selected novels. According to Hollander in *The Gazer's Spirit*, the object in question need not even exist. Notional ekphrasis, he says, is a poet's rendering of a fictional object, while actual ekphrasis references an object that exists and is ostensibly available for examination alongside the poem. Hollander classifies poems, such as Homer's description of Achilles's Shield in *The Iliad*, that are written on non-existing works of art as notional and those that are engaged with "particular and identifiable works of art" (4) as actual ekphrasis. Referring to Hollander and giving examples of notional and actual ekphrasis, another important critic in the field Michael Benton has provided a historical overview of *ekphrasis*:

> The classical paradigm is Hephaestus' description of Achilles' sword in Book 8 of Homer's Iliad; the nineteenth-century locus classicus is Keats's Ode on a Grecian Urn. Both are examples of what Hollander has usefully termed notional ecphrasis'[sic], (3) that is, where the poem describes a purely fictional work of art. More recent descendants are virtually all instances of 'actual' ekphrasis where the visual work not only exists but is accessible to the viewer. Of these, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnets on his own pictures are central to the tradition, particularly his celebrated poem 'For Our Lady of the Rocks by Leonardo da Vinci'[2], … . (101)

Byatt has a great interest in paintings as artistic expression and uses painterly language to create a visual picture; her fiction mostly includes verbal descriptions of actual paintings by famous painters. In Byatt's quartet, examples of actual ekphrasis where the

[2] Rossetti's poem is inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks* (*Madonna of the Rocks*) which is one of his early masterpieces.

visual work not only exists but is accessible to the viewer, are seen in various descriptions such as Picasso's works in *The Virgin in the Garden*, Van Gogh's paintings in *Still Life*, Titian's Marsyas in *Babel Tower*, Gerald Wijnnobel's Mondrians and Rembrandt etchings in *A Whistling Woman* and Matisse's still life at the centre of "Art Work".

In the light of these, it is possible to say that ekphrasis is a verbal representation of an encounter with a work of art represented in the form and conventions of another medium. With a commenting and interpreting voice, the images and pictures may function as mediums for reflections of greater depth. Thus, ekphrasis can function as a useful tool in the analysis and highlighting of issues by means of that interaction between verbal and visual. Poets, prose writers, orators, and historians are all credited with the ability to place a subject before the audience's eyes. Intense imaginative involvement with the scenes described is a common type of response to texts. Rather than simply looking at the visual, finding its equivalence in verbal terms could also enrich in narratives in an aesthetic way.

1.2 The Ekphrastic Theory

During the Hellenistic period, a school text known as *Progymnasmata* contained the first definitions and theoretical framework of ekphrasis. Ruth Webb's *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* is an important source in exploring the phenomenon and its place in ancient usage. Webb states that "the principal sources for the rhetorical conception of ekphrasis, the *Progymnasmata*, consist primarily of a set of definitions and instructions for the various exercises, of which ekphrasis was one" (21) and the surviving Greek sources on ekphrasis show that it was taught at the elementary stage of rhetorical training.

The most important things the students learned from that book were a set of practices and skills rather than rules. Young readers were encouraged not to approach texts as distanced artefacts with a purely critical eye, but to engage with them imaginatively, to situate themselves in the scenes and feel as if they were present. Thus, the definitions of ekphrasis as "speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes" date back to the first centuries. It is possible to say that this suggests not just a visual impact but also an emotional one as it involves the readers and listeners in the events or the scenes. Four exercise books by Theon, Hermogenes, Nicolaus and Aphthonius also deal with ekphrasis in topics such as people, places, period and circumstances. Diane Shaffer marks that starting from the rhetorical foundation provided by the *Progymnasmata*, four master rhetoricians- Lucian, Callistratus, and the Elder and Younger Philostrati elaborate on these exercise books for more complex literary and artistic purposes. In particular, Philostratus the Elder and the Younger composed a set of *ekphraseis* known as *Imagines* (306). Shaffer describes the book as follows: "The sixty-five *Imagines* of Philostratus the Elder encompass the full spectrum of painted genres that were popular during the Second Sophistic, including mythological and historical subjects, portraiture, landscape, and still life" (307). According to Diana Shaffer two models of ekphrasis derived from antiquity elucidate the descriptive and interpretative dynamics of ekphrasis. Shaffer puts great emphasis on the difference in how Philostratian ekphrasis conveys an interpretation in contrast to Homer's mimeticism in reproducing an external appearance:

> Homer's account of the Shield of Achilles in book 18 of *The Iliad* marks the beginning of a long poetic tradition founded on the imitative nature of art and the assumed likeness of poetry and painting – two aesthetic ideas grounded in a commitment to mimetic illusionism. Homer's description of the shield of Achilles, which visually depicts human events, exemplifies the aesthetic code later advocated in Aristotelian poetics; in contrast Philostratus's *Imagines*, which is based on the dramatic

> interpretation and reenactment of visual art, exposes the interpretative dimension ostensibly "objective" verbal description. Philostratian ekphrasis performs duplicitously: Purporting to describe pictures, it, in fact, interprets and embellishes them. The differences between the styles and aims of Homeric and Philostratian ekphrasis reveal the competing paradigms of description, interpretation, imitation, and invention in classical rhetoric and poetics. (304)

At the beginning of an ekphrastic encounter there might be a feeling of bringing the visual vividly before one's eye, however as it unfolds, the focus might turn into digging deeper and going further with new interpretations, as David Kennedy points out, "conveying this experience involved not only the careful description of telling details but also a sense of what encountering the person, place or object felt like" (24). At that point, the standard feature is considered to be the element of wonder. Homer himself draws attention to that by saying "such was the wonder of the shield's forging"[3] referring to the amazement of the viewers. Although that amazement starts with imitation, for Philostratus it is only the starting point before interpretation, deeper understating of the work and what the painter might have intended to relate.

To the information offered by *Progymnasmata* can be added Quintilian's discussions of *energeia* and his *Institutio Oratoria*, a well-known account of such imaginative supplementation of a text in which Quintilian discusses the effects of vivid language on the audience. For Plutarch, who emphasized, *energeia* or verisimilitude as the prime quality in poetry, the analogy between poetry and painting becomes important because the quality of truth in the imitation is accentuated. He called this concept *energeia,* or pictorial vividness. *Energeia* represents the energy that is transmitted to the readers of poetry or the viewers of a painting by the poet or the painter. *Energeia* is the creative energy that lies behind the conception and the realization of every work of art,

[3] See Homer's *Iliad* 18.548-9.

be it painting or poetry. It is the life force inherent in the achieved work of art, connecting it to the world it refers to. Effective *energeia* is the result of a controlled and conscious process of visualization (Webb 68). In line with this, it could be stated that the whole treatment of ekphrasis and *energeia* by ancient rhetoricians is based on the assumption that audiences can be made to respond imaginatively to a speech, placing themselves in the situation described. Ruth Webb remarks that Quintilian's distinction between a plain statement of facts, which is narration, and a narration with *energeia* corresponds to Nikolaos's distinction between *digesis* and ekphrasis. Thus, Quintilian provides important information explaining how *energeia* contributes to the overall persuasive effect of a speech. He shows how important the ability to place before the eyes was for the orator who wished to make the audience feel involved in the events, and moreover he explains how *energeia* is achieved through mental images in both the creation and reception of the vivid language which is called *phantasiai* (87-88). Rather than plain statements of facts, a vivid account could capture the audience's attention, and thus become more memorable, just like a painting: although the plain statement reaches only the ears, the vivid version, equivalent of ekphrasis, presents the subject to the mind's eye as well. Webb concludes that *energeia* is more than a figure of speech, it has "the capacity to visualize a scene" (105) as it sparks images and corresponding emotions in the mind of the listener. It is actually *energeia* itself that makes ekphrasis an ekphrasis.

1.3 Ways of Looking at Ekphrasis: Mimetic, Illusion, A Battle of Word and Image

Ever since Plato, who thought imitation signified the creation of images, mimesis has been debated in relation to arts. For Aristotle, imitation is also at the genesis of poetry but could also mean the creation of new artworks in different domains. He distinguishes between poetry and painting through the media that each art uses,

poetry imitating life by music and rhythm and painting through shapes and colors (Bilman 9).

The major characteristics of early ekphrasis examples show a tendency towards mimesis and the general aim is to bring the subject before the mind's eye through *energeia*. They are generally composed on imaginative works which recall notional ekphrasis and rather than paintings; shields, tapestries and armor are the pieces of art composed upon. As mentioned before, Homer's Shield of Achilles is an example of notional ekphrasis and it is founded on the imitative nature of art.

The poetical descriptions of a work of art trigger the *paragonal* relationship between word and image. The word-image, verbal-visual or poetry-painting dichotomy is at the core of ekphrastic way of thinking. Throughout history, literature and visual arts have always evoked and responded to each other. Simonides of Ceos who lived in 6^{th} century BC was the first to emphasise this saying, "Painting is mute poetry and poetry is speaking picture". After him, Horace in his *Ars Poetica* declared one of his most famous dictums "ut pictura poesis" (as is painting so is poetry). The relationship between poetry and painting, and their relative superiority, gives rise to differing opinions. For some, the use of visual art, paintings and sculptures were thought opaque without the poet's voice. Poetry then becomes the only medium that can render the absent thing present and make the images speak. Although during the middle ages, the formula of "ut pictura poesis" was still popular, the difficulty of the reception of a poem started to shift terms of comparison. Painters and sculptors struggled to affirm their status as creators or artists rather than mere imitators. Leon Battista Alberti is an important figure in reasserting the primacy of the painter with his work *Della Pittura* (1435). Taking this further, Leonardo da Vinci sided with visual arts even more

fervently with *Paragone* (1510), claiming that if painting is mute poetry then poetry is blind painting (209). He says that:

> If you historians or poets or mathematicians, had not seen things through your eyes, you would only be able to report them feebly in your writings. And you, poet, should you wish to depict a story as if painting with your pen, the painter with his brush will more likely succeed… . (20-21)

Da Vinci clearly places painting over poetry with an emphasis put on eye being the primary sense of perception and supporters included Michelangelo who said "Whenever… a great painter makes a work which seems to be artificial and false this falseness is truth…" and Hollander who adds: "A painter is worthy of great praise if he paints an impossible thing which has never been seen with such art and skill that it seems alive and possible and causes men to wish that such things did actually exist" (qtd in Barkan 337).

The belief that poetry and painting must be alike or sister arts was challenged most notably in the 18th century by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing who claimed that the two arts existed on different levels, painting in space and poetry in time in his landmark work, *Laokoön or The Limits of Poetry and Painting*. Since Horace, poetry and painting have been considered as sister arts and the similarities between them have been discussed until although Lessing emphasized the radical distinction between poetry as time-art and painting and sculpture as space-arts. Lessing argues against the primacy given to visual arts as more vivid in representation. Verbal representation is more effective in describing "aspects of beauty which has a more suitable relation to poetry than painting" (Becker 280). A similar argument comes from Edmund Burke in his work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. In attaining sublimity which is a higher form of beauty, poetry is a more

powerful mode of representation eliciting a strong emotional response, as a literary work of art represents the effect rather than visible features.

The divide between poetry and painting, whether a friendly alliance, or a rivalry, still remains a disputable issue in critical circles. But Lessing's objection of the spatiality of visual arts and the temporality of verbal arts brought about new theories. In his book *Picture Theory*, W. J. T. Mitchell draws attention to the curiosity element as a verbal representation cannot actually represent its object in the same way a visual one can. He says that "it may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do. Words can "cite" but never "sight" their objects" (152). Expanding on Lessing's ideas, Mitchell remarks that ekphrasis is a type of heterogeneous text that enacts within its own pictorial field a figurative confrontation with a semiotic *other* (184). Mitchell writes that the otherness of visual representation from the standpoint of textuality may be anything from a professional competition *(paragone)* to a relation of political, disciplinary, or cultural domination in which the self is understood to be an active, speaking, seeing subject, while the other is projected as a passive, seen, and (usually) silent object (152-157). He talks about how this relationship is inevitably gendered as the fixed, silent image is female exposed to the gaze of the male viewing subject. The discussion of gender in ekphrasis is important as it informs some ekphrastic texts on the power struggle between sexes, inspiring some writers and critics to challenge traditional gender roles. In her work "A Maid Came Free: From Sighting to Citing in Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*", Özlem Uzundemir mentions how Griet defies submissive roles expected from a maid by challenging the male gaze of the painter and his patron; she "observes/sights the painter, describes/cites his paintings" (205). In spite of being captivated by his gaze and treated as an object of beauty, Griet also looks at the painter and turns the gaze into a mutual one.

Mitchell also elaborates on different modes of perception as it could create a feeling of impossibility of ekphrasis which he calls the ekphrastic indifference. However, he also adds that that fear could be overcome with imagination and metaphor, or ekphrastic hope. But there is also a third phase which he calls ekphrastic fear and is the moment of resistance when the difference between the verbal and the visual representation might collapse. He thinks that ekphrasis provokes fascination through those three phases or moments of realization.

Peter Wagner points out that it is not coincidental that ekphrasis was developed by Sophists as a rhetorical exercise, primarily "an art of make-believe" (58) which brings illusion into minds, one of the phenomena associated with ekphrasis. Quoting Barthes's "the effect of the real" (l'effet du reel) Valentine Cunningham has a similar vision of ekphrasis:

> The painting or tapestry or whatever aesthetic object is gazed at, described, made present in such texts, offers what Roland Barthes called "the effect of the real," "l'effet du réel," the knowable, touchable real, in a more certain style than writing by itself can ever do, and making the painting and so forth a subject, or object, of the writing is, in effect, a way of laying claim, by proxy, to the presence, reality, truth of the writing. (62)

As ekphrastic description should evoke the imagination and experiences of both the describer and the viewer and this can be achieved by thauma, or marvel, astonishment and amazement; all in all, then, what ekphrasis registers is the astonishing power of art to tell and convince. Ekphrasis celebrates the wonder, the miracle, the shock of art, the aura of the art-object (to use Walter Benjamin's word) (Cunningham 65). In Andrew Sprague Becker's words, this is equal to the illusion ekphrasis proposes as readers are encouraged to try the world of the text and enter its ways of making sense (39). In a similar manner, while discussing Byatt's ability to create narrations through her

descriptions of paintings in the novels, Paola Spinozzi in her article "Ekphrasis as Portrait: A.S. Byatt's Fictional and Visual *Doppelgänger*" points out that the dislocation of portraits and their relocation in her writing exhibits that they gain another existence through ekphrasis and each ekphrastic portrait is "other" from the one on canvas (230). So, while making an ekphrastic description, images are not kept enclosed but other images proliferate. Becker calls this a kind of *mise en abyme*, "a miniature replica of a text embedded within that text; a textual part reduplicating, reflecting, or mirroring the textual whole" (4). In a broader sense, ekphrasis can provide new readings as the intermedial relationship between different mediums invites interpretations.

Among the associations or features of ekphrasis is what Nazmi Ağıl calls the artistic entrapment or imprisonment. Ağıl highlights the difficulty of a visual being represented in language. The idea could have its roots in Lessing's emphasis on painting's spatiality as the picture is thought to have frozen or the image being caged in a frame. While the poet is free to reproduce every phase of an action, the painter is confined to a single moment. Actually, in every work of art the artist becomes imprisoned in his work. Only through the readers, viewers or listeners and their acts of reading, viewing or listening do they get the chance to be freed. Keats's "Grecian Urn" shows that no matter how long-lasting the image on the urn is, it is bound to remain silent and motionless. In the first installment of the quartet, *The Virgin in the Garden*, there is a mention of Keats' poem as the character associates the stillness of the objects on the urn with the stillness of marriage and motherhood thereby projecting the artistic entrapment of an ekphrastic object into a domestic entrapment that the character is afraid of falling into.

Whether notional or actual, all artworks emerge from within a structure of comparison or rivalry. Jodi Cranston finds the perfect statement for that situation,

saying “ekphrasis conceals the absence as loss” (214) and that conversion of absence into loss results in narratives that render images into narratives. Narrating the stories, interpreting the scenes, emotions could be called making pictures speak which could be attributed to the *prosopopoeic* function of ekphrasis. A painting could only be seen as immobile, framed, hung on a wall and recalling Simonides, it is mute poetry. But the artist’s views and emotions are projected onto the viewers and find voice in their perceptions and appreciations. It is seen from all those different perspectives that whether it is a battle between word and image or a fruitful collaboration, painting and poetry are dependent on each other and it is possible for a meditation across both mediums.

1.4 Back to Basics: History of Ekphrasis

The earliest known example of ekphrasis in Western literature is Homer’s lengthy descriptions of Achilles’s shield in *The Iliad*. The construction of the shield of Achilles is one of the most fascinating sections in *The Iliad*. Here, while Achilles and everyone else await the unfolding of his fate, the poet suspends the narrative by describing the decoration of the shield by Hephaestus. The adornment consists not of the frightening images seen on other Homeric shields, but rather the everyday scenes which comprise his vision of earthly life. The shield is even viewed as an image of the entire Homeric world order as noted by W. J. T. Mitchell:

> Not only did ekphrasis establish itself firmly as a distinct poetic genre, but the great prototype of Achilles’s shield seems, in the work of modern classical scholarship imbued with assumptions of formalism, to have established a kind of dominance over the epic of which it is supposed to be a mere ornament. This is not just a question of the popularity of the passage as an object of teaching, research and analysis. It also has to do with a sense of the function of the shield as an emblem of the entire structure of the *Illiad*… (180)

Fig. 1 John Flaxman, *The Shield of Achilles,* 1824, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Homer meticulously describes the shield demonstrating the prevalence of imitation in the aesthetic practices of the period. As marked by Jean Hagstrum in his book *Sister Arts*, "the reader's attention is made to concentrate on the object, which is described panel by panel, scene by scene, episode by episode. It is remarkable how the eye is held fast to the shield" (19). Beginning with the panoramic framework of the cosmos, he first describes the earth and then focuses on life in polis finally proceeding to rural scenes (Shaffer 305). The making of the shield is crucial for the development of the poem but the scenes on the shield contribute even further to mirroring the world of the poem, transcending the war and representing many other experiences like marriage, ploughing,

sheep-herding, dancing, festivals and singing as indicated by Heffernan (11). Heffernan draws attention to the fact that Homer narrates the making of the shield rather than the finished version. In "that verbal painting of figures fixed in space", (12) readers are bestowed with a chance of animating the figures, recreating what the poet creates hence making Homer's account of the shield an example of notional ekphrasis, the representation of an imaginary work of art.

Homer's lines set an example that successively led to two other significant accounts of ekphrasis in Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Purgatory*. Homer is believed to be the inspiration behind Virgil's *Aeneid*, which is a similar epic to *The Iliad*. Virgil, in the 8th part of *The Aeneid* gives a description of Trojan Aeneas' shield while recounting his adventures after the war. Upon the shield the history of Rome is engraved hence making the shield a sign giving Aeneas the good news of a glorious future.

On the other hand, Virgil himself appears in another, important historical text which is Dante's *Purgatory*. Accepted as another early ekphrasis example, the text features some instances especially in the 10th canto that lend themselves to visual form. Dante and Virgil climb a rock and finally come to seven terraces that rise one above the other on the mountainside. In that tower, reminiscent of Babel, the terraces represent the seven deadly sins, the first being the pride. Dante and Virgil are met by some people carrying a burden of rock on their backs, symbolizing punishment for pride that can only be corrected with humility in Dante's world. Among the artists who have brought their vision to those scenes are John Flaxman, Gustave Dore, William Blake and Sandro Botticelli.

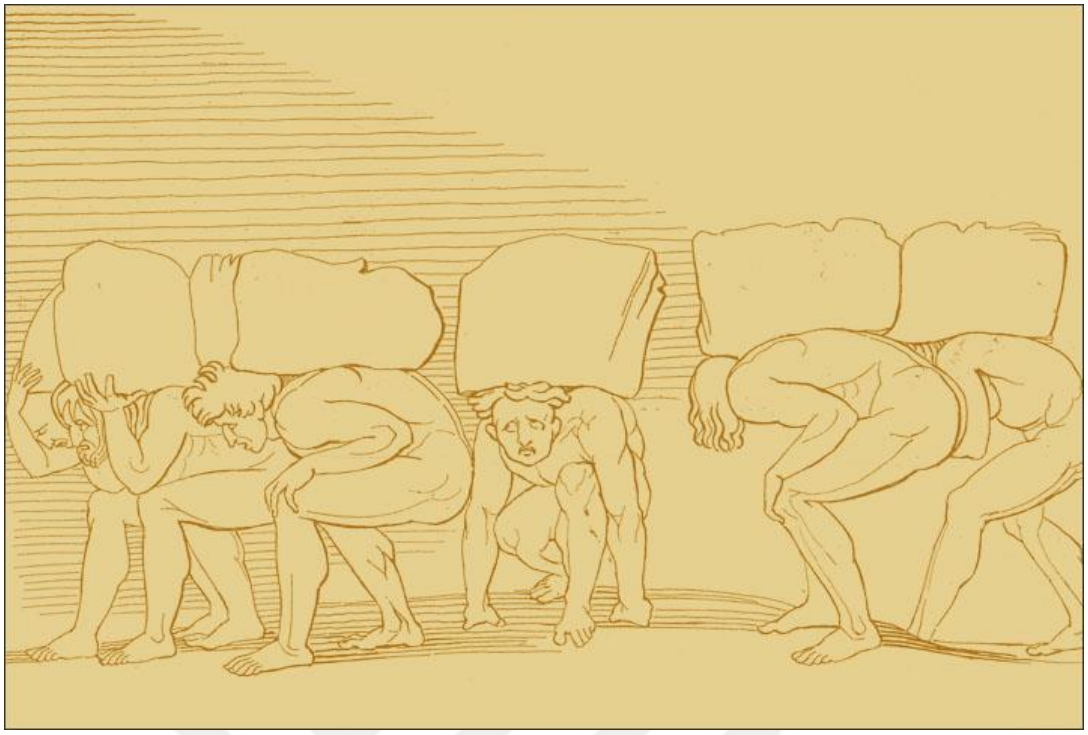


Fig.2 John Flaxman, *Proud Penitents*

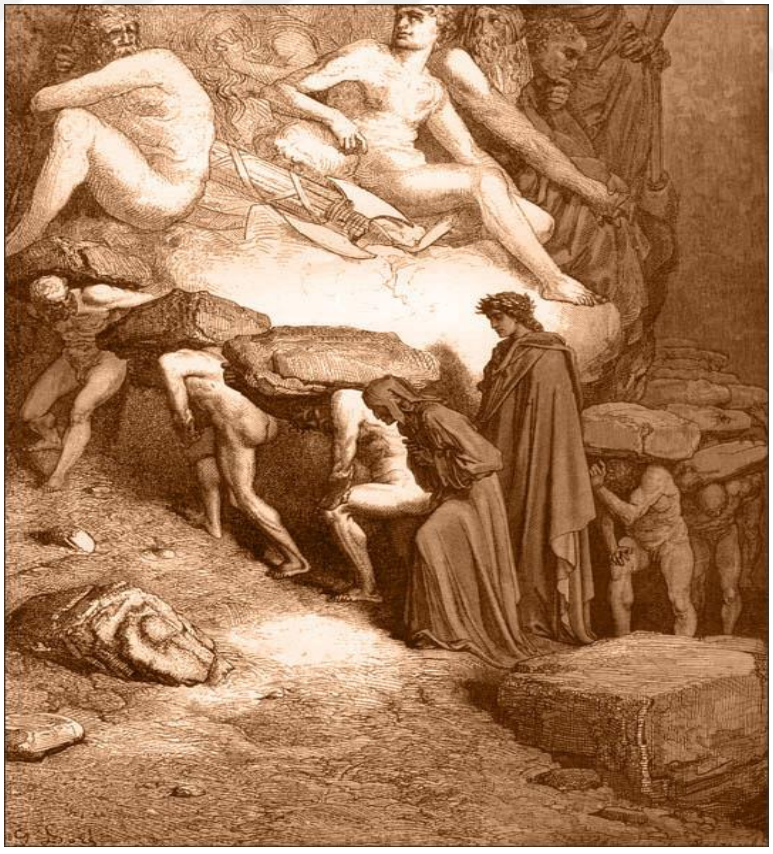


Fig. 3 Gustave Dore, *Proud Penitents*

Carved on that rock are images of the angel Gabriel, who opened Heaven to men after Adam and Eve had been banished from Eden. The artist rendered Gabriel so beautifully that he hardly seems to be just an image, and Dante claims he "appeared before us so faithfully sculpted there in a gentle attitude that he did not appear a dumb image, you would have sworn that he was saying 'Ave!'," (239) in prayer to a painted Virgin Mary in front of him.

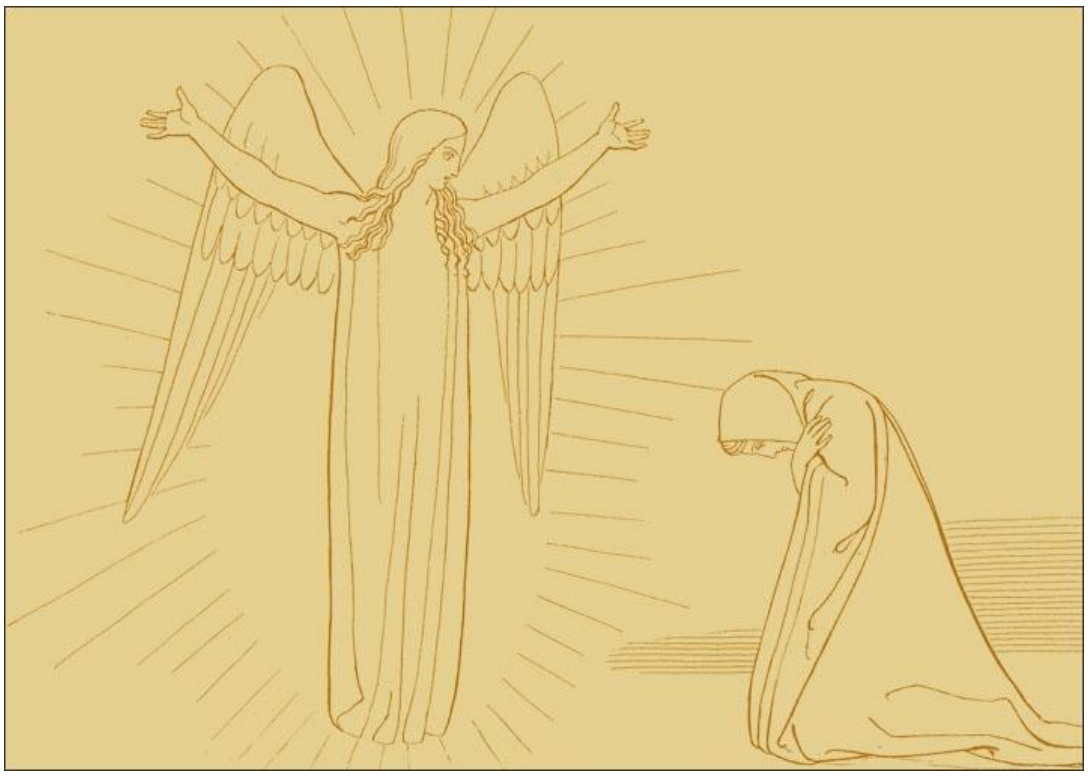


Fig. 4 John Flaxman, *Annunciation*

Past the figure of Mary is another Biblical story rendered in the stone, "the cart and the oxen drawing the sacred ark" (240). A crowd of people stand before it, divided into seven choirs, depicted so realistically that he can almost hear their singing. Similarly, his nose even smells the incense smoke painted there. Opposite, at the window of a great palace, Michal is looking on "like a woman who is scornful and sad" (240).

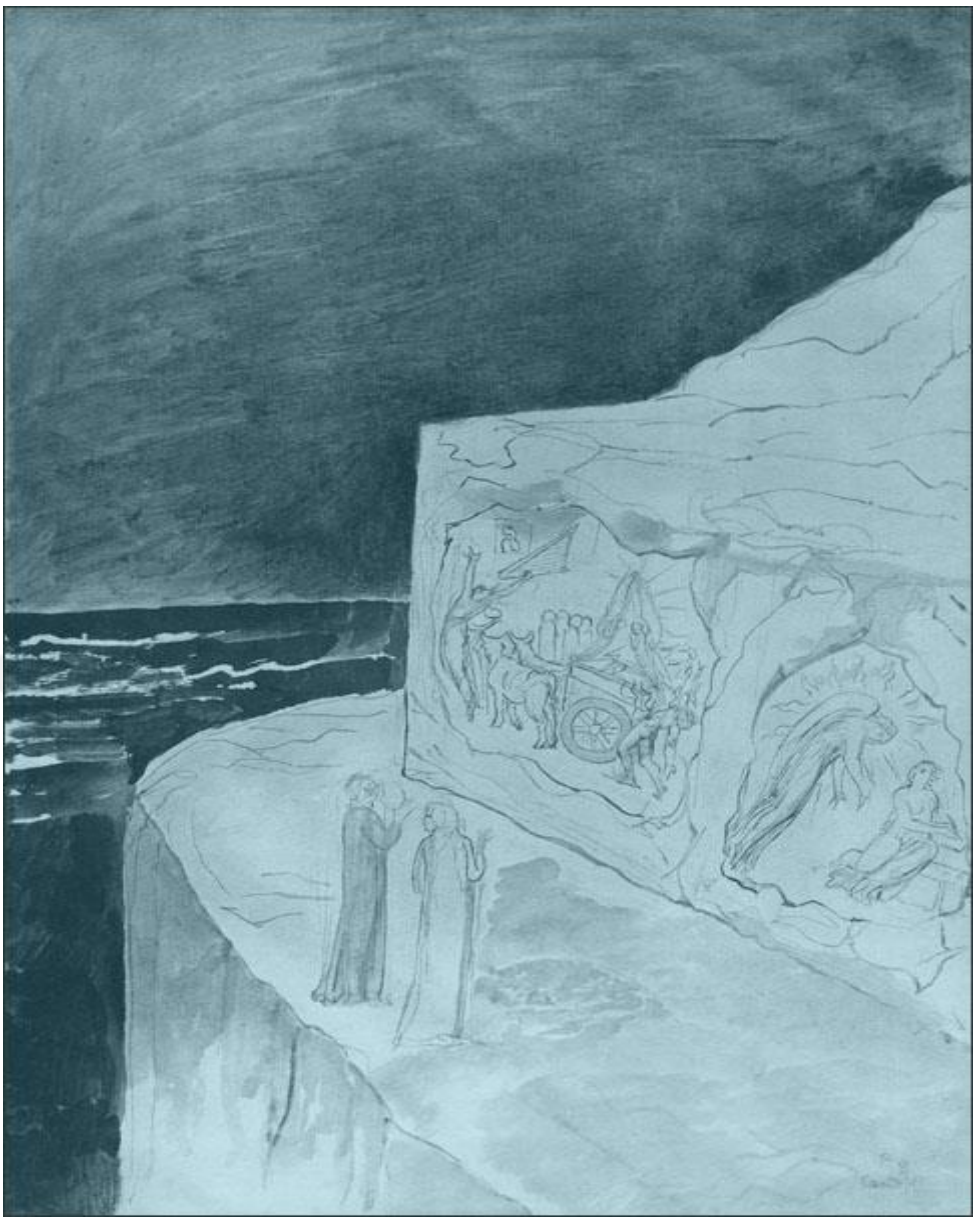


Fig.5 William Blake, *The Rock Sculptured with the Recovery of the Ark and the Annunciation,* 1824-27, Tate, London

Beyond that picture Dante sees another in which the Roman Emperor Trajan is mounted on horseback and surrounded by golden banners emblazoned with the eagle emblem. Near him stands a poor widow. The representation is so detailed that Dante can hear the conversation being held, the widow begging her Lord to avenge her son's murder (241). As Marianne Shapiro asserts in her article "Ekphrasis in Virgil and Dante", "Purgatory is to be understood in part as a map of visionary experience attainable through images, in this life, and as a model of divine presence and purpose. It

deeply concerns the contemplative enjoyment of representation" (107) celebrating the power of visuals accompanying words.

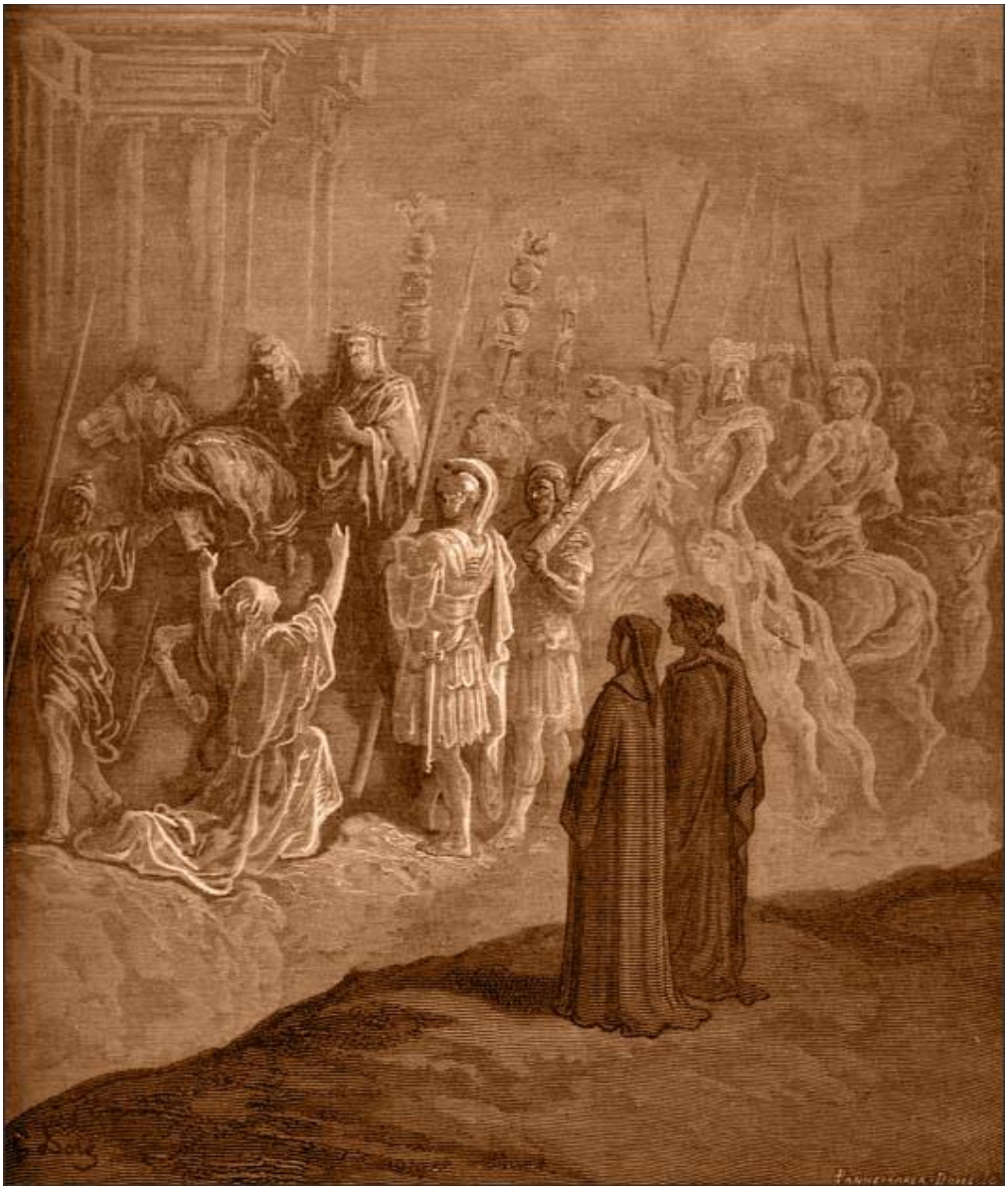


Fig. 6 Gustave Doré, *Trajan and the Widow*

Interestingly, another important ekphrastic example bears a resemblance to Virgil in portraying allegorical representations. In the "Knight's Tale" of *The Canterbury Tales,* Chaucer writes a scene in which Emily visits the temples of Venus, Mars and Diana whose walls are decorated with pictures that are devoted to allegorical representations of Jealousy, Lust, Hypocrisy, Fear, Treason, Madness, Rebellion and Victory. Although "The Knight's Tale" is accepted as a common ekphrasis example,

there has to date been little discussion on the Ellesmere Manuscript, the Troilus and Criseyde Manuscript and the Caxton woodcuts.

Chaucer is probably the most famous and important English poet of the Middle Ages. Before his masterpiece *The Canterbury Tales*, his greatest work was the romance *Troilus and Criseyde*, of which there are sixteen manuscripts, six in the British Library today.

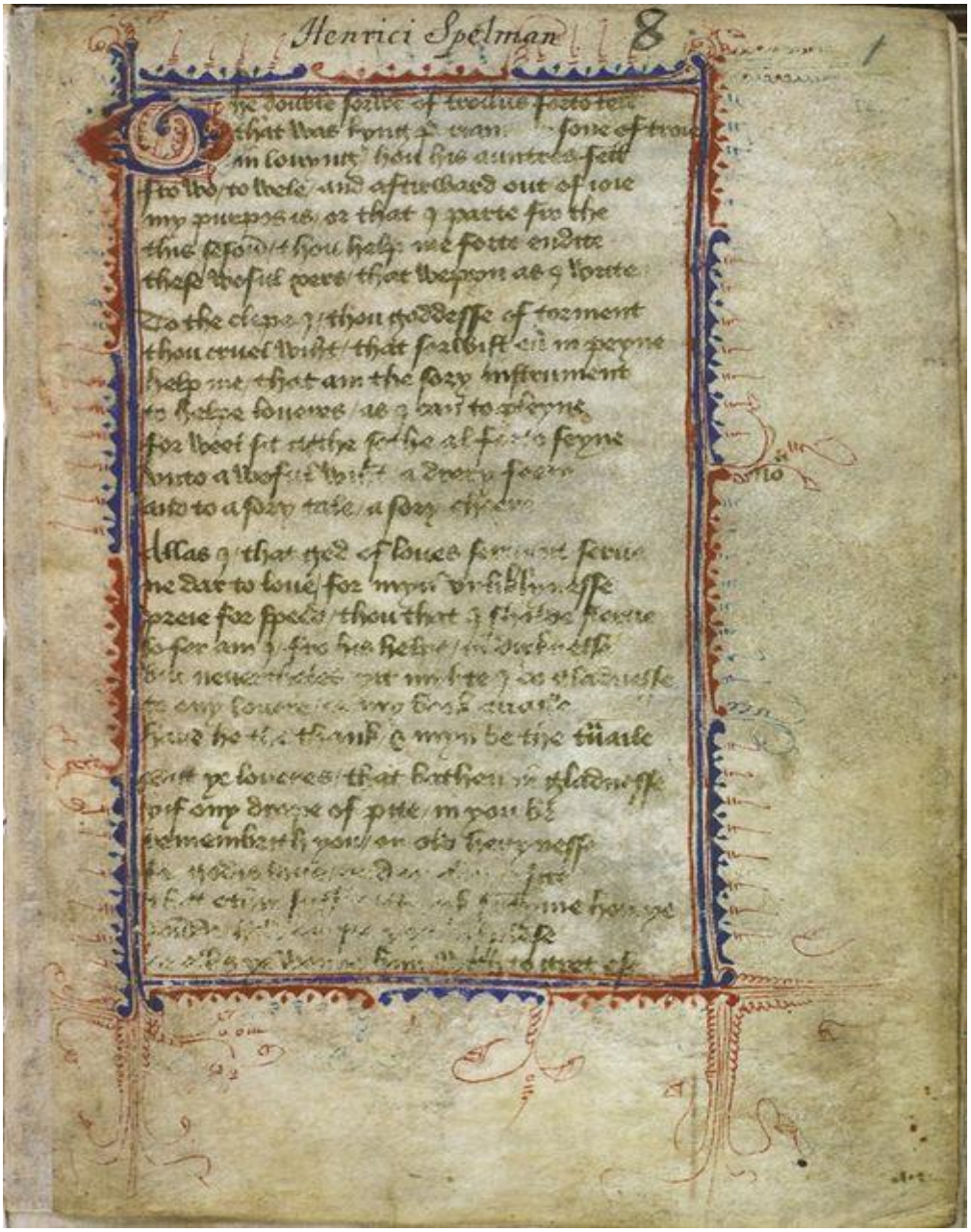


Fig. 7 From *Troilus and Criseyde*, Harley MS 2392

Fig. 8 A portrait of Geoffrey Chaucer from The Canterbury Tales, 1410, Lansdowne MS 851

Fig. 9 A battle scene from *Troilus and Criseyde*, Naples, c. 1330-c. 1340, Royal MS 20 D

The Ellesmere Chaucer manuscript, also known as Ellesmere Chaucer or Ellesmere manuscript, is an early 15th century illuminated manuscript of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales.* The Ellesmere Chaucer is held in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California and is named after its former owner, the Earl of Ellesmere.

Fig. 10 "The Knight's Tale", Huntington Library, San Marino

In this manuscript, each tale is illustrated with a portrait of the teller at its beginning. Created between 1400 and 1405, it contains what is believed to be a portrait of Chaucer, mounted on a horse, as well as miniature paintings of twenty-two of the

fictional pilgrims who tell stories in order to enliven their journey from London to Canterbury.

Among the chief methods of illustrating is also woodcutting. A woodcut is a relief printing technique in which text and images are carved into the surface of a block of wood. Such adornment and decoration of printed books increased the popularity of the books. The early English press is already identified with William Caxton. The first English woodcut examples by Caxton are *The Mirror of the World*, the first illustrated book in England, and the third edition of the *Parvus et Matgnus Cato*, both of which were printed about 1481 (Aldis 81). But most notably Caxton added illustrations to another edition of *The Canterbury Tales*, and this set, consisting of twenty-three cuts, was used to illustrate the beginning of each section of the General Prologue, and thus had a mnemonic function, emphasizing the structure of the text as well as giving faces to the persons speaking. (Hellinga and Trapp 103).[4]

[4] Other manuscript examples in different libraries:

*Bodleian Library a late fifteenth-century paper manuscript containing a fragment of Troilus (to 3.532) in a miscellany of other poems by Chaucer, Hoccleve, Lydgate, and others.

*University Library, Durham, Cosin MS. V.II.13. A fifteenth century vellum manuscript also containing Hoccleve's Cupid's Letter and another short poem.

*Cambridge University Library MS Gg.4.27 an early fifteenth century vellum manuscript containing, besides Troilus (the openings and endings of some books are missing), a miscellaneous collection of Chaucer's works and Lydgate's Temple of Glass.

*MS Harley 2280, British Library. A fifteenth-century vellum manuscript containing only Troilus.

* H2 MS Harley 3943, British Library. A fifteenth-century vellum manuscript written by four hands and containing only Troilus.

*H3 MS Harley 1239, British Library. A mid-fifteenth-century vellum manuscript written by three hands and also containing selections from the Canterbury Tales.

H4 MS Harley 2392, British Library. A fifteenth-century paper and vellum manuscript containing only Troilus.

H5 MS Harley 4912, British Library. A fifteenth-century vellum manuscript containing only Troilus, but incomplete (ends at 4.686).

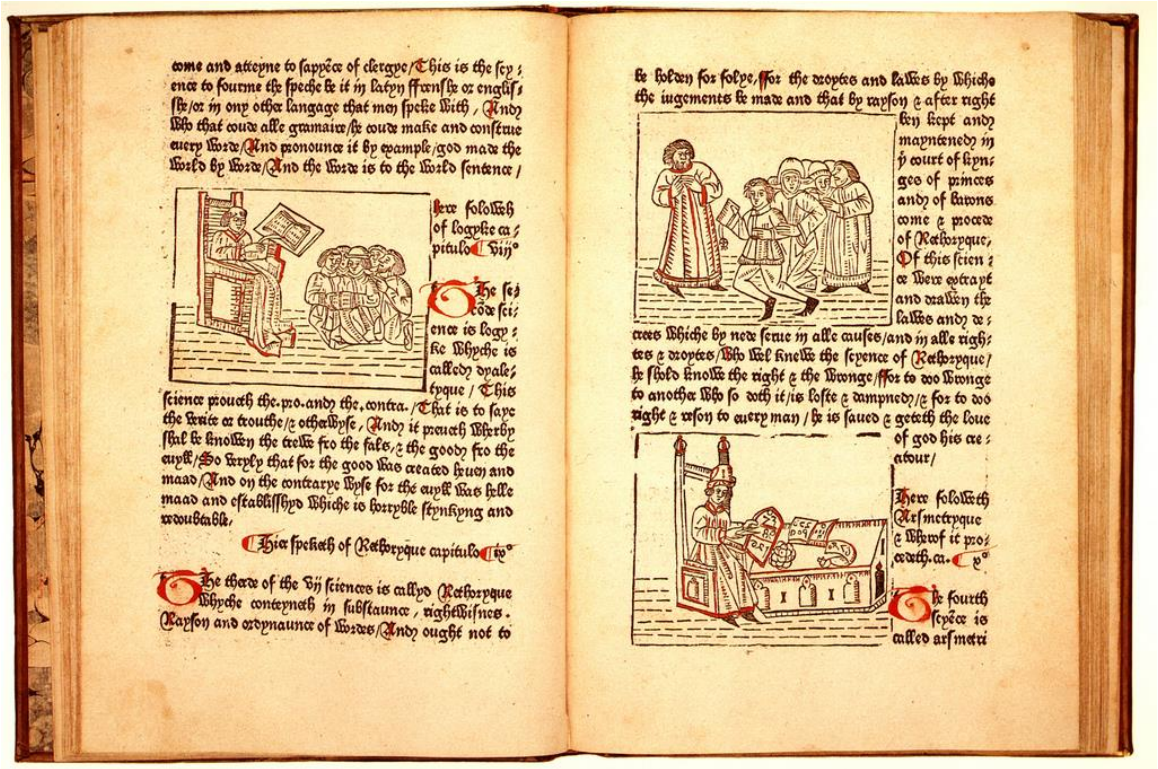


Fig. 11 William Caxton, *The Mirror of the world*, 1489, MS Westminster, Glasgow University Library

Shakespeare is another figure who made use of ekphrasis, most notably in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. However, there are some like Richard Meek who consider that Shakespeare exhibited more than a mere interest in visual arts, but made a conscious ekphrastic effort; one of the inspirations for the painting in Lucrece is Virgil's narrative description of Aeneas and the poem's supposedly pictorial images derive elements from Philostratus' verbal descriptions of paintings in the *Imagines* (390).

In *The Rape of Lucrece,* Lucrece contemplates a tapestry painting of a scene from the Trojan War. The two hundred lines of the poem in which Lucrece describes the ancient characters involved in the war represent a remarkable piece of ekphrastic transposition. It produces a vivid effect in the poem's narrative, drawing attention to the power of ekphrasis in guiding the reader's interpretation. It was a Trojan, Paris, who caused the Trojan War, provoking the Greeks by abducting Helen, the wife of the Greek

king Menelaus. Lucrece, who has just been raped by Tarquin, the king of Rome, no doubt identifies herself with Helen. In her work "Shakespeare, The Ekphrastic Translator" Pia Brinzeu comments that:

> The illusion is so convincing that Lucrece briefly forgets that she is looking at an imitation; and gazing still, she sees "such signs of truth in his plain face" (1532) that she concludes the picture is belied and "tears the senseless Sinon with her nails" (1564), imagining that he is her assailant. Even though moments later she reminds herself that "his wounds will not be sore" (1568), the painting has already worked its magic by deceiving the heroine and temporarily suspending her ability to differentiate reality from representation. The entire world of Lucrece's Rome merges with that of ancient Greece, and, indirectly, with that of the author's Renaissance England, a totalizing vision on human civilization, where women had to suffer outrageous calamities of war and persecution. (95)

By giving Lucrece a voice, translating the wall painting into a verbal equivalent, Shakespeare creates a medium of ekphrasis; much more intriguing is the fact that Lucrece's own ekphrasis merges with ekphrasis of the readers of the poem as it invites them to concentrate on and visualize the painting. Shakespeare himself might have had an ekphrastic moment inspiring him to write the poem upon seeing Titian's 1571 painting *Tarquin and Lucretia*. It would be difficult to establish whether Shakespeare knew of the painting but the Italian influence in his works and publication of the poem in 1594 might support such an assumption.

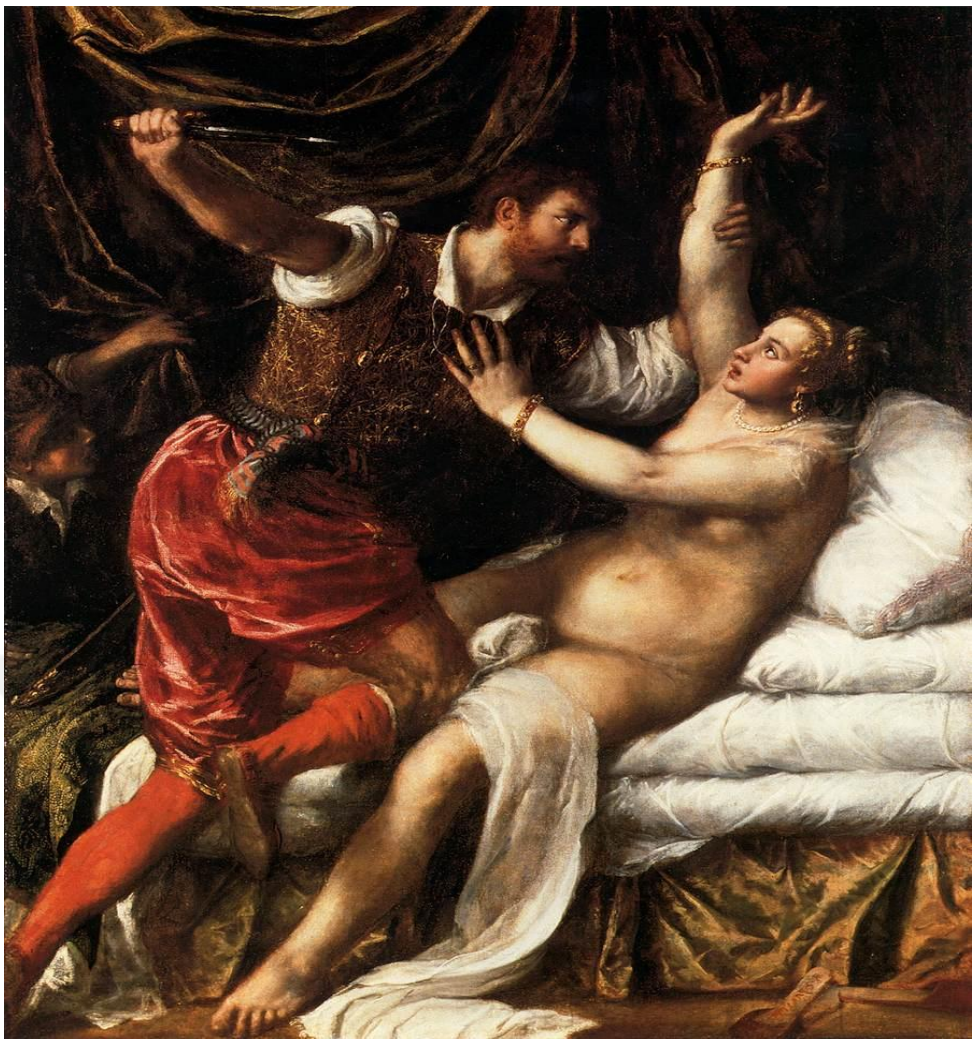


Fig. 12 Titian, *Tarquin and Lucretia*, 1571, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

When it comes to *The Winter's Tale*, the most notable ekphrastic moment happens when Paulina seems to make Hermione's statue come to life. Richard Meek elaborates on the fact that this is like witnessing a work of art becoming "real" (403) bringing *energeia* to mind which is of high importance in the definition and practice of ekphrasis. Hermione's miraculous resurrection is actually beyond what is identified with ekphrasis and coincides with those who view ekphrasis as an art of illusion; readers of Shakespeare may also feel deceived by that scene. But both Lucrece and *The Winter's Tale* borrow visuality, and whether illusion, deception or identification, they highlight the narration.

Although the 16th and 17th centuries seem to mark the period when ekphrasis made a name for itself in English literary history, the fact remains that ekphrasis had a more powerful impact in the Romantic and Victorian ages. William Blake is the prominent figure in understanding Romantic ekphrasis. John Flaxman, the artist behind the reproduction of Achilles's Shield, was Blake's patron and was a great influence in shaping his illustrated collections of poetry. As observed in *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, Blake's poems are accompanied by the drawings he himself made.

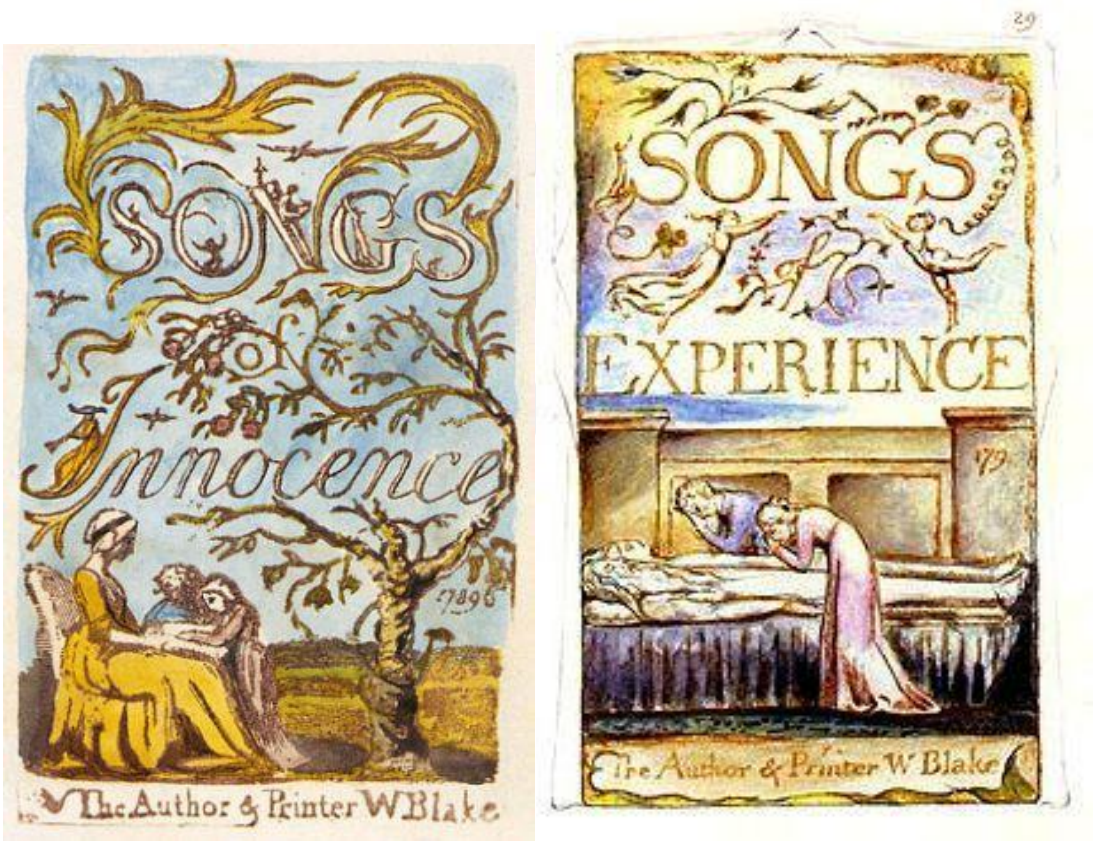


Fig. 13 William Blake, title pages from *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1792)

As a poet and painter, he is singularly original in that the relationship between word and image becomes literal as he provides a close space for both arts. According to Berkan Ulu, Blake's works mark the beginning of a new phase since as a painter poet he

revitalized the visual and saved it from its neglected position (187) as words and poems had gained prominence during the Renaissance.

Berkan Ulu adds that the opening of public museums in the late 18th century aroused a curiosity for art which eventually led to the opening of galleries like the Vatican collections, the Vienna collections, The Uffizi in Florence and two significant institutions in England – the British Museum and the National Gallery (188). Among those who paid visits to those museums and found inspiration from them were poets like Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats. Heffernan says that "As the museum took away the common belief that works of plastic arts are bound to perish, the poem, too brings about a sense of preservation of the fleeting moment…." (109). Shelley's "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery" is believed to have been inspired upon seeing a painting in Uffizi that was long thought to belong to Leonardo da Vinci but in the mid-20th century was revealed to be by an unknown Flemish painter.

Fig. 14 A Flemish painter, *Medusa's Head*, ca. 1600, The Uffizi Gallery, Florence

As far as English poetry is concerned, Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" which was inspired by a collection he saw in The British Museum, is probably the most well-known example of ekphrasis after W. H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts". The

contrast between verbal and visual is also very clear in the poem as on the one hand Keats celebrates the durability of the urn while on the other he mourns for the passivity of the images.

The equation of poetry and painting also brings forward the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood which is an important development with regards to ekphrasis. The original Pre-Raphaelite painters created paintings suggesting the narrativity and techniques of poetry and they also presented the meanings of these paintings through the use of explanatory texts. Of the major Pre-Raphaelites, only Rossetti achieved greatness as both a painter and a poet. Ruskin is considered to have greatly influenced the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood whose works are relevant to the theory of *ut pictura poesis* and the connection between poetry and visual arts. In her study *Ut Pictura Poesis: Visual Poetics of Pre-Raphaelite Art* Stepanka Bublikova states:

> In Pre-Raphaelite art, three different types of this phenomenon can be observed. They are *ekphrasis proper*, i.e. the technique when the artist firstly creates an image and consequently produces the written piece; *reversed ekphrasis* which is achieved in the opposite way, i.e. a picture is produced based on a previously composed poem. Finally, the last type and a combination of the preceding is known as *self-ekphrasis*, which occurs when the painter and the poet are the same person. (7)

As a means of exemplifying self ekphrasis she turns to Dante Gabriel Rossetti who created the brotherhood with William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais. Rossetti focused on the mutual combination of poetry and painting by adding to his paintings sonnets or brief comments. In the principle of reversed ekphrasis there is always a first that serves as the basis for the visual work and the best example for that tradition is considered *The Lady of Shallot* which inspired many artists. Alfred Tennyson's long narrative poem was inspired by a medieval theme that can be found in Malory's *Morte*

d'Arthur. The rhymed ballad treats the Arthurian theme and presents the mythic castle of Camelot and the knight Lancelot. There are so many artists who have produced various versions and scenes depicting different parts of the poem. Among them, in particular, John William Waterhouse's versions of 1888, 1894 and 1915 combine a selection of scenes, all of which seize the visual representation respecting the original text integrating an interpretation that is in harmony with *ut pictura poesis.*

Fig. 15 John William Waterhouse, *The Lady of Shallot*, 1888, Tate, London

Fig. 16 ***Lady of Shallot Looking at Lancelot, 1894,*** **Leeds Art Gallery**

Fig. 17 ***I am Half Sick of Shadows, – said the Lady of Shallot,*** **1914, Art Gallery of Ontario**

When it comes to modern ekphrasis much is owed to institutionalized galleries. In an image-driven age, the dominance of images is also inevitable. In "Entering the Museum of Words: Browning's 'My Last Duchess' and Twentieth-Century Ekphrasis", Heffernan also reflects that "twentieth century ekphrasis enters the museum and salutes the power of its words" (262). The opening of museums as public institutions also meant a tendency toward actual ekphrasis as before that ekphrastic poems were largely notional, based on imagined works of art as Hollander had suggested. Known as the most influential ekphrastic poem, Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" accompanies Pieter Brueghel the Elder's painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus.* Instead of Icarus, Auden names his poem after the museum where he saw the painting. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" is not just a verbal reconstruction of Brueghel's painting; in the poem

he also makes a generalization about the paintings of that Brussels museum[5] in order to show how the old masters viewed suffering and how the neglected suffering of Icarus is made the center of Brueghel's picture.

Fig. 18 Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, 1560s, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels

William Carlos Williams dedicates a whole collection to Brueghel named *Pictures from Brueghel (1962)* which contains poems based on paintings by Brueghel like *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, *The Hunter in the Snow, The Adoration of the Kings, The Peasant Wedding*, *The Corn Harvest* and *The Parable of the Blind.* Most of those short poems simply relate what is seen in the pictures in a descriptive mood. While proposing his discussions of ekphrastic texts in his work "Ekphrasis and Intersemiotic Transposition: Literature, Visual Arts, and Culture", Viladimir Martinovski refers to Williams' collection:

[5] The other paintings, to which Auden merely alludes, have been tentatively identified as two other Breughels: *The Census at Bethlehem* (1566) at the Brussels Musée and *The Slaughter of the Innocents* (c.1564) at Vienna's Kunsthistorische Museum

> The title of the book (*Pictures from Brueghel*) implicitly recalls both the heritage of the Imagist poetic approach and the idea that poems "based on" the most renowned works of the Flemish master are also implicitly "pictures." On the other hand, it further proves that the poetic images are a verbal translation or transposition of the "visual texts." It is interesting to note that on the basis of Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (c. 1558) there have been, in the twentieth century alone, over forty different poetic texts describing or "transposing" this sixteenth-century artwork in many different manners. (13)

Martinovski views the process of ekphrasis as a translation/transposition of the image into text and also as a form of intercultural communication through the act of commenting on a painting. Giving the example of Brueghel's Icarus, Martinovski highlights that while transposing the details from Brueghel's painting into poetic text, the readers are guided to interpret the poem rather than merely observing. For him ekphrasis is more than illustration as it invites the reader to "explore the relation between the poem and an assumed pre-existing visual work it evokes" (13) achieving an ekphrastic communication.

Parmigianino's *Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror* becomes the inspirational source of an important ekphrastic poem written by John Ashbery. It is already a common belief that what the artist creates is a reflection or extension of himself and therefore coming across self-portraits is understandable. However, Ashbery's poem is one of the rare instances in which the verbal-poet is attracted by the visual-painter. This close-up is the climax of a *deparagonal* relationship in which the poet welcomes the painter with reverence and admiration (Ulu 290). The poem focuses on how the painter began to paint himself and the poet's voice takes a meditative, contemplative tone which is in accordance with modern ekphrastic tradition, as opposed to the mimetic nature of ancient times.

Fig. 19 Parmigianino, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,* 1524, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

As an ancient term of referring to the practice of describing works of art, ekphrasis has deep roots in antiquity and over time has been subject to different sets of assumptions. The definition of ekphrasis is wide and versatile and its function and power enable reading of images or visualizing verbal descriptions. The ekphrastic scope varies from paintings, urns, and statues to frescoes, tapestries, movies or photographs, and recent works prove that ekphrasis is not confined to poems, applying as it can to other genres like novels, dramas even cinema, something which is discussed by Laura Sager Eidt in her work *Writing and Filming the Painting: Ekphrasis in Literature and Film.* While outlining the evolution of ekphrasis, Sager tries to explore the connection between films and paintings which mirror the relationship between literary texts and paintings. We often tend to organize our experiences into narratives and our views of

the world into pictures. Ekphrasis is a layered encounter as it is a visual, intellectual, cognitive and spiritual process. It might have drawn the attention of poets, and have already been applied and studied, but such an ancient and innovative form is still struggling for modern recognition. Its use in long fiction and how it enriches the meanings embedded in the text are the aspects that this study will engage with, focusing on Byatt's four novels. In the light of the artistic development of ekphrasis, from its early beginnings up to the modern age, finding out in what ways this form retained its aesthetic origin in the narrative strategies employed in Byatt's novels will be examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER II

AN EKPHRASTIC APPROACH TO *THE VIRGIN IN THE GARDEN* AND *STILL LIFE*

2.1 Byatt and Visual Arts

This chapter aims to provide an ekphrastic approach to A. S. Byatt's fiction with a special focus on the first two installments of *The Frederica Quartet*. Born in 1936, Byatt is a prolific writer, scholar and critic. Beginning with *The Shadow of the Sun* in 1964 she has published many novels like *The Game* (1967), The Booker Prize winning *Possession* (1990), *Angels and Insects* (1992), *The Biographer's Tale* (2000) as well as several collections of short stories and essays.

The critical discussions concerning Byatt's fiction generally center on postmodernism, fairy tales, myths and attempts to determine whether she is a realist or feminist. But another important field worth enquiring about is her fondness of words and pictures and how they are connected with the characters she has created. There is in Byatt's writing, a painterly approach, not simply of description, but in the sense of wanting to "capture 'the thing itself' like a painter" (Kenyon 77). Byatt's habit of using a visually rich language and the inclusion of many paintings and painters could be examined in an ekphrastic framework as such descriptions or elaborations open a new window into understanding the characters, their motives and the basic ideas behind the construction of the novels that may not be comprehended at first glance, as Byatt employs narrative techniques that are complex in style and content with intertextuality, references, allusions to fairy tales, myths, literary theories, history, art, science and religion. Ekphrasis not only provides an aesthetic and imaginative reading but as an important device of narration it serves as a bridge in seeing the key points and major themes, unraveling a whole picture and achieving a substantial meaning.

Art is very central to Byatt and possibly as an extension of that she employs ekphrasis widely. As pointed out in the book *A. S. Byatt: Critical Storytelling* Byatt has written "catalogue essays for various art exhibitions, produced art journalism for newspapers and magazines, commented on painters and art exhibitions in her broadcasting work and woven discussions of art into her literary criticism (as indeed into her fiction)" (140). Moreover, in her work, "Verbal and Visual Language and the Question of Faith in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt", Susan D. Sorensen emphasizes that Byatt creates a visual language of her own with a fusion of the visual material and the written language, which is ekphrasis itself. She says:

> Byatt puts her visual tendencies to various uses: she revitalizes written language, she explores whether the visual can make a more substantial attempt at achieving meaning (which I designate as "Meaning" if it is meant in an ultimate sense), she wonders whether these ways of knowing and articulating can be combined to make a truly superior and even transcendent kind of communication. (19)

That visual tendency could be explained as ekphrasis since the combination of a revitalized written language and a more enhanced meaning through visuals equates to such power. Byatt has always been fascinated by the relationship between the visual and the verbal. From the focus on paintings and portraits in *The Shadow of the Sun* and *The Frederica Quartet,* to her non-fictional works such as *Passions of the Mind* (1991) and *Portraits in Fiction* (2001), Byatt has contemplated issues like the 'real', perception, language and transformation into shapes, colors and into the verbal equivalents. Jane Campbell also considers that what Byatt and especially Iris Murdoch share as a central concern is the tension between real people and images. She believes that Byatt addressed that problem in *The Virgin in the Garden, Still Life*, and in her short stories "Sugar" and *The Matisse Stories,* developing a characteristic blend of traditional and

postmodern techniques that she calls self-conscious realism (5). In *Passion of the Mind* while talking about how she started writing novels, Byatt also refers to that notion in particular.

> The problems of the "real" in fiction, and the adequacy of words to describe it, have preoccupied me for the last twenty years. If I have defended realism, or what I call "self-concious realism," it is not because I believe that it has any privileged relationship to truth, social or psychological, but because it leaves space for thinking minds as well as feeling bodies. (XV)

Byatt believes that self-conscious realism leaves space for thinking minds and feeling bodies, and finding the balance between them, especially for women, is a haunting problem throughout the quartet, reaching a climax with a conference on 'Body and Mind' in *A Whistling Woman*. Byatt does not just want her readers to have a mere reading or just look, she wants them to see, feel and think at the same time, which entails a process similar to ekphrasis; that ancient tradition embodies the interweaving of many arts, recalling Simonides' remarks that painting is mute poetry and poetry is a speaking picture, both arts enabling a dual meditation.

Questioning the words' sufficiency in conveying the real, Byatt might be looking for ways of filling this gap, which could be achieved through ekphrasis as the reader also becomes a listener, viewer or thinker hence a multi layered and a highly intellectual interpretation is obtained. Furthermore, Campbell states that the prominence of painters or paintings in Byatt's works could be explained with a third element that Byatt herself mentioned in an interview with Juliet Dusinberre. Obviously, that third element does not have to be an image or a person just "what is there", which paves the way to understanding why Byatt sides with painters: the artist is naturally concerned with that element (7) or with what they simply see and interpret. Paintings and famous

painters and how they function through ekphrasis in Byatt's texts are pointed out by Campbell as follows:

> The special importance painting holds for Byatt is reflected in the presence in her fiction of real and imagined painters: not only Van Gogh, but Matisse in The Matisse Stories, Velazques, who appears as a character in "Christ in the House of Martha and Mary" (Elementals), … . (8)

Byatt's short story "Christ in the House of Martha and Mary" not only gets its name but also its whole inspiration from Velasquez's famous painting *Kitchen Scene with Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*. In a sense, Byatt moves beyond those painters' concepts of color and form through the characters she creates as demonstrated with the presence of Matisse in "Art Work" from *The Matisse Stories*.

2.2 Byatt and *The Matisse Stories*

In order to have a better insight into Byatt's interest in art and its representation it might be useful to introduce her through her short story collection *The Matisse Stories* (1993). The book consists of three stories intensely embellished with visuals, each of them concerning with French artist Henri Matisse and his works. In "Medusa's Ankles" a woman who is about to have her hair cut remembers the first time she had visited the salon as it had a copy of Matisse's *Rosy Nude (Le Nu Rose 1935)* in the window. "The Chinese Lobster" focuses on an art student who is charged with sexual assault and two academics who ponder on Matisse's attitudes toward women. "Art Work" is set in London in 1990 and revolves around a home space whose inhabitants are Robin and Debbie Dennison who are passionate artists with different tastes and approaches and the eccentric, flamboyant house cleaner Mrs. Brown. Of the three, "Art Work" might be viewed as an exemplary art form of Byatt. In the story, how Henri Matisse and his love for color is crucial in shaping the story and the characters is easily perceived through

ekphrastic descriptions. It is possible to read the story with the same feeling of looking at a painting by Matisse which is evoked in the story by Matisse' famous *Le Silence habite des maisons.* Matisse has omnipresence in the story, especially through Robin, who is a loyal follower of the artist, and Mrs. Brown, whose unusual, flamboyant style and love for color serve as a reminder. Through the tension created between them, Byatt on the one hand pays great tribute to Matisse, his art and also addresses certain inequalities of gender, class and race through Mrs. Brown whose art work casts a light on her character and on the other enables her to transplant her emotions as a servant, woman and human being.

As each of the stories in *The Matisse Stories* revolves around a painting by Matisse, Laurence Petit claims that each text is composed to be read or viewed as if it were a painting and the Matisse painting verbalized and fictionalized into a text (395). Matisse's concept of art is also echoed in those stories and "Art Work" especially illustrates this by "presenting itself as Byatt's textual equivalent of Matisse's visual experiments with color and composition" (396). In his discussion of text and image in Byatt's fiction, Laurence Petit explains the process of picturing texts or turning texts into picture and stresses Byatt's familiarity with ekphrasis as a genre:

> British novelist A.S. Byatt's fascination with both verbal and visual forms of expression is conveyed through a type of fiction that challenges the traditional distinction between the arts in an attempt to achieve what seems at first an impossible task—reading a text visually or viewing a painting textually. This "picturing" of texts (that is to say, the turning of texts into pictures) is often achieved—as well as initiated—through the ekphrastic "textualizing," or descriptive verbalizing, of actual paintings, thus following a tradition of ekphrastic texts that dates back to Homer's *Iliad*. (Petit 154)

Petit underlines that "short story as a free, "outlaw" genre has often been compared to the visual arts, in particular painting and photography, in its ability to capture and

render a specific moment of perception" (156). That said, the story also opens with an ekphrasis example by giving an extended description of Lawrence Gowan's black and white reproduction of Matisse's *Le Silence habite des maisons (The Inhabited Silence of the Houses)* which is a work that has parallelisms with the story:

> In 1947 Matisse painted *Le Silence habite des maisons.* It is reproduced in Sir Lawrence Gowing's Matisse, only very small and in black and white. Two people sit at the corner of the table. The mother, it may be, has a reflective chin propped on a hand propped on the table. The child, it may be, turns the page of a huge white book, whose arch of paper makes an integral curve with his/her lower arm. In front, a vase of flowers. Behind, six huge panes of window, behind them, a mass of trees and perhaps sunlight. The people's faces are perfect blank ovals, featureless. Up above them, in the top left hand corner of the canvas, level with the top of the window, is a chalked outline, done as it might be by a child, of a round on a stalk, above bricks. It is a pity there are no colours but it is possible, tempting, to imagine them, sumptuous as they were in what Gowing says was 'the reconciliation which is only within the reach of great painters in old age.' (31-32)

Fig. 20 Henri Matisse, *Le Silence habite des maisons (The Inhabited Silence of the Houses),* 1947, Private Collection

The ekphrastic effect is immediately felt as the narrative voice emphasizes the missing colors, with the temptation of imagining them through the text. As an artist passionate for color and believing its power to convey, Matisse is not a random choice for Byatt. In that respect, the function of words in language could be equated with colors in painting and how they gain meaning as every viewing actually involves an act of reading. "What Byatt does is to fill in or restore the missing colors Matisse leaves out of his paintings- a spatial representation- via a textualization" (Pokhrel 412). The realm of a painting and the fiction are interlaced, inviting the readers for both a visual and verbal process of interpretation. Likewise, the living space, the protagonists who inhabit that space are crucial and very central to the story. The family's home space actually echoes Matisse's painting with an inhabited silence. In contrast to black and white, the story focuses on color, its different practices especially by the cleaning lady Mrs. Brown. It is not just the colors with which Mrs. Brown leaves a mark but the silence that inhabits the house is usually replaced with the noises Mrs. Brown makes, like the sound of the vacuum cleaner.

Color has a central place in the story not just through Matisse but also through Robin and Mrs. Brown as it creates a tension between them in terms of creativity. Obviously, just like Matisse they both love color but with a different approach. As a female of low status, a working class and immigrant background, Mrs. Brown represents a feminine, more colorful, recreational aspect of art which obviously triumphs over Robin, who goes for a purer, structured, cold style. Mrs. Brown seems to have her own color theory which is based on her own natural instincts and beliefs, like the fact that God makes and mixes all the colors in the world.

> They always told us, didn't they, the teachers and grans, orange and pink, they make you blink, blue and green should not be seen, mauve and red cannot be wed, but I say, they're all there, the colors, God made 'em all, and

> mixes 'em all in His creatures, what exists goes together somehow or other, …" (58)

Reminiscent of her cool attitude, Mrs. Brown's color theory is attributed to natural instincts and even divine power, unlike Robin, who reveals to his wife Debbie that he owes much of his theory to Matisse's 1904 foremost work *Luxe, calme et volupté.*

> He could talk to Debbie. Debbie knew about his vision of color, he had told her, and she had listened. He talked to her agitatedly at night about Matisse, about the paradoxical way in which the pure sensuousness of *Luxe, calme et volupté* could be a religious experience of the nature of things. Not softness, he said to Debbie, *power,* calm power. (55)

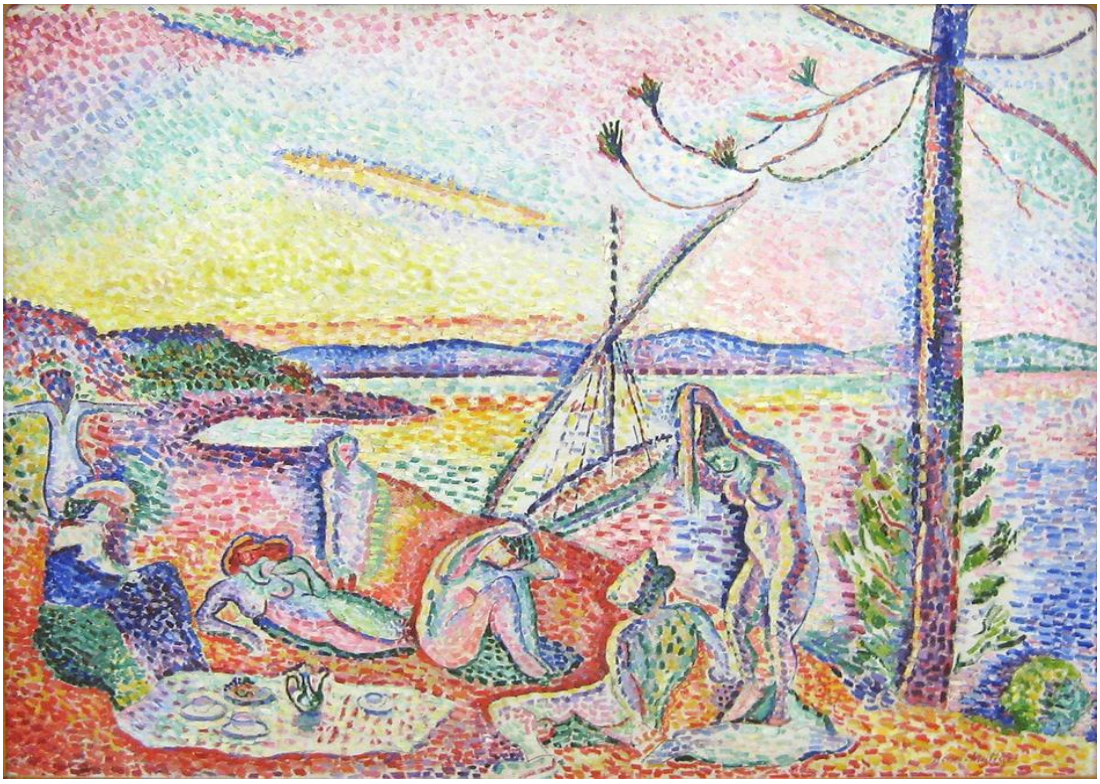


Fig. 21 Henri Matisse, *Luxe, Calme et Volupté*, 1904, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Robin questions the possibility of pure representation and taking his inspiration from Matisse who actually named the painting after Charles Baudelaire's poem "L'invitation au voyage (Invitation to A Voyage)" from his collection, *The Flowers of Evil,* Robin claims that his minimalist works "are not about littleness but about the infinite terror of the brilliance of color" (70). Debbie remembers their holiday in the South of France,

how Robin had "tried putting great washes of strong color on the canvas, a la Matisse a la Van Gogh, and it came out watery and feeble and absurd, there was nothing he could do" (55). Thus, Robin and Mrs. Brown become foils to each other for while Robin is obsessed with light, color and the same art forms, Mrs. Brown seems more experimental, vivid and daring in her choices of color and outlook.

Mrs. Brown has been with the family for ten years and she is portrayed as someone who is not a prototype of feminine beauty. The way she is depicted is all about her colorful, unusual appearance:

> Mrs. Brown had a skin which was neither black nor brown but a kind of amber yellow… She had a lot of wiry. . . soot-colored hair, which rose, like the crown of a playing-card king, out of a bandeau of flowery material, tied tightly about her brow, like the toweling of a tennis star, or the lace cap of an old fashioned maid. Mrs. Brown's clothes were, and are, flowery and surprising, jumble sale remnants, rejects and ends of lines, rainbow-colored jumpers made from the ping-pong-ball sized unwanted residues of other people's knitting". (39)

Considering Byatt's familiarity with Matisse, the way she describes Mrs. Brown, her flowery style might recall Matisse's women with hats and feathers. According to Laurence Petit, Mrs. Brown seems to have come straight out of a Matisse painting, a cross between the painter's rainbow-like *Woman with a Hat*, his series of "feather-hat" paintings featuring his model, Antoinette, wearing extraordinarily inventive and decorative hats; and his conception of the "plane-tree woman", or "flower-bouquet woman" (401). She is an eccentric woman with an appearance of scraps of colorful clothes, and a face like "a primitive mask" (40). In a way, Mrs. Brown becomes solid proof of Matisse's love of color and embodies all the features attributed to Matisse's women. The way she is portrayed could be categorized as an ekphrastic verbal description of a real portrait drawn by Matisse.

The crisis of the story occurs when Debbie arranges with a gallery owner for her husband to show his works, but instead of him the twist ending of the story has that it is Mrs. Brown who somehow manages to arouse the gallery owner. Pokhrel remarks that: "Although Matisse becomes a primary source of energy and inspiration for both artists, Robin's mimetic representation of Matisse's art is presented in opposition to Mrs. Brown's experimental art that mixes high art, such as Matisse's paintings, with everyday objects" (408). As well as her own creativity and free spirit, Mrs. Brown gets material and ideas from household objects like pieces of fabric or the vacuum cleaner but recycles and transforms them in such a flamboyant and innovative way that her exhibition becomes an overnight success.

The way Byatt describes Mrs. Brown's exhibited works of art brings to mind ekphrasis as the readers are allowed to visualize them and also develop a critical eye because art and paintings could be used to reveal the creator's identity, casting light on their traits, attitudes and self-image (Fishwick 54). The centerpiece is an Aladdin's cave of bright, soft sculptures, including deconstructed female bodies entrapped by washing, "twisted brassieres and demented petticoats", and a broken doll-like figure with only half a face, guarded by a dragon who is also a vacuum cleaner, "inert and suffocating" (77). Completing the story of the chains of imprisonment of women's bodies by domesticity are two versions of the ineffectual male rescuer, a tiny toy knight and a toy soldier, both of which have "obviously been through the wheel of the washing-machine, more than once" (81). The walls are hung with huge tapestries, partly knitted, partly made like rag rugs, swaying crocheted cobwebs hang from the ceiling, inhabited by dusky spiders and swarms of sequined blue flies with gauzy wings. The whole cavern, tapestries, cobwebs and her artistic objects actually echo the house and her duties while she was working and who she is as a woman or servant. On a similar note, Byatt herself

remarks in *Portraits in Fiction* "they act as temporary mirrors allowing the protagonists to see themselves with a difference" (5).

Reading a text visually and viewing a painting textually is achieved by Byatt in "Art Work" through color and composition. One of the functions of the ekphrastic tradition as a literary device is giving voice to objects. Similarly, Mrs. Brown also finds a voice to expressively convey her anger as a woman and a domestic servant, yet she does it so lightly, inventively and with wit. Actually, her art "unites a feminist point of view with an unconventional but authentic aesthetic purpose" (White 223). In that respect, Mrs. Brown goes beyond Matisse's color and form through her bricolage. Thus, "Art Work" as a text surpasses certain pictorial interpretations as through the character Mrs. Brown, class, gender sex-based biases and mistreatments are referenced. As the text gives a detailed description of Matisse's painting at the beginning, the reader is invited to a pictorial world hence the black and white version of the same painting is "transported into the textual world of Byatt's fiction" (Petit 399). In other words, there is a mutual relationship between text and images and Byatt is engaged in both visuality and the verbal. For Byatt, ekphrasis is not just an artistic rendering of words and images but becomes an unusual but effective medium for offering a postmodern reading in challenging the traditional roles of women particularly in terms of gender and class. Mrs. Brown's creative genius and powerful imagination combined with her love of color and an interest in old, shabby clothes she has accumulated over the years, beget a stimulating and experimental work of art that changes not just her life but the course of the story. In that sense, Mrs. Brown and the function of ekphrasis in "Art Work" becomes an appropriate and preliminary example of questioning the traditional roles through female characters in an ekphrastic framework; this is also focalized in the topic novels.

2.3 *The Frederica Quartet*

Byatt's *The Frederica Quartet* covers a time period of almost twenty years beginning in 1953, the Coronation year of Elizabeth II. In her book *A.S. Byatt and the Heliotropic Imagination,* Jane Campbell's take on the four novels' scope and style is as follows:

> In these novels Byatt finds a form capacious and flexible enough to hold her development of the female Bildungsroman in combination with her ongoing exploration of language: The four texts are very different in language and styles: the first, *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), is dense with myth and metaphor; the second, *Still Life* (1985), represents the attempt at- and inevitable failure to achieve- a plain demythologized style, bare of metaphor: and the third and fourth, *Babel Tower* (1996) and *A Whistling Woman* (2002), even more ambitious in scope, reflect the jangling fragmentation of the sixties and make more use of visual art. (61)

Although Campbell emphasizes the differences in language and style, all four novels actually share a common tendency of highlighting visual imagination through the employment of many paintings, images, pictures and visual materials. Focusing on Byatt's engagement with realism, representation of art, the adequacy of words to represent the real, the novels could be explored through Byatt's ekphrastic interventions that actually provide on the one hand a visual solution to Byatt herself, who is not content with words alone, as well as an aesthetic, intellectual and artistic reading to readers, reviving their imagination, letting them approach the characters from a different perspective and have a closer, enlightening look at the basic dilemmas concerning women during the time periods of the novels. The quartet's visual prominence lays the way open for ekphrasis; however, it is also observed that each visual work of art Byatt renders through ekphrastic verbal descriptions provides important clues in weaving the plot illuminating key moments that act as the main sources of narration.

THE VIRGIN IN THE GARDEN

2.4 An Ekphrastic Look at the Iconography of Elizabeth in *The Virgin in The Garden*

Published in 1978, *The Virgin in the Garden* is the first installment in *The Frederica Quartet* and traces the fortunes of the Potter family, particularly the daughters Stephanie and Frederica. The head of the family Bill Potter is also the head of Blesford Ride School. His domineering attitude is mostly felt by his wife Winifred and the couple's only son Marcus. The eldest daughter Stephanie has just returned from Cambridge and started teaching at a grammar school for girls. During the course of the story, she falls in love with a curate named Daniel Orton much to the dislike and disapproval of her father. Meanwhile, Stephanie and Daniel's wedding coincides with another important event, the production of a play named *Astraea* written by Alexander Wedderburn in honor of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The play is a nostalgic homage to Elizabeth I and to Renaissance England, and Frederica, the Potters' seventeen-year-old daughter still preparing for college, is playing young Elizabeth in the play.

In *The Virgin in the Garden*, ekphrasis appears in the descriptions and verbalization of some figures like Elizabeth as her iconography sets a chief example for the protagonist Frederica, in particular, and many of the women, who incorporate and address the basic dilemma of women with Stephanie and Frederica pondering on their pre-determined roles and construction of a separate identity. The fascination with Elizabeth, who was paradoxically both virginal and powerful, is related to the problem of marriage and identity for women that Byatt vocalizes through the Potter sisters, whose respective evolutions during the course of the novel contrast sharply but somehow both correspond to the dichotomy Byatt raises concern over. The whole quartet is like a journey of Frederica on the way to forming an identity. In the first volume, in order to display growth and self-building in every respect for Frederica,

Byatt utilizes the figure of Elizabeth, as well as other principal figures from mythology and history that are associated with her, but at the same time incorporates the basic dilemma the sisters represent: the fear of being trapped in a house and the pressure of going after aspirations, independence and seeking pleasure highlighted with the ekphrastic descriptions of the chosen images and art works.

The novel starts with a prologue in which Alexander, Frederica and Daniel pay a visit to the National Portrait Gallery in 1968, sixteen years after the actual events of the book. Alexander thinks about the words *national* and *portrait* and how they have to do with identity, "identity of a culture (place, language, history), the identity of an individual human being as an object for mimetic representation" (9). He finds himself surrounded by people who are looking at the *Darnley Portrait* of Elizabeth Tudor. Alexander describes the portrait as follows:

> There she stood, a clear powerful image, in her airy dress of creamy stiff silk, embroidered with golden fronds, laced with coral tassels, lightly looped with pearls. 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 of movement suppressed in the figure. There were other ambiguities in the portrait, the longer one stared, doublenesses that went beyond the obvious one of woman and ruler. The bright-balanced face was young and arrogant. Or it was chalky, bleak, bony, any age at all, the black eyes under heavy lids and distant (13).

Fig. 22 (Unknown Artist), *The Darnley Portrait,* 1575, National Portrait Gallery, London

Alexander's elaboration on the portrait could be a moment of ekphrasis as he not only gives a detailed description of Elizabeth enabling the readers to visualize that picture in their minds but through such an ekphrastic meditation, he finds a way of conveying an interpretation of her identity as a woman and ruler. More importantly, Byatt's fascination with that portrait is already evident in *Portraits in Fiction* as she opens the book with Elizabeth's portrayal with the same words that Alexander utters. *Portraits in Fiction* explores the relationship between "portraits made with paint and portraits written with words" (Alfer and Campos 142). The book brings a new dimension to the discussions of word and image illustrating many examples of portraits in fiction ranging from Proust, Ford Maddox Brown to Iris Murdoch, Monet and Oscar Wilde. In her work titled "Ekphrasis as Portrait: A.S. Byatt's Fictional and Visual *Doppelgänger*" Paola Spinozzi lays great emphasis on the concept of "portraiture", how

painterly and fictional portraits confront each other paragonally in a mode in which verbal representation stands out. She believes that:

> Byatt's ekphrastic descriptions of portraits from the Renaissance to the contemporary age sustain the logocentric conception that visual art is a powerful source of inspiration for verbal art. Portraiture with words competes with and even surpasses portraiture with the brush: the representational power of the visual image is overcome by the evocative power of the image verbalised which, functioning as the verbal substitute for something absent, stimulates acts of figuration by the reader. (225)

This might explain why visual art appeals to Byatt as it nourishes verbal art, it is a source of creativity for writing and the verbalized image and what it evokes surpasses mere representation. Thus, the portraiture attributed to Byatt could be synonymous with ekphrasis as the portraits are verbally interpreted, unveiled and symbolic meanings are sought through verbalization, endowing "the writer with the unique gift of turning the subject of the portrait into a narrational core" (231). So, the narrational aspect of portraiture Spinozzi mentions involves the artistic and aesthetic contemplation of ekphrasis given the fact that in that ekphrastic moment the narration is deviated yet that interruption introduces a new rhythm into the narration. Ekphrasis becomes a driving force as the subject portrayed with vividness empowers the rhythm of narration. It becomes a mode of initiating the narration and constructs the plot which elucidates why Byatt begins the book with *The Darnley Portrait*. *The Virgin in the Garden,* as the title suggests, owes a lot to the 'Virgin Queen' and establishes a connection between her and Frederica Potter, whose name becomes the emblem of the whole quartet in time as she also plays the part of young Elizabeth in the play *Astraea*. As Lena Steveker points out in her book *Identity and Cultural Memory in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, "the figure of Elizabeth I serves as a means of representing Frederica's development from a sexually

ignorant teenager to a sexually active young woman" (94). Actually, what Byatt aims to tell through Frederica has great origins, implications in Elizabeth as Frederica's virginity is also at the center of the first novel.

Although a portrait is fixed in time and space, offering it in words or fictionalizing it in a novel, could kindle the imagination but also limit how they are viewed as portraits or images of icon and it might be difficult to overcome what they already determine or reinforce. Likewise, what the Darnley portrait does for Elizabeth in determining identity and the culture of a nation is similar to what society frames for women, something Byatt questions in the portrayal of Frederica, whose story inclines in that direction. Elizabeth I is one of those figures firmly ingrained in British culture to such an extent that it has a solid role in determining identity both individually and collectively as "the figure of this anomalously powerful unmarried woman has been… central to the making… of Anglo-British… culture" (Dobson and Watson 4). In the context of the novel it would not be wrong to say that Byatt renders a verbal construction of that portrait in order to start her novel and the whole quartet and makes full use of that painting which does not merely refer to Elizabeth I as a queen but also as an eminent figure determining the dynamic relationship between identity and culture.

The novel begins with the words "in 1952 history took a grip on the world of Alexander Wedderburn's imagination" (17), marking the importance of the role social events play for Byatt, as the year is also the coronation year of Elizabeth II and the year of Alexander's historical drama paying homage to Elizabeth, or, in Byatt's own words from her essay "Still Life/Nature Morte" from *Passions of Mind*, "a great play with the iconography of the first Elizabeth as Diana, Virgo-Astraea, the Virgin Mary, Idea, Cynthia" (3).

The associations between the myths of Astraea, Diana, Elizabeth and Frederica can best be explained with an initial short historical account of Astraea. Astraea or Virgo is the goddess of justice in Greek mythology. During the Golden Age, Astraea[6] was the last immortal but she had to abandon the earth and was transformed into the constellation Virgo in heaven. The month of August and the constellation of Virgo make Astraea both virginal and fruitful as August is also the month of harvest. "Iam reddit et virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna" from Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue* is translated as announcing the return of Astraea (Virgo) and the return of the Golden age (Hamilton 72). In her work titled *Astraea*, Frances A. Yates states that Virgil's statement was interpreted by the Christian church as a messianic prophecy of Christ's birth; the virgin became the Virgin Mary, heralding the golden age of Christ (34). That phrase also refers to rebirth and golden age which are associated with Elizabeth I as well as the Virgin Mary; Astraea-Virgo becoming one of the accolades of Elizabeth is symbolized within Renaissance England. According to Jane Campbell, Alexander also tries to represent the earlier hope of renaissance through the density and energy of his play *Astraea* (76). For Juliet Dusinberre Byatt's treatment of women and usage of myths is explained as an attempt to construct a female mythology of birth to replace the dominant male mythology of death (193). This might be another reason why Byatt heavily draws upon the Renaissance and Elizabethan England while placing her story in early fifties

[6] According to classical and Christian interpretation there is a famous description of the four ages in the first book of Ovid's Metamorphoses. In the first golden age, under the rule of Saturn, men gathered their food without labour in an everlasting spring, all were virtuous by nature, and peace universal reigned. After the golden age of Saturn came the silver age of Jove, when the eternal spring gave way to the seasons men felt for the first time, the extremes of heat and cold and the labour of tillage began. The third was the age of brass, sterner than the first two, but yet not impious. Finally came the Iron Age, when evil was let loose. Modesty, truth, and faith flew from the earth; men travelled greedily over the seas for gain; delved into the earth for metals. War came and brandished in its bloody hands the clashing arms. Piety lay vanquished, and the virgin Astraea, last of the immortals, abandoned the blood-soaked earth. (quoted in Yates 30)

England and the coronation of Elizabeth II. In the interview Dusinberre clearly expresses that:

> In *The Virgin in the Garden* I wanted to substitute a female mythology for a male one. The male mythology is the Dying God and Resurrection. The female one is birth and Renaissance, and that is what the Elizabethans recognized… I'm interested in Renaissance because things going on being born. (193)

So, what the patriarchy has constructed in society generally favors men and Byatt wants to replace that with a story putting forward women whose search for power and identity is best found in Elizabeth and the Renaissance. "The Queen and the Elizabethan Age become for Alexander and the reader historical and literary links between past and present" (Rohland-Le 42). Alexander wants to represent the earlier hope of the Renaissance but also in Yifan Lee's words, "Queen Elizabeth II's coronation and Queen Elizabeth I's mythical virginity prompt Frederica not only to consider but also earn her place in the world" (13).

The book's fascination with Elizabeth, the emphasis put on her virginity, help to further examine Frederica's attempt at forming a separate identity for herself. Lena Steveker points out that during the course of the novel Frederica turns into a twentieth-century version of the Tudor queen giving examples from Frederica's calling herself 'I am Elizabeth', imitating the queen's alleged manner of speaking and adopting the rigid expression associated with her portraiture (88). Actually, at one point the image of Elizabeth starts to determine how Frederica is described. While she is watching Alexander having sex with a girl named Jenny in a car, he realizes that somebody is watching. When he looks up, he sees "the framed face of Frederica" (208), which recalls an actual painting or Elizabeth's *The Darnley Portrait*. The emphasis put on Frederica's appearance of "gilded eyelids, red hair, wine-dark mouth, pale powdered mask around them" (208) is reminiscent of Alexander's verbal reconstruction of the

portrait in the prologue. Therefore, the ekphrastic rendering of that painting functions not just as a medium of cultural iconography but also presents the development and growth of Byatt's protagonist in relation to the Queen. Playing young Elizabeth in the play, Frederica, in Enstrom's words, "associates power with the iconographic virginity of Elizabeth I, her physical virginity becomes an object of her own curiosity" (58). Ironically, in the end, it is not Alexander to whom Frederica surrenders her virginity but to Edmund Wilkie who plays Raleigh in the play. Although Alexander is an idealized embodiment of art and culture for Frederica, she is unable to physically consummate her love with him.

The iconography of Elizabeth is also evoked through another of her associations, implied in Paolo Uccello's *Hunt in the Forest,* hung over the table in the dining room of the Potter family. The hunting evokes and recalls Diana, the virgin goddess of the hunt, the moon and chastity in Roman mythology and equivalent to the Greek goddess Artemis.

Fig. 23 Paolo Uccello, *The Hunt in the Forest,* 1465-1470, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

Dating back to the 15th century, the painting is set in a nocturnal atmosphere with many hunters with spears and dogs in a forest. Interestingly, Byatt particularly stresses the fact that despite being a small framed print, Frederica supposed for a very long time that the thing was huge, spanning a whole wall (32). Uccello is known for his pioneering contributions to linear perspective during the Renaissance; hence the effect it creates on the looker could be deceptive and illusory regardless of the size factor which could explain Frederica's confusion. Hunting is considered a dignified pastime and especially among the aristocracy it has always been very popular to hang paintings with hunting scenes on the walls. As Fischer-Hansen and Poulsen state, "The hunt was always prerogative of the aristocracy, and hunting scenes- both non-mythological and mythological- were a favorite embellishment of houses and villas" (401) symbolizing power. "Although the pictorial tradition of the hunt is rather thin in Tudor and Stuart England, a number of images confirm the importance of the sport as an emblem of monarchical power" (Berry 4). Given that Diana was one of the icons that Byatt had identified Elizabeth with, that painting is not a random choice. Although Elizabeth is not portrayed as a huntress in a specific image, the convergence of real and symbolic power in the monarch as a hunter leads up to the association with Diana, virginity and power invoked through contemplation on visual art, as is the case with ekphrasis.

Unlike Frederica, Stephanie chooses an unusual or unexpected path for herself by marrying Daniel Orton. In order to introduce Daniel, Byatt makes use of ekphrastic depictions of where he lives. The decoration of the rooms, the colors of the walls are important details that enable Byatt to use her painterly language and also give important clues about the characters. For instance, in order to depict the room Daniel is staying in, Byatt turns to visual imageries, giving long descriptions of wardrobes, drawers, coffee tables, armchairs or writing table. Yet what is more striking is the emphasis put on what is adorning the walls. "Albrecht Dürer's *Praying Hands* and Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*,

and a large photograph of two lacy altar boys and a brass vase of lilies in a very long shaft of sunlight" (50).

Fig. 24 Albrecht Dürer, *Praying Hands,* 1508, Albertina, Vienna

Albrecht Dürer's *Praying Hands* is a simple ink and pencil drawing of clasped hands on blue colored paper. The appeal of this sketch is already universal and for a character like Daniel who is a curate, Byatt accordingly chooses a religious themed visual in order to give insight into where he is living. On the other hand, Van Gogh produced a series of sunflower paintings that have contributed a lot to his fame and achievement as an artist. The time period he spent in Arles with his brother, the yellow house, his hosting of Paul Gauguin coincides with the time Van Gogh completed those works. It is important to note that Byatt turns most of her attention to that particular phase of the Dutch artist's life and draws her inspiration from it in writing the second installment, *Still Life.*

Fig. 25 Van Gogh, *Sunflowers*, 1888, National Portrait Gallery, London

The predominant color of the painting is yellow which recalls sadness. The gloomy atmosphere of the room is combined with the unhappiness of Daniel himself. It is revealed that Daniel grew up in Sheffield, "in a little row of blackened smoky houses with closed yards and slate-roofed bogs" (51). The loss of his father, how his relationship with his mother evolved into a burden for her, his lonely, silent school days, are in a way reflected in those two works, which could be an aesthetic and visual means of understanding Daniel and what he has been through. As a graduate of Theological College and working as a curate, Daniel's life is solitary and isolated until he meets Stephanie Potter.

In spite of being a Cambridge graduate and a passionate book lover, Stephanie ends up in a conventional marriage with Daniel. However, she cannot hide her anxiety

of losing creativity which mostly emerges in her dreams. Those dreams mirror her fear that marriage might become a destructive force upon her imagination which is illustrated in the class where she is teaching John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn". As mentioned in the first chapter of the thesis, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is frequently viewed as a pioneering ekphrastic poem giving detailed verbal descriptions of an image with visual scenes on it. The beauty of the poem comes from the elaborations of Keats himself as he imagines how they will remain immortal, young but also frozen in time and space. As well as being an ekphrasis example, the poem is also celebrated as one of the most well-known poems on the themes of art, life, beauty and immortality.

In the class, she tries to read the poem as expressionless as possible so that she can see what the students ponder or what comes to their mind's eye, analogous to an ekphrastic moment as she asks the students to have their own visualization. This poem is also about the dilemma between immortality and immobility, that is, that while the figures are immortalized on the vase and can endure forever, the fact is that they are also immobile, a reference to 'stillness'. Accordingly, Stephanie might fear the stillness and dullness of marriage and its confinements, yet at the same time by having children she is in a way immortalized in terms of the continuation of her lineage. Stephanie's fondness for the poem makes more sense as she actually becomes an embodiment of the poem with the crisis she has between domestic and intellectual identities.

Another important character whose living space is narrated with important details is Alexander Wedderburn, the author of the play *Astraea*. The most eye-catching thing about his room is that the walls are painted in different colors. On the blue wall there is a large print of Picasso's *Saltimbanques*, opposite on the pink wall, his *Boy with a Pipe*. While on the green wall there is a "large and gleaming photograph, white on

black, of a nude woman, sculpted in marble, lying on one side, seen from the back", on the gold wall there hangs a poster of one of his plays *The Buskers* (99).

Fig. 26 Pablo Picasso, *The Family of Saltimbanques*, 1905, National Gallery of Art, Washington

There have been different views of colours and what their respective significances since ancient times. Although color symbolism might change according to culture, religion or mythology, most notable associations have a common ground. Interestingly, the predominant colors Picasso used in his lifetime also changed from period to period and it is not a coincidence that what Alex prefers to hang, or what Byatt endows her character with, are products of Picasso whose career is categorized according to his color choices. The time period between 1901 and 1904 is known as the 'Blue Period' in Picasso's career. In his book *The Life, Times and Works of Pablo Picasso* O. B. Duane mentions that by the end of 1901, Picasso had entered a world within himself, a desperately sorrowful and gloomy world (21). The themes of death,

sorrow, poverty and isolation dominate his works. This has a lot to do with the death of his friend Casagemas and in a sense through art Picasso tried to come to terms with his loss. Duane furthers his claims by saying his melancholic mood was inspired by artists like Van Gogh (23), who is another influential painter as far as Byatt's works are concerned. According to Duane, Van Gogh had been one of the first to choose his colors for their emotional impact (22). Picasso seems to be following the same path with a focus on the inner turmoil and difficulties of men and blue seems the most appropriate color to express such feelings of anxiety or sadness. Picasso continued to use that color for over four years and his pictures became more and more monochromatic. Those are also the years he struggled as an artist - he was far from famous, and only a few people knew this young Spaniard (Walther 16). As Calosse points out in his work *Picasso*, "Blue is cold, it is the color of sorrow, grief, misfortune, inner pain; but blue is also the most spiritual of colors, the color of space, thoughts and dreams that know no confines" (33). The way Calosse defines that period pays tribute to Alexander himself:

> In 1904, the Blue Period, with its pessimistic, ingrown character and furious desire for an aesthetic absolute, reached its climax. This crisis of youth had to be replaced by a new stage in the process of individual development - the stage of self-building (43).

Therefore, through such examples of ekphrasis, moments of verbal depictions of visuals, Byatt might be aiming to give an insight into Alexander's struggles as a writer, his insecurities, and attempts to come to terms with his works. The pictures on the walls are, like the products of Picasso's transition period as an artist, his way of finding his unique style. The first critical assessments of Picasso's *The Family of Saltimbanques* in particular, reveal the artist's ideas of philosophical and physical cognition. Victoria Charles stresses that those works actually repeat "the nostalgic strains of Gauguin's

questions: Where from?...What?...Where to?" (55). Considered within the framework of self-formation, those questions point to what Alexander is also asking himself.

Picasso's 'Blue Period' lasted until 1905, when the sense of acute misery started to disappear from his paintings and 'Rose Period' began with inclusion of a wide range of colors like pink or orange. The subject matter also changed for him as he turned his attention to more charming figures like circus people rather than skeletal forms. *The Family of Saltimbanques* was painted in 1905 and though falling in the Rose Period, yet there is a sense of poverty in that impressive work, too. In Duane's words, on a barren background "there is a distinct impression of separateness among all the figures" (37). On a similar note, the main heroes of the painting are the seemingly cheery circus artists yet the dark mood of the Blue Period still lingers. That uneasy inner state of mind or world could be traced in Alexander as he is still trying to find a way to come to terms with his play, how to put it on the stage. Although Frederica finds the room much more decorative and airy than she had expected, the mysterious and incredulous nature of Alexander could actually be hidden in those paintings. In that sense, apart from the main theme of the novel built around the Potter sisters, it is possible to view Alexander as a character who poses an alternative dilemma which heavily draws upon artistry and vision. Therefore, reading Picasso's paintings in an ekphrastic framework helps a closer inspection of Alexander who is trying to form his identity as an artist.

In the same scene, Frederica points at the photograph of a woman which is soon revealed by Alexander to be Rodin's *Danaide*. The narrative voice says: "He ran his index finger along the indicated line of recumbent marble spine, under the marble-silky skin, a half-moon from abased nape to rounded buttocks vanishing and shining into the black" (104) giving a vivid depiction of the marble sculpture.

Fig. 27 Auguste Rodin, *Danaide,* 1889, Musée Rodin, Paris

When Frederica looks at the statue, what she thinks corroborates the feeling that Byatt deliberately chooses this statue of a woman with head bent down lying in an agonized position:

> She was acute enough to realize, despite her excitement over Alexander himself, that she had never been made to look at a visual work of art before. This kind of silent sensual contemplation was usual for him, she saw, and profoundly new to her. She had never, she realized, looked at a picture or a carving or even landscape without some immediate verbal accompaniment or translation. Language was ingrained in her. Bill had done that. He had described her own early words to her, sung them back at her, repeated them admiringly to others in her presence, improved on them unconsciously. He had read and read and read. (104)

The constraints of life mostly imposed by her father might have deterred Frederica from looking at a work of art with such a keen and conscious eye. Contemplation, meditation and other such intellectual ways of pondering on art are not obviously so familiar to Frederica. Rodin makes a woman's back as expressive as her face. His art enables the viewer to consider both the agony of the kneeling position and the wealth of flowing

hair as women are also creative, fertile and innovative. The spine of the woman might represent the universally metaphorical burden put on a woman's back and the patriarchal demand of obedience. Another important aspect of that work of art comes from the fact that Rodin was inspired by a Greek myth, the story of Danaus' daughters who murdered their husbands on their wedding night and were consigned to Hades, fated to draw water in broken urns (Elsen 505). *The Virgin in the Garden* is principally about Bill Potter's daughters Stephanie and Frederica who choose different paths for themselves presenting two contrasting lifestyles. It is not just Bill Potter and his domineering attitude, but the general domesticity of marriage and children that will bring confinement to Frederica and Stephanie. As a means of escaping that fate, Frederica is engaged in art like playing young Elizabeth in Alexander's play; and she makes every effort to attract his interest and lose her virginity, unlike Stephanie who clearly embraces that fate in spite of being a Cambridge graduate, marrying someone that conflicts with her education and upbringing in every respect. While Frederica is a dilettante and in pursuit of her own happiness and independence, Stephanie represents the kind of woman who has capitulated to the anxieties many women face with marriage and children. Rodin's statue becomes another visual paving the way for an interpretation and embodiment of the dilemma women face throughout their lives which finds forms in Stephanie and Frederica.

Alexander runs his finger along the marble spine of the woman but interestingly Byatt emphasizes the fact that he "came to rest under *The Boy with a Pipe* which was his private, his secret joke" (105). Knowing this boy almost means knowing himself for Alexander. Although he displays Rodin's *Danaide* to girls, he also keeps this boy on his wall as a private space as it indicates his inner world. Picasso's picture is generally highlighted for the ambiguity of the boy's sex and his obscure facial expression: in Byatt's words "he could be anything, or more probably everything" (105).

Fig. 28 Pablo Picasso, *The Boy with a Pipe*, 1905, Private Collection

The painting suits Alexander's pink wall perfectly as the boy is also crowned with roses, reminiscent of the artist's Rose Period. It is important to note that Picasso starts to show signs of his groundbreaking cubism style with this picture which is not just a literary depiction of a boy holding a pipe. In a totally blue suit, the boy is holding a pipe which is generally identified with intellectuality, yet it is held in reverse, askew in his hand. It is possible to identify the boy with Alexander as he is at the beginning of his writing career and in order to achieve the intellectual capacity he aspires to, he needs time and more maturity.

Considering Rodin's *Danaide* refers to the Potter siblings from two different aspects, how Stephanie's relationship with Daniel evolves into marriage could be explored in the chapter named "Anadyomene" which brings Venus Anadyomene to mind. Called the Ancient Greek goddess of love and beauty, and generally associated with Venus by the Romans, Anadyomene is also known from Titian's oil painting

depicting Venus rising from the sea or Botticelli's version in which Venus emerges from a shell.

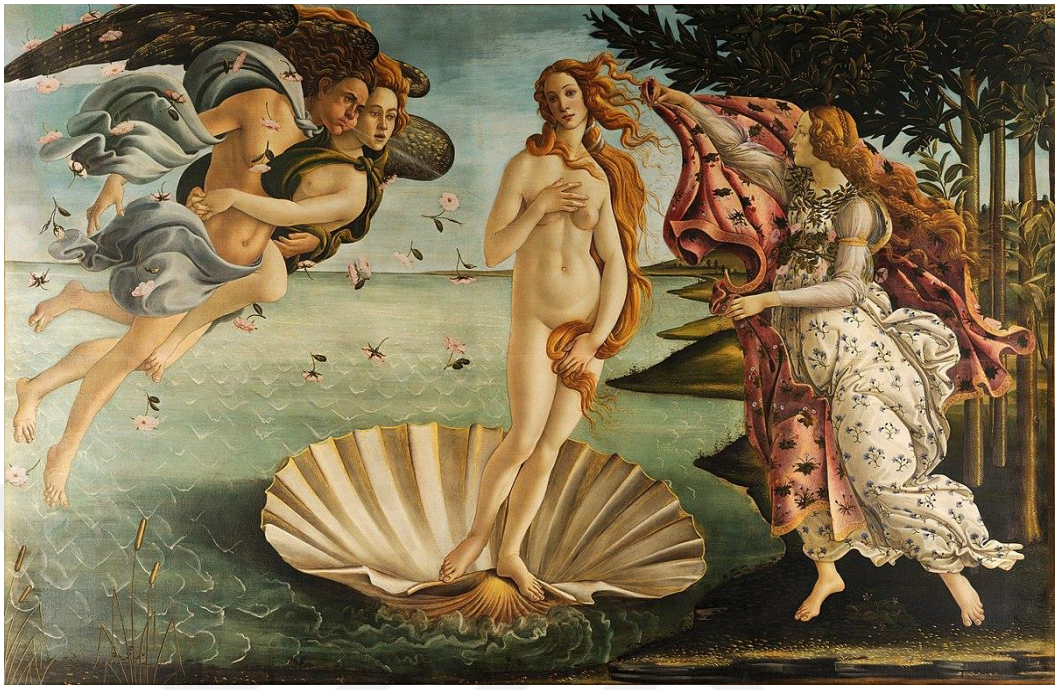


Fig. 29 Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, 1484-1486, The Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Fig. 30 Titian, *Venus Anadyomene,* 1520, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh

Anadyomene is actually first uttered by Stephanie during her class on Keats. While teaching "Ode on a Grecian Urn", Stephanie asks the girls what they see. Meanwhile she thinks that: "The thing had a remembered look, not pleasant, and she grimaced, as she saw it. Venus de Milo. Venus Anadyomene. The foam-born, foam from the castrated genitals of Kronos" (78). The Venus Anadyomene is the origin of Aphrodite (Greek)/ Venus (Roman), goddess of love. According to the myth, when Titan Cronos castrates his father, Uranus and throws his genitals into the sea, Venus rises from the foam of the sea. Conceived in the sea, Venus is born as a fully grown, mature woman[7]. The roles that are correlated with the image of Venus could be connected with Stephanie. The already earmarked roles of women in society as mother and wife could be symbolized in Venus' already fully grown form at birth. On the other hand, the constraints put on Stephanie also come from her father Bill whose overbearing attitude is felt profoundly by the siblings and Stephanie's marriage is subjected to disapproval and criticism by him vocally. The chapter entitled Anadyomene is about Stephanie and Daniel's trip to Filey where Daniel used to spend his childhood holidays. It is possible to compare Stephanie with the Goddess of love and beauty and the fact she and Daniel decide to marry after that trip, thereafter she herself will be born into a new life.

Clearly, Byatt places the story of her women against "a background of culture, art and history" (Campbell 63). In her interview with Juliet Dusinberre Byatt talks about the metaphor she turns to in that endeavor: "blood and stone, flesh and grass, music and silence, the heard and the unheard melody, the red and the white rose" (191). This could be linked with Alexander's play as the colors red, white, green and Botticelli's *Primavera* are also central; the florid nature of Alexander's language in his play is also concretely linked to the flower images from *Primavera*. Primavera represents spring and the central figure in the painting is also Venus. In his book *The Cult of Elizabeth:*

[7] This short account is taken from Paul Chrystal's *In Bed with the Ancient Greeks.*

Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry, Roy C. Strong remarks that Venus, goddess of love and beauty, is also Elizabeth-Astraea-Virgo (47). One of the attributes of Venus is the rose and it is symbolic of the union of York and Lancaster. Byatt comments in "Still Life/Nature Morte" that "Botticelli's tumbling florets became Elizabeth's Tudor roses, red and white, in a circle round her image in the Phoenix Jewel" (4). Elizabeth could be defined in relation to paradoxes as the appellations merged in her are also contrasted and accordingly it is possible to find a dual nature in the representation of Potter sisters, too. The duality of Venus-Virgo finds form in Stephanie-Frederica as Stephanie could be associated with Venus, goddess of love and beauty and Frederica who "was born under Virgo, August 24th, St Bartholomew" (139) embodies the virginity and fertility attributed to Astraea-Virgo.

Fig. 31 Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera,* 1482, The Uffizi Gallery, Florence

As mentioned before, Byatt has a special interest in colors which is obvious from her abundant usage of color adjectives and a fondness for fairies, myths and stories which are to a large extent inspired by northern stories about ice, snow and mirror

image. In Byatt's *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays*, "Ice, Snow, Glass" is about Andersen's *The Snow Queen*, Grimm's *Snow White* in which symbolic oppositions like ice and fire, red and white, snow and blood or life and death, the 'frozen sleep' or 'death-in-life' situations could be associated with Tennyson's The Lady of Shallot (154). The Lady has things in common with the frozen, death-in-life states of *Snow White* and of the lady and her castle in the glass coffins. She is enclosed in her tower, and sees the world not through the window, but in a mirror.

> Preserving solitude and distance, staying cold and frozen, may, for women as well as artists, be a way of preserving life. A correlated figure who fascinated me and found her way into my work was Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen, whose ambivalent image runs through The Virgin in the Garden. 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. (Byatt 158)

Obviously, Byatt draws a connection between Elizabeth and The Lady of Shallot in that they are both isolated and cold which gives them the power to preserve life like Elizabeth's virginity but also somehow reveal their passion, artistry and imagination. Byatt's portrayal of women and the Potter sisters could also be analyzed in relation to "The Lady of Shallot". The saddening story behind that lady not just inspired many artists like John William Waterhouse who painted three different versions, but it obviously has an influence on Byatt. Alfred Tennyson's "The Lady of Shallot" tells the story of a beautiful woman who lives alone in a tower; forbidden to look out of the window, she views the world only through a mirror. Yet the appearance of a young knight, Lancelot, causes her to look out of the window thus bringing a curse on her head. The mirror cracks and the lady realizes she is fated to die. She leaves her tower,

floats down the river with the hope of finding Lancelot yet cannot escape the curse. In *The Frederica Quartet*, the sisters Frederica and Stephanie might be representing "The Lady of Shallot" from two angles in that the limitations of marriage and children and the urge and desire to go out, seeking pleasure are the key points highlighted within the storylines of the sisters. The Lady's confinement in a tower might correspond to Stephanie's domesticity in the house on the other hand Frederica's curiosity and search for alternatives can be linked to the Lady pursuing her dream of seeing Lancelot. For Stephanie, "human beings, even as a very small child faced with the *Lady of Shallot*, might so easily never have hit on the accidental idea of making unreal verbal forms, they might have just lived, and dreamed, and tried to tell the truth" (79). While teaching "Ode on a Grecian Urn", Stephanie thinks how much she cares about that poem especially in seeing "the unseen, realizing the unreal, speaking what was not". Through Stephanie, Byatt voices her own ideas by saying:

"Heard melodies are sweet but those unheard
Are sweeter,"

What makes the unheard melodies sweeter might be the effect of dreaming it. The poem was a popular subject among painters of the period as an emblem of female creativity and power. The plot of the poem clearly resonates with Byatt's women in the quartet as Frederica and Stephanie are well-educated young women, yet they feel and fear the pressure of domesticity, being trapped in a house, cut off from creativity and imagination.

In the novel, the inertia of domesticity is also connotated through a rooted form in visual arts which is still life genre and it finds verbal representation through Marcus whose acute sense of smell or sight is manifested in those scenes. Bill and Winifred's only son Marcus is sixteen years old and suffers from attacks of asthma. His life revolves around school and hospital which after a while starts to influence his

perception as the extension of the constant pain he feels causes him to develop a sense of identification with mathematics and geometry.

> There was an extreme point where pain refined vision to mathematics. He would see a two dimensional map, gray-black-white, of linear relations: curtains, furniture-corners, bed, chair, fingers plucking up triangles of blanket. This was related to the inner map of blocked, narrowing, imagined passages for air. ….[…] What he saw was turning geometry, spinning graph paper with the squares decreasing in size on some almost definable geometric principle, and simultaneously rotating, so that somewhere in the centre, on the periphery of the field of vision, was the vanishing point, infinity. (91)

As the pain reminds him of hospital, the upper and lower windows, their geometric proportions generate a feeling of unusual but strong sensitivity. Even simple and everyday objects seem in certain shapes, lines or triangles to him as his sense of vision and perception are determined by sharpness and cleanness. That is mostly observed in his visits to shops and markets with his mother, Winifred. Byatt uses such a painterly, ornamental language that the scenes evoke ekphrastic meditations, as the details provide a vivid and clear visualization for the readers and bring to mind the still life genre through sensory images.

> Allenbury's shop window was, in its way, a work of art. It is not possible, with meat, to create the symmetry, the delicate variation of colour and form that a fishmonger can make on marble or ice with a wheel, or an abstract rose, of his proffered goods. But Allenbury's window had a compensating variety….[…] From a glittering steel bar on elegantly curved hooks hung the chickens, with plump naked breast and limbs, and softly feathered stretched necks. The ducks, in line, had their webbed cold feet tucked neatly along their sides, gold beaks, black eyes, neck feathers scarlet on white. Beneath them the display counter was lined and fringed with emerald green artificial grass…. A grinning card-board pig, poised on one trotter, bore on its forelegs a platter of steaming sausages. (92-93)

Byatt continues that sort of detailed and visionary narration for pages, bringing before the mind's eye how sliced, pushed or wrapped pork, kidney, liver and heart shine. Michael Worton focuses on the varied representations of still life in Byatt's fiction, which contains many examples of detailed sentences and paragraphs. These may be looked at, firstly, as written representations of still life paintings, whether real or imagined works of art. Ingvar Bergström defines the genre as "a representation of objects which lack the ability to move e.g. flowers, shells, plate and which are for artistic purposes grouped into a composition" (3). The term came to be closely associated with the French expression *nature morte* and the general purpose is to celebrate the fertility of nature, through descriptions of breakfast tables, kitchens and market stalls.

In his book *Still Life*: *Still Life Painting in the Early Modern Period*, Norbert Schneider states that the word still life was not used until the mid-17th century as it had been competing with other terms used exclusively for special variants of still life, such as *fruytagie* (fruit piece), *bancket* (banquet) and *ontbijt* (breakfast) (7). Byatt's long descriptive passages of food and meals provide a sensual experience, shaping her aestheticism in a way which resembles that of Marcel Proust (Hicks 1), whose fiction, for example *Remembrance of Things Past*, also contains numerous instances verbal still life. Byatt and Proust may be said to share an aesthetic tendency which is heavily reliant on visual representation. Elizabeth Hicks thinks that there are so many common points where Byatt and Marcel Proust meet especially in that both writers use still life depicting food or meal in long passages evoking an aesthetic ekphrasis. The intense sensual passages at the butcher's shop is according to Hicks reminiscent of Proust and demonstrates how his writing influenced Byatt. Those long sensual descriptions of food provide a visual delight that readers might experience upon reading. Byatt commingles the constraints of domestic, everyday life or the obstacles put on female creativity

through such verbal descriptions, obviously recalling an ekphrastic still life with images of food, fruit, cooking and the table.

> Although the still-life genre in Byatt's fiction celebrates the feminine through the sensuousness of food and domestic objects, it also foregrounds the inherent tension which can be present in the relationship between women and domesticity. She dedicates much time and attention to evoking the pleasure to be experienced through preparing and serving food, yet often portrays elaborate meals as representing entrapment for women. (Hicks 135)

In a way, that domesticity finds concrete form in the stillness of the objects in still life paintings. The subject matter of those paintings also has direct connections with women, kitchen, food and domestic life. Accordingly, the quartet contains numerous examples of Stephanie and Frederica questioning the roles of women, the stillness after marriage and motherhood. Their mother Winifred, for example, has degree in English from Leeds, yet "she looked like a Victorian image of an exhausted Scandinavian goddess" (29). In the Potter family domesticity and its entrapment for a woman is also felt in those words Winifred utters while preparing lunch:

> She made a cheese soufflé, roasted a chicken, put together a fresh fruit salad and splashed in a miniature bottle of Cointreau. She enjoyed the soufflé-making, with a limited nostalgia for pre-war plenty. It was her daughters, children of austerity, who would later go in for authentic, gluttonous cookery with butter and wine and roasted spices. Winifred believed in convenience foods as she believed in labour-saving devices. She remembered baking days in the past, raised pies and kneading dough, as she remembered galvanised wash-tubs, copper ponches and monstrously strutting hand-wringers, chores you were glad to be shot-of. (212)

The sensory features and color imagery of still life objects might be providing an aesthetic and artistic language but the state of stillness also refers to a woman's position in the house as an object of a still life scene; verbal still lifes or still life paintings

thematize objects of food and the kitchen that are generally identified with women. Remarkably, Byatt employs an unusual way to debate and narrate the women closed in the house in inserting the main point through visual images of still lifes. She will cultivate that further in the second novel which also takes its name from the genre.

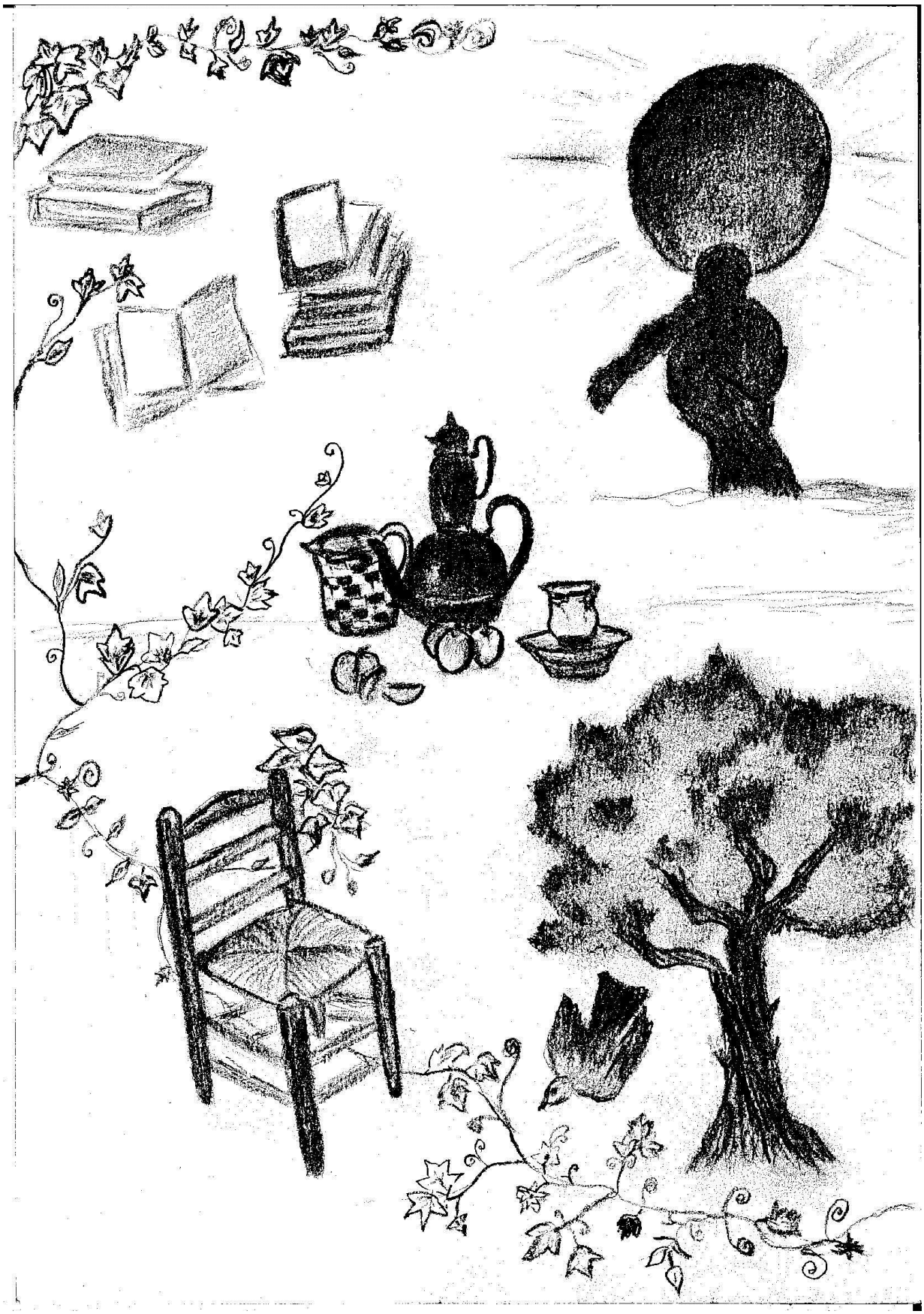
The discussions of word and image at the core of ekphrasis finds form in Byatt's text through her thoughts on the power of language, visualization and the power of symbolic language. After meeting Edmund Wilkie who is likely to play Walter Ralegh in the play, Frederica is fascinated by his research on visual images and languages. As a graduate of King's College Cambridge, Wilkie is not just a brilliant psychologist; he also rose to fame as an actor. Given Frederica's father Bill's attitude of deciding almost everything for his family, Wilkie is almost proof that escape is possible from Blesford for Frederica. He says, "visual images are more primitive, more fundamental than words" (135). Upon the importance put on visual thinking, Alexander shows his own drawings on the table which are like the illustrations of his characters in the play. "The writing had led him, half-scholarly, half besotted, to portraits, miniatures, the garments themselves…" (135). As well as writing, putting what he imagines into words, he also visually thinks and brings before the mind's eye concretely. This act by itself could be seen as an ekphrasis executed by Alexander himself. In a way, he does not give voice to characters through words alone but also creates them on paper in fully shaped which is a visual reflection of his mind.

The Virgin in the Garden ends with Frederica's visit to Stephanie who is expecting her first child, to see Marcus after he suffers a nervous breakdown. Over time, Marcus has difficulty in finding a way to cope with his visionary experiences which actually gain a hallucinatory dimension after he meets biology master Lucas Simmonds. Marcus experiences limitless visions and drags the young man to an inevitable breakdown that causes him to live with his sister Stephanie and Daniel for a while at the

end of the novel. While the whole family is trying to work through the Marcus crisis, Frederica seems to have entered a new phase in her life. After playing young Elizabeth in Alexander's verse drama, she not only gains sexual fulfillment by finally losing her virginity to Wilkie, she also starts feeding her greed for knowledge and intellect, as revealed with the satisfactory results she gets for entrance to college.

Byatt, in portraying her women, utilizes myths, mythology, historical and literary figures ranging from Astraea to Venus to the Lady of Shallot or Elizabeth. In doing so, the images of those figures are brought before the readers' eyes through ekphrasis, which not only serves as an aesthetic means of expression but also helps to lend a critical eye with the symbolic contradictions they incorporate, represented through the Potter sisters. *The Virgin in the Garden* is substantially indebted to the figure of Elizabeth I as Byatt uses her iconography to represent development and self-building in every respect especially for Frederica. The novel highlights Frederica's quest for identity but what is distinguishable is the fact that Byatt turns that journey into a visual one by making use of ekphrasis; she invites the readers into a pictorial world and provides them with such art works that somehow underline the basic crisis from which women suffer: the dilemma between a conventional way of life or fulfilling what society already expects of them, and having an independent and intellectual voice and space.

STILL LIFE



2.5 The Still Life and Ekphrasis in *Still Life*

Published in 1985, *Still Life* continues the quartet that began with *The Virgin in the Garden*. In *Still Life*, Frederica is at Cambridge, while Stephanie, who is pregnant, tries to cope with the challenges of married life. She has abandoned her academic life and now desperately seeks privacy and the rekindling of her imagination. Their brother Marcus, who has suffered a sort of breakdown, is also living with Stephanie and Daniel. Because of his bizarre relationship with his ex-biology teacher Lucas, with some homosexual activity between them, Marcus goes through a difficult time and rather than living with his authority figure father, he lives with his sister, but with minimal talk and action in the house. With Marcus and Mrs. Orton, Daniel's mother, in the house, home is not like home for Stephanie with those new guests and the exhaustion she has already been feeling because of her pregnancy and domestic life in general. Alexander Wedderburn's new inspiration is Van Gogh and he is desperately trying to write a play about the artist in Nimes where he comes across Frederica who is spending the summer there as an au pair before starting college at Cambridge.

In *Passions of the Mind* Byatt comments that: "The idea of the second novel of the series – *Still Life* – was that it should, by contrast, be very bare, very down-to-earth, attempt to give the thing itself… I wanted to write about birth and death plainly and exactly" (5). In keeping with Byatt's wish, *Still Life* could be evaluated from two perspectives. On the one hand, it focuses on Byatt's own dilemma of writing in the most plain form possible, which is projected onto Alexander's struggles in creating a drama on Van Gogh, whose pipe, chair, friendship with Gauguin, asylum days, major works and still lifes grant a simple form focusing only on the thing or the object in question, thus providing a similar realistic, accurate vision but also make their way into the unfolding lives of the characters through ekphrastic depictions. On the other hand, as

the title of the novel suggests, *Still Life* is profoundly engaged with stillness and domesticity as a continuation of *The Virgin in the Garden* echoing the dilemma Byatt foregrounded through Stephanie and Frederica of the entrapment of domesticity and the prominence of intellectual pursuit given to Stephanie in whose 'still life' Byatt's emphasis on birth and death find form.

Once again Byatt begins with a prologue which features a museum visit made by Alexander, Frederica and Daniel at a later date than the events taking place in the novel itself. The exhibition is on post-impressionism and takes place at Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1980 seventeen years after the end of *The Virgin in the Garden*. The first two volumes of *The Frederica Quartet* open with prologues featuring visits made to famous exhibitions in London galleries, suggestive of Roger Fry's exhibition for the Grafton Gallery in 1910 which had a massive impact on British culture, introducing notable works of painters like Cezanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh. The historic exhibition "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" marks a defining moment in modernism and it is frequently cited to explain Woolf's statement in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" that "on or about December 1910 human character changed" (Quick 547). The exhibition had a great influence on modern movements in painting in England and the exhibition that Frederica, Daniel and Alexander visit in *Still Life* is also on post impressionism; the characters' elaborations on the paintings serve as moments of ekphrasis exploring visual perception and how it is articulated in verbal terms. While *The Virgin in the Garden* centers on Alexander's *Astraea*, a play about Elizabeth, and the novel begins with ekphrastic descriptions of the *Darnley Portrait* of the Queen at a museum, *Still Life* takes another of Alexander's dramas named *Yellow Chair*, inspired by Van Gogh, whose life and struggles as an artist are such a substantial part of *Still Life* and at some points become a parallel storyline to Alexander as an artist.

Vincent Van Gogh is one the most famous and greatest Dutch painters and the artist's most productive years before succumbing to mental illness and subsequent suicide to a large degree provide the inspiration for Byatt in *Still Life*. As with many artists, Van Gogh also resided in Paris yet the trip he made to Arles in February 1888 revived not only his love of nature in that sunny southern province, but also prompted his most prolific years and his best works. Van Gogh owes much of his development to the countryside during his eighteen months stay in Arles. He lived in the famous yellow house, painted sunflowers, the yellow chair and befriended Paul Gauguin, with whom he had the incident that resulted in cutting his own ear. Van Gogh invites many artists to stay at the Yellow House to establish a community of art but only Gauguin accepts and travels to the south of France with Vincent's brother Theo's help. However, Vincent's strange behavior frightens Gauguin and after the ear incident he departs which is followed by Van Gogh's stay in hospital. He actually chooses to enter an asylum at St-Remy, but continues painting even from the window of his room. Together with the letters he writes to his brother Theo, these paintings present a comprehensive view of Van Gogh's personal life, his mental state and artistic development[8]. In her work *A.S. Byatt: Essays on the Short Fiction*, Celia M. Wallhead comments that Byatt gave us the added dimension of the visual plus verbal in the verbal by including in the intertext not only references to paintings of Van Gogh, but also references to his writings about art in his letters to his brother (85). In that record of his ideas and lifelong struggles in more than seven hundred letters, Van Gogh not only presents his spiritual journey into art but also allows the readers to enter his mind and innermost thoughts.

[8] The biographical information about Vincent Van Gogh is obtained from the book *Through the Eyes of Vincent Van Gogh: Selected Drawings and Paintings by the Great Master.*

At the exhibition, while waiting for Frederica, Alexander is caught up with a long wall on which a row of Van Gogh paintings are hung, including *The Poet's Garden*, *Olive Pickers* and Paul Gauguin's *Man with the Axe* and *Still Life, Fete Gloanec 1888*. One cannot help questioning why Byatt opts for these particular works. A further examination might enable a link to be established between them and the characters. For *The Poet's Garden*, Alexander stares "at the serenely impassioned garden made out of a whirl of yellow brushstrokes, a viridian impasto, a dense mass of furiously feathered lines of blue-green, isolated black pot hooks, the painfully clear orange-red spattering" (2). By calling the painting *The Poet's Garden*, Van Gogh intentionally linked the image to the 14th-century poets Francesco Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio, as he writes in one of his letters: "Some time ago I read an article on Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio and Botticelli. Good Lord! It did make an impression on me, reading letters of those men" (3).

Fig. 32 Vincent Van Gogh, *The Poet's Garden*, 1888, The Art Institute of Chicago

Further in the letter it is implied that Petrarch lived somewhere near Avignon with the same cypresses and oleanders that Van Gogh illustrates in his work. Van Gogh imagines such a garden, that he wants the viewers to imagine poets of the Renaissance strolling through the bushes. Byatt directly quotes from Van Gogh who might have imagined his friendship with Gauguin to parallel the artistic partnership between Petrarch and Boccaccio. Together, Petrarch and Boccaccio could be called the founders of Humanism. The two formed a friendship which lasted their entire lives, so much so that Boccaccio is the recipient of a large number of letters which appear in Petrarch's collections. As Van Gogh's relationship with Paul Gauguin is the origin of Alexander's play, *The Poet's Garden* and the reference to another artistic and intellectual friendship connectively illuminate Alexander's role in the novel. It is possible to find some traces of Alexander in the painting with his wish of creating a play about two companion painters, recalling Van Gogh's imaginings of bringing before the eyes two similarly inspirational figures.

The museum visit also includes some of the works of Gauguin, an early 19th century French artist known for his exotic environments like Tahiti, bold colors and unusual body proportions, which are mentioned during the conversation between Daniel and Frederica. Obviously, Daniel has something to talk about to Frederica but they take time off to look at the pictures like Gauguin's *Man with the Axe* and *Still Life, Fete Gloanec 1888*.

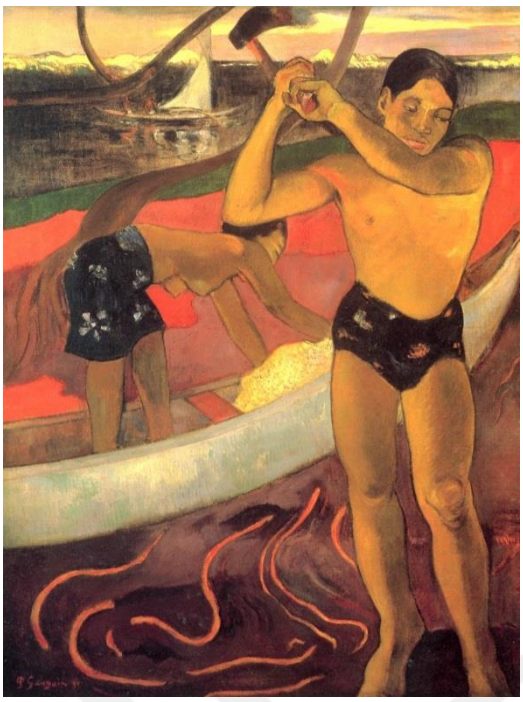


Fig. 33 ***Man with the Axe,*** **1891, Private Collection**

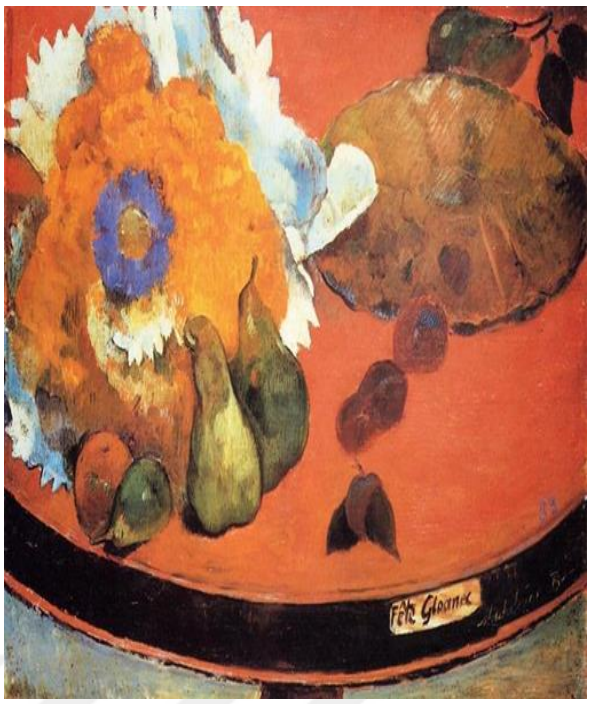


Fig. 34 ***Still Life, Fete Gloanec 1888,*** **Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Orléans, Orleans**

Gauguin's *Man with the Axe* is from his Tahitian period. In the picture, the central figure, almost naked, holds an axe above his head, ready to strike a target. Alexander and Frederica's conversation on this work serves as an ekphrastic meditation. For them there are some androgynous aspects to the figure as Alexander tells Frederica that he "preferred his androgynes to be more obscured, more veiled, more suggested" (7). In *Still Life, Fete Gloanec* two ripe pears, a bunch of flowers and some other inanimate objects are laid on a red table. Alexander informs Frederica that Gauguin had flirted with a young woman named Madeline Bernard and had characterized her as "having the desirable, unattainable androgynous perfection" (7). Although Frederica thinks that the pears might stand for breasts of the woman and the flower could be her hair, Alexander opposes this as the pears could be read as androgynous in themselves, as partly male. A clash of female and male perspective recalls the dilemma in the nature of androgyny given that it incorporates both feminine and masculine aspects. Yet what makes the androgynous mind bright and great for thinkers like Coleridge or Woolf, is

finding the balance and reaching a full capacity. With their incompatible contemplations on a still life, Alexander and Frederica introduce one thread of the narrative in *Still Life* that concerns the dilemma of women who cannot find a balance between the challenges of married life and a yearning for privacy and a revival of imagination. The two works by Gauguin could represent the Potter siblings, Frederica and Stephanie: Frederica could be the androgynous figure that could be 'anything' or 'everything' with the joy, energy and taste she has for life, representing the kind of woman who enjoys life, men, sex, nature – she aspires to be an actress or writer, manages to go to Cambridge, and lives life to the fullest; her sister could best be associated with a still life painting as she is stuck between the domesticity of married life with children and the will of going back to academic life.

At the exhibition, the last post-impressionist work that catches their attention is Van Gogh's *The Olive Pickers*.

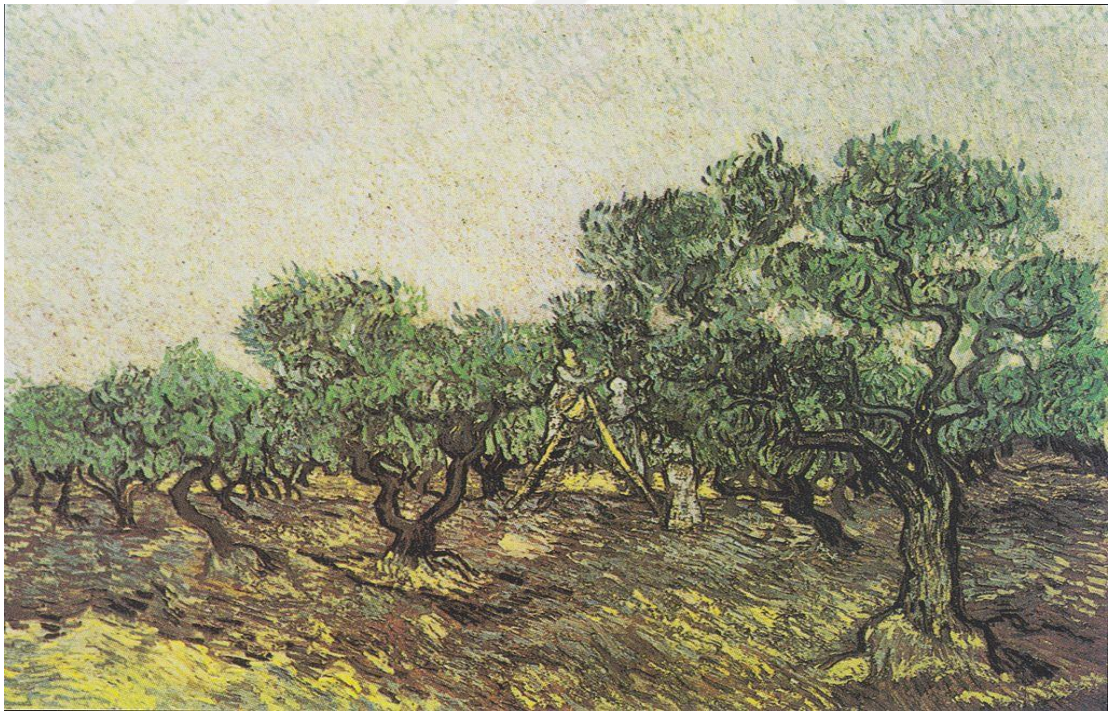


Fig. 35 Vincent Van Gogh, *The Olive Pickers*, 1889, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Van Gogh produced a series of olive paintings, mostly painted during his stay in Saint-Remy-de-Provence in 1889. It is known that he stayed at an asylum located near to olive trees, or cypresses. Given that Van Gogh was ill and suffering from a kind of emotional turmoil, the feeling of relief he got from the trees is symbolically significant in the relationships between man and nature or life and death, which has a place of some consequences in the general scope of the novel in terms of birth and death, which complement each other and which could be traced in Van Gogh's art as well as through his colors and subject matters. The fact that Van Gogh painted it while staying at an asylum after a mental crisis could be directly linked with Marcus Potter whose fate in the novel bears an obvious resemblance; however, more intriguingly Sorensen believes that "Byatt's discussion of Van Gogh parallels the Stephanie plot line, investigating the possibility that visual and verbal language can amalgamate in some revelatory manner and coming to a similarly pessimistic conclusion" (70). According to Hicks during his stay in Arles Van Gogh devoted a great amount of time to the still life genre, including the sunflowers, the bedrooms or chairs as representation of himself (15), establishing a delicate connection with Stephanie whose still life tragically ends in another form of stillness. Considering those paintings in a row, it is possible to find certain traces of major characters in them as Alexander, Stephanie and Frederica as the main figures of this volume are foregrounded and the narrative discourse is shaped at the beginning of the novel through the ekprastic meditations.

Byatt herself explains in her introduction to *Passions of the Mind* that she wanted *Still Life* to be as plain as possible. In her work "The Quest for the Thing Itself in A. S. Byatt's Still Life", Emilie Bourdarot explains that "the novel's project is based on the idea that painting may be better equipped to render nature than language, and that achieving a perfect verbal equivalent of still lifes might enable the novelist to reach the 'thing itself'" (87). That thing itself is directly linked to Byatt's aims of the plain and

simple in her novel as with the still life paintings shifting the whole focus on themselves. Interestingly, at the beginning of the novel, Alexander Wedderburn is also looking for a way to write something plain. In her article "Still life and the Rounding of Consciousness" Gail Davey comments that:

> Byatt outlines the available alternatives to metaphor and uses several of these alternatives in Still Life—but still returns time and again to the difficulty of conveying all she wishes without metaphor. Byatt comments that she dwells on Van Gogh's difficulties in painting the Yellow Chair because she recognizes his dilemma as equivalent to her own. The pitfalls Van Gogh experiences in painting simple objects divested of metaphorical significance are identical to those Byatt encounters in presenting objects in plain words. (1545)

Alexander becomes the symbolic embodiment of Byatt's own dilemmas, especially in her writing style, as the struggles of his contemplation on exploring the ways of pure expression could only be matched by Van Gogh's accuracy and plainness. Van Gogh might be employing simple objects but the metaphorical significance they embody is immense. Although Byatt meant the novel to be about birth and death plainly and exactly, the novel presents a dual authority of words and images, as Byatt herself accepts in "Still Life/ Nature Morte" which is her account of her failure to write without metaphor. Celia Wallhead's comments on the relationship between verbal and visual makes a reference to ekphrasis itself. She says that "the role of the listener-reader is paralleled to that of the observer in visual art. What both visual and verbal art have in common is the 'vision' in both a literal and a metaphorical sense" (87). What is so essential to ekphrasis is also a remaking process because it presents a multi layered interpretation for readers, viewers or listeners. While looking at a picture or reading words, it is almost inevitable not to color what is heard, seen or listened to with one's own vision or imagination. What brings Byatt closer to Van Gogh is not just color but

also her firm belief that the painter reflected what he saw or thought as plainly or realistically as possible. On the other hand, Byatt moves beyond the painter's concepts of color and form in visual depictions through Alexander whose engagement with Van Gogh, his paintings and ideas engenders ekphrastic debate with a focus on the power of words, metaphors and images giving an alternative insight into the inner world of the character.

The first striking visual image is introduced when Marcus is seeing a psychiatrist named Mr. Rose whose room and how it is decorated is once again narrated by Byatt in detail, focusing on a print of Norwegian Edvard Munch's famous 1893 work *Scream* on the wall.

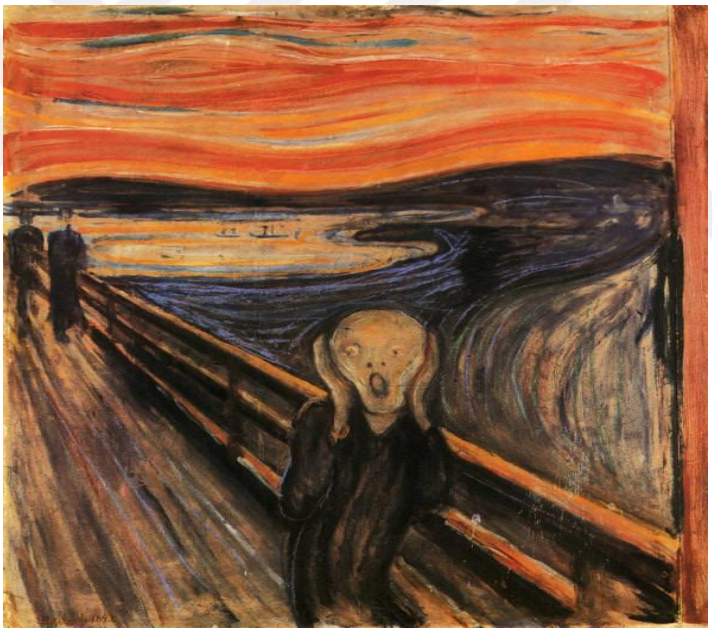


Fig. 36 Edvard Munch, *Scream*, 1893, National Gallery and Munch Museum, Oslo

With his mouth wide open and hands held to his head, the figure screams piercingly, with two other people strolling past in the background. That scream could represent a universal cry of humanity in the modern age. While looking at the picture, Marcus might easily identify himself with that figure as he feels in desperate need of help. When Mr. Rose asks him to think about home, he visualizes a geometrical map. "Home

to him was a pattern of relations, lines between chairs, window-oblongs, stair numbers with corner-segments…" (40). While trying to find himself, Marcus is also trying to find where he belongs to. At the center of those pattern of relations lies his father, Bill. "So home for Marcus was a few dangerous objects that were extensions of people, Bill's ashtray and pipe, Bill's carving tools…" (40). Considering Van Gogh's omnipresence in the novel, the asylum, mental breakdown, chairs, geometrical shapes like windows or pipe implications could be indications of Byatt's Van Gogh reflections on the characters. Dwelling on painters like Van Gogh and Picasso, Byatt presents the tension between Bill and Marcus through their usage of pipe image in their works as it could be the embodiment of fierce and brutal authority that Bill holds over his son.

The novel starts with the summer Frederica spends in France as a sort of au-pair before going to Cambridge. A provincial city, Nimes, is where Frederica is staying and the hotel room she has rented has walls painted in dark blue, recalling Van Gogh's famous *Starry Night* (65). The color blue reminds her of the day she had seen Picasso's paintings from his 'Blue period' in Alexander's house.

Fig. 37 Van Gogh, *The Starry Night,* 1889, Museum of Modern Art, New York

As mentioned above, the Blue Period is significant in Picasso's career as it is also a process of individual development or a stage of self-building for the artist. Accordingly, Frederica's growth as a woman, artist or human continues and even takes new turns in that city like deciding to become a writer. As a stranger in a foreign land she makes comparisons with some notable painters who found their inspirations in new lands. She says:

> I do not think the compulsion to write about foreign places can be very closely compared to a painter's sensuous delight in new light, new forms, new colours, Monet seeing the Cap d'Antibes in blue and rose, Turner seeing the bright watery Venetian light in Venice, Gauguin in Tahiti. Pigment is pigment and light is light in any culture. But words acquired slowly over a lifetime, are part of a different set of perceptions of the world, they have grown with us, they restrict what we see and how we see it. (72)

The contrast between word and image is a central issue for ekphrasis and by claiming how language and the words that have grown with us actually limit our perception or do not pave the way for new forms that could enliven imagination, Byatt brings her views to that discussion with an emphasis on lived experiences and seeing things in person. The binary opposition drawn between the visual and verbal, and how it has been viewed, analyzed and interpreted by many scholars, has been discussed in the first chapter of the thesis. But there are also those who refused such formulations and stressed an interactive relationship between the power of verbals and images, words and visuals. While accepting the power of the words, Byatt also cares about the visual competence considering that she debates over the inadequacy of language. Therefore, looking for ways to fill in that gap might have led her to develop an interest in visual materials and metaphors. One of the reasons she chooses Van Gogh and his works might stem from the fact that the Dutch painter is known for his elucidation of

"looking" and "seeing" as seen in the letters he wrote to his brother, Theo. Like Van Gogh, Byatt seems to be immersed in the importance of seeing through developing a third eye in readers by the inclusion of visual metaphors. In that way, readers would be prompted to undertake a double process of interpretation that would invoke their imagination and intellect as in the case of ekphrasis.

In Nimes, Frederica comes across Edmund Wilkie to whom she had surrendered her virginity at the end of first book and Alexander Wedderburn, her first real but unconsummated love. Obviously, Alexander is in the town for art as he is anxious about his next work, which is "the dramatization of the dispute, in the Yellow House in Arles, between Paul Gauguin and Vincent Van Gogh" (82). Actually, it all begins like a touristic visit to Arles for Alexander. He realizes that the muddy brown line that had divided Van Gogh's *Yellow House* painting is an actual "soft muddy raised bank of an irrelevant ditch" (82).

Fig. 38 Vincent Van Gogh, *The Yellow House*, 1888, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Although the yellow house is gone, he feels an impulse to dramatize the electric arguments between Gauguin and Van Gogh. His wealthy friend Matthew Crowe, who had sponsored his play *Astraea* in the first book, gives him Van Gogh's *Letters* and he himself gets a copy of Gauguin's *Avant et Apres* which is an account of the episode in the yellow house from Gauguin's point of view (82). While narrating Alexander's interest in those painters, that specific location they spent time together, Byatt actually invites readers to a visual experience, igniting the imaginations, and she gives concrete, historically accurate information to the readers. In her article "More than Words: The Elusive Language of A.S. Byatt's Visual Fiction", Margarida Esteves Pereira tries to understand the language of fiction and the paintings, posing questions on the way Byatt evokes pieces of art in her works which highlight the visual quality of her writing. *Still Life* in particular is Pereira's focus, as that second volume of *The Frederica Quartet* clearly evokes Van Gogh's paintings.

> A.S.Byatt's discussions of painting vis-à-vis language and writing are instructive as to the way she, so often in her fictions, uses actual pictures that suggest a specific image to the reader. In a certain sense, then, the use of pictures by Van Gogh, or by Matisse, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Velázquez, among others, evoke in the readers specific images of place, atmosphere, people (219).

The way Van Gogh has illustrated south of France accords almost completely with what Frederica and Alexander have seen in Arles:

> And Vincent Van Gogh? Provence is as he painted it, we use his images as icons by which to recognize certain things, the cypresses above all, the olives, some configurations of rock and vegetation, the line of the Alpilles, the plain of the Crau, the light itself. (74)

Those scenes are like re-creations of what Van Gogh had invoked in minds through his works in that province. However, what should not go unmentioned is the emphasis put

on those images being used as icons even in recognizing things. Recalling Elizabeth's portrayal as an iconic symbol in defining a nation and Frederica's indebtness to it in creating an identity, Van Gogh's plain, exact and accurate images and portrayals assume a similar role for Alexander who is trying to find his identity as an artist. On a similar note, in the chapter titled "Seascape", Van Gogh's *Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries* is brought before the readers' eyes and minds through an ekphrastic rendering that evokes the image itself:

> Frederica arrived when the beach party at Les Saintes-Maries was posed. It was at some distance from other groups, in those days not yet numerous, on that beach. It had arranged itself around bright canvas bags and wicker baskets in the part-shade of a fishing boat. In those days also the boats were unchanged since Vincent Van Gogh had spent one week there in June 1888 and had painted them, red and blue, green and yellow, with coloured delicate masts erect, and the slanted, tapering yard-arms crossing each other on the pale mackerel sky. (89)

Fig. 39 Vincent Van Gogh, *Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries*, 1888, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

"Seascape" is a term that readers often come across in Van Gogh's letters while talking about Gauguin. "I hope you'll send him Gauguin's fine seascape" (486) writes Van Gogh to his brother Theo in one of his letters. Sue Sorensen asserts that what Byatt aims for in *Still Life* is "to redirect us toward a respect for Van Gogh's realistic inclinations and to accept him as a literary artist (73)". Frederica's shock in seeing the boats at Saintes-Maries very much as they looked when Van Gogh painted them exemplifies that in the best way possible. The reader might feel like being in the frame of that painting, as do the characters highlighting the point that nothing has actually changed. What Van Gogh had reflected visually on the canvas could be narrated verbally within a story as if the characters experienced it.

Byatt's essay "Van Gogh, Death and Summer" from *Passions of the Mind* is a precursor to the omnipresence of the painter in Byatt's *Still Life*. The presence of Van Gogh is felt in almost every aspect of the novel, not just through his works but also through Alexander Wedderburn. As in the first novel, Alexander strives to write a dramatic play, here named "Yellow Chair". As the title suggests, it focalizes Van Gogh and a specific phase in his life that obviously had an inspirational impact on Alexander. Alexander becomes obsessed with the yellow chair and realizes that Van Gogh painted it after the Gauguin crisis as a companion to the portrait of Gauguin's empty chair, *Effect of Night*, which might recall "Night Café".

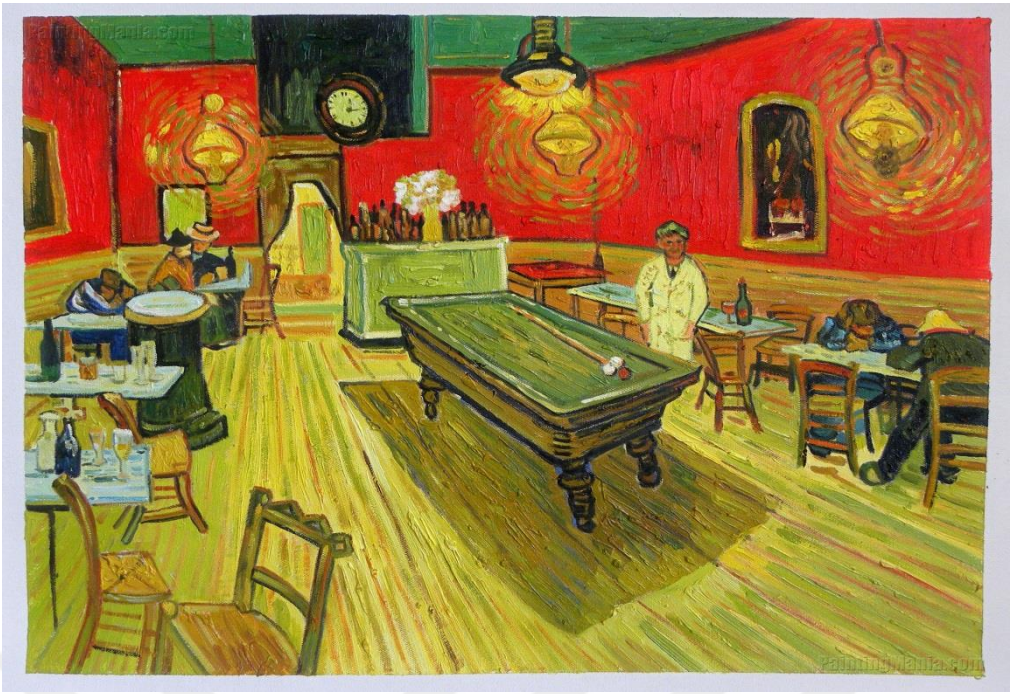


Fig. 40 Vincent Van Gogh, *The Night Café*, 1888, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven

Byatt quotes from one of Van Gogh's letters: "in the Night Café I have tried to express the terrible passions of humanity by means of red and green" (85). This is where Van Gogh lived for a few months before moving to the yellow house. The disorienting perspective, the opposing colors suggests the idea of the loneliness and sadness of Van Gogh's mood. In the midst of a crisis, Van Gogh comes up with one of his best works and because he is also a struggling artist, Alexander identifies himself with him.

Those images and opposing colors ignite Alexander not just for his play, but they also prove his general interest and admiration for Van Gogh. "The man could both paint and name a chair and bring into play his own terrors and hopes" (85). Many of Van Gogh's paintings are closely connected to his life, mental health, passions and surroundings. The yellow chair is generally identified with Van Gogh and has become a universal emblem for the artist. As the yellow chair is a symbol or metaphor for Van Gogh, in order to convey his state of mind and feelings, Alexander hopes to find the same simplicity in writing a drama without metaphors. In her work "The Fiction of

Connection: Structures and Emptiness in the Work of A.S. Byatt" Maria McDonald supports that idea by saying:

> Both art and language are deemed inadequate for the purposes of describing the ideal. The gap between words and things, or symbols and things is permanent and irreconcilable. *The Yellow Chair* is a metaphorization of this gap, since it paints a picture of absence while attempting to present something of the actual object. (35)

So that inadequacy is explored by Alexander as he tries to write as plain as possible, like Byatt herself, and in doing so the yellow chair becomes the thing itself. The images of the chair or his bedroom at Arles have attained iconic status and become familiar for many people. The chair paintings named *Vincent's Chair* and *Gauguin's Chair* suggest an insight into the differences of the two painters in terms of character and represent their respective status from Van Gogh's point of view. Currently held by the National Gallery in London, *Van Gogh's Chair* was painted by the artist in 1888 and it was followed by a companion picture depicting Gauguin.

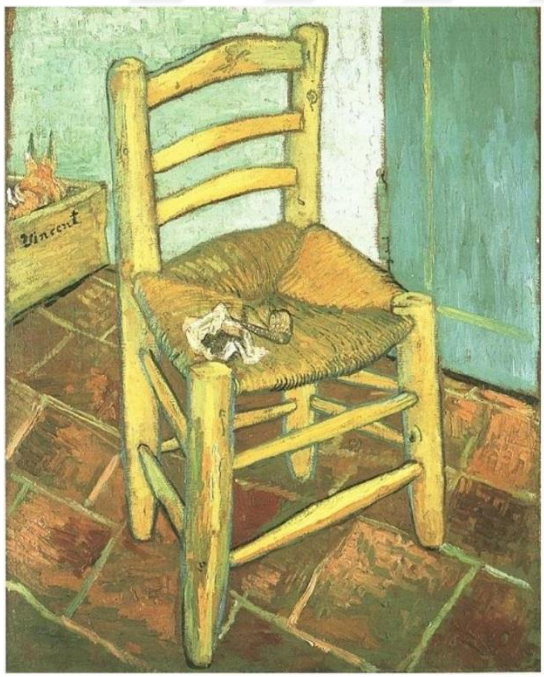


Fig.41 *Vincent's Chair*, 1888, National Gallery, London

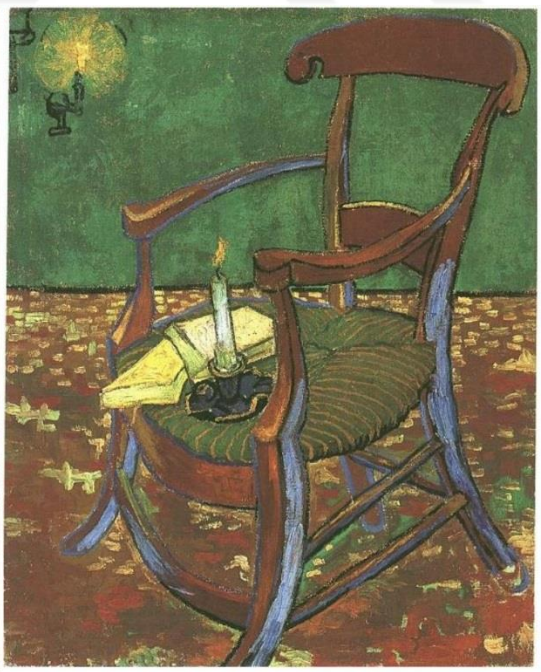


Fig. 42 *Gauguin's Chair*, 1888, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

The two works are especially incompatible in color to represent the two painters' tempers and interests. While constructing her story, Byatt endows her character Alexander with the words and thoughts to serve as ekphrastic descriptions:

> He discovered first that it (like the fencing gloves) had been painted in the wake of the Gauguin debacle and as a companion piece to the portrait of Gauguin's empty chair (Effect of Night). Gauguin's chair, an ample, armed chair was painted in the dark against a lamplit green wall 'in dark brown-red wood, the seat of greenish rush, and in the place of the absent a lighted candle and two modern novels'. (84)

Given the idea that two chairs represent Van Gogh and Gauguin, it is important to note that Van Gogh paints a simple, yellow chair with a pipe and tobacco on it for himself. Those still objects and the chair itself could be personalized to give an insight into Van Gogh's emotions and sanity. On the other hand, the chair he paints as Gauguin's chair has striking differences in that it is much more colorful and most importantly the chair itself is more decorated with a burning candle and books on it. Alexander reads those paintings in such a way that he adopts the most vivid qualities of those works into his spoken and written language. Alexander Wedderburn's inquiry of Van Gogh in *Still Life* could be attributed to a similar attempt of finding meaning or contriving his own path. Alexander's struggles in contemplating exploring the ways of pure expression can only be matched by Van Gogh's accuracy and plainness.

In the midst of these notable works, Byatt mentions Van Gogh's Paris days and painting *Still Life with Books*, "a profusion of yellow novels on a clear, brilliant pink ground" (84). Given that Byatt refers to still life both as a genre in painting and a way of living pondering the questions of domestic imprisonment, that particular work of art could be attributed to Stephanie as her still life and fondness of books are embedded in it. According to Barber and Gerlings, painters often use still life as a recourse to

expression when other means are blocked. Again, when the mind is struggling for focus, the ability to produce a still life can be the quickest way to resolve the problem (151). Taking into consideration Byatt's own tussles in putting the novel together as plainly as possible, that painters turn to still life on canvas to remove obstacles in terms of expression could accord with Byatt's writing *Still Life* with many still life objects, images or scenes.

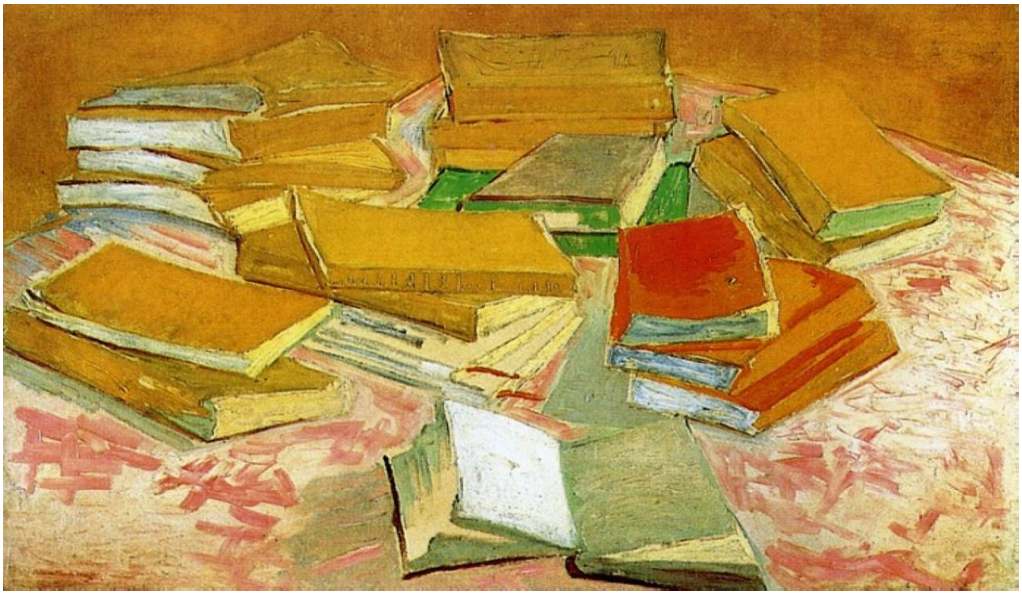


Fig. 43 Vincent Van Gogh, *Still Life with Books*, 1887, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Apart from portraits, sunflowers, starry night, landscapes, chairs and Gauguin, Van Gogh owes much of his popularity to still life that he most probably inherited from his Dutch upbringing and education. Still life is a special form of painting of fruits, objects and dead animals, generally associated with Dutch artists; the Dutch word *stilleven* originally meant inanimate object (Hicks 15). The Dutch Golden age of a trading empire provided luxury items and high value objects in high esteem as they symbolized the wealth they acquired. Accordingly, for Byatt, behind these books lies "in the imagination the heavy tomes, eaten away and dusty, of the Dutch still-life masters' reminders of the vanity of human wishes, of death" (84). Hence the birth of *vanitas* which is a type of still life that contains objects highlighting the transience of

life and the vanity of earthly goods also originated in this period. The discussions on still life might help to foreground the importance of visual representations through ekphrasis in Byatt's fiction. Not only does she include what may be termed ekphrastic representations of still-life paintings in order to comment on, explain or elucidate aspects of both the narrative itself and of art, but her employment of terms such as "*memento mori* and *vanitas*, the idea that life must inevitably end in death and decay" (Hicks 2) clearly evokes associations with Stephanie's life and her tragic end.

Stephanie has two children and the birth scenes of her children are conveyed in such a way that it is possible to find connections with the dilemma she has been caught in as a mother-wife and book lover. Whenever the most inconvenient and uncomfortable symptoms of pregnancy arise, she continues her readings of Wordsworth. Stephanie has a deep urge to turn to literature, especially Wordsworth during her son Will's birth, and with her daughter Mary's birth, Dickens. These are the guides that she thinks will help her through labour. Through baby Will, Byatt finds a way of narrating and focusing on how a baby first looks and sees the world around it. The first contact with light, having no initial knowledge or perception of sun, moon, circular or geometrical shapes, prompt Byatt to convey her thoughts of the concept of the innocent eye and writing as plainly as possible again.

> 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 recognised 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. (131)

Byatt contemplates objects, seeing and naming them, how they are expressed, the thing itself. That's how she realizes the impossibility of writing innocently or without

metaphor and simile. However, Byatt herself recognizes the impossibility of that endeavor. Inevitably people remake the world as they see it, as they look at it. One cannot think at all without recognition of the ways of thinking and seeing is learned over time. Byatt's proclamation of being a realist writer is accurate given her style of writing, as the language she uses to narrate the birth is as natural as possible. Yet her desire or intentions of writing plainly or without metaphor mostly fail as she herself accepts. In a sense, the constraints of realist fiction or the inadequacy she feels might be compensated for with a more colorful style mostly achieved through ekphrasis in her writing.

What complements birth is death and unfortunately towards the end of *Still Life*, Stephanie dies in a tragic accident in the house. While trying to help a sparrow that goes under the unearthed fridge, she is electrocuted. Flora Alexander notes in her essay "A. S. Byatt. Still Life" that Byatt sets Stephanie's death in a tradition of thinking about mortality, . . . by using as an epigraph the passage from Bede's Latin *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in which the brevity of human life is illustrated by a sparrow flying into a lighted hall by one door and flying out the other. Ironically, it is a sparrow which inadvertently causes Stephanie's death, when she tries to rescue it from behind the refrigerator and is electrocuted. Marcus, who is there at the time of the accident, is unable to turn off the power and save his sister on time. As the title of the book evokes, Stephanie falls into a state of stillness for good. Stephanie was the one whose dilemma of stillness was most clearly felt as she strived so hard to keep her imagination and potential alive yet was caught in the constraints of domestic life. In a way, Stephanie's teaching of "Ode on Grecian Urn" in the first book and the duality of immobility and immortality corresponds to her tragic end.

Towards the end of the book, Byatt takes the readers to Alexander's small apartment in London. His walls are decorated with his old posters like Picasso's *The Boy with a Pipe, Saltimbanques,* an advertisement for his own *Buskers,* and the Rodin *Danaide.* But to these he also added a poster of *Astraea*, *The Darnley Portrait* and small prints of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* and *Yellow Chair*. Alexander's preoccupation with Van Gogh and his paintings gradually invades even the most mundane moments of his life: sitting at breakfast one morning, Alexander struggles to find the right words to describe the exact color of the plums on the table (Alfer and Campos 53). "How would one find the exact word for the color of the plumskins?" (198). The fresh fruit, the coffee in French filter pot, gold-rimmed croissants, unsalted butter or home-made jam are like the objects of one of Vincent's paintings, how the two lemons amongst the plums intensify the color contrast prompts Alexander to further question why it is not enough to look or eat or savour the plum. It is a fact that the lemons and the plums, together recall the complementation between yellow and purple that Van Gogh employs frequently as in sower/reaper paintings. The question of whether there is a natural history of color alerts Alexander to the fact that Van Gogh very rarely made his color adjectives agree with the nouns they qualified. For him they could be "read as things more real than the things they qualified, a pattern of eternal forms from another world, not part of the solid world of cabbages and pears-yellow and violet, blue and orange, red and green" (97). Color is an essential element in Van Gogh's entire collection, just like Matisse. The theories on color developed by some famous and significant figures like Delacroix had a deep effect on his style. In one of his letters he clearly refers to Delacroix's influence on him:

> I've just checked—all the colours that Impressionism has made fashionable are unstable, all the more reason boldly to use them too raw, time will only soften them too much. So the whole order I made up, in other words the 3 chromes (the orange, the yellow, the lemon), the Prussian

> blue, the emerald, the madder lakes, the Veronese green, the orange lead, all of that is hardly found in the Dutch palette, Maris, Mauve and Israëls. But it's found in that of Delacroix, who had a passion for the two colours most disapproved of, and for the best of reasons, lemon and Prussian blue. (493)

The French painter Eugene Delacroix is a prominent figure of the 19th century Romantic Movement. In his book titled *Delacroix: Masters and Movements* Lee Johnson states that "His writings on color derive in the main from the basic proposition that any color seen in isolation appears to eye to be surrounded by a faint aureole of its complementary (63). According to Delacroix, color gradations are relative and the surrounding lightness or darkness actually has a more determining role. Rather than blending colors together, the viewer has the chance to fuse them together as one with his own eye.

Van Gogh embraced the theory that some colors complement each other like red-green, yellow-purple, orange-blue. The complementary relationship between birth and death or the color theory Van Gogh adopts is also recalled by a mention of the painter's famous 'sower' and 'reaper' paintings. Throughout his artistic career, Van Gogh painted many sower/reaper themed works with different variations but generally highlighting a lonely figure strolling on a field with a glowing sun behind.

> The brushstrokes in 'The Sower' are almost tessellations, the sky flows with them, the furrows of purple earth run away from the central heavy gold sun, the sower scatters seeds of gold light which are brushstrokes in the pattern on to the dark morning clouds. They are thick and solid: they are the movement of light over things, of the eye over things. In 'The Reaper' Vincent's later spiraling forms are everywhere, curling and linking the white-hot furnace of the cornfield, the blue figure of the man, the purple mountains, the green air, into one substance, his vision. He radiated brushstrokes in a self-portrait from his own eyes like twin suns. It is new and the opposite of it is seen, and thought, and made. (132)

The sun is so big and effective that the colors appear complementary as the field also seems violet in the picture in accordance with the color theory Van Gogh embraces. Inspired by Jean-François Millet, Van Gogh created several *Reaper* and *Sower* paintings between the years 1888 and 1889. The French artist Millet had a great influence on Van Gogh as he made copies of some of his works like the sower. In the book *Through the Eyes of Vincent Van Gogh: Selected Drawings and Paintings by the Great Master*, it is mentioned that the sower in Millet's painting was a rather noble and extraordinarily heroic figure, whereas Van Gogh saw the working peasant more realistically: strong but not noble, wrestling his living from the earth by the sweat of his brow and with a lifetime of unremitting toil (53).

> In Van Gogh's version of *The Sower* the forms of Millet are adhered to fairly faithfully, but somehow the drama and romance of the Millet figure has been subsumed in the rather awkward movement of Van Gogh's. The peasant's work now appears much harder and his appearance is grim, like an early version of *The Reaper*: the sower sows the seeds of man's futile existence while the reaper cuts it down again. (53)

As the quotation makes clear, the seeds of man's futile existence whether it is reaped or sowed, mark a continuation of the emphasis put on the transience of life and the ultimate decay and death in still life. In "Van Gogh, Death and Summer" from *Passions of the Mind*, Byatt writes that the reaper is "Van Gogh's natural image of death, to set beside his image of the sower, sowing the yellow seeds of light into the purple clods of earth, beneath a golden sky" (272). The way the colors complement each other is also felt in the subject matter of those paintings. It might be stated that through the sower/reaper connotation, Van Gogh intended to show the delicate relationship between birth and death and how they also complement each other.

Fig. 44 Vincent Van Gogh, *The Sower*, 1889, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

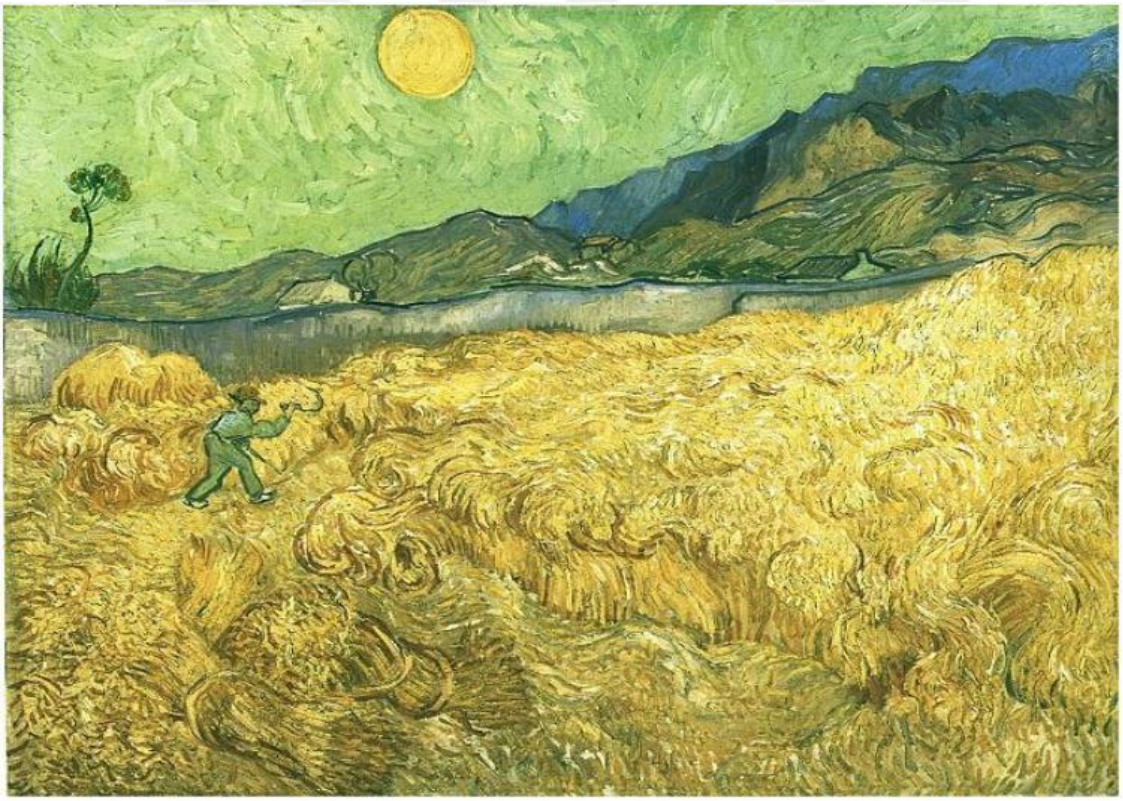


Fig. 45 Vincent Van Gogh, *The Reaper*, 1889, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

On the other hand, as a writer who deals with words Alexander cannot help questioning the adequacy of words or to what extent the words that are firmly established into cultures evoke the same image in every reader's mind. So, finding the words to convey objects is another means of creation. For Byatt it is impossible to have such mimetic deception in writing and those hesitations and struggles are all conveyed through Alexander in the book as he has trouble with the nature of adjectives in his play. He identifies himself with Van Gogh considering that he also had conflicts like fearing and fleeing the domestic but also idealizing and desiring its order. He might have paintings of his Yellow House in Arles, yet he also depicts earthly black 'Potato Eaters'. Byatt's ekphrastic reflections on the painting are as follows:

> 'The Potato Eaters' is painted in the black light of the North: the characters in it painted 'in the earth in which they were sown' do not meet each other's eyes but are firmly linked, breaking bread, pouring coffee, in their dark hut, individuals subsumed in a common life. The painting has a moralizing intention: it is a sermon in paint about the basic necessities of human life. (202)

Fig. 46 Vincent Van Gogh, *The Potato Eaters*, 1885, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

The harsh realities of country life are clearly seen on the faces of the peasants and in the dark composition of the painting. As a product from an earlier stage of his career, Van Gogh seems to be reflecting more on his social and moral views of society through art. But later on, his devotion to art grows and the objects he has chosen, like the chair or the house show that they actually stand for him and embody certain emotions. Van Gogh is like a guiding figure for Alexander and he also still needs maturity and experience before moving on to find his own voice.

When it comes to Frederica who is at Cambridge now; she cares about sex, wine, men, arguments, hopes to be an actress, meet interesting people, work in the Arts but not teach like Stephanie did or be like her mother whose freedom and power is questionable. Frederica's Cambridge years also include many experiments with men some of whom stand out, like Raphael Faber, a writer Frederica interviews, and finally Nigel Reiver, a dark young man. The two men in Frederica's life, Raphael and Nigel, are also like complementary figures. The poetry evenings of Raphael, the intellectual debates they have with friends, offer an alternative Frederica for the future, one that is closeted in libraries, writing something elegant and subtle. Upon her sister's shocking death, Frederica finds consolation in Nigel Reiver who is crucial for the rest of the series, as the remaining two books entirely feature Frederica. Meanwhile, unable to deal with his wife's sudden loss, Daniel goes on a long journey, leaving his children in Bill and Winifred Potter's care only to return to Alexander's flat in London at the end of the novel.

Daniel, who has come back from the brink of suicide after Stephanie's death, visits Alexander and Byatt stages a verbal still-life description in which Alexander cooks and serves Daniel a breakfast "of gammon and eggs, brown bread and mushrooms, tomatoes" (432) and coffee to "put some life into" him (434). The last

scene in which Alexander pours coffee from a blue pot into a golden cup immediately recalls Van Gogh's *Still Life: Blue Enamel Coffeepot, Earthenware and Fruit*. In the novel Byatt finds a shorter and more appropriate title for it which is "Breakfast Table". Blue and yellow are the dominant colors of the painting and the contrasting effect also generates a sort of coherence, a clean bright paradox. Byatt herself quotes one of Van Gogh's letters in depicting the painting in detail:

> A blue enameled tin coffee-pot, a royal blue and gold cup (on the left), a pale blue and white chequered milk jug, a cup—on the right—white, with blue and orange designs, on a yellow grey earthenware plate, a blue barbotine or majolica jug with red, green, brown designs, and lastly 2 oranges and 3 lemons; the table is covered with a blue cloth, the background is yellow green, making 6 different blues and 4 or 5 yellows and oranges. (508)

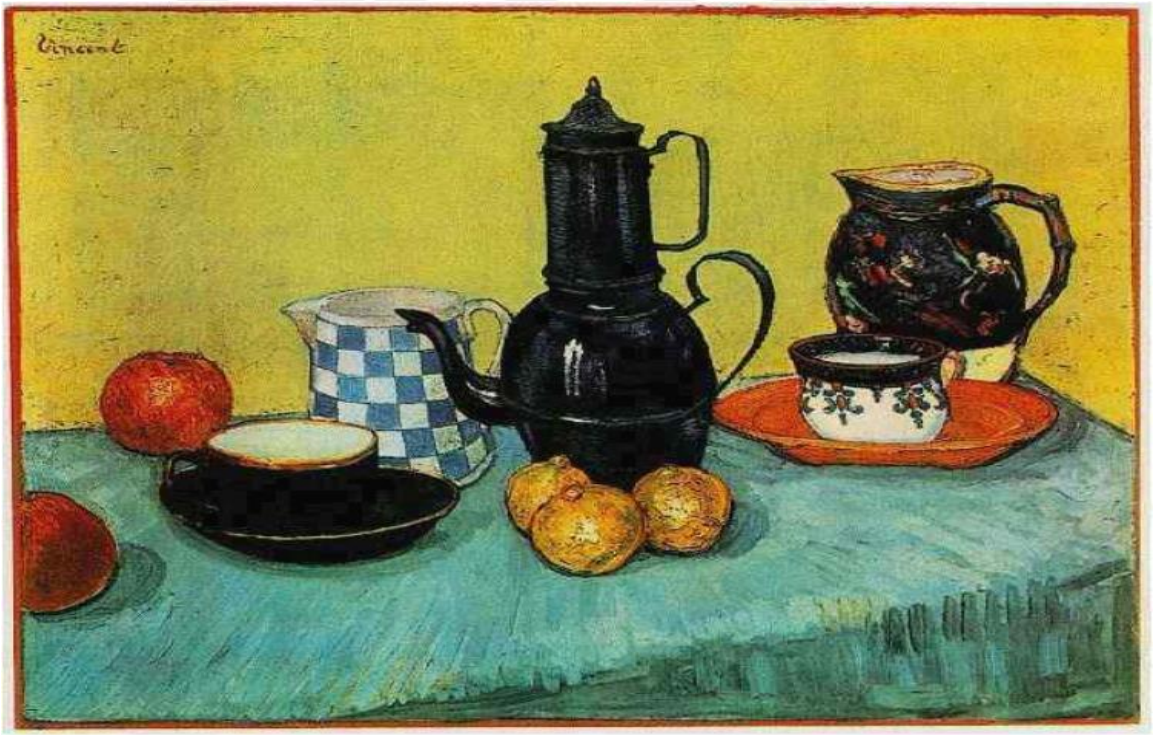


Fig. 47 Vincent Van Gogh, *Still Life: Blue Enamel Coffeepot, Earthenware and Fruit,* 1888, Private Collection

Elizabeth Hicks claims that "in Byatt's fiction, the frame or the boundary between written text and embedded artwork is blurred" (86) recalling Jacques Derrida's philosophical essay on the aesthetics of painting, "Truth in Painting". Derrida introduces the idea of *parergon* which is frame and *ergon,* which is the work of art. For

parergon Derrida says, “neither work (ergon) nor outside the work (hors d’oeuvre), neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but dos not remain indeterminate and it gives rise to the work” (9). The frame not only separates the integral inside of the work of art from the outside, but also from the wall it is hung on. Alexander, who is too immersed in the realness of Van Gogh’s paintings, finds himself where the boundary between the text and the mentioned visual is blurred, leaving an impression that Alexander is in it or he regenerates it. The scene could be interpreted as a good example of Derrida’s comments on the frame and the work of art itself and a testimony to Van Gogh’s realistic inclinations that go beyond the inspirational and find a visual form for the readers.

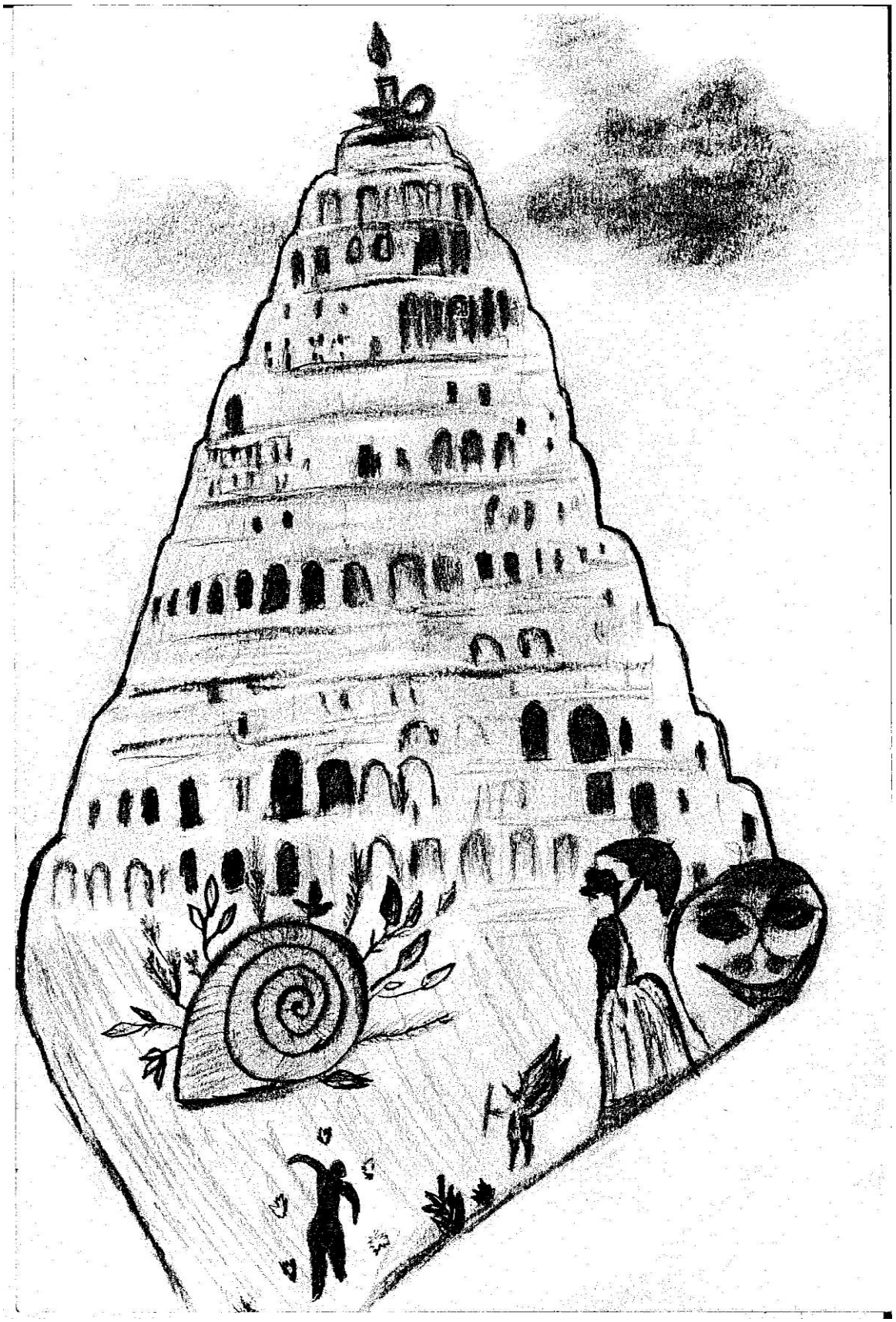
In *Still Life*, Byatt once again takes readers into a visually rich world in which Van Gogh is the leading man providing the characters with inspirations or parallel storylines. Ranging from his pipe, chair, house, asylum days, friendship with Gauguin to universally acclaimed major works, Van Gogh’s presence is profound and has certain reflections especially on Alexander, Frederica and Stephanie. The artist’s theory developed from the complementary relationship between colors is felt in the main theme of the novel, which is birth and death. Through ekphrasis, the readers get to know that what Gogh depicted in his paintings fully corresponds with what the characters see and experience. After a while, the boundary between the text and work of art gets blurred for the readers as the scenes look or sound like an actual painting. Beginning with Byatt’s own endeavors in writing plainly, questioning the adequacy of words alone, the importance of seeing things in person or reaching the thing itself appear in ekphrastic descriptions and prompt readers to initiate a process of visual and intellectual interpretation.

CHAPTER III

AN EKPHRASTIC APPROACH TO *BABEL TOWER* AND *A WHISTLING WOMAN*

Byatt's explorations of visual language continue in the last two volumes of *The Frederica Quartet.* Taking into consideration the time of the events of the last two novels, the late sixties and early seventies, it would be hard to think of them separate from the impressions of modernism and the social dynamism of the period. In *Babel Tower* and *A Whistling Woman,* Byatt offers a perspective into the general atmosphere of the time including the social, cultural and artistic movements that do not just affect society but the characters' outlook on life. In accordance with the concept that the idea behind a work of art is more important than the work itself, the emphasis put on certain movements dominating the era indicate that they obviously had an impact on Byatt and on her choice of visual arts. *The Frederica Quartet* in that sense maps a journey of the development of art starting with impressionism in the 1870s up to the modern movements in the first half of the 20th century. Apart from displaying Byatt's special interest and broad knowledge, the inclusion of painters and visual works of art into long fiction presents a wide range of ekphrastic examples to discuss. The traditional British novel focuses on realism and form but the contemporary novel concentrates on creating the fiction itself, the relationships between the writer, reader, plot and character. This might explain why Byatt is engaged with language, words and representation which reaches a climax in *Babel Tower* and *A Whistling Woman*. The Romantic's attachment to naturalism, turning to inner visions, the ideas beyond, emotional and intellectual impacts like the impressionists that were conspicuous in the first two novels, could be evaluated in a context where modern aspects of art and literature act in accordance with what Byatt tries to render in the last two novels. Byatt's engagement with different forms of visuals provides a panoramic picture of the time period while concluding the journey of the protagonist Frederica.

BABEL TOWER



3.1 Ekphrasis as a Mirror in *Babel Tower*

The third installment of the quartet is set in 1960s England and focuses extensively on Frederica Potter, her troublesome marriage and her concerns as a woman. *Still Life* ends with Stephanie Potter's sudden and unexpected death, her husband Daniel's visit to Alexander's house and Frederica finding shelter with Nigel Reiver. In *Babel Tower*, Frederica is now married to Nigel, she has a son named Leo and lives in her husband's isolated country house which is in total contrast to her Cambridge days. During the course of the story, Frederica leaves her abusive husband, meets with her old friends in London, starts working and faces divorce proceeding including a harsh custody battle.

Babel Tower (1996) signals some changes in Byatt's narration, tone, style and even the employment of ekphrasis[9], given that there is a considerable time gap between the writing processes of the first two novels and the final two volumes. During that time, Byatt published three volumes of short stories, two novellas and most importantly, *Possession*. One important point to note is the fact that Byatt's former preoccupation with myths, fairies, the adequacy of words to describe the real, and her concept of self-conscious realism falls by the wayside in the face of postmodern narrative strategies like multiple openings, intertextuality and the theme of fragmentation. In that sense, and published after *Possession* (1990), *Babel Tower* bears resemblances to it in terms of intertextuality as the narration is interrupted with excerpts from stories like Jude Mason's *Babbletower*. The theme of disintegration is not just in the stories within the stories like *Babbletower* or Frederica's family life but it is projected into the art forms that Byatt depicts employing ekphrasis. *Babel Tower* does not start with a prologue,

[9] In the first two novels, Byatt employed real, classic, popular works of art that she directly referred to, but in the third and fourth novels, she favors a tendency of mentioning the artist or the art form rather than a specific image. Therefore, in this study, certain exemplary works have been provided in order to engender a more precise contemplation.

unlike the first two novels. Considering that the book ends in 1967, before the exhibition visit in the prologue of *The Virgin in the Garden*, it is possible to find connections with the characters in the aftermath pf the book's events. Following in the footsteps of John Fowles who had provided alternative endings to his postmodern novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* Byatt chooses a similar path by introducing several beginnings, each unfolding with "it might begin". The first centers on snail shells being hammered by a thrush followed by Hugh Pink, an old friend of Frederica from Cambridge, walking in Laidley Woods and seeing Frederica with her son Leo. In the third beginning, Daniel Orton sits at the crypt of St. Simeon's Church and the fourth is also the opening part of *Babbletower* which is a story interspersed between the pages of the novel.

According to Andrea Louise Rohland-Le, like *The Virgin in the Garden* and *Still Life*, the focus of *Babel Tower* is the problem of perception and representation: "how best to express images, ideas, and states of mind in words or paint. This time, however, Byatt is interested in analyzing discourse more broadly, in both its public and private uses (71)". At this point it might be illuminating to take into consideration the time period of the novel, the social changes and revolutionary acts of the 1960s. Byatt's choice of artists, art works, movements and all the visuals combines Romantic figures, William Blake in particular, with some modern artists and forms of art that demonstrate a transition from traditional forms of art to modern, experimental and innovative movements. *Babel Tower* lays out a panorama of those forms and movements in particular through visuals interpreted through ekphrasis. In both romanticism and modernism, there is dissatisfaction with the world order which leads to a need to challenge, change or make it new,[10] which corresponds to what Frederica wants in building a new life with her son. Accordingly, Frederica, whose life is falling apart, gets

[10] inspired by the modern poet Ezra Pound's famous dictum 'make it new'.

inspired by those modern works introducing new ways of expression that ultimately leads her to write her novel *Laminations*. Therefore, given the fact that the spirit of the 60s suits Romantics in term of prizing individuals but without ruling out the modern and postmodern tendencies and forms of art dominating the same period, Byatt once again turns to visual arts for an aesthetically inspirational but equally influential and indicative analysis made possible by ekphrasis and so renders an intertextual narrativity with the theme of fragmentation at the forefront. As the title suggests, the tower of babel is very central to the novel in terms of language, representation and fragmentation, found not just in the form of the novel but also in the chosen art works and artists; they do not just play functional roles in providing insight into the period, but also mirror Frederica's storyline in her attempt to build a new life, the fragmentation and fall she feels and the need to find her voice to become free again.

The story of the Tower of Babel in the Bible is one version of a larger body of stories that attempt to explain or describe the division of the human race into language and culture groups. According to the myth, the leader of Shem settles with his people in the land of Shinar following the flood. They share one language and start building a city and a tower to reach heaven and God. In seeing their omnipotence and authority, God punishes them by confounding their language. They are scattered around, their project forever remains incomplete and multiple languages are born as a result. According to Theodore Hiebert, this is a "pride and punishment" reading of the story that is firmly established in the earliest interpretations of Genesis in the book of *Jubilees;* he adds that outside of biblical scholarship, this reading of the Babel story has been given a broad cultural legitimacy in classics such as John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and in many works of art such as Pieter Brueghel's masterpiece (29).

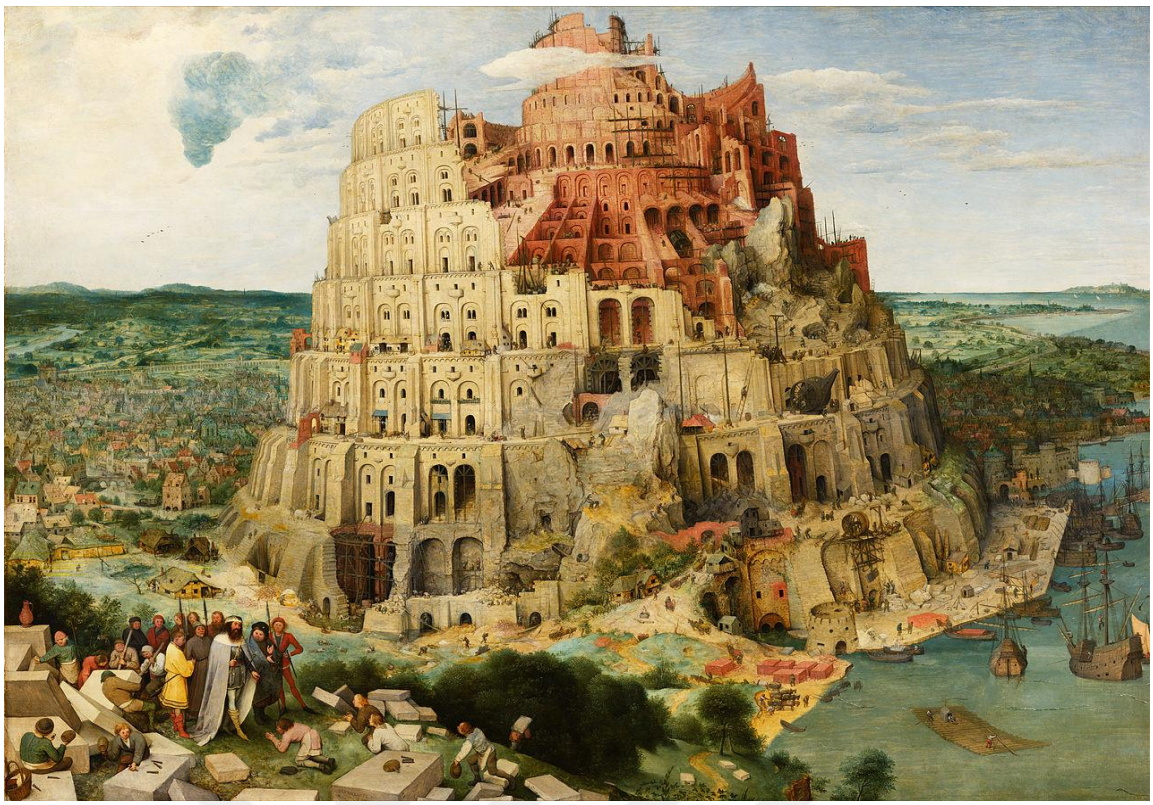


Fig. 48 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Tower of Babel*, 1563, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

There are so many images, prints, paintings based on that ancient tale but Brueghel's painting stands out amongst them all. In the novel, when choosing the cover for his book, one of the options Jude Mason is offered is this particular work. The narrator says, "One has Brueghel's beautiful painting of the unfinished, crumbling weed-ridden Tower of Babel, with brilliant little droplets, or tongues of scarlet shiny blood dripping out of its orifices and down its ledges" (440). Brueghel actually produced three Babel-themed paintings, probably between 1553 and 1568. The most famous depiction is the second one and it is housed in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Joanna Morra draws attention to the fact that one of the most common attributes ascribed to Brueghel's work is its allegorical character in that it depicts one thing while having an alternative moral or didactic meaning (198). On a similar note, Edward Snow questions whether we are given a realistic portrayal of the original Tower

of Babel, with the fall yet to come, or a figurative depiction of its modern reconstruction with the fall having already occurred (44).

In any event, the tower appears either unfinished or demolished which might suggest a dual interpretation. Building towers in order to escape certain rules, conventions, traditions or society itself recalls Romantics who prized individuals and found peace and freedom in nature. This might correspond to *Babel Tower* looking incomplete and unfinished at first glance. In that sense, the story of *Babbletower* broadly mirrors Byatt's *Babel Tower* as the attempt to form a new life and break from the past applies to Frederica as she probably tries to deal with her sister's death by marrying Nigel. What she has built for herself is a country life existence that does not fit her intellectual capacity and education. Once she replaces the words, literature and art with the physical pleasure that Nigel gives her in the marriage, she regrets it and realizes that she wants to be free again. The appearance of the tower as demolished equals the disintegration and fragmentation that Frederica feels in her life, which is closely linked with modernism and foregrounds Byatt's choice of the modern artworks integrated into the text. This might justify some critics supporting the idea that the shape of the tower is modelled after the Coliseum. For instance, Barbara Kaminska notes that "Brueghel therefore confronts his audience with the juxtaposition of a successful construction process and ancient Roman architecture, activating beholders' knowledge of the biblical story in which the Tower of Babel perished, just like Coliseum eventually did…" (5). Either way, Frederica's story is mirrored through the tower image, where building a new life, failure and fragmentation are all imbedded in her story.

In "The Fiction of Connection: Structures and Emptiness in the Work of A.S. Byatt", Maria H. McDonald says that "Byatt uses the tower to illustrate further the paradox of language: it can define, but it can also imprison" (50). Byatt's alternative

story, line which is Jude Mason's *Babbletower,* serves to reinforce ideas of freedom and imprisonment, the plotline of the story having some basic parallelisms with Frederica's story. "The sadism and ritual violence of Jude's *Babbletower* overlap with the abusive sexual violence Frederica suffers from Bluebeard-spouse Nigel Reiver" (Stewart 498). Another exemplary figure caught in the prison of language is John Ottokar, Frederica's student and new love interest. Together with his twin brother Paul, they have a system of language they created for themselves that no one understands. Yet it seems that after a while they are also unable to communicate with each other as Paul grows more and more manic depressive and obsessive. "We grew up speaking a kind of private language—almost a silent language—of signs and gestures. We closed everyone out. No one could reach us. We were like a child and a mirror that spoke to itself... And at the same time, we were each other's prison" (290). In McDonald's words, they "both try to achieve dominance within their linguistic world, or attempt to move out of it, but are unsuccessful" (66). They demonstrate the possibility of a new language, but that could also turn into a kind of prison for them.

In Nicholas Tredell's interview, Byatt apprises that the book is "about voices as opposed to writing, and it and Volume Four [would] move much more into different areas of visual art as a kind of paradigm" (74). The social and cultural atmosphere of the 1960s, the dramatic changes caused by the breakdown of certain ideologies is symbolized by a visually rich narration at the beginning of the novel. The growth of industrialization and the devastating effects of war brought fragmentation and so much to doubt in every field. The windows of St. Simeon's Church are obviously bombed, and the fragments of glass become the embodiment of the general post-war atmosphere, the breakdown of ideologies and unified structures:

> It once had gaudy nineteenth century stained glass, of no particular merit, depicting Noah's Ark and the story of the

> Flood on one side, and the stories of the raising of Lazarus, the appearance of the risen Christ at Emmanus and the tongues of fire descending at Whitsuntide, on the other. All these windows were sucked in by bomb blasts, leaving heaps of brilliant blackened fragments strewn in the aisles. A devout glazier in the congregation undertook to rebuild the windows, after the war, using the broken lights, but he was not able, or even willing, to reconstitute the narratives as they had been. What he made was a coloured mosaic or purple and gold constellations, of rivers of grass-green and blood-red, of hummocks of burned amber and clouded, smoke-stained, once-clear glass. (6-7)

The passage vividly visualizes the stained glass that was once clear but now damaged after war. The fragments are strewn in the aisle and even if the glass is rebuilt, it is devoid of the narratives it once had. In the first place, the fact that the old biblical narratives represented on these windows are smashed hint at the fragility of those narratives as if they are inadequate to sustain the Christian faith in the modern age (Alfer and Campos 70). Glass has historically been employed as a metaphor for the transparent nature of language but Alfer and Campos suggest that the image of burnt glass is an image of language and the glass becoming opaque could be correlated with the question of language becoming increasingly problematized mirroring the linguistic debates of the 1960s. Throughout the whole quartet, Byatt's preoccupation with language, perception, truth and fiction is already observable and ekphrasis becomes an important narrative tool in finding the verbal equivalent, apart from providing an aesthetic elocution. In that sense, *Babel Tower* "critically engages with contemporary sense of crisis in language exploring the beginnings of a post structuralist vision of society and culture" (Alfer and Campos 68). Byatt employs different narrative strategies like a story-within-story inspired by the myth of *Babel Tower* or such ekphrastic depictions in order to display her preoccupation with language, and the power of words in conveying the truth.

However, the fragmented glass could be a reference to the postmodern tendency of Byatt she has adopted more clearly with this novel. Byatt introduces many other voices through letters from friends and solicitors, extracts from well-known novels, book reviews, transcripts of two court hearings, and excerpts from two other fictitious novels, Frederica's *Laminations* and Agatha Mond's *Flight North*. A layered form of narration, intertextuality which is tied with metafiction, disrupting the story line with intrusive comments and Frederica's own book she names *Laminations*, another piece of assembled fragments of texts, address *Babel Tower*'s plurality. Byatt's novels are still true to life, but they also have an orientation on how they are constructed which makes them self-consciously realist. Accordingly, artists and painters who share the same tendency in matters of form and expression make their presence felt more in this novel.

For Frederica, *Babel Tower* starts in autumn of 1964 in Laidley Woods where she comes across an old friend from Cambridge, Hugh Pink. While Hugh is thinking about his poem and the myth of Persephone, he notices Frederica with her son. Byatt continues her tradition of making use of myths, fairy tales and stories and allows the readers to erect between that Greek myth in which Hades, the god of the underworld, abducts and marries Persephone, and Frederica Potter, who vanished after marriage and who seems to be locked up in her husband's country house. After this meeting, Frederica receives letters from old friends including Alexander Wedderburn, Alan Melville, and Wilkie Edmunds, some of whom also pay a visit to her in order to see her new, isolated life. At dinner Nigel also introduces his Indian companions from Holland, Govinder Shah and Gijsbert Pijnakker. Although Nigel tries not to include Frederica in the conversation, she mentions her interest in the Rijksmuseum and Van Gogh paintings, remembering Alexander's play from *Still Life*. The mention of that particular museum in Holland may not be random as the Rijksmuseum is not just the grandest and

most popular museum exhibiting Dutch art, but it also hosts some valuable pieces by Vermeer like *The Milkmaid* and *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter* that might mirror Frederica's life, reminiscent of the problem of domesticity and personal aspirations that Byatt had mainly dealt with in the first two novels.

Fig. 49 Johannes Vermeer, *The Milkmaid*, 1660, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Fig. 50 Johannes Vermeer, *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*, 1663–64, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Critics have often noted the primary presence of women in the works of the Dutch painter. Those women are generally engaged in daily, mundane activities. In their domestic realm, the women are frozen in time and space while reading, sewing, playing an instrument or pouring milk, as in the case of *Milkmaid*. Vermeer has six paintings of a woman reading a letter. In those paintings Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat draws attention to the inaccessibility of the inner realm as "the interior room becomes the interior of the figure" (245). There is a reflective and calm mood in the painting inspiring an interest in the woman's emotions or the content of the letter. Equally significant is the fact that their gaze is directed on their work rather than the viewer, which arouses more curiosity into their silent, mysterious world and also recalls Uzundemir's emphasis on the fixed, gazed female model. Consequently, Vermeer's women are so enigmatic and invitatory for the viewer and readers, and ripe for an ekphrastic experience. Those two paintings at the museum correspond to Frederica's life, as a woman, mother and wife, which is the basic argument of the novel in general concerning Frederica. Her silent and isolated domestic life recalls those women, especially in evoking mystery. While the woman in *The Milkmaid* pouring milk is fulfilling her duty in the household, the woman reading a letter in that action is separated from all other women, contrary to the way that Vermeer and other 17th century Dutch painters generally portrayed them in a domestic realm. As mentioned before, Frederica also receives letters from her old friends and the act of reading those letters marks great change in her marriage. Frederica's subsequent decision to leave Nigel and take her son occurs in the aftermath of that particular night. The letters her friends sent ignited Frederica's escape with her son.

Frederica's escape is brought before the readers' eyes through the mention of a particular picture imagined by Alan Melville when he steps out of the trees to meet Frederica and her son. What Alan thinks is "a moment of the lion in Stubbs's absurd

and wonderful picture of the great cat clawing for purchase on the shoulders of its white-maned mount and prey" (129). That "wonderful" picture he refers to is George Stubbs' *A Lion Attacking a Horse*.

Fig. 51 George Stubbs, *A Lion Attacking a Horse,* 1762, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

Stubbs is an 18th century English painter known for depicting horses, dogs and wild animals. In many of his works, the animals are in the grip of a combat and the violent forces of nature, a horse being devoured by a lion, the feelings of pity, terror and fear aroused in the viewer which are associated with sublime themes in art. One of the most important theorists of the sublime, Edmund Burke, argues that whatever is fit to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is any sort of terrible, or is conversant on terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable

of feeling (36). While the beautiful is calming, the sublime is terrifying and inspires more potent emotions. Burke says the sublime "comes upon us in the gloomy forest, and in the howling wilderness, in the form of the lion, the tiger, the panther, or the rhinoceros" (75). Burke's sublime included most elements later identified as Romantic- fear, uncertainty, obscurity, and horror. The conditions he describes "as producing them- danger, darkness, silence, solitude, vastness, pain, infinity- were key ingredients of Romantic art" (Facos 78). What the Romantic poets, William Blake in particular, tried to evoke has strong connections with the sublime in that what is great, infinite and beautiful could be an object of danger, awe or terror. It is a terrifying moment for Frederica in the darkness and gloom of the forest, trying to escape with her son. The way the lion devours the horse could be associated with the relationship between Frederica and Nigel. Married to Nigel, Frederica experiences direct oppression as a woman and realizes that the worst oppression is not being allowed to work, she is only a wife and mother. Jane Campbell points out that "Nigel has little use for language except as a means of getting what he wants; he attempts to control Frederica by using love-language as well as the appeal—and the brute force—of his body" (241). Frederica realizes that the only thing appealing to her is sex yet she cannot help feeling repelled upon discovering Nigel's collections and magazines of "so much flesh" (101) which graphically displays her husband's pleasure in women's subjection. Their toxic relationship is a blend of sex, fights, bruises, blood and even being chased like an animal. She thinks "he must have a hunting animal's instinct for warm flesh and breath" (121). In order to depict the scene, Byatt turns to a Romantic period artist and the sublime associations of terror, pity and awe correspond to the complication of Frederica's state.

After her friends help her to escape, Frederica finds herself in Alexander Wedderburn's flat, who is pouring coffee from his blue pot, a scene familiar to the

readers from *Still Life*. Alexander suggests staying at Thomas Poole's house for a while; he lives alone with his children as his wife Elinor left him for another man. He has two teenage boys, a girl who is about twelve and a little boy, Simon, who is eight. Alexander remembers Simon's birth, his affair with Elinor while staying in their house during his work on *Yellow Chair* and the possibility of Simon being his own son. Frederica knows that she has to work to begin a new life with her son; Alan finds her part time teaching at Samuel Palmer School and also writing reviews for novels in a publishing house which will ultimately lead Frederica to recommend publishing Jude Mason's *Babbletower*.

The Samuel Palmer School of Art and Craft is the school where Frederica starts teaching, although all her life she had never wanted to teach because of her late sister Stephanie. Her impression of the school and the office of the head of Liberal Studies evoke some ekphrastic resonances with three paintings and prints with "beautifully lettered verses and quotations underneath them, all of which Frederica sees are from Blake" (161). With William Blake in the first place, there is a great mention of the Romantic period and some prominent artists. The head says that "I make Blake the center of my teaching here. He is the greatest English poet and the greatest English painter. He draws the mind out of itself" (161). As can be inferred from the quotation, William Blake is not just a poet but also a great painter, illustrator and engraver. He takes a poet's words and effectively transforms them into visual equivalents, which is a testimony to his greatness in combining both arts without giving predominance to one. Even the school Agatha and Frederica choose for their children is William Blake Primary School and when the young poet Mickey Impey encourages students in a discussion to think of creativity, vision and freedom, he gives William Blake as the best example. As the narrator says, "There was one great man who understood it all- William Blake. He saw that if you look at the world properly your imagination inhabits infinity"

(179). It is clear that Byatt pays great homage to Blake and the poet is omnipresent in the novel in the same way Van Gogh was in *Still Life*. As Alfer and Campos stress, Byatt's novel, with broken threads and ruptured textures depicts a society focused on individualism (68), a position which might explain the attachment to so many Romantic artists, intellectuals and images. Besides Blake, some other notable Romantic figures, and most importantly the ideas dominating Romanticism and how they are reinforced in modern age and connected with other movements, are narrated through visuals that Byatt once again employs extensively in the novel.

For instance, Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), after whom the school is named, is an important British painter and a key figure of Romanticism with his pastoral works. Frederica notices on the walls the reproduction of "Linnell's portrait of the mildly agricultural Samuel Palmer, and two of Palmer's prints of sheep clouds, trees, dark, light, linear insistence and the mystery of space and vanishing behind the lines" (224). John Linnell and Salmuel Palmer were Romantic artists and painters most notably associated with William Blake. The relationship between Samuel Palmer, John Linnell and William Blake has attracted the attention of art historians and critics like Robert N. Essick who clearly writes that "John Linnell, Samuel Palmer, George Richmond and Edward Calvert have found their place in the history of English art primarily as followers of William Blake" (18). The artistic influence John Linnell had on Palmer is great, not only through fruitful exchanges of art but also in Linnell being the person who introduced Palmer to William Blake. The pastoral elements and naturalistic drawings are indebted to the artistic influences they had on each other. Colin Harrison notes that "although essentially a Christian, Palmer's vision combines the abundance of God's bounty with a neo-Platonic interpretation of man's relationship with nature" (22). Like the prints Frederica notices, Palmer's art includes landscapes, shepherds and

animals that are in full harmony with nature but under the guidance of faith and religion.

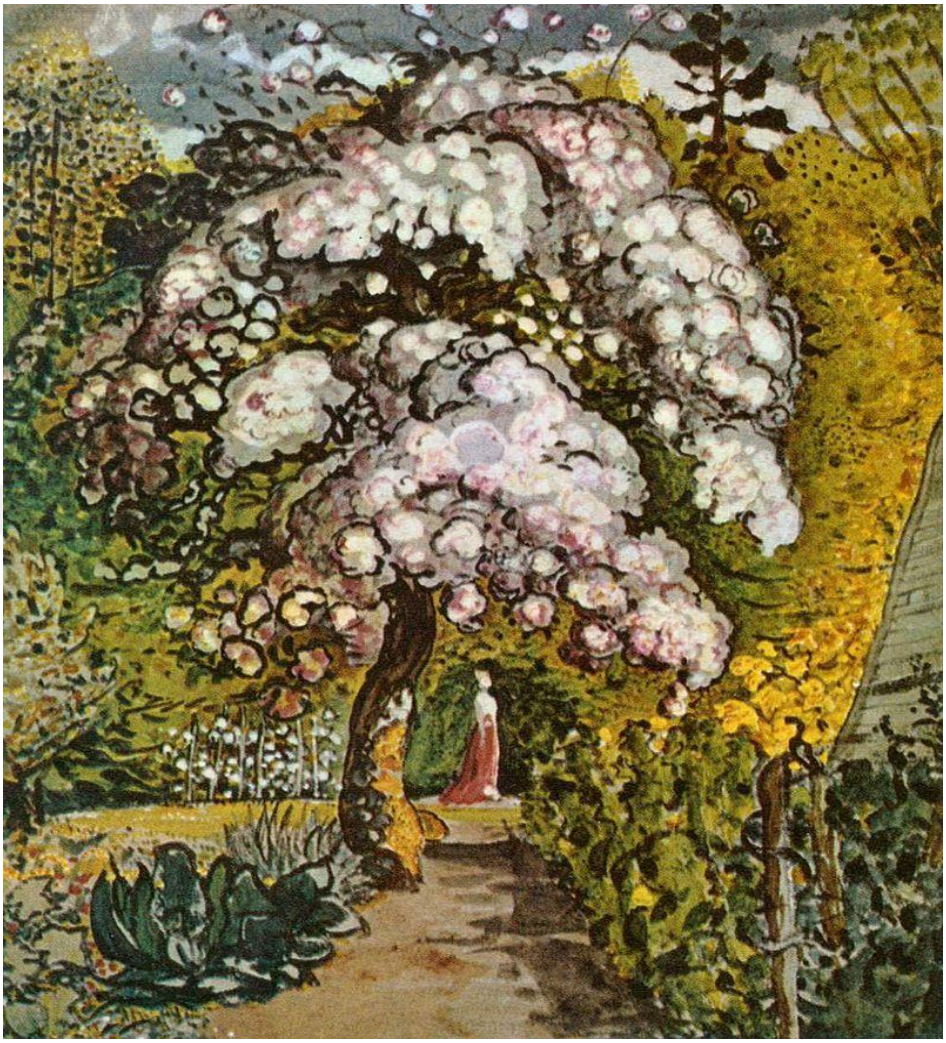


Fig. 52 Samuel Palmer, *In a Shoreham Garden*, 1829-1830, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Further to this, Palmer, Richmond and Calvert formed a circle called the "Ancients", based on pastoral representations of the Kent village of Shoreham. That artistic brotherhood was deeply religious and was inspired by William Blake's illustrations and images derived from the Bible, Milton and Dante. In the book *Samuel Palmer Revisited*, it is emphasized that some critics credit Palmer for foreshadowing later developments like Post-Impressionism and some even label Palmer as "The English Van Gogh" (1). His landscapes are not just based on his observations of nature, but are filtered through his mind and imagination. He also comments that the revival of

interest in Palmer in the 20th century manifests the same suspicion of modernity found in numerous commentaries appearing in the 1920s and 1930s: that modern culture, oriented primarily to urban experience and technological innovation, carried with it a mechanistic, inhumane and over-rationalized understanding of the world and its domination posed very real threats to a more compassionate way of life (118). Alan Melville says, "I've suddenly got interested in Turner, romanticism was never my thing, but I've got interested-" (107), making a reference to Neo-Romantics who also reacted against that mechanistic, inhumane understanding, distancing themselves from society and civilization and turning to nature, to an inner state of mind.

The attitude of the students towards art highlights the underlying principles of modern art. For the students of Samuel Palmer School, Desmond Bull points out to Frederica that "they really believe the past is dangerous, is a kind of death. They think it destroys their originality…mostly they believe in making a rupture, making a revolt, making a new world" (226). In his letter to Frederica, Alan's first question is whether Frederica has a collection of paintings in her house or not. He soon reveals that he is thinking of writing a book on early Venetian art, but at school he teaches "Art history to painters and potters and industrial designers and weavers who think they don't want to know about Giotto or Titian…" (81). Alan Melville also remarks that "they talk about slashing Rembrandts and Vermeers because young painters don't get enough attention" (227). Rather than a realistic depiction, innovative and experimental methods of more abstract forms are adopted. Before Alan's lecture, Frederica takes a glance at the room and notices some remarkable art works demonstrating that:

> The walls are hung with paintings, chosen very fairly from amongst the current student trends: two brilliant hard-edged abstract acrylic paintings, a large soft grey abstract whirl, a painting of stick-like figures in a somber green park, owing something to Lowry, something to Seurat,

> something to Nolde, a mystical image of floating figures in conical hats. (224)

The excerpt is like a testimony to how difficult it would be to evaluate the novel without knowing the time period in which it was written. Changing winds blow in new trends that are popular among the students and the traditional figures are still maintained. The American critic Clement Greenberg formulates a modern theory by saying that the Old Masters created an illusion of space in depth that one could imagine oneself walking into, but the analogous illusion created by the modernist painter can be seen into; and traveled through, literally or figuratively, only with the eye. (8). Byatt's inclusion of modern painters like Seurat, Nolde and Lowry along with Romantic followers like Linnell and Palmer evidences this transition. The attitude of the students and the school's outlook on art, featuring a blend of romantic and modern works reflect the general mood of the 60s. The transition from more traditional forms of art to unconventional and more abstract forms is transparently observed in spite of an attachment to the Romantic vision. The desire to leave the old behind is not just felt in new student trends; Frederica wants to rid herself of her married life in a country house and make a fresh beginning in London as a single, working mother. Her own transition has parallels with how views on art changed in the 60s, and the school is an embodiment of that change.

It might be useful to provide exemplary works from those artists for greater insight into modern art and to understand why Byatt opts for those artists in particular. L.S. Lowry, one of the most celebrated artists of the twentieth century England, is known for his urban and industrial landscapes. But, most of all, what distinguishes him from his contemporaries is his unique style, especially of human figures, often referred to as matchstick men. Breedlove states that: "His teeming human figures—commonly

called “matchstick men” for their singular narrow vertical forms—rigidly move about their activities, appearing disconnected from each other despite their proximity in crowds and long lines” (1936).

Fig. 53 L.S. Lowry, *Industrial Landscape*, 1955, Tate, London

Alternatively, there is Georges Seurat (1859-1891), another prominent modern painter whose technique is based on small dots or color strokes. In her book on George Seurat, Michelle Foa mentions that critics focus on the artist’s pointillist method of paint application, countless small touches, a swirling mixture of small dots (63) that appears in *A Sunday on the Island of La Grande Matte* very clearly.

Fig. 54 Georges Seurat, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, 1886, Art Institute of Chicago

The artist's pointillism or divisionism becomes the defining feature of Neo-Impressionist painting as the work is unlike the "Impressionist model of visual perception as a glimpse and of painting as the hastily produces representation of the glimpse" (68). Finally, Byatt refers to Emil Nolde, a German expressionist painter especially known for prints of flowers and seascapes. Neo-Impressionists Van Gogh, Edvard Munch and most notably James Ensor, already mentioned in the novel, had a great impact on Nolde which led him away from the naturalistic mode of Romantics to a use of color that recalls Matisse. According to Barbara Butts, the seascapes reveal his belief in "mankind's oneness with the mystical forces of nature" (33). Yet, for Charles Werner Haxthausen that was the real breakthrough in Nolde's art as he turned to "an art of inner visions" (58), which might explain his obsession with masks in his works.

Fig. 55 Emil Nolde, *Mask Still Life III*, 1911, Nelson Gallery of Art, Atkins-Museum, Kansas City

The artist's engagement with women and especially mask-like figures is important as the dramatic changes of the modern age are also felt in how still lifes are depicted. That popular genre of 17th century Netherlands gains a philosophical aspect as masks are thought to hide behind them a wide range of emotions. In all these artists, it is possible to find a connection with nature and Romantic elements yet their innovative approach highlights a further dimension, that it is not merely an expression of art and personal impressions. It is hard to find romantic joy in Lowry's industrial landscape or Seurat's detached and lonely figures or Nolde's masked figures.

In the chosen works, it is possible to trace the aforementioned disconnectedness among the figures, which is reminiscent of modernism, and explains why such works appeal to students, considering the technological and industrial advancements and social changes and how they are manifested in contemporary art, which most commonly rejected past and traditional art. Rather than idealized renderings of portraits, artists

endeavored to apply more alternative experiences, valued their personal impressions more and searched for new modes of expression. In that sense, the school does not just represent the transitory atmosphere of the period with a blend of those artists, but it also marks a transition for Frederica, who is about to enter a new phase in her life. As mentioned before, it would be hard to think that the changing conditions of the period would not be echoed in Frederica's story. The modern art works could be discussed in relation to Frederica in terms of finding a new voice and they could serve as stimulating works for Frederica before coming up with the idea of writing a book in such a form that would embody features from those pieces. Although Lowry, Seurat and Nolde meet on common ground in terms of the pessimistic mood of their work, reinforcing loneliness, detachment and obscurity, all three have a signature that determines their style and makes them distinctive. Frederica's attempt at finding a voice and becoming free of the oppressions of an unhappy marriage life is consolidated with her book which is put together in a unique, unconventional and distinctive way.

In her first visit to the school, Frederica is invited to Alan's lecture on Vermeer. Besides *Milkmaid,* the slides also include *View of Delft* and Byatt illustrates two works with the following words:

> A woman pouring eternal creamy-white milk from a jug, in a plane of light, a woman weighing gold dust, intent faces closed on their own meditation, knowing somehow, Frederica thinks, that this moment of concentration is to stretch out into eternity, or at least into an inhuman stretch of time. The geometry of maps, of carpets, of the panes of glass in half-open windows, mediating light, mediated by light. The View of Delft, with the yellow patch of roof and the perfect spherical bubbles of light on the wet sides of the ships. A mediation intense, quiet, concentrated and apparently without any touch of anger, or hurt, or aggression. (226)

Fig. 56 Johannes Vermeer, *View of Delft*, 1660, Mauritshuis, The Hague.

Her words prove that apart from the general ekphrastic depictions, Byatt draws attention to the eternity of the pouring of the creamy white milk or how this moment of concentration stretches into eternity. The images being frozen in a single moment have been discussed in the first part of the thesis in relation to the word-image and space-time debates. Byatt integrates a new dimension with the help of technological developments, introducing a slideshow of the photographs, a recent development at the time of the novel. Vermeer may not have been randomly chosen as the Dutch artist is known for his photographic details and rigorous work. In his article "Mimesis and Ideation", Parry Chapman notes the handling of the paint in the *Milkmaid*, the glistening light on the crusty bread and how the saturated colors prove Vermeer's near scientific study of vision and the effects of the *camera obscura*. What Byatt tries to render through that

scene is actually a modern debate regarding "the paintings, or not the paintings, but light shadows of them, thin skins of color transfused and transfixed by the stream of light" (226) appearing on the screen. The duality of word and image that is very central to ekphrasis is consolidated by the technological advances. Making timeless moments or reversing the direction of images is now possible yet for some like Jude Mason, writing is still safer. What Alan does is actually what Vermeer could never have seen. However, Desmond Bull claims that the only reason people get wrong ideas or see *wrong* is because viewers these days only see transparencies, that is the colors of the light not the colors of the pigment (227). As a painter himself, Desmond Bull does not just introduce new modes of expression in art in accordance with modern trends, he also undertakes an important role in inspiring Frederica in her creation of *Laminations*.

After the lecture, Frederica and Bull take a stroll in his studio which is divided into two rooms that he calls "the divided self of Desmond Bull" (228). While the left room is "modern art post-Rauschenberg", the right is "Scottish European, the guilty painterly painter" (228).

> In the left hand studio, the work is made by someone in the grip of the idea that art is everything and that everything can be seen as art. There is a sense in which it is a junk shop. One work is made of hundreds of and hundreds of electric wires, stripped, coiled, layers thick like impasto, and all colours, woven red and black fat wires, heavy duty plastic wires, orange, brown, green acid yellow, like nests, like tangles, like barbed-wire fences, like cartoon roses. (229)

In a sense, Bull's everyday "junk shop" objects represent the 17th century still life painting materials being reinterpreted in a modern way. Such mundane objects are distorted, reassembled and rearranged and gain a new meaning in an original form. Byatt had also introduced a similar art form in the short story "Art Work", in which the

cleaning lady achieves success and fame through a bricolaged form of art she assembles through years of cleaning and tidying in the house she works drawing inspiration from Matisse. Obviously, Bull is among that group of modern artists who employ unconventional methods of expression in their works. In the art world of the sixties, collages, cut-ups, pastiches and combines are favoured by the artists. Frederica finds Bull "turning things round, bringing colors and forms and objects into the studio" (230). One item is "a gaudy and strangely pleasing collage of flowered shirts, pressed very flat, blue with yellow daisies, pink with red poppies, orange with purple hibiscus" (230). Jack Stewart names Bull's colorful, collage painting as "overpainting" which is analogous with Byatt's "overwriting" and Frederica's *Laminations*. "Overpainting is a layering of pigments, in which a painter subsumes another's or his own work without removing traces of it from the canvas—or at least from memory. Overpainting is analogous to verbal lamination or intertextual layering" (505) denoting ways in which texts gain new meanings through the evocation of other texts. Bull shows his paintings to Frederica saying: "Black canvases, white canvases, some shiny and uniform, some with black and white smeared over color which stares faintly through, a hairstreak of crimson here, a veiled patch of delicious apple green there, yellow ochre under a black stain, indigo under smoke" (230). He tells her that "these are all erasures of my own work. There are old paintings of mine struggling around under the black and white" (230). As Stewart points out, "such juxtaposing, cutting-up, and layering deconstruct texts, bringing new insights to the surface. Transposing and altering contexts modifies meanings, as texts are overwritten and subsumed within a changing discourse system" (506). Bull says that these are erasures of his work. They are old paintings that he erases, wipes or paints again just like "Rauschenberg erased de Koonings" (230).

Robert Rauschenberg was an American painter and collagist known for his "Combines", referring to a technique of combining unconventional materials in an

innovative way. His experimental approach to art is viewed as a transition from abstract expressionism which is related to combining unlikely materials to some other modern movements like pop art of the 60s; he challenged the art scene by introducing everyday objects and images taken from popular culture. He gained a reputation with *Erased de Kooning Drawing* in which he literally transformed a work of Willem de Kooning discovering whether a work of art could be produced through erasure.

Fig. 57 Robert Rauschenberg, *Erased de Kooning Drawing,* 1953, San Francisco Museum of Fine Art

Given those artists and painters, in *Babel Tower* Byatt moves away from traditional, classic painters to more alternative modern artists and movements. Bull's methods of erasing or layering pigments serve as triggering factors for Frederica before creating *Laminations* which is a different form of narrative in that Frederica assembles and organizes her book in such a way that the layered texts become voices of her inner world. Bull's intertextuality in a pictorial sense and Frederica's book *Laminations*

parallel what Byatt does in the general scope of the novel, interweaving many texts together.

Desmond then moves into the second studio: "This time he does not speak; he moves from wall to wall, humping the canvases and grunting, and offering no more comment than 'A painting of masks', another painting of masks', 'another painting of masks', 'a painting of masks on fire'" (231). The masks, first referred to with Nolde, might seemingly hide the identities of those figures, but in fact they actually function to reveal their true selves. The masks do not just conceal the outer appearance but expose what is inside as the symbolic faces represent certain emotions. The conversation between Frederica and Desmond also suggests this:

> 'I like the pinks.'
>
> 'That's Ensor. His pinks are staggering. I am still learning. You might say the masks are Ensor- but the masks are mine, too they aren't his, his kind of grisly carnival isn't what I'm doing, mine's about Greek tragedy, too about *coming from behind a front*.'
>
> 'As the erased paintings were trying to talk' says Frederica, inspired. (232)

Stewart comments that seeing through Bull's work "as though the erased paintings were trying to talk" (232), Frederica senses how a remnant of an earlier work can speak through the layers of paint on canvas, just as earlier texts can speak through later (506). Rather than going for the conventional ways of conveying ideas in art, the new tendency is trying alternative ways of making pictures speak like erasing a picture or drawing faces as masks which could create a more powerful and dramatic impact and bear more forceful messages. Masking the figures in a painting might be interpreted as drawing attention to their inner selves rather than outer faces. In that sense there is more chance to reveal more of their true selves. Questioning the evolution of mankind finds experimental forms that are articulated in modern art and James Ensor applies that with

a series of paintings of masks with great symbolic presence. In her work "Ensor's "Masks Confronting Death", Cynthia Johnson draws attention to the fact that "although masks usually transform or conceal the wearer, these masks of Ensor's seem instead to gather into themselves all the malignities of the beings they purport to disguise. Their grotesque-ness seems a physical manifestation of a deformed human soul beneath. They reveal Ensor's view of humankind, with its weaknesses and cruelties" (2). Frederica thinks that she "has been in the Art School long enough not to try to convert it into narrative, although the masked figures half invite this" (231). That invitation is the ekphrasis itself as she realizes that those figures wearing masks are "full of extremely articulated expressions of horror, delight, the rictus of sexual bliss, the smirk of flirtation, the disintegrating template of age…" (231). For Kalina, masks also function to raise certain questions like:

> Where does the real end and the fanciful or imaginary begin? What is the difference between a person caricatured or exaggerated and a person in a costume or disguise? What is the border between the self and the world? How does one present oneself to others? How truthful is that presentation, and how can it be properly and safely controlled? (134-135)

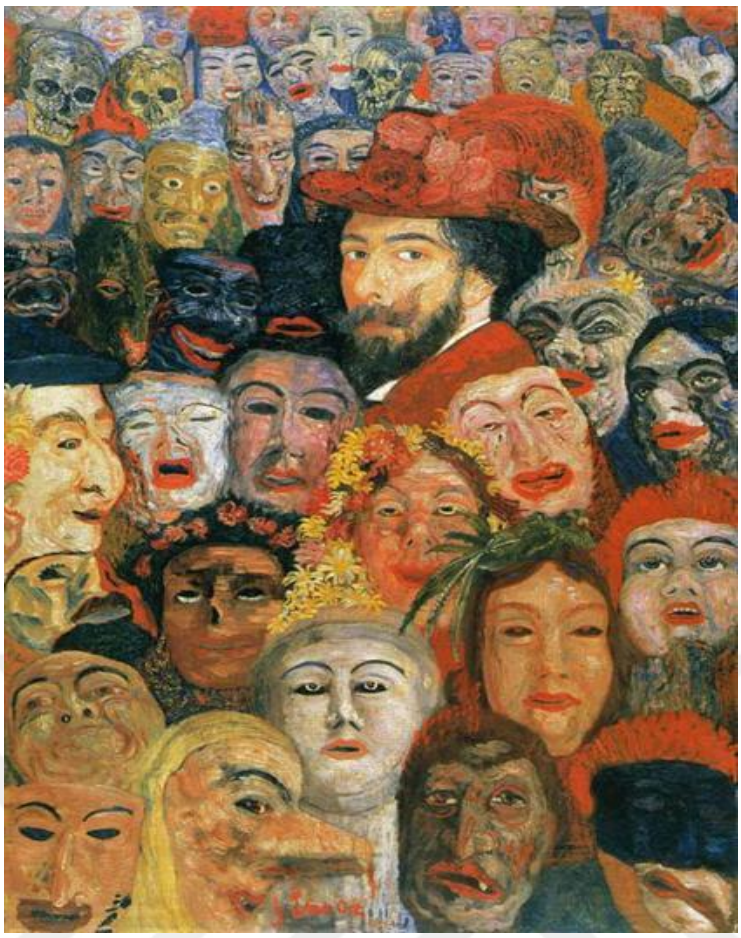


Fig. 58 James Ensor, *Self-Portrait with Masks*, 1899, Menard Art Museum, Komaki, Japan

Byatt's questions on the representation, perception and problem of language come down to the level of self or individual. With *Babel Tower*, the readers have a clear mind as to why the quartet is named after Frederica. The books focus solely on her and especially on her inner world inviting the readers to a journey of her mind. On the way, Byatt once again embellishes her narration with visuals and allows the readers a different, artful experience. Equally significant is the fact that the paintings mentioned in the book refer to pain, terror, fear, anxiety and most importantly the hidden self. Frederica's ostensible life of marriage, child and isolated rurality is far from satisfactory for a Cambridge graduate. It is possible to say that, metaphorically, she is also wearing a mask and the whole book is about her taking off that mask, freeing her soul and being free again.

Frederica, Leo and Daniel travel north, to Bill and Winifred's house for Christmas. That evening they also go to a party hosted by Matthew Crowe at his house. There are familiar faces like Alexander, Gerard Wijnnobel, Edmund Wilkie and Raphael Faber. Crowe is serving champagne "under his painting of the flayed Marsyas. He is older: his rubicund face is more hectic, his hair sparser, he has shrunk" (246). While thinking of what to make of this particular figure or painting, Byatt also draws attention to the group, who are having a similar discussion. Hodgkiss says Raphael does not understand how Matthew could live with it and he should burn it. On the other hand, Frederica's thoughts are reflections of ekphrasis:

> Frederica feels a perverse desire to defend the picture, which has always given her a frisson of terror, disgust, and then pleasure of some kind. She looks at it, the faun bound to the tree, his pelt at his feet, his lips drawn back from his pointed teeth, his whole body glistening dark red with gouts of blood that are about to burst forth into fountains. His anatomy is lovingly accurate; his bloody muscles fold over his shoulder-blades and belly.
>
> 'It is about art. And pain-' (249)

The emphasis Frederica puts on art and pain in her meditation equals the artistic and emotional effect ekphrasis leaves on the viewer. There are so many works with Marsyas as the central figure but foremost is Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas*. The Venetian master of Renaissance, Titian depicts religious and mythological scenes in many of his works and this is no exception as the story of Marsyas is taken from Ovid's Metamorphoses; this includes a reference in Book VI to the myth of Marsyas who challenged Apollo to a musical competition. Upon losing, he was flayed alive, hung upside down on a tree.

Fig. 59 Titian, *The Flaying of Marsyas*, 1575, National Museum of Kroměříž, Czech Republic

There are some sources like Egmond and Zwijnenberg's *Bodily Extremities: Preoccupations with the Human Body in Early Modern European Culture* which support the idea that Titian's painting could be interpreted as Apollo releasing Marsyas' soul with that punishment. As Egmond and Awijnenberg point out, "Titian's Marsyas hides, within his interior, a great truth and beauty that will be revealed unto daylight by flaying". Jutta Held delivers a similar opinion, that Apollo is redeeming the soul of Marsyas and purifying him by flaying him and thus releasing the inner self which is full of beauty and conceals a valuable treasure (188). She bases her view on the idea that once the soul leaves the prison of the body, dichotomies like body and soul, appearance and hidden beauty, materiality and spirituality are also overcome. This might be another

reference alluding to Frederica's own efforts to free herself from the entrapment she feels. During his trial, Jude Mason also likens himself to Marsyas at one point:

> He was a goat-foot, a satyr, who challenged Apollo to a musical contest. He lost, and Apollo flayed him alive. He pulled him, Dante says, out of the scabbard of his limbs, '*della vagina delle member sue'*. He had no more song, after that. Oscar Wilde says that modern art is the cry of Marsyas, bitter and plaintive and sad. (575-576)

Even if Byatt refers to a classic painting from ancient times, the flaying of Marsyas might be associated with the process some of the modern works undergo which is being flayed of traditional components. As the writer of an unconventionally obscene book, Jude, is prosecuted and no matter what he says or how he is defended, the ultimate verdict is against him. Marsyas' severe and extremely violent punishment of being skinned alive applies to Jude who is flayed of his most natural human right, the freedom of thought and expression.

Another Titian painting of cruelty and suffering with characters from Greek mythology is depicted in the embedded story *Babbletower*. A small band of free spirits leave their city and travel to the isolated castle La Tour Bruyarde under the leadership of Culvert and his chief companion Lady Roseace so as to create an ideal community. Inside her living chamber, a close inspection reveals this exquisite depiction:

> All in reds and whites, roses and flesh tints, of the chaste Diana bathing under snowy branches by a silver spring, and of the lovely young Acteon, part ruddy youth, part milk-white stag, and all laced and interlaced with gouts of brilliant crimson blood, which dripped also from the bright white teeth of the pale hounds, they reached elegantly for his extended, panting throat…(27)

That ekphrastic moment clearly interprets Titian's *Death of Acteon*, which is a sequel to *Diana and Acteon*, depicting the scene of Acteon bursting in while chaste goddess Diana is bathing naked with her nymphs. According to the myth, Diana turns him into a stag and Acteon is chased and killed by his own hounds. Ekphrasis serves as a foreshadowing element in this scene as when Lady Roseace tries to escape, she is also going to be attacked by hounds in the forest. The story mirrors the myth of Babel Tower as their utopic project ends with failure and triggers extreme destruction, violent action and tyranny that will ultimately get Roseace killed in the most tragic way.

Fig. 60 Titian, *Death of Acteon*, 1559-1575, National Gallery, London.

After deciding to get a divorce, Frederica moves to another apartment as it would not serve her well in the eyes of the court for a woman to live with a man with

children. Alexander convinces his colleague Agatha Mond who is a single mother, to take in Frederica; she has a daughter named Saskia whose father is unknown. Some of the details regarding her house are important and can be categorized as ekphrastic depictions, helping the readers with a visual thinking and also recalling painters and paintings incorporated into the narrative.

> The curtains and the sofa are rich, dark and bright with William Morris's Golden Lily: the walls are white and studded with prints and paintings, some abstract, some nineteenth century, some Dore Dante illustrations, some of John Martin's images of Paradise, Chaos and Pandemonium with swarms of small bright angels like light-emitting bees. In the kitchen Matisse's Jazz prints sit also on a white wall, amongst earthenware jugs and bowls, Sabatier knives, a mixture of old blue white plates on a dresser. (294)

According to Elizabeth Hicks, the house is indicative of Frederica's break with her past (120), as Agatha's sense of beauty and order understood from those verbal descriptions are different from what Frederica is used to. Agatha's house presents a mixture of different art forms and artists ranging from the 19th century painter poet, interior designer and architect William Morris, to Henri Matisse to the French artist Gustave Dore, whose *Divine Comedy* illustrations have visually enlightened Dante's work. On the other hand, there is also John Martin, a Romantic artist best known for his black and white mezzotint illustrations depicting John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. By itself, Martin's work is a good example of ekphrasis as "the signs of painting contribute to the concepts put into words through the poem" (Atashi and Anushiravani 164). Martin does not just offer an alternative reading of the poem, he also leaves a long-lasting effect on the generations to come with such imaginative visual experience. Pandemonium is the capitol of Hell in Milton's epic built by Satan and fallen angels after being banished from Heaven. John Martin's pictorial reading of the poem in the 19th century consists of twenty-four scenes that are unevenly distributed among Milton's twelve books.

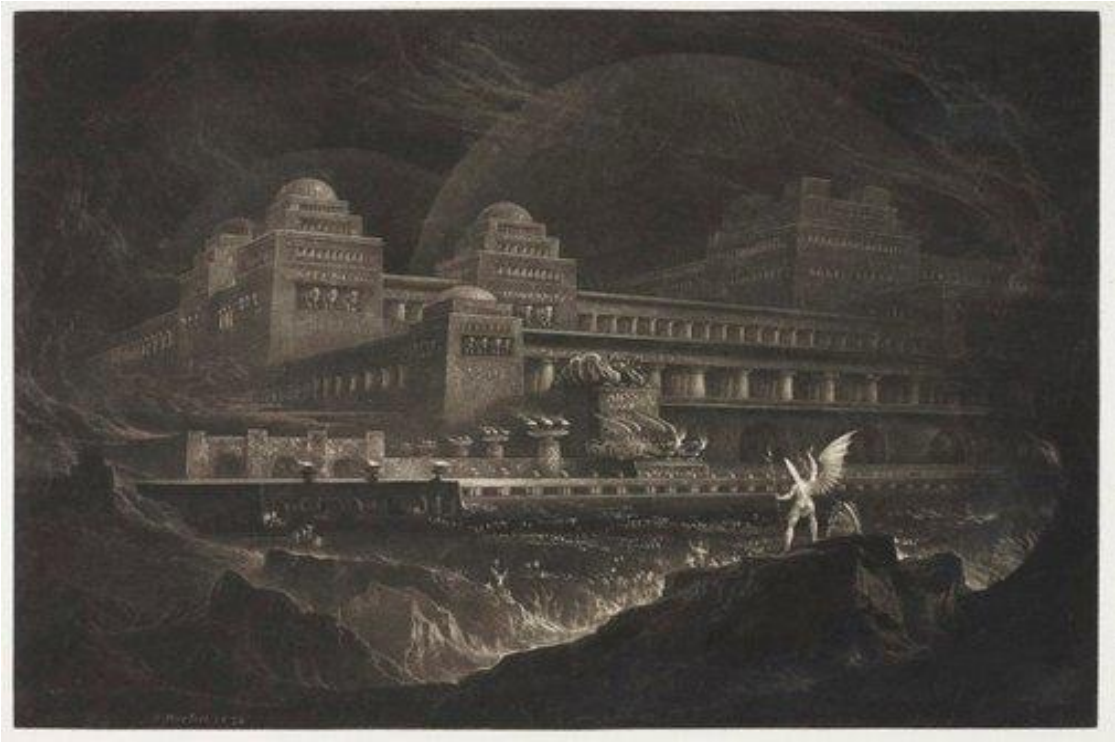


Fig. 61 John Martin, *Pandemonium*, 1824, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Fig. 62 John Martin, *Paradise, with the approach of the Archangel Raphael*, 1825-1826, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Fig. 63 John Martin, *Bridge over Chaos*, 1824-1826, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

The interpretations and commentaries on *Paradise Lost* are not limited to verbal accounts; paintings and illustrations also provide alternative readings of the poem. According to Jack Stewart "Martin's image of Pandemonium in Paradise Lost (Book 1: 768-76) clearly relates to the Tower of Babel and loss of a unified language" (502). They both symbolize upward aspiration, pride, an attempt to equal God. While creating his work, Milton might have been influenced by the myth of tower. The ambivalence of the glory of the rise is converged with the catastrophe of the fall. In his work "The image of the Tower in Paradise Lost", Anthony Low provides a similar comment:

> In its more concrete manifestations, Pandemonium and Babel, it provides fixed references and symbols against which to measure pride, vanity, glory, honor, and power as they are achieved by man or fallen angel. It is, finally, the most compact, perhaps the most central, symbol embodying those continual risings and fallings which are the basic movement in the poem. (181)

Martin's 19th century illustrations of a 17th century poem are already striking examples of ekphrasis. In her work *Milton and the Ends of Time*, Juliet Cummins emphasizes that Martin achieved a unique visual analogue evoking "the grandeur and sublimity of *Paradise Lost*, the themes of exile, the vertical dynamics of light and darkness, the gathering darkness over mankind in the temporal world, and the everlasting darkness and everlasting light in the eternal world" (139). Such illustrations of *Paradise Lost* also connote sublimity as those big, deep voids of darkness and chaos arouse awe, violence and terror and make the figures seem so small before their vastness. Martin's choice of engraving those images on mezzotints is also very appropriate as the process follows a similar path from darkness to light in the shades. *Paradise Lost* also reveals such contrasts and transitions. What is remarkable is the effects of the industrial revolution on Martin as he used images drawn from industry and technology, "the Causeway resembles aquatints of the Thames tunnel and the Great Hall of Pandemonium is illuminated by huge rings of gas-lights" (Svendsen 66). Now that Pandemonium equates to the Babel tower, it could also symbolize Frederica's isolated married life that brought her darkness, gloom and, in the aftermath, fragmentation. While the chaos and dark mood pervade the images of Paradise and Chaos, there is light at the end of the tunnel and an angel is waiting for Adam and Eve. Frederica's escape with her son, meeting with Alan in the forest in the middle of the night was also like crossing a bridge and leaving darkness and chaos behind.

Matisse's *Jazz* prints on the kitchen wall are also worth mentioning. The French artist has an art book called *Jazz* which consists of twenty color stencils and includes his cut-out works that dominated the last decade of his life. Those colorful paper cut-outs are also accompanied with the painter's notes. When it comes to how Matisse developed the technique, Charles W. Millard mentions that Matisse began using cut and pasted paper in the 1930s as a convenient method of studying the compositions

of decorative projects such as book covers, stage curtains and scenery, tapestries and stained glass windows. Then, in 1941, a serious illness and a subsequent operation forced him to remain in bed which resulted in the assembled paper cuts being his principal medium of expression. (320)

Fig. 64 Henri Matisse, different prints from *Jazz*, 1947

On a similar note, Frederica is prompted to make a collage of written texts when she receives an invitation from Desmond Bull who is making "a large picture of layers of faces, from past and present, newspapers and paintings, with Robespierre's eyes in Marilyn Monroe's face above Bronzino's Fraud's scaly tail, or with Roosevelt's seated figure cut into Titian's seated Pope" (377). Frederica's writings under the title *Laminations* are reminiscent of a cut-out technique she borrows from the Beat writer

William Burroughs, although in her case she gathers excerpts from different texts. As Jane Campbell articulates "Frederica's 'Laminations' are a strategy for survival" (244), what she cuts up and juxtaposes is diverse, ranging from Blake or Auden to a letter she receives from Nigel's solicitor. It is not a coincidence that she gets that idea of different layers of texts as she sees her own life and self being fragmented. For Frederica "their beauty is in the difference as well as in the simultaneity of the vision" (359). The process of writing *Laminations* and how it is received occupies a central place in the novel. Although Frederica ponders on oneness or "the Romantic desire for everything to be one" (360), she gives primacy to keeping things separate:

> She is feeling for something, and doesn't know what it is, cannot push the thought further. Laminations. Separation. I was thinking about the Virgin Queen, and the power of her solitude and her separation, the fact that her power and her intelligence were dependent upon her solitude and her separation. (359)

Only in the end does she realize that what she needs is full control over language itself before she can write. "Laminations. Keeping things separate. Not linked by metaphor or sex or desire, but separate objects of knowledge, systems of work, or discovery" (359). As Matisse moved away from traditional painting, Frederica also moves beyond the language of the community and towards a control over language. A collage is found in different forms by different artists in different periods. It is named 'Combines' by Rauschenberg, while Matisse calls it a 'cut-out'. *Laminations* is a strategy for Frederica to keep certain aspects of her life separate, a quality that is directly linked with postmodern pastiche and intertextuality, and is something that Byatt employs a lot. Elizabeth Hicks introduces another dimension by saying that "Frederica-as-artist utilizes 'laminations' as a space for solving aesthetic problems of composition, as well as matters affecting her life" (100). In a sense, she deconstructs those texts and rearranges

them as a new narrative form. She realizes that *Laminations* refers to her attempts to live in such a way that sex, literature, kitchen, teaching, motherhood are separate and do not interact with each other. *Laminations* serves as a projection of Frederica's personal crisis: she feels she is a woman whose life appears to be flying apart into unrelated fragments. According to Alfer and Campos, her response to that invites comparison with Anna Wulf from Doris Lessing's 1962 novel *The Golden Notebook*: "like Anna Wulf, Frederica's experience leads her to develop a distinctly postmodern sense of herself as a multiple of fragmented identity" (69). To put it in Byatt's words, Frederica is "many women in one – a mother, a wife, a lover, a watcher, and it might be possible to construct a kind of plait of voices, with different rhythms and vocabularies" (462). The comparison with *The Golden Notebook*, Anna and Molly as free women living together, could be correlated with Frederica and Agatha as two single mothers within a context that William Blake's pictures could shed light on.

While Frederica continues her stroll around Agatha's house, her eyes are drawn to the walls on which hung pictures of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* particularly "Nurses Song":

> Innocence is on the left, the poem contained in the arms of a weeping willow, in a pink and gold sunset glow. The nurse sits at the base of the tree, perhaps sewing, perhaps writing. Beside her two rose-colored slender girls hold hands in an arch, under which, into the warm light, the rest of the circle are dancing. (297)

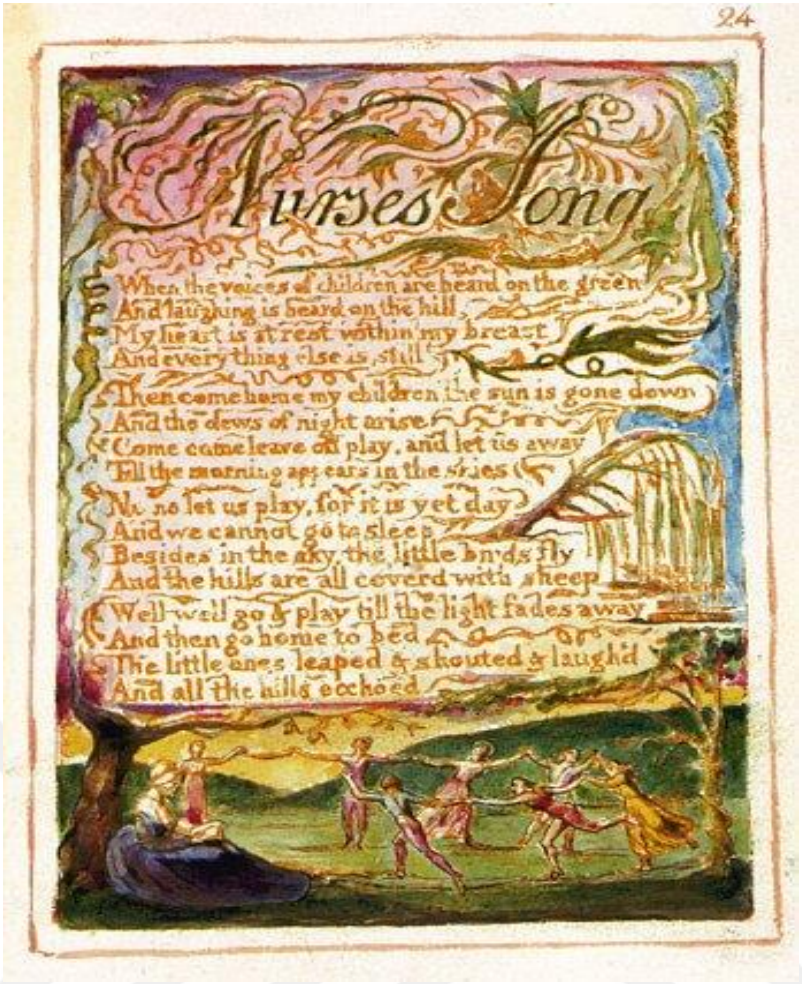


Fig. 65 William Blake's "Nurse's Song" from *Songs of Innocence*

As indicated in the first chapter of the thesis, William Blake's poetry collections are ekphrastic examples in that the poet-painter illustrated his own poems in the book. The readers' imagination is already prompted upon reading however Blake's own visuals do not just reflect his vision and fantasy world but also bestow the readers with a different experience of aesthetics. In his extensive analysis of William Blake in *Fearful Symmetry*, Northrop Frye notes that according to Blake's treatment of innocence and experience, happiness is based on love, protection and peace in childhood while in adulthood it is based on law and reason (190).

As seen from the picture, the poem features a group of children playing and a nurse looking after them who is sitting under a tree. When she asks them to "leave off" before the sun goes down, they insist on playing longer as it is still daylight. Their

innocence and simple joy is harmonized with the sounds of nature and the nurse also feels a corresponding delight and peace in this. On the right wall is the picture of the second version of the same poem from *Songs of Experience*:

> Experience shows three figures in a doorway, a purple woman bending solicitously over a green-clad youth with long blond hair and a hand laid across his waist to emphasize, rather than conceal, his sex, which is faintly outlined in gold on his green breeches. Behind him a female figure of indeterminate age sits in the angle of the doorstep, head bowed. Vines heavy with grapes climb richly upwards, purple, gold and green, reaching out spiraling tendrils towards both woman and youth. (297)

Fig.66 William Blake's "Nurse's Song" from *Songs of Experience*

The tone changes drastically in the second poem as does the view on childhood. Although the nurse in the first poem draws a kind and generous portrayal, the nurse in the second sounds more anxious. The atmosphere of the poem is also different, in that

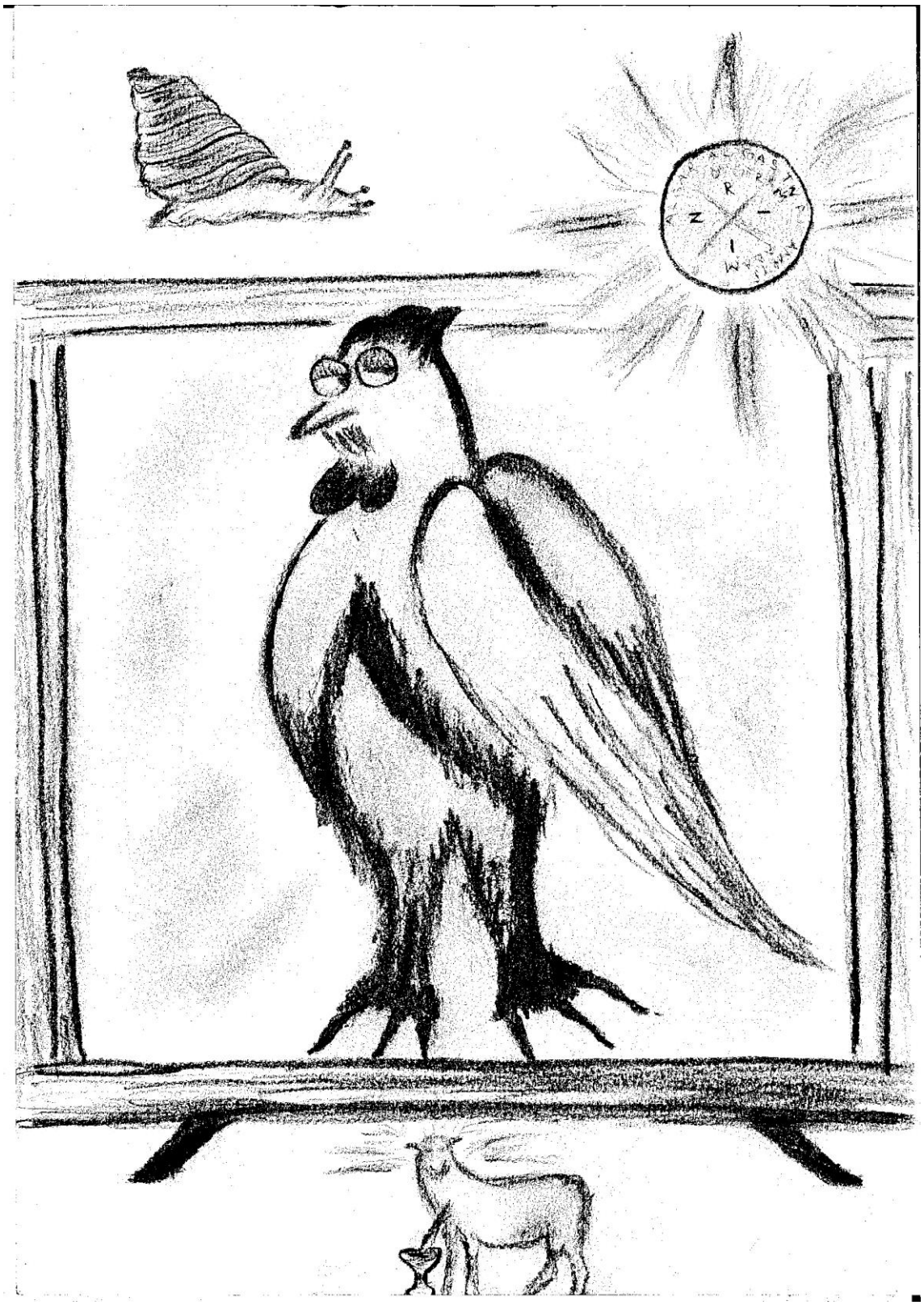
the sun is already gone and the voices of the children are obviously absent. The transition from day to night corresponds with the transition from childhood to adulthood. Undoubtedly, Byatt consciously chooses those two poems for Frederica and Agatha who are both single mothers with children and they share emotions and anxieties of Blake's nurse in the poem, especially regarding their children. Frederica says: "I wish I had them all. I love their doubleness. One thinks differently about the innocence of children once one has them. And about oneself, one's own childhood" (298). It might be interpreted as the first poem representing Frederica in the first two novels, a girl with joy and hopes of making the most of life, Cambridge, men and art. She might be the one who is not worried at all and sees no trouble in 'playing a little longer'. Yet the atmosphere and gloom of the second poem lingers over Frederica's new way of life. Now as a mother and a woman who is about to divorce, her views on children, her own childhood and the concept of innocence are what she questions. It is possible to say that Frederica and Agatha do not just share a flat but in Jane Campbell's words: "Frederica, who never has been and still is not comfortable in groups of women, bonds with Agatha over their mutual love for the "doubleness" of the texts and illustrations of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* and over shared memories of their childhood impatience for adulthood" (241). Although Agatha does not reveal much about her private life which remains a mystery until the end of *A Whistling Woman*, she becomes proof of living as a single working mother.

While the first half of *Babel Tower* concerns Frederica's escape from a life that she thinks imprisons and traps her, the second is about the divorce and her struggle in a new circle that tries to trap and imprison people, such as the courts, words, language itself and the power of manipulation. Byatt is passionately interested in language and ponders the use of words, the images they create, verbal thinking and the habit of rendering things into language. Words and their connotations might create such a

dominant discourse that it may be misleading and insufficient, which is especially apparent during the two court cases at the end of the novel. Frederica realizes that words actually do not tell what she is feeling. Byatt notes that "*Babel Tower* was planned to be a novel about language, a novel about the ways in which language distorted, created, changed life and the social world" (3) which is clearly felt in the divorce case as "Frederica sees herself as a caged or netted beast. She sees something limp and snarling in a barred cage on wheels in a hunter's net suspended from a bough" (324). That net is made by words that do not describe what she is feeling. The trial soon develops into a clash of opposing narratives, and truth remains elusive, hidden behind "lies and equivocations and painful approximations" (Alfer and Campos 72). Despite the upheavals of the 1960s, during the divorce and custody court, Frederica finds herself being questioned whether higher education would deter her from fulfilling her duties as Leo's mother and Nigel's wife. Although she wins custody of her son, she comes to realize the verbal traps she could encounter in every field of life ranging from literature to the legal system. Therefore, to a large extent *Babel Tower* examines and reflects the social revolution of the 1960s and appreciation of the individual over society, which is very connected to Frederica's life, and in doing so, Byatt makes great use of an intertextual and ekphrastic narrative in accordance with the new trends and tendencies.

Questioning traditional gender roles, the new emerging free women are vocalized more potently in *A Whistling Woman* as, to put it in Lena Steveker's words, "by 1970, women are eventually able to live autonomous lives as they are free to adopt other roles besides those of wives and mothers, even if they are married and have children" (63). Women gaining autonomy is closely related to having an identity in *A Whistling Woman* and it is highlighted with different characters, inscribed in multiple discourses dealing with contemporary issues like science, religion and a modern visual medium, television.

A WHISTLING WOMAN



3.2 Identity and a Compromise of Body and Mind in *A Whistling Woman*

The quartet that began with *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), set in 1953, is completed with *A Whistling Woman* published in 2002. *Still Life* covered the years 1954-59 and was published in 1985. Published eleven years after *Still Life, Babel Tower* (1996) features the revolutionary 1960s. It might be hard for some readers to follow the sequence as the prologue of *The Virgin in the Garden* is dated 1968, a year later than the end of *Babel Tower*. The prologue of *Still Life* is set in 1980 and chronologically marks the real end of the quartet as *A Whistling Woman* ends in 1970.

Not only is linearity subverted but different narratives are overlapped in the last volume. According to Alfer and Campos, "the novel dramatises, on closer inspection, a complex ideological conflict played out between different groups of people with different sets of beliefs that reaches far beyond its immediate relevance to the students, university authorities, scientists, anarchists and religious cult members that make up its cast" (81). The action centers around several plots that are woven into the story. The protagonist of the story Frederica is still living with Agatha as the novel begins with an excerpt from *Flight North*, Agatha's book written for children. Byatt makes it clear that the year is 1968, almost two years after *Babel Tower*. Frederica is now hosting a TV show on BBC named *Through the Looking Glass*; *Laminations* is also published to commercial and critical success. Jacqueline Winwar's storyline parallels that of Frederica as she also experiences the dilemma of sexuality, marriage and motherhood that Byatt had first introduced with Stephanie. She and Luk Lysgaard Peacock, the readers would remember from *Babel Tower* as Marcus's friends, are working at the biology department of the University of North Yorkshire. The intellectual atmosphere of the day is conveyed through a conference organized by Gerard Wijnnobel, The Vice Chancellor of the university. The 'Body and Mind' conference brings linguists,

philosophers, biologists and sociologists together. At the same time, some students are revolting under the Anti-University act and their violent actions at the conference results in major damage. Another destructive event comes at the hands of Joshua Ramsden, a new character, whose story is conveyed through letters written by Elvet Gander and Kieran Quarrell to Brenda Pincher and Avram Snitkin. On the moors of Dun Vale Hall, he leads a religious commune involving sub-groups like Spirit's Tigers, to which John's twin brother Paul Ottokar belongs, and Gideon Farrar's 'Children of Joy' that Ruth and Gerard Wijnnobel's wife Eva are part of. The letters form an important part of the story as the readers get to know about Ruth giving birth to a child, whose father is probably Farrar, and the ultimate disaster of the group caused by a fire that not just leads to the death of Joshua but also Eva Wijnnobel and Ruth.

Alfer and Campos assert that *Babel Tower* depicted a world in the grip of individualism and the resulting fragmentation of society and its languages, *A Whistling Woman*, by contrast, is deliberately organized around larger groups of characters and is centrally concerned with the bigger and collectively shaped narratives that affect their lives (79-80). Religious, scientific, academic, social and cultural issues of the late 60s and early 70s are addressed through multiple sub-narratives but above all Byatt's recent acquisitions of science brings her closer to a realm of genetics and construction of identity. In order to show a stance against science, she builds a religious discourse around a new character, and, in doing so, ekphrasis serves as a foreshadowing and activating tool in illuminating the defining moments and figures that are inherent in the sub-narratives. With a conference on body and mind as the focal point, Byatt extends earlier issues that run through the quartet, that is, finding a balance between domestic and intellectual identities. While outlining the social and cultural atmosphere of the period, Byatt uncovers those conventions that especially determine the fate of women. In doing so, Byatt makes use of ekphrasis that could be evaluated within a context that

the digital and technological modern age makes its presence felt and enables a new visual medium like television to discuss the dichotomies of thinking minds and feeling bodies concerning women.

In the first two novels, Byatt gave examples of ekphrasis through the depictions of the rooms in which the characters were living. She revisits this technique in giving insight into Gerard Wijnnobel's study room which hosts Rembrandt etchings and Mondrians:

> Some of the Rembrandts had come with him from Holland, and other he had bought after the war…[..] His favourite, perhaps, was 'Student at the table by candlelight' with a pit of darkness and a bright small flame. He had Rembrandt's only etched still life, a conical shell, *Conus marmorens*, it spiral closest to the onlooker's eye, its surface pattered like a dark net thrown over bone. He also had a copy of a work known as 'Faust in his study'. The old man in his cap looked through gloom at a lit window where a mystic had pointed. It pointed at a floating apparition of three concentric circles, scattering brightness. The inmost one was crossed with Christian INRI in its segment. On the outer ones was written:

+ADAM + TE + DAGERAM + AMRTET + ALGAR + ALGASTNA++[11]

> No one had ever explained this writing. Wijnnobel's cabbalist grandfather had tried and been baffled, like the rest. He himself had an idea about it, from time to time, but they never worked. (27-28)

The quotation refers to three specific Rembrandt etchings in Wijnnobel's study room that could be interpreted in such a way that it is possible to find traces of the central events that help to shape the key ideas in the novel built around a religious community and a scientific conference.

[11] INRI was appropriate as a Socinian substitution for the Holy Ghost. The four Gospels of the New Testament mention INRI as the symbol hung on Christ's cross by order of Pontius Pilate to announce the crime for which he was condemned. Taken from the Latin "Jesus Nazarenus Rex Judaeorum," or "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," the monogram or entire phrase were frequently included in paintings or prints as part of the iconography of the Crucifixion. As a reminder of Christ's Passion, INRI also alluded to the Atonement, or humankind's reconciliation with God through Christ's sacrifice. (McHenry 11)

Fig. 67 Rembrandt, *Student at a Table* by Candlelight, 1642, Rhode Island School of Design Museum

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) is another important Dutch painter that Byatt turns to in the quartet. Apart from etchings, the artist is known for his portraits and scenes from the Bible and the extensive use of light and shadow in his works. Wijnnobel is the Vice-Chancellor of the University and he is planning a conference. The central figure in *Student at a Table by Candlelight* and his uneasy, musing mood corresponds to Wijnnobel's state of mind. As well as the planning and execution of that conference, his distressed marriage might also be represented in that brooding man Rembrandt portrayed in the 17th century. However, what the other two etchings refer to might be viewed in a broader sense as relating to two important incidents in the novel. Apart from Frederica, the last volume is preoccupied with certain communities that provide polyvocal narratives. While the university and the conference represent academics, scientists and philosophers, the religious community showcases dangerous, fanatical inclinations.

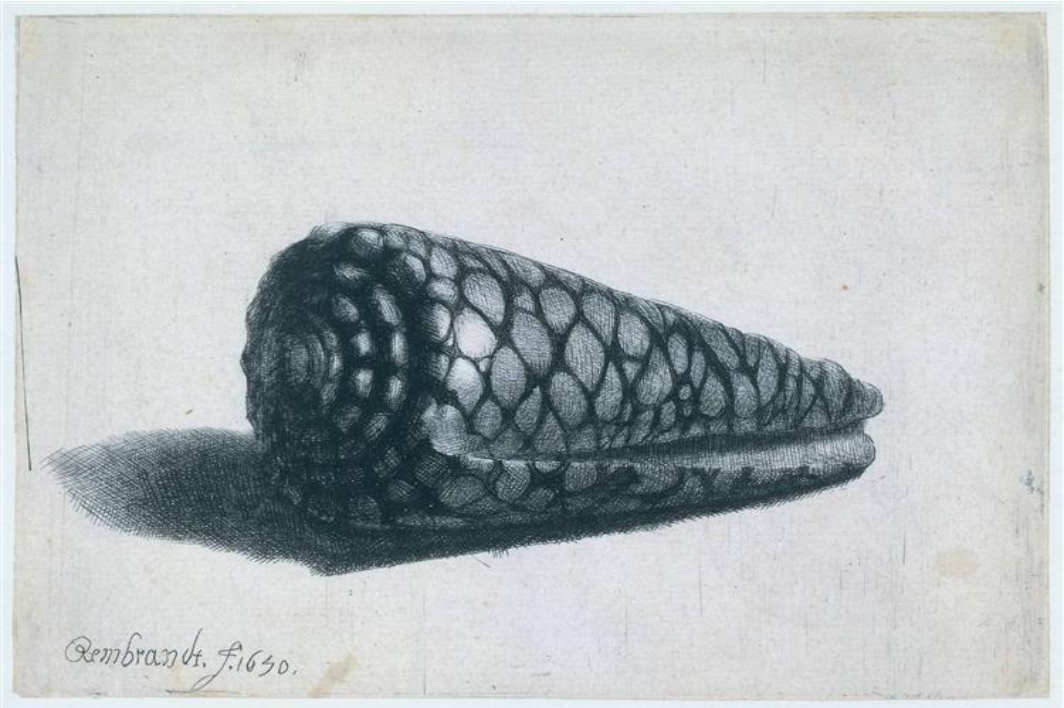


Fig. 68 Rembrandt, *The Shell (Conus marmoreus)*, 1650, Private Collection

The etching of a shell brings to mind Luk Lysgaard Peacock who is studying snail populations and the genetics of life. Byatt's interest in scientific research on life might have resulted from a fondness for snail shells as, according to Karin Leonhard's observations, interest in collecting shells became a popular pastime in the 17th century and then it formed the basis for the science of conchology (179). She reveals that the colored speckles, lines and structures on seashells resembled the markings on tigers and leopards, and the iridescence of mother of pearl, whose mutable colours were akin to those of peacock feathers and butterfly wings, were the features that were found painterly and gave rise to shell still life painting (180). Rembrandt is one of those figures who responded to that curiosity with his etching which is drawn from a mirror image. Byatt shares a similar interest, with one of the four beginnings of *Babel Tower* being snail shells being hammered by a thrush, or that *Babbletower* excerpts were set apart from the main narrative with snail shell drawings marking their beginnings and endings. For Byatt, the whole idea of the study of the snails was first introduced by relating an ancient name for snails which is *helix* to the spiral form of the snail and the

spiral of the DNA (Pereira 500). Especially after Darwin's theories on the origins of life, defining humans in relation to religious, Biblical narratives has been replaced with scientific ideas. In her work "Ancestors" published as an essay in *On Histories and Stories,* Byatt supports this idea saying, "Human lives used to be thought out in terms of the Biblical narrative. Related narratives were made of the significance of lives – the allegory of Everyman, of *Pilgrim's Progress*, the saints' lives and Confessions against which the Bildungsroman formed itself in turn" (65). Byatt furthers her claim saying, "Darwin's patient experiments on adaptations, selection, inheritance, created a very different narrative of human origins" (65).

Byatt's curiosity about human origins develops a scientific scope and many characters who deal with such matters are vocalized dynamically in the last volume. Alfer and Campos comment that Wijnnobel enjoys "speculating about the possible links between genetically inherited neurological structures and the human capacity for language" (73), which is based on the idea that the genealogy of snails can be read on their shells. They also put emphasis on some popular science writers of the 1970s who generated controversy by suggesting that human behavior and culture might be determined by genetic factors. It is possible to relate this to the focal point of the 'Body and Mind' conference, which is to explore whether identity is constructed or determined. According to Lena Steveker, Byatt's novels suggest that female life in post war middle class England was determined by a gender difference which excluded married women, especially mothers, from an intellectually satisfying 'life of the mind' (67). In a sense the novel problematizes the dichotomy of associating body with women and mind with men as a social norm that patriarchy constructs. While outlining the social and cultural atmosphere of the period, Byatt has been uncovering the conventions that especially determine the fate of women since the first novel. Frederica's evolution from a young, self-centered girl reached a crucial turning point in *Babel Tower* in

leaving her husband, getting a divorce and starting a new life. In *A Whistling Woman*, Frederica seems to have completed her progress to a strong, self-sustained, working mother. Starting with *A Virgin in the Garden*, Byatt designates female autonomy addressing similar debates and dichotomies and with an inclusion of an academic conference, she creates the opportunity of evaluating that concern in a professional circle. Byatt's choice of a shell drawing is not random as the scientific debates on human life being fated or constructed could be conveyed through a snail shell image which is closely linked with scientific researches on life. The discussion is also projected into the focal point of the novel concerning women within the context of body and mind which is an influential factor in the process of the formation of identity.

Fig. 69 Rembrandt, *Faust in his Study*, 1652, The Uffizi Gallery, Florence

The scientific discourse is countered by a religious narrative hinted at in the Faust etching. The central figure is a man whose gaze is directed to a circle with letters inscribed on it, in a study room furnished with books, papers and a table just like in Wijnnobel's study. There have been many attempts to decipher the etching, Rembrandt's motivation in depicting such a scene and what the inscribed letters might mean. But Deni McIntosh McHenry's "Rembrandt's Faust in His Study Reconsidered: A Record of Jewish Patronage and Mysticism in Mid-Seventeenth Century Amsterdam" might be the most benignant and elucidatory work as apart from the most accepted interpretations built around either magic and alchemy or *Dr Faustus*, McHenry proposes a more convincing theory which is about the doctrines of a Dutch immigrant religious sect founded by Faustus Socinus in Holland. McHenry highlights the tie between Jewish Kabbalah inscriptures and the Jews of Amsterdam which at the time might have inspired Rembrandt as the circular inscription contains names of God and angels in Kabbalah. Apart from the conference that occupies a great place in the novel, *A Whistling Woman* also deals with a religious community gathered away from London life, academics or science, under the leadership of Joshua Ramsden. The fate of that cult is disastrous which is predicted by Daniel, who talks about Joshua as follows: "He's a religious man. He loves the Light. He wants to love the God. He is sick – physical, he has fits – he knows extremes. He's –…" (256) completing his sentence with the word 'dangerous'. Joshua's quest for light and his ultimate fall recalls Dr Faustus, whose dangerous quest for power and knowledge also brings about a dramatic downfall. As well as a portrait that gives an insight into Wijnnobel, Byatt also provides illustrations that might refer to other important incidents concerning the general scope of the novel. Byatt might be suggesting that "our literary narratives are shaped by our belief narratives and that, in the contemporary age, these belief narratives are likely to be supplied by science and religion" (Alfer and Campos 83). Viewed from this perspective,

science and religion are the key elements highlighted in the shell and in the Faust etchings; the representative figures Byatt portrays are Luk and Joshua, whose stories also mark a journey of identity constructed in different discourses. While the etchings give glimpses of those alternative storylines, the epiphany moments forming identity will be provided with ekphrastic readings of certain paintings Byatt directly refers to.

Winnjobel's room also hosts Mondrians which might signify another community Byatt builds a narrative around, that is the Anti-university act. Although Byatt does not refer to a specific work, she opts to elaborate on the general principals of his art:

> Mondrian believed that everything – the sum of things – could be represented by these three colours, with black, white, and grey, within the intersections of verticals and horizontals. The colours were signs, denoting all the colour in the world, symbolizing everything, purple, gold, indigo, flame, blood, earth, ultramarine, even green which Mondrian could not bear to look at. The straight lines represented the refinement of spiritual vision. They were the intersections of the infinite flat horizon, and the infinite vertical, travelling away from earth into the source of light. They avoided the tragic capriciousness of the dreadfully particular curves of flesh, or even of the changing moon. The vertical line was taut, and was the tension in all things. The horizontal line was weight and gravity. The figure of the Cross was the meeting of vertical and horizontal, an intrinsic form of the spirit. (28)

As made clear in the quotation, Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) is best known for reducing shapes and colors to their simplest forms like lines, rectangles and squares and everything could be represented in colors like red, blue, yellow with black, white and grey. Like other modernists, Mondrian also moves beyond naturalistic depiction and focuses on the ability to express ideas abstractly which according to him would provide a true picture of reality. Wijnnobel thinks of Mondrian's art as "mad in its man-made purity" (28). As for picking primary colors, "like the Rembrandts, it represented his country in his own mind" (28). Byatt states that Mondrian had also lived in Hampstead

between 1938 and 1939 “painting severe black and white grids with discrete peripheral rectangles of red, yellow and blue” (28). Because he lived amongst the English for a while, and knew they were adversaries of the extremes, he might have chosen such colors and plainness that would remind him of his country. Wijnnobel having such works by Mondrian, and Byatt’s emphasis on the possibility that Mondrian might have been influenced by his experiences of war, could be linked with the Anti-university and their extreme acts that reach a climax at the conference.

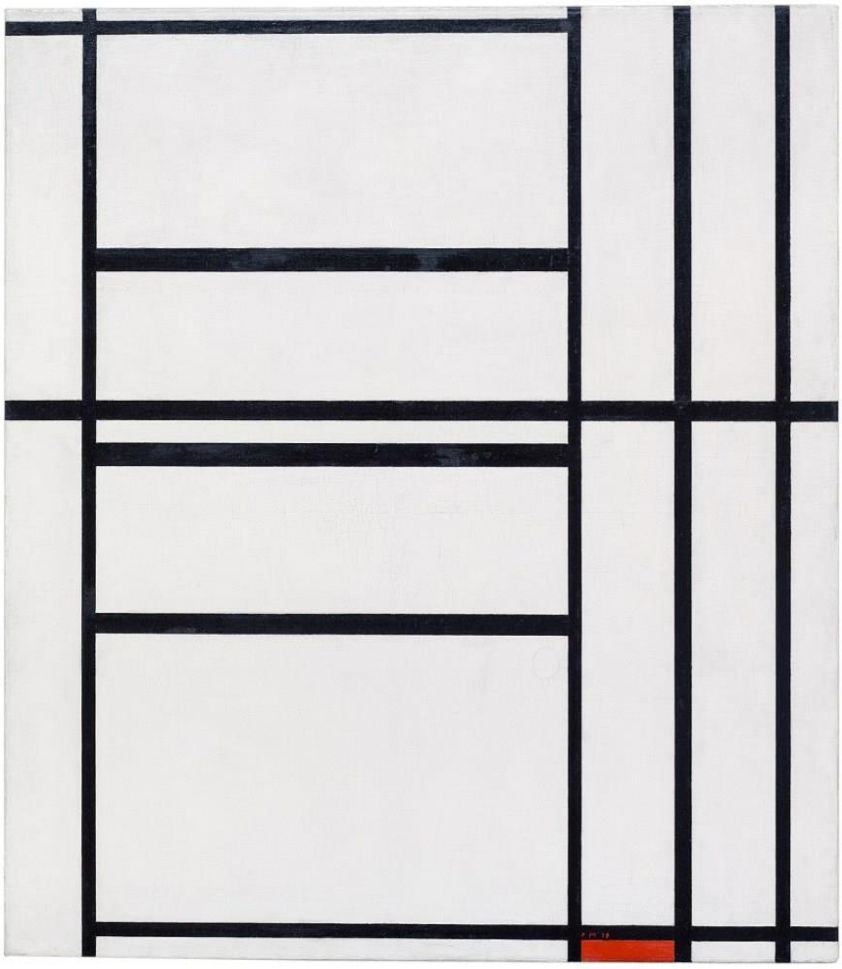


Fig. 70 Piet Mondrian, *Composition No. 1 with Grey and Red 1938 / Composition with Red* 1939, Guggenheim Museum, Venice

Mondrian lived in London for two years during wartime and the letters he exchanged with his friends Naum Gabo, Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson reveal his perspective on the war, his commitment to his work, his plans for writing an article

entitled “Art shows the Evil of Totalitarian Tendencies” and his experiences during the London Blitz, provided by Sophie Bowness in her work “Mondrian in London: Letters to Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth” (785). Although it may not necessarily be a war, the Anti-University act at the conference and the destruction they cause mirrors a war scene. The marchers burst into the auditorium, throwing eggs, fruit, stones and books. Small fires and battles soon break out across the campus and create such a scene that Byatt, according to Hicks, renders an unusual form of ekphrasis in the quartet which is notional ekphrasis (90). The narrator describes the scene as: “There were very small fires in the hall – slowly burning neat heaps of books, which Frederica recognized. Skoob. An art-form” (371). Notional ekphrasis had been explained in the first chapter as referring to the representation being based on a non-existent work of art. One might question how an act of book burning could be viewed as an art form. In the sixties, a man called John Latham became popular with his Skoob Towers, referring to the piles of books that he set fire to. Latham questioned traditional forms of art and structures in unusual ways as “this so-called art form is associated with destruction rather than creativity” (Hicks 91). In accordance with the changing atmosphere of the time period, that allows for alternative renderings of art despite being highly controversial, Byatt refers to a very recent trend in art and even likens the scene to it. As a result of such mass action, great damage is done to the university, ancient embroideries, carvings and art treasures, like the painting of the *Death of Hyacinth* falling from the ceiling or bed-curtains in the Elizabethan bedrooms burned. Frederica still occupies a central place in the novel but those three communes that are given insight through ekphrastic readings of some visual images are equally important as dichotomies concerning humans find form in those narratives.

The summer of 1968 also brought student marches and banners which led Frederica to give up teaching. The new trend among the students obviously demands

release from the oppression of imposed ideas, and for them the past is to be abolished. Byatt had already hinted at such changes in *Babel Tower,* with students who wanted to destroy Vermeers and Rembrandts. It appears now in some degree they have achieved that as they put Alan Melville's Vermeer slides in a bath of acid. In that atmosphere, Edmund Wilkie is the one who opens a new career door for Frederica. He asks Frederica to make a show for the BBC named *Through the Looking Glass* with guests discussing everything from science, politics to art.

Television was already a huge change for the viewer of that period as it revealed images in motion. Wilkie seems to be keeping up with the age with the words "we need images made of language" (48). However, for Frederica, who is no longer able to teach her novels and written texts, they are entering an age "when language becomes subordinate to images" (48). Evaluating television in an ekphrastic context might be disputable yet the fact that it brings images before the eyes vividly, visually and auditorily, arousing intellectual senses at the same time, might bring it closer to that ancient tradition. According to Wilkie, television is going to change everyone's consciousness, "the politics of the future would be conducted in these small boxes" (47), he says "rhetoric would go, must go and was going" (47).

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, ekphrasis used to be a rhetorical device primarily aiming for a vivid description evoking the visual for the reader. So the use of images even makes the effect of the text 'sublime' transcending a mere depiction. Hence, those ancient readings coincide with changing trends of visuals and images that also pertain to imagination and mind. Modern age allows and enhances new experiences and what Byatt does in the last volume corresponds to that. With technological developments and on entering a new age of digitals, ekphrasis could also be recontextualized; it is possible to see reflections of that in Byatt's writing, given the fact

that the novel ends in 1970, which marks the beginning of the digital age, and that Byatt published the book in 2002. For Johanna Hartmann, this has resulted in consequences of various dimensions that pertain to literary production, distribution and consumption as the changed forms of human experience impact the way literature manifests itself in changed aesthetics and new forms of literary work (130). As ekphrasis operates between image and word, the changed forms of experience affect the art forms and pave the way for different mediums of ekphrasis like the television screen, which is able to combine sound, image, voice and text at the same time. Hartmann also notes that the effects of the new age suggest a comparison with what Walter Benjamin described in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". Benjamin analyses social, cultural, and technological changes over the first decades of the 20th century and makes an inference that reproduction leads to the loss of 'aura' as the work of art lacks a unique presence in time and space. Television would be another extension of reproduction without aura, yet with its framed form, and its visual and interactive function, it brings a different dimension to ekphrasis in the modern age. Emily Bilman says that modern ekphrasis combines verbal and pictorial elements through imagery and the painting's *energeia* is created by the poet's images and his personal projections in poems. She quotes from Erwin Panowsky who recognizes that works of art have a communicative and functional purpose and stresses the importance of the viewer's freedom of perception in appraising a poem or a painting (8). In line with these views, what Byatt does with *A Whistling Woman* is beyond combining images with verbal projections. In keeping with the modern age, Byatt manifests new forms that highlight the communicative function.

When it comes to how Frederica utilizes that interactive and highly functional aspect of television, Mara Cambiaghi in her work "The Gendered Memories of Frederica Potter: A.S. Byatt's A Whistling Woman" says that:

> While new trends in science, education, television, visual culture and counter-culture of the Sixties affect life in England during the decade, television becomes the most prominent medium for addressing public argument and discussion. The novel does indeed show this gradual transition towards visual culture, when women's issues first enter television, reflecting changes in cultural values and society. (227)

That gradual transition towards visual culture is best represented with Frederica's show and the topics she debates with her guests accordingly address matters of particular importance to women. In one of the episodes of her show, Frederica's discussion topic is creativity. Frederica's guests are Hoder Pinsky who is already invited to Wijnnobel's conference, and Elvet Gander, a psychoanalyst the readers would remember from the *Babbletower* trial in *Babel Tower,* and whose letters written to Kieran Quarral provide another narrative giving insight into the events of the book. A copy object of a Picasso ceramic makes all three laugh, as the narrator describes:

> The clay pot was curved and full-bellied, standing on hen's claws, with a cockscomb over its delicate beaked spout, and the pointed breasts and pleated navel of a human woman. Its handle was a curved tail. It was made in white earthenware, dabbed with smoke and black paint; it had wicked staring eyes, and pretty nipples, and a flurry of wing-opinions. (156)

Fig. 71 Pablo Picasso, *Vase Deux Anses Hautes (Vase with two high handles)*, 1953

For Frederica, "it was a solid, tangible metaphor. Hen-in-woman. Woman-in-hen" and likewise Pinsky speaks of it as "cock-hen-woman-vase" (157). Picasso's works of ceramics and pottery came towards the end of his career, after visiting a pottery exhibition in the South of France. Although he started with simple objects like flats or bowls, in time he created pieces like the vase, mixing human figures with animals whose anatomical parts formed the handle. Most of those human faces that he blends with animal forms are women. Marriage, domesticity and motherhood has been questioned by Byatt since the first novel through Stephanie and Frederica going through the same crisis. This time, Byatt provides a three-dimensional visual that the characters are discussing and an ekphrastic depiction that draws an analogy between a woman and a hen, recalling birth and productivity. Picasso's ceramic might be alluding to Frederica and also Jacqueline, who both go through pregnancies in the novel, although the latter ends with a miscarriage. Jacqueline Winwar's story complements Frederica's as her quest for identity bears similar dilemmas and dichotomies, although her desire to devote

herself to work, pregnancy and settling down in a conventional marriage also haunt her. Stephanie was the first character going through the same crisis and fear that marriage and having children would diminish her intellectual capacity. On the other hand, in the divorce trial, Frederica had encountered a reverse situation as her maternal instincts and care had been questioned because of being a highly educated, intellectual woman. By marrying Nigel and having a child, Frederica seems to have answered what the body wants like sex or maternity. But she soon notices how unhappy and discontented that makes her feel and, in a sense, *Babel Tower* staged her attempt to avoid a similar fate to her sister. Actually, a body-mind dichotomy had been alluded to in *Babel Tower*, as Frederica's escape had come after realizing that her intellectual capacities did not fit the bodily pleasure she got in marriage. For Uhsadel, Frederica's life is determined by attempts to reconcile body and mind, to achieve emotional and intellectual fulfillment (94). Frederica's proclamation of "I want to think" (138) is a testimony to that need of working and having intellectual activity which pervade the quartet and reach a climax in *A Whistling Woman* as Frederica has a new voice which is enabled by television, a modern device of visual culture.

The most evident search for identity with a religious perspective is introduced with a new character, Joshua Ramsden who has a tragic past, having witnessed the murder of his mother and sister by his father, who was subsequently executed. Joshua remembers his father sending him postcards, one of which had a biblical reference from the book of Genesis 22, 6, 7 and 8. Those are some of the accounts of Abraham's story:

> *And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and took the fire in his hand, and a knife: they went both of them together. And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here I am, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb*

> *for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. (100)*

Joshua, known as Joshua Lamb, inevitably questions the possibility of a sacrifice that his father had to offer in order to save him as Abraham had saved Isaac. After the Holocaust, Joshua is raised in a village community by people who teach him Latin, the love of God, and Old Testament stories, one of which is Noah and the Deluge. "Joshua was praised for imagination, when he painted his ark on a stormy night in inky water, with a lantern at the prow and a silver of the moon in the sky" (102). They also draw angels with huge wings; Miss Manson brings pictures of angels by Van Eyck, Giotto and Fra Angelico when it comes to painting "the boy with the wood on his back, the man with the knife, the angel, the ram caught in a thicket by his horns" (103). Joshua cannot help displaying his contempt for illustrating Abraham's story. In the biblical story, God wants to test Abraham's faith and obedience and asks him to sacrifice his son. Although Abraham sets out to sacrifice Isaac, he is stopped by an angel and Rembrandt depicts that exact moment in his work. When Joshua sees that picture, the narrative voice renders a fully ekphrastic depiction as the image is brought immediately before his eyes:

> He knew that it was Rembrandt's version of the Sacrifice of Isaac. The angel leans out of black thunderclouds. Its right hand grasps Abraham's strong wrist. The curved knife, sharpened horribly clean, hangs forever in free fall across the landscape. Abraham's bearded face, intent on what he has set out to do, startled in his nerves by the apparition, is turned up to the angel, away from the boy. The boy naked except for a loincloth, lies back on the firewood. He has no face, Abraham's left hand, brown skin on white, is clamped like a sucker, over the whole upper head of the boy. The head is forced back, smothered, so that the man cannot see the boy's face and the boy cannot see the knife. What can be seen is the stretched white throat. Murder and pity. (105)

Fig. 72 Rembrandt, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1635, Hermitage, St Petersburg

Byatt gives a long and detailed ekprastic description of the painting, emphasizing the emotional effect it leaves on Joshua, who is staring at the painting with an overwhelming and appalling pity. He himself links his father's postcard with the Genesis reference to the Rembrandt painting and his ultimate survival. The painting mirrors what Joshua's fate could have been yet he becomes the ram that his father symbolically offers instead of a sacrifice, which explains his last name 'Ramsden'.

Joshua also remembers when his aunt used to take him to morning church prayers and, in particular, the framed reproduction of Van Eyck's *Adoration of the Lamb from Ghent* over the altar.

> The Ram or Lamb stood, benign but judicial, on a scarlet table, its head emitting effulgent gold in rays. Lovely angels knelt around it. From a neat hole in its breast a spout of blood poured itself neatly and perpetually into a gold cup, a crimson pool rimmed with bright yellow sparkings. The sight of the round hole in the fleece and flesh made the boy feel nauseous. It was, the man believed, round about this time that he had started to see the blood running down surfaces in gouts, in clotting rivulets, in fast moving sheets. Over the white-washed walls of the church, over the glass in the frame covering the Mystic Lamb. (113)

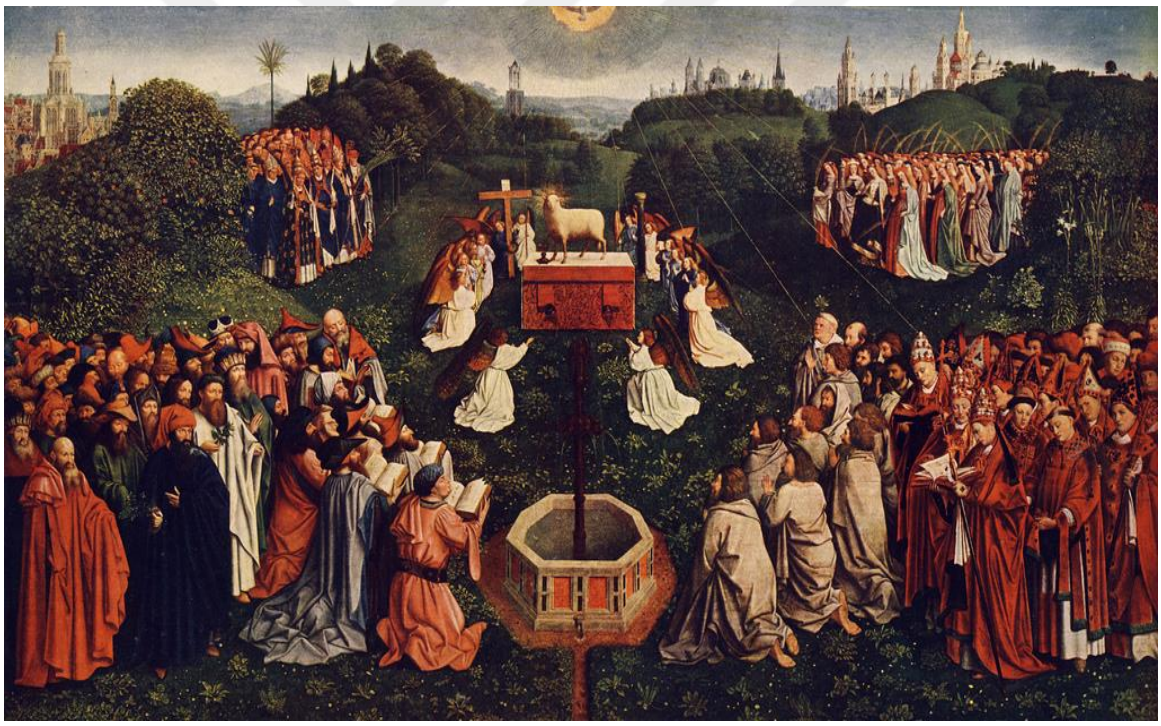
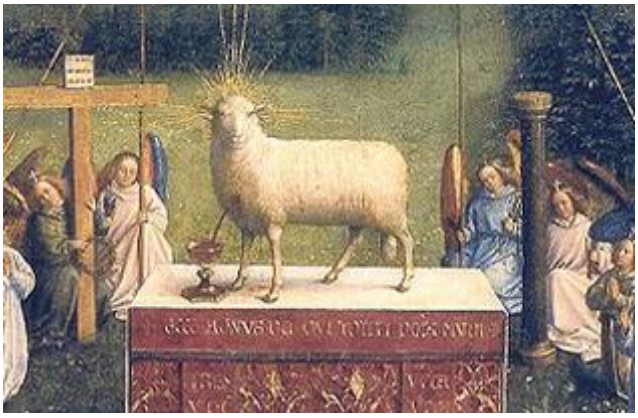


Fig. 73 Jan and Hubert Van Eyck, *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb,* 1432, Saint Bavo Cathedral, Ghent

The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, also known as the *Ghent Altarpiece,* is attributed to two brothers who were early Flemish painters. Byatt's ekphrastic description and its impact on Joshua refer to only one section of the work which consists of twelve panels.

The Lamb most often represents Jesus in Christianity and in the picture it could be an allusion to Jesus' sacrifice for mankind.



It is at this time that Joshua meets religion, reading the book of Joshua in the Old Testament and writing holy books.

> He was asked to believe that God had become the impotent hanging man on the dark tree, the ghostly friend had breathed himself into flesh and blood and had become a burnt offering, a sacrificial Lamb, the bloody food not of the ghostly enemy but of the Lord of Hosts, the avenger of blood, who, sated with this flesh, would stop stoning and burning and burying alive. (115)

This explains his visions of blood, especially when he has epileptic fits. Hence, a different version of body and mind conflict is represented by Joshua as he represses his memories as a means of overcoming the crisis deriving from his tragic past but on the other hand tries to control his body, which might explain his avoidance of flesh, sex or sleep. Yet the epileptic fits might symbolize his failure in reconciliation or finding harmony. He starts reading St Augustine, who was a Manichee, his concept of nature and evil being that God is infinitely good and powerful but human desire lets dark forces in (123). So, Joshua acquires a new concept of the Christian faith, Manichaeism, and starts to eat and sleep less, abstains from sex and kills nothing. Byatt builds a narrative around the religious cult of which he becomes the spiritual leader at Dun Vale

Hall and some of the familiar characters being drawn into it. Alfer and Campos remark that "Manichaeism's story of an epic battle between darkness and light mirrors Ramsden's troubled sense of the reality and power of evil in the world, and it appeals to his followers, who crave a heightened spiritual intensity in their lives" (80). Accordingly, Ramsden is not just heading for his own fall but also taking with him some of his followers, purged in the fire at the end of the novel.

Besides Frederica and Joshua, another character going through a conflict is Luk Lysgaard Peacock. As Frederica labors to reconcile body and mind dichotomy, Luk achieves it for religion and science. Unlike Joshua's story, Byatt might be opening ways to discuss anachronism through him. As a child, Luk was a devout Christian; however, as an adolescent his belief grew weaker and thinner upon the happening of a particular incident.

> One day, walking amongst the trees in a wood, in sunlight, he had an intense flash of vision, which because of his education he compared to the Pauline flash on the road to Damascus. Except that what he saw – what was revealed by the brilliance of the ordinary light – was that the stories they had told him were stories and were not true. And when he saw that, suddenly everything was differently real, shining with clarity, which particularity, and with a mystery which was to be a calling. He saw flies and worms, leaves and roots transfigured because they were not transfigured, they were what they were. He thought of his religious faith as a horny lens over his eyes which were now washed clean. (187-188)

That moment of enlightenment for Luk is redolent of St Paul and his conversion as referred to in the quote. St Paul's conversion from a persecutor to an apostle of Jesus has been most famously illustrated in Caravaggio's *Conversion of St. Paul* and *Conversion on the Way to Damascus* although there are some other notable painters like

Albrecht Dürer, William Blake and Pieter Brueghel the Elder who depicted similar scenes.

Fig. 74 Caravaggio*, The Conversion of St. Paul*, 1600, Odescalchi Balbi Collection, Rome

Fig. 75 Caravaggio, *Conversion on the Way to Damascus*, 1601, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome

Paul is known to be on his journey to Damascus in order to arrest followers of Christianity. However, his conversion happens on the way and becomes a miracle story across the centuries, affecting art and literature as stated in the following words:

> Chapter 9 of the Acts of the Apostles relates how Saul was simultaneously thrust into darkness and granted spiritual insight: "as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? . . . And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me do? . . . And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. (quoted in Meyers 587)

Saul's conversion finds the best verbal equivalent in the ekphrastic poem "In Santa Maria del Popolo" written by Thom Gunn, who was so impressed by Caravaggio's painting. Through an interpretation of the painting iconographically, it is possible to imagine what Gunn went through upon seeing it in Santa Maria and what the readers bring before their minds' eye upon reading it, which is a testimony to the multi layered intellectual correspondences of ekphrasis. The way Byatt narrates Luk's story, his moment of religious ecstasy, sounds quite similar. Although what Luk goes through is the exact opposite experience, turning away from religion, he still feels the same epiphany, gains new perspective and state of mind on life. At the conference, Luk is among the speakers providing perspective on human structures being fated or designed by society. Luk argues in his paper that "in ultimate biological terms the losers are redundant males, despite the fact that in human society women have been compressed by males" (Campbell 250). At the very end of the novel, Frederica finds herself pregnant by Luk and what should not go unmentioned is the fact that of all the men Frederica has been with, Luk is the one who respects her most as a woman. Frederica is so impressed by his paper that she begins thinking that the world is bigger and there are

new metaphors worth searching for. That also marks an important decision in her life as she decides to continue her career in television instead of becoming a writer and sets out on a journey to famous museums in Holland.

Towards the end of the novel, Alexander Wedderburn who was a major character in *Still Life,* stages Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale,* which brings many of the characters together paying a homage to the subject matter of the first volume *The Virgin in the Garden*. The role of Perdita he assigns to Mary, Stephanie and Daniel's daughter. Interestingly, in accordance with the story's rebirth and resurrection theme, watching Mary on the stage also becomes a way of resurrecting Stephanie for the whole family. The novel ends with Frederica, Alexander and Wilkie's trip to Holland to film some paintings. They visit the Van Gogh Museum, film his famous *Reaper* "blue in the gold field of corn ready for cutting" (417) that had been discussed with *Sower* in *Still Life*. They then film Vermeer's *View of Delft* in The Hague which "Frederica knew from reproductions, and from Proust's descriptions of the death of Bergotte in front of it, but had never seen" (417). With regard to Proust's admiration for *View of Delft* which plays a considerable role in *Remembrance of Things Past*, Jeffrey Meyers writes that "on 18 October 1902 Proust arrived at The Hague, saw Vermeer's *View of Delft* at the Mauritshuis Museum and recognized it for the most beautiful painting in the world" (112). In her book *Still Life in the Fiction of A.S. Byatt,* Hicks claims that Byatt's admiration for *View of Delft* is a homage to Proust and she views the painting through Proust's vision or lens. Hicks even devotes a section named "Proustian Vision" to both writers with a focus on their common grounds. According to her, Byatt and Proust share an aesthetic that is heavily reliant on visual representation which could be a painting, an image, an engraving or a photograph" (41). While Proust's elaboration on the work of art presents one ekphrastic moment that encouraged Byatt, her meditation on it presents a new interpretation that should be evaluated in the context of the topic novel. In the

scene that is mentioned above, Hicks says that Proust presents the view that the act of reading should be like experiencing a work of art for the reader (43). The technique Vermeer used for his works, *View of Delft* in particular, also provides a distinctive experience for the viewer. Wilkie is excited by this *camera obscura* which is "a mirror-lens in a dark space, so that the drops of water painted on the painted side of the painted boats appeared as perfect spheres, which from that distance they could not have been" (417).

Camera obscuras were widely acclaimed in the 17th century for the naturalistic landscape effects that they created. Their effectiveness comes from the fact that they present a living image, where movements of clouds, water and birds are visible; the apparent realism, however, is also derived from the vividness of the image. Color accents and contrasts of light and dark are intensified and apparently exaggerated through the use of a camera obscura, thus giving an added intensity to the image (Wheelcock and Kaldenbach 20). That effect and intensity even arouses a feeling of looking at a photograph rather than a painting. Frederica had first been introduced to the painting through Alan's slides of photographs. Now she finds herself looking at the real work. What Frederica goes through is a moment of ekphrasis as while sitting in front of the *View of Delft*, she falls asleep for a while. When she wakes up, for a moment she cannot grasp where she is, even feeling as though she was in it. While giving a historical and contextual account of ekphrasis since ancient times, its capacity in enabling the reader or viewer to feel like a participant in the visual experience has been emphasized. Remembering Valentine Cunningham's vision that put forth the 'the effect of the real', how the gazed upon object was made the knowable, the touchable through ekphrasis is in a sense reinforced in that scene. It also marks a turning point for Frederica as, on their way to Mauritshuis, they come across Agatha, Saskia and Gerard Wijnnobel only to discover Wijnnobel's paternity Agatha had been keeping a secret all

those years. Having the dilemma of telling about her pregnancy, Frederica decides to go after Luk and tell him the truth with Leo's encouragement. The novel ends with Luk, Frederica and Leo sitting together and thinking what to do without having the slightest idea.

With *A Whistling Woman*, Byatt completes her quartet that spans a period of almost two decades, from 1953 to 1970. With a wide range of characters and several sub-plots, Byatt displays a narration that is rich in visual allusions and intertextual references. Those visual materials offer connections with social, religious, cultural, scientific contexts and Byatt once again transfers what is in the realm of the painting into a verbal equivalent or vice versa. The visual images gain such a prominence that they actually embody a functional role of highlighting certain issues that Byatt wants to address in a more impressive way. With body and mind as the key of the last novel, Byatt builds narratives around certain characters or groups of people addressing this conflict and in doing so ekphrastic images that are not just paintings, but different visual materials provide illuminative and binding interpretations and lay foundations for a transition to visual culture. Frederica's journey of forming an identity evolved on many levels and with *A Whistling Woman*, it is accompanied by alternative storylines in which certain characters experience a similar journey of identity.

CONCLUSION

Ekphrasis is an active exchange and encounter between the viewer and the object. Once Byatt's characters engage with paintings, pictures or art works, their ekphrastic narration coincides with the ekphrasis of the readers who bring those images before their eyes, enquire of Byatt's visual language and find the right connections to knit the net of narrativity. Byatt's fondness of visual arts could be interpreted as having various functions in each book, but the common ground that these novels share is the way in which ekphrasis serves as a medium to explore the verbal and visual representations that place women in relation to their social worlds and display female identity in progress through Frederica in particular by means of an aesthetic combination of word and image.

In *The Frederica Quartet*, Byatt voices her discontentment with the social roles society imposes on women, and she uses literature as an influential means of challenging these roles. Yet what differentiates her is the fact that instead of a mere narration and proffering of words, she gives space to depictions of many visuals, images, paintings and works of art. Rather than interpreting those purely aesthetic tools for enriching the narration with painterly language or even factors of disrupting the overall flow, an ekphrastic look and analysis facilitates seeing the value of those key moments making contributions to what actually matters for Byatt. A closer reading and examination reveal that those visual representations are consciously chosen, embody certain meanings and all by themselves function as tangible, concrete forms of what the characters and their experiences stand for constructing the plot and empowering the rhythm of the narration. In that context, Byatt's wide knowledge of the history of art, artists, and movements do not just remain a personal interest and fondness, but turns into a unique, distinctive device for narration.

Stretching back to antiquity, ekphrasis has been long debated by scholars. The definition of ekphrasis is wide and versatile and its function and power enable the reading of images or visualizing verbal descriptions. That mutual relationship nourishes creative writing and the operation between word and image generates potentiality for narrativity as the writer intersperses painters and paintings into the story. As the visual arts are important motifs in weaving the plot, the first chapter of this thesis gives a mainly historical account of ekphrasis, from ancient times until the 20th century. The chapter examines definitions, history, theoretical framework, important examples and multiple ways of seeing ekphrasis under different subheadings. The theory of ekphrasis begins with Ceos' "painting is mute poetry and poetry is speaking picture" and Horace's famous dictum "ut pictura poesis" (as is painting so is poetry) from *Ars Poetica.* Poetry and painting were considered as 'sister arts' until Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's landmark work *Laocoön; or The Limits of Poetry and Painting,* which claimed that the two arts exist on different levels, painting in space and poetry in time.

There are so many writers, critics and scholars who have pondered on ekphrasis and provided a definition of the term. James Heffernan's "verbal representation of a visual representation" proposes one of the most commonly used expressions and he discusses the battle between word and image in his treatment of ekphrasis. While Murray Krieger focuses on the aesthetic articulation of a still moment of art, some scholars like Hagstrum and Bosveld draw attention to the quality of giving voice to the mute object, making pictures speak. Andrew Becker moves from simply giving voice to an object to descriptions that intend to bring person, place or picture before the mind's eye and attests that ekphrasis invites us to consider responses to visual representation, then also, by analogy, to consider our response to literary representation. Apart from the modern definitions, Ruth Webb makes a direct reference to ancient studies of rhetoric by bringing up "a speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes" which is

a definition belonging to school text known as *Progymnasmata* that was taught to students in Greek schools. Young readers are encouraged not to approach texts as distanced artefacts with a purely critical eye, but engage with them imaginatively, to think themselves in the scenes and feel as if they were present. The effects of vivid language on the audience can also be found in Quintilian's discussions of *energeia* and his *Institutio Oratoria*. Quintilian's distinction between a plain statement of facts, narration, and a narration with *energeia* (the capacity to visualize a scene) corresponds to ekphrasis. Hollander differentiates between notional ekphrasis, a poet's rendering of a fictional object and actual ekphrasis, figuring an object that exists and is available to the eye. The definitions demonstrate that rather than plain statements of facts, a vivid account could capture the audience's attention thus becoming more memorable, just like a painting. Although the plain statement reaches only the ears, the vivid version, the equivalent of ekphrasis displays the subject to the eyes of the mind as well, hence an interaction between the two might achieve a better meaning.

As art is very central to ekphrasis, it gives rise to debates of mimesis, as early examples of ekphrasis have mimetic inclination in bringing before the mind's eye through *energeia*. Given that poetry and painting use different mediums of representation, the paragonal relationship between word and image affects the ekphrastic way of thinking as giving prominence to visual arts or having a poetic voice is met with different opinions. Among them, Lessing's theory of visual arts existing in space and verbal arts in time stands out as some notable critics expand on that theory. While Mitchell interprets it as confronting the other or treating the silent, fixed object as female as opposed to the active male looker, Spinozzi points out the relocation of one medium into another, generating another existence and procreating new images. The power of ekphrasis in making believe, the illusionary effect of feeling in it is countered by the concept of artistic entrapment as the images are frozen or confined in a frame. In

order to free them or give voice through *prosopopoeia*, a narrative voice and a response through reading or listening paves the way for a collaboration rather than a battle that could make two imaginations work at the same time.

The historical account of ekphrasis presents some notable examples like Homer's long depiction of Achilles's shield in *Iliad* setting an example to Virgil's depiction of the Trojan's shield in *Aeneid*. The tenth canto of Dante's purgatory has also become an important source of ekphrasis for some artists like John Flaxman, William Blake and Gustave Dore, who have illustrated some scenes while Virgil is guiding Dante through the terrace of pride such as Proud Penitents, the Annunciation of Mary by the Angel Gabriel and some Biblical stories. It is important to note that Dante's representations are so vivid and detailed that it turns into a visual experience not just for Dante and Virgil but also for the readers. Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde* are illustrated in manuscripts and woodcuts which could be alternative ekphrasis examples to classic paintings, pictures and visual works of art. While in manuscripts the narration is illustrated with a portrait of the teller at the beginning, woodcuts are adorned with a carving of both the text and the images as exemplified with William Caxton's woodcuts. Shakespeare also mediates between visual and verbal as the ekphrasis in *The Rape of Lucrece* offers an example of the heroine herself decoding a painting while identifying her rape with Helen's abduction, a scene from the painting on the wall depicting the Trojan War. Hermione's miraculous resurrection in *Winter's Tale* is also like witnessing a work of art becoming real in accordance with the illusionary power of ekphrasis. In addition to these, ekphrasis seems to have had a powerful influence in the Romantic period with poet and painter William Blake and opening of museums paving the way for poets to find their inspiration from the visual collections on display. Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn", Shelley's "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery" and Auden's "Musée de Beaux Arts" are

worthwhile to noting as they are based on some famous, authentic works of art. Pre-Raphaelite artists also combined poetry and painting, either creating an image and subsequently producing the written text, or doing the opposite as with Tennyson's poem "Lady of Shallot", inspiring so many painters, most notably John William Waterhouse who provided three versions. Hence, a detailed look at ekphrasis exhibits that it has had a wide scope of definitions, theories and exemplary works since ancient times, but how it occupies a place in modern novels and in what ways it contributes to the genre itself and the literary canon is elucidated through Byatt's Frederica series as the novels encompass a broad range of references to visual arts, paintings and painters.

In *The Virgin in the Garden*, ekphrasis appears in the descriptions and verbalization of some figures like Elizabeth, whose portrayal plays a vital role in driving the plot, exhibiting a close analogy with Frederica in particular on the construction of a separate identity. Byatt begins with a visual depiction of the *Darnley Portrait* of Elizabeth. As the image has become an unquestionable icon of defining the identity of a nation, it is perfect for someone who is trying to form her identity and break away with what the society imposes upon. The fascination with Elizabeth, who was paradoxically both virginal and powerful, is related with the problem of marriage and identity for women that Byatt vocalizes through the Potter sisters, whose evolutions during the course of the novel are in sharp contrast to each other but nevertheless correspond to the dichotomy Byatt is concerned with. Since the year also marks the Coronation of Elizabeth II, and in line with the social atmosphere of the 50s in regaining the spirit of The Renaissance, Byatt creates a fictional drama named *Astraea* in which Frederica is playing young Elizabeth, bridging between Frederica and Elizabeth, her growth foregrounded in a close relation with that historical figure. Elizabeth is an eminent figure for the formation of identity but equally significant is the fact that as a woman ruler she comprises dualities or paradoxes which could be traced in

the figures associated with her. In Byatt's fiction there are certain implications that the women, Stephanie and Frederica in particular, might be read as portraits of Venus, Astraea, Diana or the Lady of Shallot, who also evoke Elizabeth from different perspectives and at the same time embody certain qualities that reference the Potter sisters. While Frederica, who is playing Elizabeth in the play *Astraea*, which is named after the Virgin goddess from mythology whose return to earth is believed to herald a golden age and rebirth, could be Virgo-Astraea or Diana, goddess of hunt and power, Stephanie corresponds to Venus, goddess of love and beauty. The symbolic oppositions also come to light in The Lady of Shallot figure who preserves solitude and distance yet tries to be passionate and powerful like Elizabeth. The Lady's confinement in a tower might allude to Stephanie's married life and the constraints of domesticity brought with it. Furthermore, Frederica's curiosity and passion for life might equate to the Lady's departure from the tower, and pursuing Lancelot, in spite of knowing the inevitable end.

Apart from such literary figures, Rodin's *Danaide*, a statue of a woman, is a substantial visual object that is debated and enlightened through ekphrasis. The kneeling position of the woman with flowing hair hints at the duality identified with Frederica and Stephanie as what the patriarchy constructs for women is obedience in spite of the women's productivity and the role that has continued for generations. Byatt's verbal still lifes that are introduced through Winifred and Marcus's butcher's shop visits go beyond long and detailed ekphrastic descriptions of food imagery and point to the problem of domesticity as food, cooking, kitchen, and market stall are all associated with women and everyday life. The stillness of the objects in those still lifes might refer to women's stillness, their inactive and enclosed position in the house. It is important to note that through some examples of ekphrasis, Byatt also gives an insight into a character's inner world: for example, Alexander's struggles as a writer, his insecurities, and attempts to come to terms with his works are traced in *The Family of Saltimbanques*

and *The Boy with a Pipe*, and the curate Daniel's unhappy, isolated, gloomy life through Dürer's *Praying Hands* and Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*.

Still Life continues following the lives of the Potter family**.** The second volume does not just owe its title to the Dutch still life genre in painting but the state of stillness and death is also at the core of the story. Stephanie's struggles in her marriage are given a new dimension with the birth of her two children. On the other hand, Byatt's own pursuit of writing plainly is reflected in Alexander's storyline, which encompasses his efforts in writing a drama on Van Gogh whose art, life and struggles are inspirational and provide the simplicity and exactness he looks for. Still life paintings that Van Gogh produced in his career also exemplify a simple form, focusing on the thing itself ensuring a realistic, accurate vision. Van Gogh permeates throughout the novel and the reflections of his impact are tracked in the construction of the plot and the characters' fates. Alexander's dramatization of *Yellow Chair* on two companion painters is preordained in *The Poet's Garden,* while evocations of life and death in *The Olive Pickers* might be alluding to Stephanie, who shares the same pessimistic and tragic conclusion as Van Gogh. Gauguin's *Man with the Axe* and *Still Life, Fete Gloanec* could be embodying representations of Stephanie and Frederica as the androgynous figure and the implication of having full capacity might refer to Frederica who has so far lived a life of wishes: Stephanie might be hinted at in another still life painting with pears and flowers.

Van Gogh's *Yellow House, Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries* are like recreations of actual places as Frederica and Alexander notice and reinforce the idea of exactness and accuracy that Alexander wants to achieve in his play. What Gogh had depicted in his paintings fully concur with what the characters see and experience. After a while the boundary between text and work of art gets blurred for the readers as

the scenes look or sound like an actual painting like the breakfast table scene in which *Still Life: Blue Enamel Coffeepot, Earthenware and Fruit* is revived. The biggest inspiration for Alexander is Van Gogh's ability both in painting and in naming a chair and revealing his own terrors and hopes, as *Van Gogh's Chair* and *Gauguin's Chair* are exemplary works in giving insight into the states of the minds of the two painters. Although Van Gogh depicts a simple object like a chair, the most vivid qualities with which he embellishes the chairs are adequate for him to fill the gap between words and things and overcome struggles of contemplation on exploring the ways of pure expression.

Apart from the domestic implications of a still life painting, a genre to which Van Gogh owes much of his popularity, the theme of death and the transience of life in relation to luxury items from the Dutch golden age and the birth of *vanitas* clearly evoke and foreshadow Stephanie's tragic death. In that regard the mention of *Still life with Books* could be attributed both to stillness of marriage, the ultimate death for Stephanie and her love of books, attempts at keeping her imagination alive even while giving birth. Byatt complements birth with death and a parallel relationship is implied in the sower-reaper paintings and Van Gogh's color theory which is reminiscent of Delacroix. Therefore, Byatt's aim of writing about birth and death as barely as possible makes way for ekphrasis to function from two perspectives in *Still Life*: firstly, the attempt at giving the thing itself comes to light through Alexander whose preoccupation with Van Gogh and his strivings in writing a play about him find visual form in his paintings that are made clearer through ekphrasis, and, on the other hand, as the title of the novel suggests, still life, both as a genre in painting and a way of life that entraps Stephanie underlines the dichotomy of intellectual commitment and a domestic, still life.

After more than a decade Byatt returns to the quartet with the third installment, *Babel Tower,* in 1996. Because of the time gap between *Still Life* and *Babel Tower,* and the time period, which is the 1960s, a time of social action, revolutions, changes in mood, style and narration come into the picture. Modern and postmodern effects are felt as intertextuality and fragmentation pervade in *Babel Tower.* The title does not just refer to the myth of Babel, a group of people breaking away from society, building a tower with the aim of rising to heaven only to fall and get demolished, but a close reading enables the reader to realize the connections between the interpretations of the tower and the evolution of Frederica's life. After losing her sister in a tragic incident, Frederica follows her path by marrying, having a child and leading a completely opposite life from the first two novels. Not only do the chosen artists and art forms have a relation to the myth of tower, but the way Frederica's story evolves also recalls it, given that her life is also falling apart, and the revitalization of her identity search and attaining her free voice are best represented in new, modern art works that infuse into *Laminations,* a projection of her crisis and fragmented life.

Frederica wants to jettison her married life in a country house and make a fresh beginning in London as a single, working mother. Frederica's own transition has parallels with the transformation of art in the 60s and the school where she starts teaching is an embodiment of that change. The desire to leave the old behind is also felt in the new student trends, manifested with Byatt's inclusion of modern painters like Seurat, Nolde and Lowry along with Romantic followers like Linnell, Blake and Palmer. The modern art works could be discussed in relation to Frederica in terms of finding a new voice and they could serve as stimulating works for Frederica before coming up with the idea of writing a book in such a form that would embody features from those pieces.

Thanks to Desmond Bull, who is a painter, Byatt provides visuals that display experimental reinterpretations of art like masking figures, making combines or collages or erasing a painting (James's Ensor's masks, Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning*) which serve as triggers for Frederica before creating *Laminations,* a collage of different texts. In her new life Frederica starts living with Agatha, a single working mother. Some of the visual images on the walls of the new house are examples of ekphrasis and point to Frederica's journey from different angles. While Matisse's *Jazz Prints*, another modern expression of art based on cut-out papers is one of the inspirations for Frederica in composing *Laminations*, John Martin's *Paradise Lost* illustrations, *Pandemonium*, *Paradise* and *Chaos* symbolize Frederica's isolated married life that brought her darkness, gloom and fragmentation but also her escape and finding light with her son again. Two different versions of William Blake's "Nurse Song" correspond to the transition from childhood and innocence to adulthood and experience. Now a mother, Frederica's transition from a girl making the most of life and art to a woman of dilemmas and anxieties equates to the changes in life, society, culture and art.

The quartet ends with *A Whistling Woman* in which the action involves several plots and different groups of people with different sets of beliefs woven into the story. Frederica, who was aspiring to be an actress in *The Virgin in the Garden* was seriously considering becoming a writer in *Still Life*. Although she appears as a mother and wife in *Babel Tower* at the beginning, the circumstances lead her to work as a teacher at a school but at the same time launch her writing career with *Laminations*. However, in *A Whistling Woman*, she complies with the innovations of the age and starts hosting a show at the BBC.

There is a preoccupation with science in this novel, which stems from Byatt's interest in the etymology of life and Darwin, and that prompts her to give prominence to

characters dealing with science like Winnjobel, Luk and Jacqueline. In order to show a stance against science, she builds a religious discourse around a new character, Joshua Ramsden. She starts the novel with Rembrandt etchings in Wijnnobel's study room that could be interpreted in such a way that it is possible to find traces of the central events shaping the key ideas built around a religious community and a scientific conference in the novel. Science and religion are the two discourses highlighted in the shell and Faust etchings and the representative figures Byatt portrays are Luk and Joshua whose stories also mark a journey of identity constructed in different narratives. While the Faust etching is probably inspired by a Dutch immigrant religious sect founded by Faustus Socinus in Holland, shell etching is related to the snail shell and the scientific research made on the lines of shells resembling DNA. The scientific and religious engagements stem from Darwin's theories on the origins of life and humans being defined in relation to biblical narratives in ancient times, paving the way for discussions of the effects of genetics and culture on human identity. Given that the novel deals with a conference on body and mind and the question of identity being determined or constructed, Byatt reboots the focal point of the series that she had introduced in relation to women, Frederica in particular. In a sense, the novel problematizes the dichotomy of associating body with women and mind with men revisiting the dilemma built on the constraints of marriage and motherhood and having an intellectual, independent existence as a woman.

While the etchings give glimpses of those alternative storylines, the moments of epiphany in forming identity or taking action are provided with ekphrastic readings of certain paintings Byatt directly refers to like Luk's moment of enlightenment making a direct reference to St. Paul's Conversion to Christianity, although his story involves giving up on faith, religion and turning to science, or Frederica's enlightenment on telling Luk about pregnancy comes in front of the *View of Delft*. On the other hand,

Joshua's encounter with Rembrandt's *Abraham saving Isaac* signals his tragic past, reminding him how his fate could have been. Van Eyck's *Adoration of the Lamb* highlights the lamb figure, alluding to Jesus's sacrifice for mankind, and crystalizes Joshua's acquisition of a new and strict form of Christian faith; this leads him to gather a group of people of whom he becomes the spiritual leader, unfortunately at the cost of a tragic end for him and many of his people.

With technological developments and entering a new age of digitals, ekphrasis could also be recontextualized in the final volume. As ekphrasis operates between image and word, the changed forms of experience affect the art forms and pave the way for different mediums of ekphrasis like the television screen, which is able to combine sound, image, and text at the same time. What Byatt does with *A Whistling Woman* is beyond combining images with verbal projections. In keeping pace with modern age, Byatt manifests new forms that also highlight the communicative function. That gradual transition towards a visual culture is best represented with Frederica's show and the topics she debates with her guests. These address women with the help of a visual object, which is highlighted with ekphrastic depictions on its form in appearing both a woman and hen, recalling giving birth. Considering Frederica's pregnancy, the problems of motherhood and conventional marriage and their role in disrupting imagination, intellect and creativity finds a visual, auditory, framed form in television, a modern medium of ekphrasis.

Consequently, Frederica's search of identity as a young and passionate woman with aspirations, expectations and joy is contrasted to Stephanie, who prefers to lead a conventional life by marrying and having children, only to get stuck between the pressures of domestic life and her desperate efforts to keep her imagination alive. Strikingly, Stephanie's dilemma reaches a climax in *Still Life* and ends in another form

of stillness as she loses her life in a tragic incident in the house. By killing one of the protagonists in the midst of the series, Byatt turns the whole attention to Frederica, who gives her name to the quartet. Her struggles as a mother and wife and inner turmoil of falling apart in *Babel Tower* lead her to a deadlock that can only be overcome by contriving her own path, bringing fragments and pieces together in accordance with modern ways of expressions. With *A Whistling Woman*, Frederica achieves sexual, social and cultural freedom, and as a thinking woman she is not narrowed to the roles of mother and wife, a situation which reinforces the possibility of female autonomy in Britain during the 1960s and 70s.

Having an ekphrastic eye while reading a novel is a different experience for readers since their imaginations are triggered by a process of uncoding the paintings or images that the writer intersperses in between the pages, inviting an alternative view that leads to a whole picture illustrating the major themes and key issues questioning the roles of women society already puts on them, and the crisis of having a separate identity in the midst of predetermined social roles. In the light of these concerns, Byatt creates a story in which two sisters are exposed to the same gruesome problems of being a woman. In doing so, she further constructs a narrative which offers a convergence of the word with the image as represented by her two protagonists – Stephanie and Frederica respectively. Given this dialogic form of sister arts, ekphrasis serves as a chief narrative tool for Byatt as she draws on an approach of embracing both mimetic and meditative aspects of the term. Thanks to that inter-art narrative, word and image relationship is foregrounded, and Byatt goes beyond depicting a work of art visually by accentuating the communicative function of literature and visual arts.

In addition to opening a new window into understanding the characters and their inner worlds, those verbal and visual representations provide an aesthetic and artistic

reading, propelling creativity and imagination and inviting readers into a pictorial world so that they also become viewers and thinkers, since ekphrasis proposes an alternative and different experience in storytelling. Although ekphrasis is generally identified with poetry, because of some examples firmly inscribed into literary canon, the fact that it finds form in long fiction and novels is a novelty, and furthermore, the fact that its use in modern discourse is inspected is equally remarkable, considering that this ancient tradition is reinterpreted with a modern approach thanks to Byatt. Taking into account Byatt's fondness for visual images, art, artists, references to painters and paintings in her fiction, such broad knowledge and inclusion could be taken beyond a personal interest and transform into a narrative tool in illuminating and elucidating the writer's highly intertextual, referential and complex style which might be too subtle for some readers to comprehend at first glance. Byatt's preoccupation with language, adequacy of words, and representation of art throughout her career impels her to a visual solution in *The Frederica Quartet* which focalizes another preoccupation or problem discomforting Byatt, that is, the dilemma of women regarding the prescriptive roles imposed by society. However, the power of ekphrasis, or the third eye it provides the readers with, bestows an innovative and unique vision, combining an ornamental articulation with the principle of ascertaining intrinsic meanings. Byatt's ekphrasis is beyond the visual experience of bringing before the mind's eye through a vivid depiction, but she obliges her readers to develop a critical eye and draws their attention to specific moments that are crucial for her as a way of narrating a journey traversing decades and four different volumes.

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between visual and verbal has always provoked debate since ancient times. Ekphrasis, the verbal representation of the visual representation has endured a number of different assumptions throughout history, either as a tool for giving voice to objects, bringing a scene before our eyes or making the listener feel in the present. The ekphrastic tradition is generally found within poetic texts ranging from Homer's Shield of Achilles to John Keats' meditation on a Grecian urn; its place in the 20th century contemporary novel can be exemplified with this study focusing on A.S. Byatt's *The Frederica Quartet,* its four volumes covering a period starting at the beginning of the 50s and ending at the turn of the 70s, tracing the Potter family. The whole quartet is a journey forming the identity of Frederica in a society where certain roles are already determined. Byatt focuses on women and the constraints imposed on them, especially through Frederica and Stephanie, sisters who represent two contrasting domestic and intellectual existences. While reading *The Frederica Quartet*, the impression of overseeing the whole action through an omniscient figure and engaging with the instantiated descriptions begets an ekphrastic narrative in which the characters and the major events are causally linked with visual images which are not rendered through merely decorative depictions but integrated into the narrative as conscious interruptions in order to impel the readers to activate their critical eye. Visual arts are an important part of A. S. Byatt's writing and accordingly she offers a wide selection of painters in her novels, artists ranging from Picasso, Titian, Van Gogh to Brueghel, Matisse, Rauschenberg, Vermeer and Rembrandt. In displaying growth and self-building in every respect for Frederica, Byatt utilizes the iconography of Elizabeth and her associations through ekphrastic descriptions of the chosen images and art works in *The Virgin in the Garden*. While *Still Life* highlights Van Gogh and the dual nature of

still life in defining the fate of the characters, *Babel Tower* features art works and artists contemporary to the time period, mirroring Frederica's new life. Finally, in *A Whistling Woman* ekphrasis serves as a foreshadowing and activating tool in highlighting the defining moments and figures. In all these novels, ekphrasis becomes a means of focalizing the subject matter through seemingly implicit but explicit signs embedded in the visuals. With an inclusion of many consciously chosen images, paintings and pictures Byatt employs ekphrasis as a distinctive and initiative narrative tool which heavily draws on the images as points of reference to key moments as a way of unearthing intrinsic meanings, giving an insight into the inner world of the characters, weaving the plot and empowering the rhythm of the narration, which finds form in Byatt's series through addressing certain dilemmas and dichotomies the sisters represent, the fear and pressure of being trapped in a house and the need of having an intellectual, independent voice and space. In this respect, ekphrasis in *The Frederica Quartet* not only prompts an aesthetic and imaginative reading but functions as an important element of narration, serving as a bridge in seeing the key points and major themes that contribute to the revelation of a whole picture and thus achievement of a substantial meaning.

Keywords: ekphrasis, Byatt, *The Frederica Quartet*, visual, verbal, artwork, image, representation, narrativity, woman, identity

ÖZET

Görsel sanatlarla yazın arasındaki ilişki antik çağdan bu yana tartışmalara yol açmıştır. Görsel sanat yapıtlarının yazıyla temsili anlamına gelen ekfrasis, nesnelere ses bahşeden bir araç, sahneyi göz önünde canlandırma, dinleyiciye anı yaşıyormuş gibi hissettirme gibi tarih boyunca birçok farklı anlamlar kazanmıştır. Ekfrasis, Homer'in Achillies'ın kalkanı ya da John Keats'in bir Yunan vazosu üzerine derin düşüncelerini aktardığı örneklerde olduğu gibi daha çok şiir sanatıyla özdeşleşmiştir fakat türün 20. yüzyıl çağdaş romanındaki yeri bu çalışma ile örneklendirilebilir. A. S. Byatt'ın Frederica serisi dört kitaptan oluşur ve Potter ailesini 50'lerin başından 70'lere kadar uzanan bir dönemi kapsayacak şekilde merkeze alır. Dörtleme belli rollerin empoze edildiği bir toplumda Frederica'nın kimliğini bulma yolculuğu gibidir. Byatt daha çok kadınlar ve toplumun getirdiği kısıtlamalara odaklanarak özellikle evcil ve entelektüel kimlik üzerinden birbirine zıt yaşam tarzlarıyla Frederica ve Stephanie kardeşlere odaklanarak anlatı yoluna gider. Romanları okurken adeta tüm olayları bir bütün olarak ilahi bir bakış açısıyla görebilme, esas olayların nedensellik çerçevesinde bahsi geçen görsel imgelerle bağlantılı olduğu ekfrastik bir anlatı doğurur ki bu anlatılar sadece süslü, sözel tasvirler değil; okuyucunun eleştirel bakış açısını geliştirmek amacıyla anlatıya kasıtlı olarak entegre edilmiş bölümlerdir. Byatt, romanlarında görsel sanatlara geniş yer veren bir yazardır ve buna uygun olarak Frederica serisinde Picasso, Titian ve Van Gogh'dan Brueghel, Matisse, Rauschenberg, Vermeer ve Rembrandt'a kadar uzanan çok geniş bir sanatçı, ressam yelpazesi sunar. *The Virgin in the Garden* romanında Frederica'nın gelişim ve kendini bulma yolculuğunu resmederken Byatt, Elizabeth ikonografisi ve benzer figürlerden ekfrasis ışığında açıklığa kavuşan imge ve sanat yapıtları yoluyla faydalanır. *Still Life,* karakterin kaderlerini belirlemede Van Gogh ve natürmort/durağan yaşam metaforunu kullanırken, *Babel Tower* romanında

dönemi yansıtan sanat yapıtları Frederica'nın yeni yaşamına da ayna tutar. Son olarak *A Whistling Woman* romanında ise ekfrasis önemli anları ve kişileri belirlemede etkin ve yol gösterici bir rol oynar. Ekfrasis Byatt'ın romanlarında görsellerde gömülü görünürde saklı ama aslında aşikâr işaretlerle esas meseleyi odak noktası haline getiren bir araç haline dönüşür. Bilinçli bir şekilde seçilen birçok imge, tablo ve resim ile Byatt, ekfrasisi yalnızca okurlarının hayal gücüne hitap eden görsel bir deneyim olmaktan çıkarır, olay örgüsünü yapılandırma ve anlatı ritmini güçlendirme yolunda ana fikir ve noktaları ortaya çıkaran, kilit anlara gönderme yapan kendine özgü, anlatıyı başlatan bir araç olarak sunar. Bunu gerçekleştirirken Byatt'ın romanlarının esas noktası olan kız kardeşlerin sembolize ettiği eve hapsolma korkusu ve baskısı ile kendine ait özgür ve entelektüel bir ses ve yer sahibi olma ikilemine işaret eder. Bu bağlamda, ekfrasis seri boyunca estetik ve hayal gücüne dayalı bir okuma sunduğu gibi gerçek ve sağlam bir anlam çıkarma yolunda esas noktalara ve ana temalara bir köprü kurarak önemli bir anlatı aracı haline gelir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: ekfrasis, Byatt, *Frederica Dörtlemesi*, görsel, yazınsal, sanat yapıtı, imge, temsil, anlatı, kadın, kimlik