Shaping the University Imaginary.
Configurations and Refigurations in British Fiction

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INTRODUCTION

1. *What is University Fiction: A Primary Focus*

The literary representation of specific historical and social environments has always raised many interrogatives both to writers and critics: how is it possible to approach the relationship between the representation of social phenomena and their contingent materiality? Is literature a mere document that gives an account of history? Or is it pure fiction, governed by the inner laws of texts? These questions involve a huge constellation of meditations, speculations, theories and practices about literature that accompanies the history of Western culture. If we narrow the focus of the investigation, a question can be asked why literature seems to become so engaged with specific topics that find a very precise and specific place in reality. An example of such involvement are novels that revolve around academic life. University is a privileged space to encounter literature as practice, as theory, as life: it is a space of reflection, of speculation, of creation of meaning. But, of course, the university is also a social and historical institution, in which public, private, and emotional dynamics are mutually related like in every human community. In short, the university is a complex system.

The complexity of its structure lies in the diversity of ontological and epistemological levels involved. Social, political, cultural, spatial, temporal dimensions determine the way in which the university has been perceived throughout the centuries. As we know from historians, universities started to be founded in Europe since the Middle Ages (Bologna, Paris, Oxford, Cambridge being the oldest). They have considerably influenced the dynamics of culture in Europe in several different ways: the academic institution of rhetorics has governed literary styles, forms and genres from Greek and Latin eras until modernity; the development of academic practices have interfered both with political/religious institutions and the editorial market, as testified by the creation of indexes, canons and targets; the education offered by academia has shaped the emerging dominant and powerful social classes, first the aristocracy and later

the rich bourgeoisie. It is therefore not surprising that the university has been mentioned or thematically discussed in Western Literature throughout the centuries.

As such, the present study will set out to answer some of the questions mentioned in the opening paragraph above, when addressed to the university world: how writers, critics and readers react to the problem of representing in an artistic way a structure, like academia, that is so peculiarly interwoven with historical, social and political phenomena? Which are the main strategies of literary representation of university life? And why are these strategies shaped in a certain way and not in another?

It is not the first time that critics investigate such field: there is a cluster of technical expressions used to refer to novels that deal with the university, with the most common one being university novels, campus novels, academic novels, *Professorromane* and varsity novels. Looking at the extant literature on the topic, it is clear that this field of study (i.e. the analysis of the representation of academia in literature) can be located quite precisely: it belongs mainly to the Anglosaxon world and it covers less than a century, starting from the 50s until nowadays.

This distribution corresponds, more or less, to the characteristics of literary forms that we here propose to classify as *university fiction*, i.e novels that are centered on characters, situations and actions around the academic world. Like all literary phenomena, university fiction has developed due to certain historical, geographic, cultural and social conditions, with one of its main defining factors being the location in Anglo-American contexts. The reasons for such specific background have been convincingly discussed by David Lodge with reference to the campus novel, a late 20th Century variant of university fiction:

> We may also find an explanation for the fact that the campus novel is almost exclusively an Anglo-American genre. I know from personal experience that there is a good deal of interest in it among Continental European teachers and students of modern English and American literature, because I am frequently solicited for assistance by students in France, Germany, Italy and other European countries who are writing theses on the campus novel. And yet there have been very few campus novels produced by native writers in these countries, and those few, I am told, have not made much literary impact. I think there are two possible reasons for this. […]

Until relatively recently, Continental European universities were not designed as campuses, territorially defined and self-contained; they were made up of faculties randomly distributed through the cities to which they belonged. Most of the students who attended them lived at home, and for them and their teachers there was no clear boundary marking off academic life from the life of the city at large. The enclosed, often isolated, residential university or college on the Anglo-American model is a very different environment, and more readily productive of the kind of behaviour that is the raw material of fiction. (Lodge 2008)

The field of inquiry in the present study encompasses a broader chronological spectrum than the one discussed by Lodge: we will take into account a period that starts in the second half of the 19th century and finishes at the very end of the 20th century. This period can be described as the time when the genre achieved specific and stable connotations that have been respectively classified as "varsity novel" and "campus novel". Although a number of intergeneric changes have occurred in time, the Anglo-American context still prevails, i.e. we do not find any relevant result of university fiction in other cultural and geographical areas (think of European continental countries), where the university environment in definitely less campus based. This study will be restricted to the British context for several reasons: first of all, because Great Britain is the geographical area where university fiction took its origins in the 19th century; secondly because the British case study will be used as a specific field of enquiry in order to look at the development, evolution and changes of such literary forms and genres.

2. _Methodological Tools for the Analysis of University Fiction: An Overview_

2.1 _The Concept of University Imaginary_

The situatedness of university fiction poses a methodological problem about the approach to such a topic. A concept that will serve as an analytic tool for the investigation of university fiction is 'university imaginary'. In order to understand what we mean by this expression is better to go back to the ethymologic root for university, which is the Latin word _universitas_. It stems from _universus_, _unus + versus_, and it refers to a whole (universe, world, cosmos) in which different parts converge. It depicts a

world with its own rules, its own temporal, spatial, social and power dimensions. This is exactly what not only the university, but also the idea of university, of the university imaginary, is about. The university world, is, in fact, a micro-cosm traditionally perceived as separate from the rest of the world. The campus architecture, on the one hand, and the alternation of semesters, exams and sabbaticals, on the other, are the boundaries within which and against which the representation of the university world is shaped. David Lodge has brilliantly highlighted this aspect:

> Umberto Eco observes in his *Reflections on "The Name of the Rose"* that "writing a novel is a cosmological matter, like the story told by Genesis." In other words, the novelist must first create or imagine a world which has some kind of logical relation to the real world, within which he can explore the themes that interest him through narrative. The university or college provides such a world ready-made, so to speak, a "small world" which is a kind of microcosm of the larger world, with its own distinctive customs, seasons, rituals, and foibles, where the factors that motivate human behaviour – power, ambition, rivalry, lust, anxiety – can be displayed and anatomised. The fact that universities are institutions dedicated to the disinterested pursuit of truth and the preservation of high culture, but staffed by human beings with ordinary human weaknesses and often more than ordinary eccentricities, no doubt explains why the campus novel is a predominantly comic or satiric genre. (Lodge 2008)

Imaginary will be understood along Remo Ceserani's definition of the italian word "immaginario" (Ceserani 1999: 43, 524-25). As Ceserani explains:

> this term had a great fortune in the last decades, and was employed largely in different fields of enquiry. Two are its main meanings: 1) within the community of historians of society and historians of culture, mainly in the French context […], the term was interpreted as "collective imaginary" or "social imaginary". Therefore, the imaginary covers experience, memory and dreams that constitute myths and collective projections. 2) the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan includes "imaginary" in the realm of his theory, between the "symbolic" and the "real". (Ceserani 1999: 524-525, translation mine)

The imaginary is an intermediate step between two dialectical opposites, i.e. social structure and ideology. According to Lacan, the imaginary is a bridge between the autonomous system of language and what remains outside the symbolic processes. From a historical overview on the uses of the term, Ceserani considers imaginary as the images, symbolic and artistic practices that nourish a specific culture, and to which all artists refer to in order to contribute to her/his cultural context. So, by saying 'university imaginary', we will refer to the cultural images, meanings, functions and symbols referred to university in a given socio-historical context.

2.2 *Literary Genre and Generic Approaches to University Fiction*

The second concept that will be necessary for the analysis of university fiction is literary genre. The concept of genre has been at the centre of heated debates since the emergence of literary theory in Western Culture. Even if it does not explicitly raise the question of genre, Aristotle's *Poetics* nevertheless shows that issues of genre have always been crucial[1]. From the Greek and Latin traditions to the eighteenth century, genres were categorised, differentiated, defined, hierarchised: they prescribed rules, modes, plots, tones and styles. Since the 19th century, with the advent of the press, of the middle-class and, in the literary system, of the novel, genres have become, first of all, pragmatic tools. They have helped to form readers' tastes, and have had a significant impact upon the book market. Simultaneously with the development of the various currents of literary theory in the 20th century – notably Russian formalism, structuralism and story-oriented narratology – genres have taken up a special prominence. In short, the category of genre has proved a useful tool for critical approaches to literature[2].

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[1] Paul Ricoeur underlines this aspect in his interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics* in Volume I, Chapters II and III of *Time and Narrative* (1984).

[2] The effectiveness of this category has been pointed out by Heta Pyrhönen: «First, genres help us to describe texts by singling our textual components worthy of attention such as plot structure; in turn, description helps to classify a text by placing it among other similar texts. [...] Second, genre directs the ways in which we write, read, and interpret texts. [...] A genre functions as a norm or an expectation guiding writers in their work and readers in their encounter with texts. Third, genres prescribe artistic practices. [...] Fourth, genres help us to evaluate literary works». (Pyrhönen 2007: 109)

Genres, in fact, provide a structure through which the poet can organize the mimetic material, but they also become an instrument of interaction with the public.

As regards the interpretation and the analysis of literary genres, the first step is usually to choose a label, a precise name, in order to describe the them, and the choice is made through comparisons. By outlining the differences, the similarities and the relationships (affiliation, intersection, hypotexts and hypertexts, archygenres, subgenres etc.) between different literary forms, it is possible to identify a preliminary set of features that belong to a specific genre. In the case of new literary genres, however, the search for a proper terminology is the last step: the definition of a genre results from the complex action of description and interpretation, after which the 'individuality' of the genre can be shaped. More frequently, though, scholars investigate given genres, whose components and history have already been described in detail. In these cases the problem of definition must be the first step towards a critical re-reading of both the genre and the already existing criticism.

The case examined in this dissertation, university fiction, belongs to this second area. As we said previously, this genre has developed in the last two centuries through paradigmatic changes, social and cultural dynamics, hybridisations processes, all of which are closely related to a number of literary and extra-literary influences. During the various phases of the evolution of this literary form, the structural model and the modes of representation of the genre have radically changed, which is why scholars, who have in the course of time investigated this kind of fiction, have used different definitions such as university novel, campus novel, academic novel, varsity novel, college fiction. These different labels depend on the specific phase or aspect of the genre under examination.

Naming a genre already constitutes a preliminary form of interpretation and selection. As Michel Foucault reminds us in *Les mots et les choses* (1966), defining things is a primary instinct that enables human beings to establish a power relationship with the outer world. The same idea applies to the naming of categories and abstract concepts in literary theory. The label 'university fiction', understood as an umbrella term, conveniently seems to suit the purposes of our inquiry. On the one hand, the term

'university' (instead of 'academic') fits with the intention to highlight the meaning of *universus*, i.e. of a world which is metamorphosed into 'a possible world' through the literary representation. On the other hand, the word 'fiction' (instead of novel) meets a primary concern with narrative modes and strategies as well as the intention to address all forms the genre has taken on during the course of time (without an exclusive reference to novels). However, in the discussion of the different historical phases and forms of the genre it will be necessary to borrow from the various labels ('varsity novel', 'campus novel' etc.) developed by critics at different times.

A survey of the studies on genre theory, and on university fiction in particular, shows that the prevailing approach is that of genre history, i.e. the description of the historical development of a genre: occurrences are usually contextualised within the literary and historical milieu, while high-brow and low-brow declinations are traced and related to the mainstream literary events. Although this kind of study is often minutely informative, usually it is not particularly concerned with the interpretation of the history retrieved. An example of this kind of approach is constituted by Heinz Antor's monumental monograph *Der englische Universitätroman: Bildungskonzepte und Erziehungsziele* (Antor 1996), whose main focus is to trace the development of the genre in the light of institutional and cultural contexts. Mortimer Proctor's *The English University Novel* has the privilege of being the only extended study on British varsity novels, and exhibits the same purpose of Antor's work, i.e. to give an account of the history of university novels, as well as a precise and comprehensive lists of novels.However, Proctor's study is affected by ethical judgement, typical of British criticism in the 1950s, which is more concerned with moral values than literary ones.

Another strand in the current criticism of university fiction is a sociological approach to literature. Even if critics are aware that university fiction is primarily *fiction*, they have taken fiction as instrumental to the reading of contemporary society. In other words, means that university fiction is treated as a document to be used to explore the social dimension of the academic world. This tendency is characteristic of several insightful inquiries of the topic: Janice Rossen's *The University in Modern Fiction* establishes a close correspondence between social classes and their fictional

representation in novels set in the academia; Elaine Showalter's more personal survey in *Faculty Towers* follows the development of academic novels along the chronological evolution of literary theory departments, with a special eye to the American context; the same attention to social and institutional phenomena is paid by Kenneth Womack in his *Postwar Academic Fiction: Satire, Ethics, Community*. We may say that in all these works the interplay between characters, the analysis of their social belonging, gender and the cultural readings of their fictional life constitute the main objects of inquiry.

What seems to be neglected in extant literature about university fiction is the culturally mediated nature of fictional representation. Of course, the socio-cultural dimension should not be overlooked: since university fiction is so visibly related to the 'real' referent of the university, the role played by the social and historical context in the shaping of the genre is undoubtedly prominent. In varsity novels (the 19th century form), for example, we will see how the cultural factors that come into play vary in relation to the socio-political moment, which has deeply influenced the formal patterns of the genre. Indeed, the debate on the role of the university as an instrument for the development of the perfect male citizen in the British Empire has been crucial for the emergence of the genre. Equally crucial is the fact that the discussions in public magazines contributed to the popularity of these novels in the middle class. The transition from the Oxbridge tradition to the system of redbrick universities, the comparison between the British critical tradition and European literary theory, and the postmodern milieu are just some of the manifold cultural factors that have affected the shaping of such a stable and hybrid form as the British campus novel in the 1960s and '70s. Nevertheless, if we only focus on historical, institutional and sociological aspects, the literary features of the university fiction genre will be inevitably ignored, as the investigation of the relationship between the genre and its cultural dynamics will be bypassed. Since the aim of the present study is precisely to bring into the foreground those literary features, the main focus will be on the modes of representation of the genre: the formal and structural features of the genre will take priority over external factors such as the circulation in the book market, the rates of popularity, canonisation modes.

2.3 *Triple Mimesis and Modes of Representation*

If we talk about cultural imaginary and literary genres, one final key concept comes up when we discuss university fiction: the concept of literary representation. Mimesis has been variously addressed, shaped and reshaped by literary critics and philosophers during the last decades, especially from narratological and cognitivist perspectives. Aristotle's *Poetics,* on one hand, and Paul Ricoeurs's *Time and Narrative* (1983-85)*,* on the other, are two key references. In particular, the triple mimesis delineated by Paul Ricouer is still a crucial starting point, not only for any elaboration of mimesis, but also for a re-definition and integration of the concept of genre, that is central to the discussion of how the university has been described in literature. Prefiguration, configuration and refiguration will be discussed in the beginning of this study. Firstly, through the lens of Paul Ricoeur's mimesis, the notions of imaginary and literary genre will become part of a more comprehensive process of representation; with a special eye on the blurring of genres, which has started to affect university fiction since the second half of the 20th century, the concepts of genres and generic change will be reframed by looking at a possible new interpretation of Ricoeur's refiguration. Secondly, the problem of mimesis will be investigated by looking at the stylistic and cultural forms assumed by university fictions: a special attention will be paid therefore to what we can call modes of representation.

By modes of representation, we mean strategies of representation which are perceived as constants and that go beyond the limits and the differences between literary forms and genres. Modes of representation are constructs recurring throughout the history of literature. They depend, of course, on cultural aspects that can stimulate a certain mode instead of another. Modes reflect a specific attitude towards what is represented as well; moreover they are immediately linked to readership, to expected effects and responses.

Processes of configuration and re-figuration of the university imaginary will be considered as a constant interaction between two opposed modes: realism and self-consciousness. In particular, what will be argued in the present thesis is that the relation

between the university imaginary and literary configuration, re-figuration and modes of representation oscillates between realism and metafiction. In fact, even if realism and metafiction have been historically associated with specific periods, cultural contexts and literary traditions, they have nevertheless been acknowledged as permanent features, or, in Northrop Frye's terms, as constant modes belonging to different literary genres, ages and cultures.

The reasons for considering realism and self-reflection as two opposed poles in the study of university fiction are to be found in the specificity of the subject matters under discussion. As the university imaginary is such a highly structured world, a realistic portrayal seems the obvious choice for the early forms of university fiction[3]. However, the university imaginary already contains embryonic traces of self-reflection. Most varsity and campus novels, indeed, portray the life of students and professors in the field of humanities. To represent university, then, basically means to represent institutions and people who are directly related to literature, and this can be seen as an implicit form of self-reflexivity. Moreover, as our close reading of specific examples will show, there are literary and extra-literary dynamics that affect the shaping of university fiction and that also determine the relevance of certain modes of representation.

3. *Structure and Purposes: Reframing Mimesis, Literary Genres and Dramatisation Through University Fiction*

The first part of the present study will investigate the forms taken by university fiction in the British context from the 19th century until the second half of the 20th, a period when the genre achieved specific and stable connotations that have been respectively classified as varsity novel and campus novel. The second part will deal with what happens when the university imaginary and its representation go beyond the boundaries

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[3] Janice Rossen opens her study on the university fiction by pointing out the general interpretation of the genre under the realm of literary realism: «The way in which academic life is portrayed in fiction creates a complex intersection among a number of forces. A primary issue which these novels engage is the interplay between fiction and fact: we assume that University novels to be realistic because they are based on an actual institution, often enough on a real University in a real place. As such, they are important because they are widely believed by their readers to constitute an accurate representation of academic life, whether they do so or not; and what remains true is that these novels are heavily influenced by the subject itself, which exerts a strong pull on the novel form». (Rossen 1993: 1)

of university fiction as a genre. The case study proposed is constituted by the novels of the British writer A.S. Byatt. This case study will allow us to analyse a different way in which the university imaginary has been configured, a way that is, of course, related to literary genres, but which also goes beyond the typical boundaries of genres as literary constructs. This re-figuration will be explained by resorting to a concept that originally came from theatre and adaptation studies, but which proves to be productive when applied to narrative texts: the concept of 'dramatisation'. A narrower definition of the term will be provided in order to embrace specific mimetic and diegetic strategies. Moreover, the comparison between university fiction and dramatisation, as regards processes of worldmaking (Goodman 1978), will shed light on how literary configuration is always subjected to processes of reconfiguration, which take shape through new strategies of representation and literary forms.

Chapter I will be devoted to a more insightful exploration of the already mentioned theoretical tools useful for the analysis of the different case studies. Firstly, the concept of university imaginary will be accompanied by a general rethinking of mimesis, in light of Ricoeur's theory and of the contemporary debate on configuration and reconfiguration. Secondly, the notions of formula and hybridisation in literary genres will be considered, especially when focusing on their application to university fiction. Thirdly, a new concept will be introduced: dramatisation, a term coined originally in Theatre and Film Studies, will be reframed in light of literary theory, and it will introduce an original and different representation of the university imaginary in narrative texts. After this overview of the main theoretical aspects and on the reframing of key concepts in literary theory, we will read the configuration and refiguration of the university imaginary by looking at three exemplary moments of this process.

Chapter II will address the 'varsity novel', the first literary form directly dealing with the representation of university life. This literary form arose in Britain in the second half of the 19th century and soon became popular in the book market. The 'varsity novel' is generally considered to be the first expression of the university genre, as well as the antecedent of the better known 20th century 'campus novel'. In this chapter, the analysis will be mainly conducted on a general level: instead of focusing extensively on close

readings of exemplary varsity novels, a more insightful attention will be devoted to the generic characteristics of this literary form. Indeed, as these novels are characterised by a high degree of formulaic conventionality, it is more productive to look at the features shared by the whole group of texts. The most prominent features of the genre will be analysed in relation to the modes of representation, with the purpose of tracing which one of them prevails and which kind of narrative that mode conveys. As we shall see, the dominant strategy in varsity novels is a realistic account of young male students' self-developments according to the Bildungsroman pattern. The themes, the plots and the diegetic instances invariably disclose a pedagogic intention which is put on display within a master narrative usually supporting national identity. What is particularly interesting, however, is that master narratives sometimes coexist with counter-narratives, as in the cases of female varsity novels, where women, as new members of the cast of university characters, make their first appearance.

Chapter III will address the campus novel, which is the second, characteristic form of university fiction as a genre. The early records of campus novels date back to the mid-50s in the British and American contexts. But only between the 1960s and the 1980s did the campus novel gain its popularity in Britain, thanks to the huge success of such novelists as David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury, who were also academic professors and friends. David Lodge's so called *Campus Trilogy",* composed of *Changing Places* (1975), *Small World* (1984) and *Nice Work* (1988), is probably the most representative example of late-twentieth-century representations of the university. In this chapter both David Lodge's and Malcolm Bradbury's novels will be analysed by looking at the way in which campus novels configure themselves as a genre, with recurring features, modes, characters and situations. Therefore the investigation will be focused more on how those common features are created and shared by the novels, instead of looking novel by novel.

Chapter IV will examine A.S. Byatt's work, which is the third object of inquiry. While her most famous novel, *Possession,* has already been analysed as an example of a novel belonging to the university fiction tradition, the rest of Byatt's production is not usually associated with this particular genre. What will be argued, instead, is that

Byatt's entire production – from her early novels to the last volume of the so-called *Frederica Quartet* – can be read as a complex process of internalisation and dramatisation of the university imaginary. Although visibly and deeply aware of the tradition of university fiction, Byatt consciously exceeds the boundaries of the genre, so that dramatisation becomes a lens through which we can view how her whole process of worldmaking bears upon themes, structures and processes of narration that innovates in an original way the tradition of university fiction. While the introduction and explanation of dramatisation will be further expanded, the analysis of the single novels will be conducted in greater detail, thus demonstrating the usefulness of dramatisation as a theoretical tool.

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

Configuring and Refiguring the Imaginary: Modes, Genres, Representation strategies

1. _Metaphorical Configuration: Rethinking the Theory of Mimesis._

The reflections on the literary representation of the university world emerge from three questions: how is the representation of the university configured and re-figured? Which paradigms of representation are involved? And what are the possible interpretations for the shift from one paradigm to another? A theoretical concept that might be fruitfully applied to treat these issues is offered by mimesis.

In *Time and Narrative* (Ricoeur 1983-85), Paul Ricoeur expands on Aristotle's mimesis as exposed in the *Poetics*. After highlighting the prominence of configuration as a result of the interaction between *mimesis* and *mythos*, Ricoeur elaborates his own new model of mimesis, which is also based on his own reception of the 'threefold present' in Augustinian theory. Representation is grounded on a three phase process that includes prefiguration, configuration and refiguration.

By *mimesis I*, Ricoeur means the pre-understanding needed by every human being in order to compose or understand narratives. This pre-knowledge is constituted by the "practical understanding" that comes from the ordinary world. This kind of knowledge can be divided into three branches: semantic, symbolic or temporal understanding. The process of prefiguration sheds light on the connection between the actual process of configuration or emplotment (*mimesis II*) and the referent, or world of reference. The act of representing does not imply a mono-directional process from a 'real' referent to its representation, i.e. it does not give proof of the incontrovertible existence of an object in the real world. Representation, in fact, is profoundly influenced by a pre-comprehension of the world that is affected by historical, cultural and social factors. What is particularly interesting in looking at prefiguration from the perspective of literary genres is what Paul Ricoeur calls "the symbolic resources":

> The word "symbol" in this work is taken in what we might call a middle sense, halfway between its being identified with a simple notation and its being identified with double-meaning expressions following the model of metaphor, or even hidden meaning accessible only to esoteric knowledge. Between too poor and too rich an acceptation I have opted for one close to that of Cassirer, in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, inasmuch as, for him, symbolic forms are cultural processes that articulate experience. (Ricoeur 1983: 71)

In this passage, Paul Ricoeur is referring to the fact that the capability of interpreting narratives stems from the capability of interpreting human action. Both the processes of interpretations (of narratives and human actions) are related to certain cultural paradigms that precede the individual, symbolic act of speaking or writing.

Mimesis II covers the process of configuration or emplotment. To Ricoeur, this is the most important aspect, since emplotment is the process whereby human actions are organised into a coherent, intelligible and internally structured whole. Moreover, *Mimesis II* constitutes the point of transition from *Mimesis I* to Mimesis *III,* as plot is what allows the reader to read the actions represented in fictional works as human actions. This mediating function is connected to time, a category that structures both the sequence of events in narrations and our perception of human life in general.

Mimesis III is refiguration, i.e. "the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader" (Ricoeur 1984: 71), the end of the hermeneutic circle in which, through the configuration of a prefigured time, a deeper understanding of human life and existence occurs. Refiguration is the act of reading, where reading represents a new knowledge of the world that the subject acquires because of the experience that narrative has produced on it. The process of interpretation that comes from configuration and refiguration bestows epistemological value on fiction.

In addition to being one of the most brilliant attempts at redefining mimesis, Ricoeur's theory has a deeply philosophical and metaphysical scope. However, the threefold mimesis becomes an extremely productive tool in the field of literary studies, especially when it comes to the study of the evolution of literary forms. Looking at the dynamics that involve literary phenomena, we can understand prefiguration as the

process of formation of cultural images and symbols, a process that anticipates the literary form itself, but without which any artistic expression would be impossible. In anthropology, in cultural studies and in thematic criticism these cultural images are called precisely 'the imaginary'. 'Imaginary' is a fuzzy term, which, as Daniele Giglioli reminds us, becomes a fruitful theoretical tool precisely because of its fuzzy nature:

> A great deal of the fortune enjoyed by [the imaginary] probably derives from its low semantic density, from it being a comfortably indefinite and flexible concept, not subject to the burdens of proof imposed on the two terms it takes charge of replacing: on one hand, the idea of literarity (i.e. the question whether there is a constitutional and not only conventional specificity of the literary text); on the other hand, the extremely problematic idea (nowadays, perhaps wrongly, in disrepute) of ideology. This is a concept that serves as a link connecting the literary, the cultural and the social. Whereas literarity and ideology divide, the imaginary unifies, joins, locates connections, establishes parallels. Its task is to record invariants, constants and recurrences in time, in space, among genres, among media. A theme is - Francesco Orlando once said – all that repeats itself (Giglioli 2008: 50, my translation).

One might debate whether the formation of collective images is already an act of cultural configuration or not. However, if we bear in mind Tynianov's notion of the literary fact (Tynianov 2003), we come to the conclusion that the cultural imaginary is a pre-figurative pre-condition, inescapable and necessary to literature as an act of representation. We can therefore re-adapt Paul Ricoeur's concept of symbolic mediation, looking at it as resulting from the cooperation of different epistemological levels: institutions, social and political apparati, the development of cultural ideas, literary traditions and conventions, canons. The process of representation is prefigured in two ways: on the one hand, the object of the representation never uniquely belongs to the extra-textual or extra-cultural world, but is always already affected by the lens of collective imaginary, i.e. by the cultural practices, symbols, myths, images and meanings that belong to a certain culture; on the other hand, the pre-figuration is already enacted in the literary text on a formal level, in a composition of motifs and structural devices that literary theory generally defines as 'genres'. This revised notion of

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prefiguration sheds a new light onto the analysis of traditional literary phenomena such as genres.

The notion of genre is also part of the realm of *Mimesis II*, the process of configuration. For Ricoeur, *Mimesis II* corresponds to 'emplotment', i.e. the connection between characters, actions and facts derived from Aristotle's *mythos*. As regards this point, a number of interesting revisions of Ricouer's position have been proposed, which might be helpful in this analysis. Pirjo Lyytikäinen, for instance, has offered a particularly interesting discussion of the concept of mimesis (Lyytikäinen 2012) as understood by Paul Ricoeur and Monika Fludernik. Monika Fludernik has developed a cognitive model for representation, based on embodiment, immersion and experientiality, "the quasi-mimetic evocation of 'real-life experience'":

> Experientiality can be aligned with actantial frames, but it also correlates with the evocation of consciousness or with the representation of a speaker role. Experientiality, as everything else in narrative, reflects on a cognitive schema of embodiedness that relates to human existence and human concerns. […] In my model there can therefore be narratives without plot, but there cannot be any narratives without a human (anthropomorphic) experiencer of some sort at some narrative level. (Fludernik 1996: 28-29)

> Experientiality in narrative as reflected in narrativity can therefore be said to combine a number of cognitively relevant factors, most importantly those of presence of a human protagonist and her experience of events as they impinge on her situation and activities. The most crucial factor is that of the protagonist's emotional and physical reaction to this constellation, which introduces a basic dynamic feature into the structure (Fludernik 1996: 48)

But if narrativity and experientiality become synonyms, the main problem lies in the absence of "an alternative principle of configuration or 'grasping together'" (Lyytikäinen 2012: 62). Fludernik offers a new perspective on literature as a cognitive phenomenon, according to which fictionality and narrativity are strictly connected to consciousness and the experiencer (Lyytikäinen 2012: 62). Lyytikäinen however objects that,

Fludernik differentiates – slightly confusingly – between macro-genres or meta-genres (narrative, instruction, argument, conversation) and discourse types: the former can include several discourse types (narrative, description, argument, exposition, conversation) as segments. Historical genres (text types) exemplify meta-genres and are mixtures of various discourse types. (Lyytikäinen 2012: 63)

As regards Ricoeur's theory, Lyytikäinen's points to the fact that the French philosopher put an excessive emphasis on the role played by time and emplotment. The model developed by Ricoeur does not seem to be as encompassing as it has been claimed, since, for instance, it does not apply efficiently to modernist and postmodernist fictions, where emplotment strategies are overcome by other representation processes.

Lyytikäinen's attempt at combining Ricoeur's triple mimesis and Fludernik's more cognitively oriented approach culminates in her re-reading of Ricouer's *The Rule of Metaphor* (1977). In this book, which is complementary to his later work on narrative forms, Ricoeur establishes a theory of metaphor, where metaphor is no more understood as a mere rhetorical trope. Metaphor, which is seen to encompass sentences and discourse, provides a new perspective on representation, because it is a way of *seeing something as* something else. The act of 'seeing as' provides access to a new knowledge of the world, resulting from the process of interpretation triggered by the metaphor itself. Lyytikäinen's interpretation of Ricoeur's theory of metaphor specifically takes into account a passage where the French philosopher reinterprets the notion of metaphor according to a wider perspective that considers discourse (and not words or sentences) as a unit:

The text is a complex entity of discourse whose characteristics do not reduce to those of the unit of discourse, or sentence. By text I do not mean only or even mainly something written, even though writing in itself poses original problems that bear directly on the outcome of reference; I mean principally the production of discourses as a work. With the work, as the word implies, new categories enter the field of discourse. Essentially these are pragmatic categories, categories of production and labour. To begin with, discourse is the arena of a work of composition or arrangement, 'disposition' (to echo disposition, the term in ancient

rhetoric), which makes of a poem or novel a totality irreducible to a simple sum of sentences. Next, this 'disposition' obeys to formal rules, a codification that belongs no longer to language but to discourse, and fashions from discourse what we have just called a poem or a novel. This code is the one of literary 'genres', that is, of genres that regulate the praxis of the text. Finally, this codified production ends in a particular work: this poem, that novel. Ultimately this third trait is the most important. It can be called style, where this is understood as what makes the work singular, individual. (Ricoeur 1977: 259)

In the preface to the first volume of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur expands on the parallels between metaphor and narrative:

> With metaphor, the innovation lies in the producing of a new semantic pertinence by means of an impertinent attribution […] The metaphor is alive as long as we can perceive, through the new semantic pertinence - and so to speak in its denseness - the resistance of the words in their ordinary use and therefore their incompatibility at the level of a literal interpretation of sentence. […] With narrative, the semantic innovation lies in the inventing of another work of synthesis - a plot. By means of the plot, goals, causes and chances are brought together within the temporal unity of a whole and complete action. It is this synthesis of the heterogeneous that brings narrative close to metaphor. In both cases, the new thing - the as yet unsaid, the unwrtitten - springs up in language. (Ricoeur 1983: ix-x)

What Lyytikäinen suggests is that we can go further into the direction opened by Ricoeur himself, and apply the correspondence between metaphor and narrative to the analysis of literary texts:

> Entire literary works can be seen as entities that create meaning through the interaction of their elements (semiotic, but also semantic, if we are speaking of larger wholes). If the analysis of metaphor can function as a "kernel" for the interpretation of stories, then we should be able to see how the tensions between larger elements can be reconciled to "make sense." The field of discourse brings in new pragmatic categories: 1) the work of composition or *arrangement*; 2) a codification belonging to discourse, or literary *genres*; and 3) the particular work and its *style*. (Lyytikäinen 2012: 65)

Lyytikäinen's argument gives prominence to metaphorical re-description or configuration, rather than on a plot-based representation. Even if it is based on modernist fiction, this perspective can be applied to literature as a whole, and it allows us to consider literary constructs, such as genres, in a new light:

> This typology of arrangement would also form part of the cartography of literary worlds and function as a way of exploring genres of literary worldmaking. These genres do not necessarily coincide with what has been traditionally understood by literary genres. Rather the levels of genre and style which Ricoeur mentions as pragmatic categories of discourse serve further analysis and interpretation of specific (sub)types and individual works under the worldmaking types or genres. (Lyytikäinen 2012: 69)

These 'worldmaking genres' can be paralleled to Northrop Frye's modes (Frye 1957). Modes are constants that recur in different literary and artistic genres, and through which, if we follow Ricoeur's and Lyytikäinen's speculations, the world of the artwork is metaphorically shaped. According to Remo Ceserani's definition,

> a literary mode is a set of rhetorical and formal procedures, cognitive attitudes and thematic aggregations, elementary forms of the imaginary which are historically tangible and which can be used by various codes, genres and forms in the creation of literary and artistic texts: every text is, indeed, produced on the basis of a precise language code and of a precise genre model, but also according to a 'mode' or to the combination of various 'modes' among those historically available in the repositories of the imaginary (Ceserani 1999: 548, translation mine).

Modes represent the different ways through which a metaphorical configuration is accomplished. By metaphorical configuration we mean a new approach to representation that entails two important presuppositions. First of all, the word 'configuration' no longer refers only or mainly to the emplotment, but it also encompasses themes, motifs, as well as diegetic instances. Secondly, the word 'metaphorical' stands for the discrepancy inherent in each process of representation, a discrepancy that must be read in relation to the hypothetical 'reality' which exists out of

the work of art. There is no direct correspondence between a hypothetical referent and its artistic representation: a dichotomy remains between the world created by the work of art and the world in which both the creator and the interpreter/reader live.

The latest cognitive theories are quite critical on this point, because a theory of narrative based on 'immersion' implies the non-persistence of the boundaries between these two worlds. However, a total obliteration of the gap between the world of art and the world of the reader could besomewhat dangerous, as it does not account for a number of literary phenomena[4]. If the difference between the fictional and the real world is given due attention, the dynamic tension between the role played by the imaginary (prefiguration) and the metaphorical configuration becomes more prominent.

The concept of metaphorical configuration also allows us to highlight another important theoretical issue which is usually underestimated in Aristotelian or Ricoeurian readings of mimesis: narrative voice, perspective and point of view. In *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur does actually consider point of view while analyzing the specificity of fiction as a narrative form. In Ricoeurian terms, point of view and narrative voice represent one of the three ways through which fiction proves self-reflexive. The relation between action, character and discourse in fiction relies on the difference between utterance (how things are said) and statement (what is said) (Ricoeur 1985: 88). Point of view reveals the position from which the events of the narration are spatially seen and temporally arranged, it allows the narrator (and also the reader) to enter the consciousness of characters. The narrative voice is related to, but not completely coincident with, the point of view: it shows the presence of a narrator, the fact that events are always told by somebody who is fictionally charged with the task of narrating. Point of view and narrative voice are the two technical tools for the transition from *mimesis II* to *mimesis III*: they are "situated at the point of transition between configuration and refiguration, inasmuch as reading marks the point of intersection between the world of the text and the world of the reader" (Ricoeur 1985: 99).

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[4] See Merja Polvinen's essay "Being Played: Mimesis, Fictionality and Emotional Engagement" (Polvinen 2012: 93-113). In this article, Polvinen focuses on the reader's emotional response to self-conscious fiction. Looking at the aesthetic dimension and the effect of pleasure of metaficiton, she highlights the limits of a concept of narrative based only on notions of embodiedness and experience.

Nevertheless, Ricoeur's focus is not on point of view and narrative voice, but rather on the dimension of plot and on temporal configuration. Therefore, although diegesis is not neglected in Ricouer's theorisation, it is not its core.

What will be suggested in the present study is that if we consider representation in terms of metaphorical configuration, point of view and narrative voice play a crucial role, and not an accessorial one. In fact, it is the point of view from which the story is told that determines which mode of representation is privileged and which mode of representation acts as a means through which what Nelson Goodman has defined "worldmaking" is achieved. The process of worldmaking is determined, first of all, from the perspective from which the story is told, a perspective that, due to the ethical implications implicit in the storytelling, establishes which mode is dominant in a given narration. Focalization becomes a strategy for organizing the entire representation process and for distinguishing between different modes of representation. Also in this respect as well, a 'metaphorical' approach to representation distances itself from a plot-based notion of mimesis.

As is well-known, the long-lasting debate on the use of such terms as point of view, voice, and focalization is still ongoing in the field of literary theory[5]. As a result of this debate, many new theories have been proposed especially in the field of narratology, even if it would seem that none of these meets the requirements of each specific critical

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[5] The definition of 'point of view' has always been a *vexata quaestio* in literary criticism. An array of critics, ranging from Henry James to Stanzel, Lubbock, Friedman, Booth, Genette, but also Doležel and Bakhtin, have set out to explore the concept from different angles and with different scopes. On the one hand, there is an attempt to define what a point of view formally is. It has been clarified that point of view and voice are distinct concepts, as the former denotes the angle from which the story is told, while the latter indicates the fictional construction to which the narration is delegated. Friedman (1955) provided probably the most detailed taxonomy of all kinds of narrative voices, based on the combination of multiple factors. These categories are rooted in the recognition of a system of oppositions: showing vs. telling, narration vs. drama, implicit vs. explicit, idea vs. image, summary vs. scene, exposition vs. presentation. Starting from some elementary questions (who is speaking to the reader? From which angle is the narrator speaking? Which kind of distance is there between reader and narrator?), Friedman describes eight different types of narrator: editorial omniscient (an omniscient, intrusive narrator situated outside the narrated events); neutral omniscient (omniscient, outside the events, nonintrusive, impersonal); "I" as witness (the narrator belongs to the narrative world as a secondary character with a peripheral perspective of the narrated events); "I" as protagonist; multiple selective omniscient; selective omniscient; dramatic mode; camera.

inquiry[6]. The way out of this impasse is a pragmatic one: the effectiveness of a theoretical category is tested against the validity of textual analysis. Therefore the distinction between focalization, narrator or voice and literary techniques that diegetically represent speech and thoughts (dialogue, monologue, free indirect speech, stream of consciousness etc.) will be kept. However, a mediatory view will be taken into account, as the one expressed by Niederhoff in the following passage:

> *Point of view* seems to be the more powerful metaphor when it comes to narratives that attempt to render the subjective experience of a character; stating that a story is told from the point of view of the character makes more sense than to claim that there is an internal focalization on the character. *Focalization* is a more fitting term when one analyses selections of narrative information that are not designed to render the subjective experience of a character but to create other effects such as suspense, mystery, puzzlement, etc. If focalization theory is to make any progress, an awareness of the differences between the two terms and of their respective strengths and weaknesses is indispensable. (Niederhoff 2013)

Focalization relates to the amount of information shared between narrator, characters and readers, while the concept of point of view covers a wider range of interpretations that are not only concerned with formal patterns of diegetic instances. As Bakhtin brilliantly showed in his essay on polyphony entitled *Discourse in the Novel* (Bakhtin 1981: 259-422), style is always imbued with ideological and sociological connotations which achieve a crucial relevance in the representation of a highly ideologised subject such as the object of the present study, university, where social and political instances are relevant traits not only of the university as a social construct, but also of university as an object of literary representation. The 'point of view' is not only the perspective from which the story is told, but it also establishes also a system for organizing texts by

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[6] An interesting summary of the most recent debates in narratology around focalization and point of view may be found online on the website of "The Living Handbook of Narratology", a highly valuable resource compiled by academic experts in the field of narratology. In particular see: Niederhoff, Burkhard: "Focalization", in Hühn, Peter et al. (eds.), *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, Hamburg: Hamburg University Press. URL = http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/focalization; Niederhoff, Burkhard: "Perspective – Point of View". In: Hühn, Peter et al. (eds.): *the living handbook of narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University Press. URL = http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/perspective---point-view.

providing an implicit interpretation of the text itself. Moreover, it provides the text with coherence and bears upon it the expectations and emotional responses of readers.

Although in the present study strictly cognitive and narratological approaches will not be applied, Rita Felski's *Uses of Literature* (2008), an analytical and pragramatic investigation of the effects of narrative strategies on the readers, will be taken into account. Felski's study makes it clear that points of view are never neutral, but are always positional, with ethic implications. The voice organizes the representation and, by looking at the formal features that characterize focalization, the reader is able to understand which mode is dominant in the construction of the fictional reality.

Before turning to re-figuration, dramatisation and how the different modes of representation come together in specific representation strategies, a reassessment of the relationship between cultural dynamics and literary forms, with a special reference to genre theory, will be presented.

2. *Formulaic Patterns and Hybridisation in Literary Genres Theory*

When we talk about literary genres, the identification of the 'generic features' or 'generic conventions' needs to be taken into account in order to establish the existence of a group of texts that share such characteristics. In other words, we need to trace the elements which allow us to define the genre. In order to describe a genre (which is a preliminary step in the process of *interpretation* of a genre) we need to look at themes, formal and structural patterns, as well as diegetic instances.

We can call 'genre' a group of narrative structures and strategies that are, more or less, fixed in the imaginary of both authors and readers. The importance of this cognitive aspect has been stressed by Heta Pyrhönen (2013). Quoting Marie-Laure Ryan's definition of generic conventions, Pyrhönen explains that we can define A as a convention of a genre X if:

    (1) Almost every sender of texts belonging to genre X conforms to A;
    (2) Almost every receiver expects every sender to conform to A;
    (3) Almost every receiver would prefer every sender to conform to A;

(4) A is not necessary, since sender and receiver could have agreed on another principle meeting the above condition. (Pyrhönen 2013: 185)

According to Pyrhönen, this pattern also accounts for what she calls the 'dominant construction principle' , i.e. "a stable and widely spread structuring of multiple formal and thematic elements"[7] that shows analogies with Cawelti's notion of 'formula'.

In *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (1977), John Cawelti establishes a close connection between genre, conventionality and formula. In Cawelti's interpretation, genre is a semantic tool that shapes both the reader's horizon of expectation and her interpretation according to a pre-determined framework. This framework is made up of critical debates and intra-literary formulations that have become a repository of literary memory and tradition. Genres therefore also include formulas whose transformations depend on social-historical-cultural contexts, and on universal archetypes. The word 'formula' stands for "a conventional story pattern" capable of eliciting a number of cultural and ideological stimuli in standardised combinations. Moreover, in Cawelti's view, formulas help the dialogue of contextual cultural influences with the main archetypical models[8].

In our analysis of university fiction, we will show how formulaic mechanisms can be traced both in the generally homogenous plots of the 19th century varsity novels and of 20th century campus novels. Although narrative features may change in time and at each stage, what is striking is the recurrence of the same standardised *topoi* and narrative turning points within the novels that belong to each stage and in particular within novels that contribute to the establishment of the genre.

It should be said, however, that, as Pyrhonen has brilliantly shown, formulaic narratives with a DCP can also coexist with another phenomenon which seems to be, at

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[7] «The dominant construction principle is best understood as a stable and widely spread structuring of multiple formal and thematic elements. It is a macro-level regulative combination of micro-level regulative rules, such as, for example, character types, plot motifs as well as style and discourse. Another way of phrasing this idea is to say that it provides the most widely known steady patterning of narrative form combined with familiar cultural material at a specific point in time in the life of a genre» (Pyrhönen 2013: 186).

[8] Drawn from Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), these models are romance, adventure, mystery and melodrama.

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first sight, quite the opposite: hybridisation[9]. The development of the campus form as a stage of university fiction will be explained precisely through the combination of persistent formulaic patterns with multilayered hybridisation strategies. In fact, hybridisation is a process which is much more common as it could be imagined. As Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning point out in their introduction to the volume *Gattungstheorie und Gattungsgeschichte* (Gymnich, Neumann, Nünning: 2007) hybridity is not a distinguishing phenomenon of the postmodern condition, but it has played an important role in the process of generic transformation since the very origins of Western literature. Nevertheless, the mimetic strategies and the modalities through which a genre appears as hybridised vary according to social and cultural aspects[10]. This means that, even if literature, and especially the novel, always tends towards a mixture of different generic features, the blurring of genre demarcations has become a prominent and distinctive trait of postmodernist fiction. Transgression, contamination and appropriation of established genres result in the creation of composite and heterogeneous literary forms that never coincide with canonised modes (tragedy, comedy etc.) and popular emplotments (crime fiction, romance plots etc.). This borrowing of structures, forms, motifs, and patterns is enacted through the employment of specific mimetic and formal strategies such as self-reflexivity or medialisation.

Since it is almost impossible to account for the variety of interpretations and definitions subsumed within the umbrella term 'hybridisation' in literary studies, we are going to limit the discussion of hybridisation to genre theory. When applied to generic

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[9] Although Pyrhönen's analysis focuses on an entirely different subject – adaptations from Jane Austen's novels – her argument about the coexistence of generic conventions and hybridisation holds true in the case of the campus novel form as well.

[10] Klaudia Seibel has argued that hybridisation and contamination work on a cognitive level: «Genres are cognitive categories. […] Thus, hybridisation or the bringing together of different generic concepts is above all part of the act of reading and cannot be regarded without bearing this fact in mind while focusing on the text. […] Genres are fuzzy categories. […] Very often, users of generic concepts agree on a 'hard core' of distinctive features that characterise a genre, but there is no consensus about more marginal features. […] In the case of contamination, one must consider whether the quality and/or amount of textual signals that do not point at the genre's 'hard core' (or at the prototype) may still be subsumed under the heading of 'family resemblance' as 'odd relatives' or whether there is an actual contamination at work. […] The knowledge about genres is acquired through the process of literary socialisation. [...] The more clearly the different genres triggered by the text are conceived of as distinct concepts, the more disturbing the contamination becomes to the reader. This is particularly true for those different genres which not only have been separated by their generic features, but also been known by their generic tags to belong to opposed social groups». (Seibel 2007: 138-145)

change, hybridisation is understood as the blending of cultures, discourses, media and, in particular, genres conventions. Hybridisation, mixing genres or genre blurring have been identified as markers of change in the development of genres[11]. This means that genres are perceived from a constructivist point of view: they are neither a given unity nor an essentialist entity but they result from the intersection of several intra-literary and extra-literary factors.

In her essay on mixing genres, Klaudia Seibel offers a typology for the classification of different levels and degrees of what she calls 'contamination' (Seibel 2007). Strong contaminations and weak contaminations take place at five levels: textual world (fictional world), textual structure (the syntagmatic configuration), textual texture, textual dynamics and textual tagging. Seibel's grid productively deals with relevant methodological issues for our topic, albeit with some variations. Although Seibel's taxonomy of the textual levels where hybridity occurs is extensive and detailed, in the discussion on university fiction two levels of hybridity are relevant to hybridisation in genre analysis: hybridisations within a specific work of art and hybridisations within the dynamics of genre. As for the former, we propose a more flexible grid than Seibel's, based on the distinction between paradigmatic, syntagmatic and discursive levels. The paradigmatic axis has to do with selection, i.e. what is represented (themes, motifs etc.), while the syntagmatic axis is about the arrangement, configuration and emplotment of events; the third level is the discursive axis, which regards communication and narrative mediation, narrator, voice and focalization. As regards the second point (hybridisations within the dynamics of genre), we will trace the hybrid dimensions of individual literary works and relate them to broader cultural dynamics within the literary and extra-literary systems. In particular, hybridisation will be considered in the light of mimesis theories, which means that hybridity will be seen as belonging to the modes of representation which embrace both literary tradition and cultural or symbolic mediation.

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[11] See Nünning/Schwanecke's article "Crossing Generic Borders – Blurring Generic Boundaries: Hybridization as a Catalyst for Generic Change and the Transformation of Systems of Genres" (Nünning, Schwanecke 2013: 115-146)

3. *Refiguring the University Imaginary: Dramatisation as a Strategy of Representation*[12]

A discussion of configuration, re-figuration and hybridisation presupposes that mimesis should be looked at from two different perspectives. On the one hand, mimesis as representation is still related to, even if not coincidental with, imitation and reference. On the other hand, literature has built its own tradition of techniques, modes of representation and styles that determine what configuration and refiguration look like in a literary text. What will be argued here, and discussed more in details in Chapter IV, is that a new concept – namely 'dramatisation' – might prove productive for the analysis of narratives whose mimetic level is particularly challenging.

The following passages, taken from critical essays in diverse areas – from narratology to postcolonial studies – exemplify how the terms 'dramatisation' or 'to dramatise' are quite frequent, even pervasive in critical writing:

> The primary narrator cues temporary shifts back from the embedded to the initial deictic center. In this way, the novel *dramatizes* the immersive power of narrative itself, its capacity to transport listeners and readers by way of deictic shifts to different space-time coordinates.(Herman 2002: 273, emphasis mine)

> To *dramatize* the description, Balzac often resorts to the device of figuratively pulling the reader into the scene through a second-person address. (Ryan 2001: 125, emphasis mine)

> I discover that these texts *dramatize* in eloquent ways the question of otherness. Their dramatization is clearly not in the story line or plot of their tale necessarily. (Kadir 1993: 7-8, emphasis mine)

What also emerges is that dramatisation has been used either to account for the relationship between texts and their relevant topics or to highlight textual/narrative

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[12] A different version of this subchapter appears in my article "Reframing the Concept of Dramatization through Literary Fiction: an Analysis of A.S. Byatt's *Still Life*" (Seligardi 2014).

strategies aimed at enhancing the readers' immersion in the story[13]. The meanings recorded in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* entry are, instead, less related to narration per se than to adaptation:

> Dramatization: the process of adaptation whereby a stage play or film drama is created from major elements (plot, characters, settings) derived from a non-dramatic literary or historical work, usually a novel, romance (Baldick 2008: 98).

It appears, then, that while in performance and adaptation studies dramatisation has clear-cut and relatively stable meanings, in literary studies it is a much more blurred concept that still eludes definitions.

Gilles Deleuze is one of the few intellectuals who have addressed the definition of dramatisation in philosophy. In *The Method of Dramatisation*, a paper presented at the Société Française de Philosophie on January 28, 1967, Deleuze defines dramatisation as the process through which an Idea (in Platonic terms) incarnates, actualizes and differentiates itself. Spatio-temporal dynamism is understood as the only strategy of organisation through which it is possible to grasp and to understand Ideas, i.e. we can understand what an Idea is only when it is incarnated or enacted by a form that exists (or might exists) in a spatiotemporal dimension. At the core of Deleuze's argumentation is the dialectic relationship between the imitation of things and the embodiment of Ideas. In the case of imitation, representation is understood, along Plato, as a process according to which a logic of the possible as resemblance is prevailing, while an Idea is "an image without resemblance", and its domain is the virtual, which is actualised through divergence and differentiation. The very process of differentiation takes shape only when the concept is embodied in spatial and temporal forms capable of answering the questions: How much? Who? How? Where? When? In other words, when it is dramatised:

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[13] 'Immersion' and 'experientiality' have been frequently investigated in contemporary narratology, such as the works by David Herman (2002), Marie Laurie Ryan (2001) and Monika Fludernik (1996). The emphasis here falls on the response of readers, perceived as a 'living experience'.

It is the spatio-temporal dynamisms at the heart of fields of individuation which determine the Ideas to actualise themselves in the differentiated aspects of the object. A concept being given in representation, we know nothing yet. We only learn to the extent that we discover the Idea which operates beneath this concept, the field or fields of individuation, the system or systems which envelop the Idea, the dynamisms which determine it to incarnate itself; it is only under these conditions that we can penetrate the mystery of the division of the concept. It is all these conditions which define dramatisation, and its trail of questions: in which case, who, how, how much? The shortest is only the schema of the concept of the straight line because it is firstly the drama of the Idea of line, the differential of the straight line and the curve, the dynamism which operates in silence. The clear and the distinct is the claim of the concept in the Apollonian world of representation; but beneath representation there is always the Idea and its distinct-obscure ground, a "drama" beneath all logos (Deleuze 1967: 588).

Deleuze's seminal and higly productive approach to dramatisation remains, however, confined to philosophy. Much more recently new light has been shed on dramatisation as a travelling concept by Franz Willem Korsten, whose 2012 essay has opened up a debate on the difference between theatricality[14] and dramatisation. While theatricality is related to theatre, dramatisation – Korsten argues – is related to drama in the following way:

Although the two are closely related, theatricality is distinctively different, in this context, from drama. Drama does not require organization in terms of perspective. In fact, drama does not even need an audience. Whereas the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi* focuses on the audience, as the subject of placing in perspective, the idea of drama focuses in the first instance on those who act, are doing something, even if that doing is playing. (Korsten 2012: 326)

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[14] In current criticism, theatricality is an interdisciplinary tool that aims at describing all the situations that publicly exhibit a certain degree of performance. Erika Fischer-Lichte (1995) has tried to reconstruct the history of the term and its different meanings. What emerges is that it is possible to read theatre and theatricality in three different ways: a) as a metaphorical model; b) as a rhetoric medium; c) as an autonomous art. According to the first two interpretations, the concept has been attributed a specific social and political connotation. In this sense, theatricality appears to be related to Judith Butler's performativity.

Korsten's notion of dramatisation is a blending of Spinoza's imagination and Deleuze's dramatisation:

> Imagination is a category of sensation, and an indispensable one at that, on the path towards true knowledge. It can materialize in the shape of mental imagery, and can capture modalities of physical representation that do not represent a concrete, recognizable shape 'out there'. With respect to this, imagination escapes the logic of representation. Because of its materiality (and by consequence in relation to sensibility) and because imagination falls outside the realm of representation proper, I read Spinoza's use of the concept in the light of what I just called 'dramatization'. Imagination with Spinoza is not something one *has*, but what one *enacts*. (Korsten 2012: 327-328)

Korsten's idea of dramatisation approximates enactment, but, being immediately related to a bodily act, his enactment bears no relation to representation. In fact his analysis addresses plays in view of their performance in drama schools.

In light of Deleuze's and Korsten's contributions, we propose instead to understand dramatisation in literary theory as the narrative enactment of abstract concepts or ideas: dramatisation is the process through which an Idea is given narrative consistence. Such enactment can be investigated on the mimetic level (through strategies such as thematisation, characterisation, i.e. an Idea is thematically staged, for example, by a character who reflects, acts, thinks or speak about it or according to it) and/or on the diegetic level (through such strategies as shifting and ambiguous focalization designed to promote the reader's awareness of the fictional world and of the discussion of Ideas she is facing in the narrative texts). Helpful suggestions in this direction come from studies in narratology and, more precisely, on focalization, where, even if 'dramatisation' is not directly mentioned, the term 'dramatic mode'[15] often comes to be used with special reference to the well-known distinction between 'telling' and 'showing':

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[15] While pointing to the difference between narration and drama, Norman Friedman (1955), for instance, calls 'dramatic mode' the straightforward presentation of words, actions and settings on the narrative stage, with no interference – comment or information – from the external narrator.

In a first approximation, the distinction can be taken quite literally: in the showing mode, the narrative evokes in readers the impression that they are shown the events of the story or that they somehow witness them, while in the telling mode the narrative evoke in readers the impression that they are told about the events. (Klauk, Koppe 2013)

It has been often maintained that, since 'telling' and 'showing' ultimately both depend on the narrator, a strict distinction between the two in the analysis of literary texts is in most cases unproductive.

Keeping the distinction between 'telling' and 'showing' in mind, however, may be helpful when dramatisation results from shifting focalizations and, ultimately, from points of view, especially in those texts where the narrator's external point of view is hardly distinguishable from the character's internal point of view. The shift from indirect to free indirect speech, which is often hardly perceivable, can be taken as the threshold between 'telling' and a new kind of 'showing'. In fact, in the case of dramatisation, 'showing' or 'drama' (sensu Friedman) are to be understood metaphorically as the staging of ideas embodied by characters.

The notion of dramatisation proves critically productive in the case of narratives that mix literary techniques and characteristics close to the realist mode with elements that perform a high degree of self-awareness and self-reflexivity, i.e. when the so-called 'self-conscious realism' is at stake. 'Self-conscious realism' is, actually, the definition that A.S. Byatt herself gave of her own realism. In Byatt's point of view, self-conscious realism is the:

awareness of the difficulty of "realism" combined with a strong moral attachment to its values, a formal need to comment on their fictiveness combined with a strong sense of the value of a habitable imagined world. (Byatt 1991: 184)

As Byatt states, the value of this kind of realism does not lie in "any privileged relationship to truth, social or psychological". It is, instead, more effective "because it leaves space for thinking minds as well as feeling bodies" (Byatt 1991: 17).

According to Byatt's last observation, we may extend the meaning of dramatisation as a mimetic strategy that mediates between the world of thoughts, i.e. the world of theory, and the world of bodies, or, in fictional terms, of characters. Instead of being exposed and discussed in a theoretical and abstract way, in Byatt's novels ideas are incarnated by characters who, through their actions and, most of all, through their thoughts, give shape to abstract concepts by putting them into the spatiotemporal dimension of the fictional world. Dramatisation, therefore, performs a kind of representation which does not evoke a referent, be it real or fictitious. Dramatisation enacts concepts, and allows the author to shape a world of Ideas through fiction by disclosing new relationships between the world of the mind and artistic representation.

CHAPTER II

The 19th Century Varsity Novel: A Formulaic Genre between Realistic *Bildungsroman* and Subversive Counter-Narratives

1. *Prefiguring Varsity Novels: The University Imaginary and its Cultural Dynamics in the 19th century*

The university as a literary motif has been part of the British literary tradition since the very beginning of its history. Chaucer is probably the first writer to celebrate the prestige of Oxford and Cambridge in his famous *Canterbury Tales*, where we find a number of characters connected to the two famous universities (e.g., students or monks studying there). However, in the centuries that followed, the representations of the university context have gradually come to achieve easily recognizable parodic or satirical traits. In particular, two main ideological constructs can be said to have played a key role in this strategy of representation. On one level, the institutional power, firmly in the hands of intellectual elites and of the upper classes, is invariably put into the foreground. On the other level, the university as a political institution is often deconstructed through narrative strategies which lay bare the contradictions of the social system: the campus puts on display a neat juxtaposition between "fast men – rich students who live dissolutely and comfortably, involved in haunting, drinking, fighting and love stories – [and] reading men or slow men, studious, cultured, socially misfit, who live in poor rooms and suffer cold and hunger" (Paruolo 1990: 42, translation mine). Until the end of the 18th century the university is just one of the many themes or motifs within narration and is usually described as a detached, and often comic episode.

In the beginning of the 19th century the university starts to be represented with the help of a specific plot and within a literary genre called *varsity novel* [16]. It is quite natural to wonder why this shift occurs at such precise moment in time. An account of the cultural dynamics that have contributed to shaping and circulating the genre should help explain the phenomenon. In fact, during the second half of the 19th century the cultural significance of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, whose symbolic status developed from the Middle Ages until modernity, has been transformed according to many factors. It is useful to summarize the impact of these factors in order to give testimony to the extra-literary factors that have affected the shaping of the literary genre and in order to give an account of the process of cultural construction of what we have previously called 'university imaginary'.

The first aspect that should be taken into consideration is the political relevance of Oxford and Cambridge. Both universities have been national symbols, places of collective identification designed for the formation of British politics and policies. The fact that the Oxbridge campus has been always perceived as a self-enclosed and self-standing microcosm, separated from society, mirrors the elitism of the members of the universities. The complex relation between power and culture, and the very idea of university education developed especially during the Renaissance: classical literature and culture, the idea of a liberal education offered to aristocrats, and the problematic balance between education and power are the fundamental traits that have characterised the university system during the centuries until the Victorian period[17].

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[16] We owe to Mortimer Proctor, a recognised authority in the study of the 19th century varsity novel, the term 'university' or 'varsity novel' for this stage of the evolution of the genre. In spite of its datedness and of its moralistic hints, Proctor's monograph *The English University Novel* (Proctor 1957) is still seminal: besides offering an exhaustive overview of the development of the genre from the first half of the 19th to the first part of the 20th century, Proctor's essay outlines the socio-cultural reasons for the 'lowbrow' (and not 'highbrow') diffusion of this literary genre. Proctor's approach is retrieved and further developed by Elena Paruolo in her *Il mito di Oxbridge* (Paruolo 1990), one of the few Italian monographs in this field of studies, with a Barthesian reading of the Oxbridge myth (in particular of Oxford).

[17] Starting from the reign of King Henry VIII and until the 19th century the political influence of the university in Britain has considerably grown, although within the boundaries set by the Anglican Church, whose control over cultural institutions has always been significant. For an exhaustive overview of the historical and political development of the British University see: Proctor (1957): 51-65; Barnhard (1947); Sanderson (1975); Anderson (1995); Graham (2005); Anderson (2006).

The major social and political transformations that affected Great Britain in the 19th century – during the so-called Victorian Period – contributed to creating expectations of parallel changes in the university system. Pressure for change – and mobility – came from an extensive range of powerful social actors in the fields of politics, education, religion, and science:

> the growth of professionalization and the demand for trained expertise in public affairs; the reform of the public school, spreading from Thomas Arnold's Rugby and creating a new middle-class clientele whose social ambitions, and training in classical culture pointed them to the universities; the growing impatience of religious minorities of all kinds with an Anglican monopoly which seemed increasingly anomalous; the intellectual progress of secularization, which attacked the church on a different front; and new forms of scientific and scholarly knowledge, making a parallel attack on the dominance of classics. (Anderson 1995: 35)

Traditionally, education in Oxbridge was based on humanistic principles, which grounded on classical studies (Greek, Latin, Philosophy etc.). In the 19th century, however, the world started to demand new different skills, related to industrial production, technological progress and a better understanding of laws of nature. The attack of scientific knowledge on the dominance of the classics, to which Anderson refers above, is particularly relevant to the varsity novel, since it accounts for the cultural forces at play reconfiguring this genre. In fact, the so-called 'two culture' controversy underlies the emplotment and narrative strategies of the university novel genre.

The core of the debate is the battle between two opposite schools of thought, relying on opposing discourses. On the one hand, we find the the scientific discourse, which, having developed in the wake of the industrial revolution and of Darwin's publications, became influential in the Oxbridge milieu as well. On the other hand, there was a powerful reaction against technology and materialistic de-personalisation, or, in Matthew Arnold's terms, Philistinism. In his critical overview of the relationship between science and culture in the Victorian era, Bernard Lightman (2010) investigates

the opposition between the two cultures, which will persist throughout the whole twentieth century[18]. In the British context this term is associated with the cultural revolution led by Thomas Huxley and John Tyndall. Not only did they favour a completely secularised idea of nature with a pragmatic scientific approach, they also promoted a great renewal of British culture, in response to important social changes within the cultural establishment[19].

Against the increasing number of scientists, a number of highly influential Victorian intellectuals, actively rallying against philistinism in their editorial projects and through their writings in literary magazines, contributed to the shaping of the ideological patterns of the university novel. Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) is beyond any doubt the most influential work in this area, which had a profound impact on subsequent literary criticism in UK. In *Culture and Anarchy*, the true manifesto of a new culture, liberal and conservative at the same time, the new ideal of culture, rooted in Platonic and Christian traditions, is put forward and promoted through a rather belligerent argumentative strategy as a weapon against the enemies of culture defined as "barbarians, philistens, populace". Culture, famously described as "the Best which has been thought and said" in a specific cultural and historical context, is deemed to be the only way to achieve moral and spiritual perfection. Arnold's focus is on the education of the members of the middle class[20], which, to keep their newly-acquired political power,

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[18] The most popular book on this cultural gap is probably C. P. Snow's *The Two Cultures*, published in 1959. For an insight into the relationship between the Two Cultures debate and the 20th century campus novel see Kühn (2002).

[19] Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century scientific discourse had been controlled by the Oxbridge aristocratic and Anglican system, whose Christian and classical frameworks were obstacles, in Huxley's opinion, to a liberal, middle-class, democratic and secular change. Lightman describes the naturalists' attempt to act as a counter-hegemonic force in order to establish a new cultural resonance as follows: «First, they argued that only science (as they defined it) offered a path to genuine knowledge of nature. Neither the church nor the Bible could be considered as authoritative sourced of scientific truth. [...] Second, scientific naturalists claimed that only they possessed the expertise to speak on behalf of science. Expertise was the result of training that could be only obtained in specific sites, especially the laboratory, and it was only achievable trough a discipline of self-renunciation – a surrender to nature – and a willingness to seek out truth regardless of the consequences. [...] The scientific naturalists embraced a third tactic as part of their strategy. [...] they insisted that scientific knowledge provided a good deal of insight into the human condition, not just the state of nature». (Lightman 2010: 17)

[20] Democracy, which might be expected to be involved in such a project, is however not really contemplated in Arnold's political thought. In fact, in spite of his poignant criticism of contemporary aristocratic ways of life and behaviour, Arnold mainly relies on the ideology of aristocracy and oligarchy, which is dominant in the Oxbridge tradition.

will need to draw inspiration from the ancient aristocratic model. By stimulating individual spontaneous inclinations towards Beauty, classical literature will replace more materialistic and utilitarian practices.

The reforms that affected Oxford and Cambridge during the 1850's mostly resulted from the influence exerted by the discourses mentioned above. In practice, the Victorian reform acts brought about such major transformations as the introduction of a fairer access system at Oxbridge, of higher standards, of a more equal distribution of fellowships, of an improvement of teaching, research and publication policies, of an increasing secularisation of university power and of a higher priority given to the classics, mathematics and philosophy in the curricula, corresponding to an Arnoldian idea of liberal culture, also shared by the ideal Christian community of Cardinal Newman. Structural and institutional changes[21] were introduced in order to get rid of the deficits typical of the previous Oxbridge institutional system.

The critics who have reflected on the origins of varsity novels take this major academic development as the historical source of the varsity novel. As we will see, the varsity novel (especially one of its variants, called the reform novel) conveys a generally positive worldview related to the Oxbridge reform process. The university campus (Oxford in particular) is fictionally shaped as a literary *locus amoenus* or *ortus conclusus*, mythically protected by its own *genius loci*. Although in the representation of the university life persists a sense of critique against the inequalities that academia exhibits, the emphasis falls on the prospect of social solutions, more than on comic or satiric disparagement.

2. *Configuring the Varsity Novel: Dominant Form, Formula and Bildung-model*

Varsity novel has usually been recognised as a genre on the basis of its exclusive setting at campuses or academic environments, and on the basis of an emplotment related to that world. *Reginald Dalton: A Story of English University Life* by J.G. Lockhart, published in 1823, has been pointed out as probably the "ancestors" of the genre. This is

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[21] These changes can be summarised in few points: a bureaucratic and didactic re-organisation of the curricula in order to achieve a more equal distribution of scholarships, the implementation of oral lectures and the planning of courses based on modern cultural and social requirements.

the story of the young son of a vicar, who, having been disinherited, decides to go to Oxford in order to achieve economic independence and thus prove his moral value. In spite of his noble intentions, however, he is soon led astray when he is acquainted with the leader of a disreputable Oxford gang. The description of the undergraduates' debauchery is central, and it becomes a rather typical trait of the genre: caught in the net of Oxford's dissolute life, Reginald experiences a moral and economic fall. Selling his father's library and working as a servitor in order to settle his debts does not help the young man. Such efforts are nullified by his duel against Frederick, the leader of the gang, who offends Reginald's fiancé Ellen Heskith, the daughter of the university vicar. Reginald is expelled from Oxford, but the novel still offers a happy ending with Reginald's marriage and the prospect of a new life away from England, in New Zealand.

Mortimer Proctor considers this novel as the model for the subsequent novelistic production in the genre dubbed 'varsity novel'. In particular, the novel provides the formulaic patterns for such stereotyped situations as:

> the journey to Oxford by coach, the first exciting view of its towers, the violent town-and-gown fight, undergraduate exploits in the town and field, the problem of debt, the effect of snobbery, and the duel. (Proctor 1957: 63)

Lockhart's novel has received considerable critical attention not only on account of the paradigmatic typology of its plot, but also because the model offered by Reginald's story can easily be classified as a *reform novel*, one of the subgenres that have been identified by Proctor among the various forms of *varsity novels*. As regards the other possible sub-forms, critics have drawn attention to four main categories. The first one is the so-called *rowdy tradition*, a continuation of the previous comic strategy of representation. The second line is constituted by the *Romantic Crichtons' novels*, influenced by different literary and genre traditions (melodrama, sensation novel, romance), where a male protagonist inevitably turns into a highly sensitive man through his beneficial contact with the university environment, where everyone (undergraduates, tutors, professors) works hard and where love stories are romantically and aesthetically transfigured. The third type is the *parodic novel*, a comically-oriented parody of the

previously mentioned romantic declination. Paruolo proposes one more category, the *problematic novel*, which "represents characters whose access to culture is a long and extravagant road" (Paruolo 1990: 65)[22]. The *reform novel*, of which Lockhart's *Reginald Dalton* and Tom Hughes' *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) are the most representative cases, can be considered as the dominant form of the genre, dealing with the reforms put into effect at Oxford and Cambridge during the second half of the nineteenth century.

As both Proctor and Paruolo have argued, the essential feature of the 19th century varsity novel is a stereotyped plot that repeats itself in most of the novels. We can trace the mechanisms of the formula in the general homogeneity of the varsity plots, where the same *topoi* and narrative turning points recur. Among these, as Proctor has shown (Proctor 1957: 45-48), we can find: the arrival at the campus by coach, with the usual view of campus towers in the background; the controversies between fast men and the young protagonist; the ludicrous activities of the gentlemen; the happy ending, when the protagonist proves to be equipped for his official entrance in the world outside academia (significantly, the male hero often decides to settle down in a colony, e.g. New Zealand). If we look at characterisation, the narrative strategy exhibits an impressive number of formulaic features:

- in the 'classic' varsity novel, the main character is a young white male who goes to university in order to achieve economic and social independence;
- the main character does not usually embark on an academic career; his academic experience is chronologically and geographically confined and the *Bildung* process will be completed off the campus;
- the university (in particular Oxford and Cambridge) is the place where the future hegemonic class is formed.

The formulaic structure of the varsity novel needs then to be situated within the network of narrative, social and cultural constructions. On the one hand, we are dealing with a popular genre, excluded from the literary canon and whose writers were either teachers or students at Oxford or Cambridge. On the other hand, the varsity novel shares

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[22] Given the multiplicity of this genre forms, taxonomies of the diverse typologies abound. As we have already specified, however, our focus will be on the formulaic repetition of the main features of the genre.

the ideological emplotment of a masternarrative, as well as their dominant imperialist and bourgeois discourse.

A dominant feature underlying the plot of the varsity novel is the archetype of the initiation paradigm, whose three steps have been described by Paola Cabibbo (1983), as follows:

1. separation/departure: the subject is separated from his spatial and cultural context;

2. proof: in a sacred place and under the guidance of someone more experienced, the subject is confronted with a number of obstacles which he needs to overcome in order to be initiated to the master power;

3. return: the subject is now accepted as a full member of the community.

Because of the fight motif intrinsic in the myth structure[23], the sacred place where the initiation takes place is closed and self-contained. The presence of thresholds is what differentiates the initiation novel from the *Bildungsroman*, which is why Paruolo considers the varsity novel as part of the former. According to Paruolo and Cabibbo, the *Bildungsroman* shows the subject's uninterrupted developments in a kind of 'chain model' ($S_o \rightarrow N_{s1} \rightarrow N_{s2} \rightarrow N_{s3} \rightarrow N_{sn}$), whereas the initiation process is shaped through a closed pattern ($S_o \rightarrow I \rightarrow N_s$)[24]. The newly achieved condition, usually an improvement on the previous one, is quite often permanent and positive[25]. Morevover, in the *Bildung* model, the development of the subject stretches into the future, while in the initiation model it is confined to a time unit: in varsity novels, the reader follows the development of the protagonist in a determinate time section, his campus life.

Regardless of these differences, both paradigms (*Bildung* and initiation) seem to influence the literary representation of the university as a space of experience. The varsity novel, in fact, seems to belong to those literary and cultural normative practices discussed by Franco Moretti, with reference to the *Bildungsroman*, in opposition to the

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[23] See Lotman (1979).

[24] S_o is the original condition of the subject, N_s the new position following the *Bildung* process.

[25] In the case of female and ethnic minority subjects, the result is more ambiguous and less predictable.

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transformational aim of the French *roman de formation*[26]. Commenting on the different plot strategies in various types of *Bildungsroman*, Moretti argues that:

> Following basically Lotman's conceptualization, we can express this difference as a variation in the weight of two principles of textual organization: the 'classification' principle and the 'transformation' principle. […] When classification is strongest – as in the English 'family romance' and in the classical *Bildungsroman* – narrative transformations have meaning in so far as they lead to a particularly marked ending: one that establishes a classification different from the initial one but nonetheless perfectly clear and stable – definitive, in both senses this term has in English. This teleological rhetoric – the meaning of events lies in their *finality* – is the narrative equivalent of Hegelian thought, with which it shares a strong *normative* vocation: events acquire meaning when they led to one ending, and *one* only. […] Under the transformation principle the opposite is true: what makes a story meaningful is its narrativity, its being an open ended process. […] Thus, on the side of classification we have the novel of marriage, seen as the definitive and classifying act par excelence […]. On the side of transformation we have the novel of adultery […]. Where the classification principle prevails youth is subordinated to the idea of maturity. (Moretti 2000: 7-8)

Undoubtedly, the varsity novel belongs to the first type mentioned by Moretti, the British family novel where the developing plotting patterns are related to two different paradigms: *Entwicklung* (the free and independent spiritual growth of the individual) and *Erziehung* (the education received in an external institution)[27]. These two paradigms

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[26] In his inquiries into the original meanings of *Bildung*, from an Heideggerian perspective, Giuseppe Nori (1983) distinguishes two most powerful characteristics: the *Vor-Bildung*, i.e. the relationship with the model-image, which means that the result of this process must correspond to a culturally shaped model (in this case, the citizen of the State and the Empire); then the *Vor-Schrift*, i.e. the fact that this process emerges in a normative and ideological apparatus.

[27] See Domenichelli (2011): 167-170.

merge into the *ideologeme*[28] of a new social status, which results from the union of aristocracy and middle class.

3. *The Modes of Representation in Varsity Novels: The Example of Pedagogic Realism in* Tom Brown at Oxford

After having explored the master discourses that were circulating in the cultural debate during the Victorian period and the main configuration of the genre, it is now time to look at how those cultural dynamics affected the modes of representation of the varsity novel. We will address different narrative patterns (plots, characters, focalisation) in order to find out the relevance of the cultural and literary master configuration which draws on *Bildung* and initiation paradigms on one hand, and on the ideology of the nation-state on the other. We will read *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) by Thomas Hughes to exemplify our statements: this novelrepresents one of the most famous cases of varsity novels at that time.

In the emplotment strategies of the varsity novel, the educational background, inspired by Arnold's perspectives, is highly relevant to the actions of the main characters since the rise and fall of their moral virtue can be interpreted as one of the effects of 'the logic of culture'. This is very clear in such a novel as *Tom Brown at Oxford*, where classics and literature – the subjects studied by the male hero – act as spiritual guides. No matter how deeply scientific and cultural changes affected Victorian society, the humanist tradition still remains crucial to the shaping of the background ideology and to the patterns underlying popular master narratives. This proves to be very true in this novel, especially if we look at the relationship with its predecessor: it is

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[28] The concept of *ideologeme* was first put forward by Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Jameson 1982). Three main frameworks need to be taken into account in order to trace the political unconscious of a work of art: the political history, the social context, the History. For each level, Jameson builds an epistemological and aesthetical category of investigation: on the first level the symbolical act provides the interpretation of the ideological dimension through the aesthetical patterns (the formal and structural aspects) of the work of art; on the second level, Jameson talks about *ideologeme*, «a proto narrative, a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion, a prejudice, about collective characters», in which the dialogical dimension of the opposition between different social classes is expressed; on the third level, the previous analyses are the basis for the individuation of a formal *ideologeme* related to the material modes of production in a specific historical period.

in fact the continuum of the more successful novel *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857)[29], which depicts five years of Tom's life at the Rugby School where he arrives at the age of eleven. From the very beginning of the novel, the reader is made aware of the link between the two stories, and *Tom Brown at Oxford* is immediately configured as the latest stage of Tom's *Bildung* process. The novel is based on Tom's three-year experience at Oxford. A third person omniscient narrator looks at the story from an external point of view, but he also lets the characters represent themselves, by reporting letters and dialogues. In Chapter I, Tom is writing a letter home, describing the first lectures he has to attend:

> I write to tell you how I get on up here, and what sort of a place Oxford is. […] first and foremost it's an awfully idle place; at any rate for us freshmen. Fancy now. I am in twelve lectures a week of an hour each—Greek Testament, first book of Herodotus, second Aeneid, and first book of Euclid! […] We keep very gentlemanly hours. Chapel every morning at eight, and evening at seven. You must attend once a day, and twice on Sundays—at least, that's the rule of our college— and be in gates by twelve o'clock at night. Besides which, if you're a decently steady fellow, you ought to dine in hall perhaps four days a week. Hall is at five o'clock. And now you have the sum total. (Hughes 1861: 6-7)

The letter is taken, by the narrator himself, as the best introduction to the story: the fact that the hero is immediately concerned with the exaltation of the idyllic atmosphere of Oxford as well as the account of his lectures, is made on purpose.

The importance of studying Humanities (Greek, Latin, Ancient History, Literature etc.) is clearly embodied in the novel by the first friend Tom becomes acquainted with: Hardy. Hardy, who is a servant[30] and a very shy man, becomes a model of integrity and labour. His love for reading and Roman history is pointed out several times:

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[29] The popularity of this novel still lasts nowadays, one of the proofs being the television film adaption of the novel made by Dave Moore in 2005 for ITV.

[30] Servants are students who, because of their poverty and incapability of paying fees, must provide some services to the gentlemen (students from nobility or wealthy bourgeoisie).

> And so at last Hardy finished his walk, took down a volume of Don Quixote from his shelves, and sat down for an hour's enjoyment before turning in. (Hughes 1861: 50)

> After hall, Tom made a short round amongst his acquaintance, and then, giving himself up to the strongest attraction, returned to Hardy's rooms, comforting himself with the thought that it really must be an act of Christian charity to take such a terrible reader off his books for once in a way, when his conscience pricked him for intruding on Hardy during his hours of work. He found Grey there, who was getting up his Roman history, under Hardy's guidance; and the two were working the pins on the maps and lists in the Roman corner when Tom arrived. (Hughes 1861: 99)

Hardy's servitorship could be interpreted as a narrative device to justify moral nobility regardless of social class, in line with Matthew Arnold's ideological proposal of calling for a revival and a renewal of aristocratic virtues. But most of all, Hardy exercises a moral influence on Tom. As Tom becomes more and more involved in the boating team and fitness, the positive example of Hardy will prevent him from falling into the 'musclemen' (gentlemen who are only interested in caring about their bodies), while turning into the better faith of 'Muscular Christianity', a combination between body care and moral commitments. The reader can test Tom's developing ethical qualities by looking at his involvement in Harry Winburn's affair, a former friend who is victimised by an arrogant farmer.

The only serious quarrel between Tom and Hardy occurs about a flirt between Tom and a barmaid, which Hardy considers totally inappropriate in light of Tom's social position. This matter opens up a reflection on another pivotal element in the emplotment system: the marriage plot. We said earlier that a typical feature of varsity novels is a tendency to happy ending, which conveys a proper marriage. *Tom Brown at Oxford* does not escape this rule: the long process of cultural and moral education, based on the exemplary teachings from Classics and Christianity, is finalised in Tom's marriage with Mary, an intelligent and elegant young woman, whom he meets in Oxford. Analysing the development of their relationship, by the end of the novel it becomes evident that

love, as a social and political value, can find its expression only once the hero's soul has been trained properly and his behaviour in the world has been readjusted:

> It was because you were out of sorts with the world, smarting with the wrongs you saw on every side, struggling after something better and higher, and siding and sympathizing with the poor and weak, that I loved you. We should never have been here, dear, if you had been a young gentleman satisfied with himself and the world, and likely to get on well in society. (Hughes 1861: 545)

This last passage, told by Mary in the story, expresses very well the implications of the university reform on the education and formation of a new enlightened middle class: while the common gentlemen are more interested in wine parties, fighting, boating, clothes etc., the *real* gentlemen, who are nobles by heart and not by blood, take care of the real matters of their country: politics and poor people. This is one of reasons why in the novel the reader finds several references to the actual historical condition of England, in which Tom expresses an increasing and passionate interest.

As to the *Bildung* process, the protagonist's successful achievement of a gratifying status is a matter of personal value which the campus life helps to display. The fact that the male student is able to reinforce his morality through his academic experience is in line with Arnold's liberalism, but also with the positivistic, secularised self-fashioning and self-making promoted by the industrial and bourgeois Victorian society.

Going back to the dynamics of the varsity novel plot, the *peripeteia* model is crucial: the protagonist is usually challenged by a number of problematic and negative situations. Only his will, when well directed, can help him to reach a new positive and, most often, adult condition. Misadventures are not usually the result of a bad spiritual disposition of the main character, but come from the outside, and are seen as temptations that the protagonist tries to resist. Usually, the temptations the protagonist has to face are introduced by the dissolution of fast men, gentlemen and of aristocratic undergraduates in general. This is one of the pivotal topics of the undergraduate representation in the formula of the varsity novel, along with the traditional parodic description, typical of medieval and Renaissance literature. In *Tom Brown at Oxford*, we

may find a perfect description of the fast men in Drysdale, a companion of Tom at St. Ambrose:

> Drysdale, the third of the set, was the heir of an old as well of a rich family, and consequently, having his connexion ready made to his hand, cared little enough with whom he associated, provided they were pleasant fellows, and gave him good food and wines. His whole idea at present was to enjoy himself as much as possible (Hughes: 78)

In the course the novel the reader learns more about Tom's mistakes: he flirts with Patty, the young barmaid, who, as the reader will discover, was previously engaged with Harry Winburn; he goes on fights; he contracts debts. Despite these controversies, Tom finally achieves the wise judgment that is required from a proper gentleman. We may conclude that the emplotment strategies of the varsity novel bring together and finalize opposing cultural forces, which aim at depicting the rise of a new social class, the middle class, animated by nobility, kindness, solidarity: Tom Brown, Reginald Dalton and varsity novels' freshmen in general do not belong, in fact, to the aristocracy, but they are members of the countryside middle-class or of a decayed aristocracy.

A few words must be said about the role of the narrator in varsity novels, as the narrative voice is responsible for the more general *Weltanschauung* conveyed by the narrative. To summarize, we can say that most frequently the narration is usually extra-diegetic and omniscient. At the beginning of the story the reader is usually given a few basic details about the protagonist through descriptions and digressions including, for example, a social portrait of the protagonist's family, or selected events of his past life, or minute descriptions of landscapes and spaces. The primary purpose of the narrative voice is therefore realistic, with a considerable amount of explanations and detailed genealogies. This is immediately clear in *Tom Brown at Oxford*, where, for example, the narrator extensively describes Oxford and St. Ambrose college, informs the reader about Hardy's and Winburn's families, and exhibits a peculiar pleasure in offering minute details and psychological analysis. Despite aiming at a realistic account, there is no erasure of the subjectivity of the narrator, who alternates third and first person narration.

The following passage is a good example of the narrator's visibility. In fact, the ruminations on undergraduates' lodgings are clearly expressed by the narrator's voice:

> Everyone of us, I suppose, is fond of studying the rooms, chambers, dens in short, of whatever sort they may be, of our friends and acquaintances—at least, I knew that I myself like to see what sort of a chair a man sits in, where he puts it, what books lie or stand on the shelves nearest his hand, what the objects are which he keeps most familiarly before him, in that particular nook of the earth's surface in which he is most at home, where he pulls off his coat, collar, and boots, and gets into an old easy shooting-jacket, and his broadest slippers. Fine houses and fine rooms have little attraction for most men, and those who have the finest drawing-rooms are probably the most bored by them; but the den of the man you like, or are disposed to like, has the strongest and strangest attraction for you. However, an Oxford undergraduate's room, set out for a wine-party, can tell you nothing. All the characteristics are shoved away into the background, and there is nothing to be seen but a long mahogany set out with bottles, glasses, and dessert. (Hughes 1861: 34)

The choice of this kind of narrator is perfectly in line with a general tendency to what we may call a *pedagogic realism*, to which the most of varsity novels tend to adhere to. If we look at another example taken from the ur-varsity novel, Reginald Dalton, we can test the ideological relevance of such a narrative voice:

> Even during the few years that have elapsed since then, what an alteration has taken place in the choice of books for children! – Crusoe, indeed, keeps his place, and will probably do so as long as any thing for the adventurous remains in the composition of the National character among people, of whom Baron Jomini is so far right when he says, "tout home est marin né"; but, with this exception, I think every thing has been altered, and almost for the worse. The fine oriental legend of the Seven Sages is altogether forgotten, except among studious people and bibliomaniacs; and even masterpiece of John Bunyan has been, in a great measure, supplanted by flimsy and silly tracts. The young mind is starved upon such fare as the writers of these things can supply. Instead of the old genuine banquet of strong imagery, and picturesque incident, by which the judgement was compelled to feel itself through the medium of excited and riche imagination, a tame milk-and-water diet is now administered, which takes no firm of fervid grasp of the imagination at

all, and which I should humbly conceive to be about as barren of true wisdom, as it certainly is of true wit. Even the vigourous madness of the old romances of chivalry, which used to be read aloud in the winter evenings, for the common benefit of young and old in a family, was better stuff than what is now fashion; for such reading, with all its defects, had a strong tendency to nourish many of the noblest parts of the intellects. (Lockhart 1827: 2-3)

The use of the first person narration, which highlights the presence of the narrative voice, is combined with a strong polemic accent against the new 'fashion' in children's and family readings. Pedagogic realism emerges as the most prominent mode of representation from the style, which reminds that one of a harangue. Not only does the narrator want to give a scrupulous account of the protagonist's education, but he also wishes to expose his personal view on the contemporary social condition, while proposing an alternative model which is in line with Matthew Arnold's criticism.

The ideological foundations of the varsity novel, which we have investigated so far, have allowed us to piece together the structure of a genre centred on young white men who are expected to become perfect citizens of the Empire and potential contributors to the progress of the country. The institutional prominence of Oxford and Cambridge along with Matthew Arnold's elitist idea of culture inform the discourses that come to bear upon these narratives, whose prevailing mode of representation is mimetic and realistic. Going back to the discussion on mimesis and metaphorical configuration, we can say that in varsity novel the configuration acquires its metaphorical value precisely in setting up an ideological apparatus: the novel stands for the educational and social process that all society has to go through.

4. *Genre Dynamics: Counternarratives in Female Varsity Novels*

It is interesting to observe that less influential discourses, only apparently in line with master narratives, also make their appearance in the representation of the university world during the nineteenth century. In those novels, which constitute a minority in panorama of varsity novels, it seems that an alternative reading of literary and cultural dynamics becomes possible, by offering an original point of view on such a debated

topic as university in the Victorian period. We will try to address these neglected voices and the ideological and cultural contradictions to which they point, to find out to what extent the structuring patterns of such variants resemble or depart from their models. We will also investigate the ways in which variants give life to alternative narratives in opposition to the master discourses which underlie standard varsity novels.

The most powerful and destabilizing declinations of the standard master narrative are the female versions of the romantic account of undergraduates' life at university, namely female varsity novels. Female varsity novels are novels written by women writers and usually focused on female protagonists, and they constitute a subgenre that has been neglected by literary criticism. Usually seen as an example of popular fiction and, as such, unworthy of being part of the high canon, female varsity novels have been accused by some critics of being badly written.

A good example of this critical scepticism is offered by Mortimer Proctor who, in a chapter tellingly entitled *The Damned Tribe of Scribbling Women*, curtly dismisses the whole of this production[31]. Except for some rare cases, female varsity novels – Proctor claims – provide stereotypical and clumsy romance plots, with deceptive and vague descriptions of university life. A product of the 1950's British context, Proctor's reading of the female varsity novel reveals culturally ingrained anti-feminist prejudices. This kind of gender bias is not surprising if we consider that the critical scholarship before the advent of women's studies and cultural studies neither acknowledged such narratives, nor sympathised with their potential subversiveness. Even considering such historical context, though, Proctor's reading appears as a grossly superficial one, in which novels written by women, but still focused on male characters, are put on the same level as novels dealing with women's admission to the sacred fields of Oxbridge or of books which only apparently represent university life[32]. No special space is reserved for the more problematic representations of female protagonists confronted with university life, which would deserve a separate analysis. We are going to focus on

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[31] Proctor (1957): 135-149.

[32] In fact, he takes *Barbara Goes to Oxford* as an example of the few most representative and interesting novels of this kind. In this novel two young women go to Oxford on holiday and here they become acquainted with a superficial image of university people and spaces.

this specific aspect (i.e. novels about women who attend university), as this is undoubtedly an example of a significant variant of the main pattern, which can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of the mainstream varsity novel.

Needless to say, the cultural context bears conspicuously upon these novels. Indeed, female university novels became increasingly popular after women were allowed to attend university courses in the 1880s. Since the 1870s and 1880s, but in particular in the 1890s, a new debate on the admission of women to university education was initiated in magazines and soon became a relevant pattern in popular fiction. The purpose here is not to trace the political and institutional framework of this social process, but rather to draw a comparison between the typologies of plots and the literary representations of university life through the lens of gender. A culturally determined construct, gender underwent radical transformations in the time span under consideration, transformations which are mirrored, enhanced and promoted by the literary representations of female varsity novels.

The representation of college girls and women coincides chronologically with the social and cultural emergence of the so-called 'New Woman'. This expression, which started to be used in the 1880s and 1890s, was originally meant as a disparaging term for the new prototype of woman which was emerging from proto-feminist and socialist discourses. Seen as a potential threat for society, the New Woman, a symbol of female emancipation, was under attack on many fronts. Medical discourses blamed her anti-maternal, masculine attitudes[33], while fictional representations railed against her sexual emancipation and promiscuity. This primary form of sexual liberation was seen as a threat to the 'marriage plot', the social mission for which the young British girls were raised. Often caricatured as a provocative masculinised intellectual, the New Woman was represented in a very satirical way:

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[33] «Anti-feminist commentators deployed pseudo-scientific biological discourses against those women who vied for educational achievements, warning that women's reproductive capacities would be damaged by traditional masculine academic pursuits. […] The eugenist current of thought […] formed a significant strand within the dominant discourse on the New Woman. […] That such fears should have been given voice at the exact moment when Britain's interests abroad seemed to be increasingly under threat, when there was a question mark over Britain's imperial supremacy, was no coincidence. The feeling was, amongst supporters of the establishment, that Britain's women urgently needed to raise up a strong British 'race' in order to sustain the nation's (supposed) supremacy, and the New Woman was construed (or constructed) as a threat to this nation need» (Ledger 1997: 18).

The illustration from an 1895 edition of *Punch* is entirely representative of one of the ways in which the New Woman was represented in periodical literature of the fin de siècle. Severely dressed, wearing college ties, and smoking, the women in the illustration are presumably discussing the books which are on the table whilst the man of the house escapes to the servants' hall for a cup of tea and a gossip. (Ledger 1997: 16)

According to Sally Mitchell (1995), the representation of college girls in female fiction provided an innovative and positive model for girls and young women. In particular, college life was perceived as more liberal, less guarded by family, more socially oriented, and, ultimately, as a place where every girl could have some space for herself[34]. At first sight, female varsity novels seem to have worked as spaces for projecting new female desires: independence, self-development, private space.

The recurring motifs in the emplotments of such novels are not significantly different from those of male narratives, with the exception of more gentle activities replacing typically male activities such as sport and games: the Parliament motif[35], the joy of communal life, the pleasure of learning, tea or cocoa parties, long walks along the river, the regularity of college life. At first sight, some of these narrative patterns seem to have been influenced by feminist, subversive discourses within the New Woman debate. But a closer inspection shows that, more often than not, subversion proves only potential, and, even though female characters are brilliant and cover a wide range of models, their stories invariably end with a domesticating marriage.

The main character is usually represented as a pure feminine creature, possessing a delicate beauty and a pale complexion, whereas her best friend is portrayed as a masculine figure, in line with the characterisations of the New Woman[36]. The fact that

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[34] In Mitchell's reading (1995), this could be the sociological explanation for the narrative functions of detailed descriptions of objects and furniture in female varsity novels.

[35] «A female head topped by mortarboard appeared […] at the head of an "Our Girls' Parliament" letters column in the penny weekly tabloid Our Girls. And the "Parliament" motif suggests recognised subtexts to be read - almost always - in and through the college students. Girls' culture made it known that students at Newnham and Girton emulated national politics in serious debate» (Mitchell 1995: 50).

[36] An alternative popular cliché of the New Woman, beside the masculine type, was 'the femme fatale' model, a sexually free and licentious character. Both models were seen as threatening and taken as potential dangerous consequences of women's university education.

most female protagonists were not portrayed as New Women shows that women authors feared the censorship of medical discourses, which argued that campus life was a cause of stress and hysteria for women: the academic world still demanded that women, no matter how educated, should preserve their traditional roles as wives and mothers. This was the most obvious way for the university to keep at bay the subversive potential of emancipated women.

Traces of a discursive gender opposition can however be retrieved in the representation of shifting paradigms of femininity, oscillating from the Victorian 'angel in the house' – still a prevailing figure – to tentatively subversive female characters. This opposition informs both the thematic and the structural level of the novel (plot, characters etc.) and the narrative structure (focalization, narrator), which appear to be shifting and non-transparent. The tension between the textual surface and the gender problematics that emerge from the narrative construction is probably the most interesting aspect of these texts and can be clearly found in the most acclaimed novels. A couple of examples will help illustrate the complexity of female varsity novels and their polyphonic potential.

The first instance is Mrs. Frances Marshall, one of the most prolific female writers of the genre, whose male *nom de plume* was Alain St. Aubyn. Her plots are usually highly stereotyped: a middle-class girl goes to university in order to achieve independence, but she eventually finds the true love of her life in the sacred gardens of Cambridge and she gets married, living happily for the rest of her life. The plots seem to confirm old paradigms: far from actually being the prototype of a female intellectual, the main character is still the angel in the house. Higher education allows women to improve their feminine virtues, so that newly educated women can become better wives and mothers. Even the academic fights that Girton or Newnham girls experience, or the nervous breakdowns, melancholy and hysterical attacks they suffer from because of the

pressure of hard intellectual work, are seen as a good training in view of the pains of their future married life[37].

However, narrative devices (i.e. focalization and the narrator's comments) yield a nuanced, often ambiguous representation of the main events, as a close reading of *The Master of St. Benedict's*, published in 1893 and possibly Marshall's best novel[38], will show. The main character is Lucy, the young nephew of the Master of St. Benedict's (one of Cambridge colleges) and a motherless girl since childhood, who moves to her granduncle's soon after her father's death. She makes the decision to go to Newnham (Cambridge's female college) in order to become a good governess, with the intention of achieving that social respectability which is a recurring aspiration in the plots of both male and female varsity novels. The characterisation of the protagonist is in line with the traditional Victorian paradigm: she has a pale complexion, red cheeks and bright eyes. She is invariably qualified as *little*, an adjective that defines her age as well as her diminutive aspirations. Lucy does not have high hopes. She is not intellectually ambitious and has no private dreams. She just wants to be able to make a living as a private tutor or to get married to a man rich enough to grant her a quiet life.

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[37] This could be referred to a real accident occurred to Marshall's daughter: according to some of the writer's letters, her daughter suffered from a psychological illness while she was studying at Cambridge. Actually, this version is quite controversial, as McClellan (2010) shows. In fact, the story of the disease could have been totally or partially invented by the writer herself. Here is the interpretation given by McClellan, which we find interesting because it lets speculate about a certain ideological reading that we can make of Mashall's texts, which are more reassuring that subversive: «One reason Marshall might worry about how higher education affects women's health lies in her personal history. In her applications to the Royal Literary Fund, Marshall claimed her youngest daughter, MargaretAnne, was physically, psychologically, and spiritually destroyed by higher education. And, she further argued, her daughter's mental and bodily failure directly contributed to her own decline as well. […] However, perhaps Marshall was an even better fiction writer than we thought. According to archivist Anne Thomson at Newnham College, Margaret Anne Marshall did come up to Newnham in the Easter term of 1891 until 1893, but she was no career invalid. There are no college records indicating Margaret ever had to be sent home for illness. While at university, she attended lectures in chemistry, geology, physics, botany, geography, and French literature. She did not take her Tripos, but she had a distinguished career with the Red Cross and the British Legion. She was awarded medals for war service and long service, which evidence a lengthy —and healthy—career until her death in 1951. […]Marshall also could have fabricated the story about her sick daughter in order to play up the cultural belief that too much education would make women ill. If this was the case, then Marshall once again played upon society's fears about women's education in order to profit from them in her writing» (McClellan 2010: 333-335).

[38] Ann McClellan has argued that, after the death of her husband, Marshall was forced to write conventional romance plots. Because of economic straits she could not take the liberty of countering editorial expectations. Plots where a female character had given up her family life in favour of an intellectual career would have been inconceivable.

The plot focuses less on her academic career than on her relationships with the other characters. The men with whom Lucy becomes acquainted belong to different spheres of power, so that a real 'field', to use Bourdieu's words (1996), is put on display: the social order that Lucy's experiences in her private life is subjected to the same categories of a broader national order, i.e. family and university conventions represents, on a different scale, the nation itself. With his anecdotes on Lucy's father and grandfather, Lucy's granduncle is the bearer and the conveyor of transgenerational memories. This is a role which the narrative highlights as relevant to the establishment of a very important social cooperation. Actually, as Patrick Parrinder (2006) reminds us, family narratives are fundamental in order to empower national identity constructs.[39] In Marshall's novel family narratives remind Lucy of her modest origins, a forgotten past embodied by her mother, whose telling surname – the "milkmaid bringing butter" – by the end of the novel will be applied to Lucy as well, as in a proleptical anticipation of a future that Lucy is quite willing to welcome.

Another reference to the power of patriarchy is St. Benedict's college gallery, where portraits of eminent scholars of Cambridge are exhibited. The gallery, which is within the precincts of the male college, is a kind of visual archive celebrating the true – male – lineage of national culture. Eric Gwatkin, the quiet, middle class man whom Lucy eventually marries, also unsurprisingly incarnates the virtues of the ideal citizen of the Empire: blandness, altruism and self-sacrifice[40]. The happy ending reminds us of the traditional male university novel, as well as of the Bildungsroman and of romance plots in sensation novels.

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[39] «In Victorian and later fiction the novel of courtship merges into the more elaborate form of the family saga, which projects an idea of the nation as a network of extended families; this is an extension of the traditional political analogy between family and state in which the monarch is father of his people. […] Family genealogies in the English novel are often loaded with cultural meaning, conveying a hint of National allegory» (Parrinder 2006: 32-33).

[40] All the novels by Frances Marshall do in fact point to the virtues of the middle class and of mediocrity. The only two characters whose intellectual ambition prevails over altruism, Wyatt Edgel and Pamela Gwatkin, are excluded from the social contract. A brilliant student highly appraised by the whole academic community, Wyatt turns out to be too clever. Unable to put up with the strain of intensive study, he is psychologically unbalanced, suffers from nervous breakdowns and eventually commits suicide. Lucy's refusal to take care of Wyatt is seen by other female students as a shortcoming. It could also be read, however, as a clever escape from a submissive and potentially annihilating conjugal role.

As said earlier, the subversive potential of the New Woman paradigm expresses itself mainly in a number of important secondary female characters. In *The Master of St. Benedict's* such secondary characters is Pamela Gwatkin. Pamela, whose bodily or moral features are not portrayed, stands out as an uncanny figure, the representative of a radically new and alternative vision of the university. Through her figure, cultural contentions about women's academic education and about their intellectual emancipation are highlighted:

> She was the leader of the most advanced set in the college and held opinions that would make one's hair stand on end. There will be a good many Pamela Gwatkins by-and-by, when there are more Newnhams and the world is ripe for them. They will quite revolutionize society. They will not be misunderstood like the Greek women of old. Nobody will question their morals because they seek to lead and teach them. Men will be quite willing to be taught by them. It will no longer be a shame for a woman to speak or preach in public. There will be nothing to debar them from taking orders. Women have proved long ago that they can reach such heights of scholarship as are demanded from a candidate for ordination. But women of Pamela Gwatkin's order will not going into the pulpit – their demands will be even more audacious. (Marshall 1893: 62-63)

The quotation shows clearly the narrator's point of view: Pamela embodies a utopian and proto-feminist ideology within which women's higher education is seen only as the first stage of a process that will lead to the relocation of femininity in a renewed social picture. The New Woman paradigm and the suffragettes' political protests are seen as part of that process. As Pamela's discourses amply prove, in order to transform society women need to fight against cultural, political and religious institutions.

In the course of a debate, Pamela gives proof of her undeniable rhetorical qualities, and in the middle of her speech the narrator wishes that women were admitted to Parliament to represent the University institution:

> She opened the debate on this particular evening —it happened to be some question of woman's rights which she was always advocating—and she spoke for half an hour without a single pause or hitch. Some people confess that they cannot

bear to hear a woman speak; that when a woman stands up to speak in public it always gives them the sensation of cold water running down their backs. No one who listened to Pamela Gwatkin would have this uncomfortable sensation for a moment. It seemed as if she had been made to stand up in public; as if Nature had intended her for a female orator, and had given her the voice — the clear, penetrating, resonant voice — the quiet, assured manner, the full, free flow of words, without which no woman may attempt to stand on a public platform. Pamela Gwatkin had all these rare gifts, and she had opinions — very advanced opinions — on every subject under the sun — religion, morals, science, philosophy — nothing came amiss to her. When women are admitted into Parliament she will probably represent an important constituency, perhaps the University. (Marshall 1893: 64-65)

The narrative voice unequivocally sides with the cause of women. But the fact remains that, since Pamela is not the protagonist of the novel, the innovative worldview she promotes is somehow in the background when compared to Lucy's ordinariness. Moreover, the emplotment itself undermines Pamela's intellectual ambitions. Pamela, indeed, is forced to take a break in her studies because of a nervous breakdown[41]. A major cause of distress is her troublesome love story with Wyatt Edgel, St. Benedict's genius, and her antagonist from an intellectual point of view. Only after Wyatt's suicide and after recovering from her own illness, does Pamela seem to have a smooth path. She gets back to Newnham and she obtains a scholarship. In the meantime, however, her outward aspect has changed. Her lips look thinner, her skin paler, her eyes tired and dark. It is as if the narrator were pointing to a transformation in the construction of her gender. A proud masculine and tall girl, she has little of the Victorian graceful young woman, thus making her incompatible with the main role and with the happy ending with marriage associated with it.

Another example that shows the polyphonic structure of female varsity novels is given by Margaret Louise Wood's *The Invader* (1907), one of the most interesting examples of the representation of a problematic gender construct. The protagonist is

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[41] The paradigmatic concept of 'monster', as opposed to 'the angel in the house', has been explored by Gilbert and Gubar with reference to the relationship of female madness with intellectual activity. (Gilbert, Gubar 1984). For a more focused analysis of the literary and anthropological representations of women in Victorian Literature, see also Auerbach (1982).

Milly, a young woman who studies at Cambridge, who is upset after a nervous breakdown probably caused by study pressure and by a romantic setback. After an experimental session of hypnosis performed by Tims, one of her best friends and a female chemistry student, she develops a double personality, and the new self is Mildred, whom the reader is led to recognize as the spirit of Milly's grand-grandmother. The shifts from one personality to the other one occur many times: the conflict between the two selves, i.e. between two entirely different paradigms of femininity, is so harsh that Milly will eventually commit suicide. This last aspect testifies that *The Invader* is one of the first novels where the marriage plot and the happy ending, in line with the master discourse of the Victorian 'angel in the house', give place to a problematic and indeed tragic conclusion.

Milly, the 'real' self, is a submissive, insecure young woman, ready to sacrifice her life for the sake of her love for her tutor. From the very beginning she is described as a mansuete, docile young woman who, despite her being a Cambridge student, seems to be neither as attractive and clever as it might be expected. In the opening chapter, the first description of Milly is compared to the portrait of her ancestress, Lady Hammerton:

> He looked up first at the pictured face and then at Milly Flaxman, a young cousin of Fletcher's and a scholar of Ascham Hall, who had taken her First in Mods, and was hoping to get one in Greats. […] "It's very like Miss Flaxman," he squeaked. Every one turned their eyes from the picture to Milly, whose pale cheeks blushed a bright pink. The blush emphasized her resemblance to her ancestress, whose brilliant complexion, however, hinted at rouge. Milly's soft hair was amber-colored, like that of the lady in the picture, but it was strained back from her face and twisted in a minute knot on the nape of her neck. […] The long, clearly drawn eyebrows, dark in comparison with the amber hair, the turquoise blue eyes, the mouth of the pictured lady were curiously reproduced in Milly Flaxman. Possibly her figure may have been designed by nature to be as slight and supple, yet rounded, as that of the white-robed, gray-scarfed lady above there. But something or someone had intervened, and Milly looked stiff and shapeless in a green velveteen frock, scooped out vaguely around her white young throat and gathered in clumsy folds under a liberty silk sash. […] Neither he or any one else there had

ever quite realized before what capacities for beauty lay hid in the subdued young face of Milly Flaxman. She had nothing indeed of the charm, at once subtle and challenging, of the lady above there. (Woods 1907: 4-6)

At the beginning of the novel Milly suffer from a nervous breakdown, when she understands that her tutor, whom she loves, is not sure she will be able to get a First in Greats. The diagnosis for her discomfort and crying is given by Tims, her male-looking female friend: hysterical attack. Hysteria plays a pivotal role in the novel, and it is a very common element in female varsity novels: its presence discloses the power of such medical discourses that discourage girls from entering the university. The way in which this topic is depicted in the novel, especially if we look at the characterisation of Milly's double personality, opens up the possibility of discovering an ironical point of view on the matter.

Mildred, the other self that emerges after the hypnotic session that Tims gives to Milly, is described, in fact, as a self-confident, attractive, and brilliant woman. Not only does she possess the charm that Milly lacks, but she succeeds where Milly risked to fail: she obtains a First in Greats and conquers her beloved tutor's heart:

Mildred had recovered her memory for most things, but the facts of her former life were still a blank to her. She had begun to work for her First in order to evade Aunt Beatrice; but the fever of it grew upon her, either from the ambient air of the University or from a native passion to excel in all she did. Her "teachers were bewildered by the mental change in Miss Flaxman. The qualities of intellectual swiftness, vigor, pliancy, whose absence they had once noted in her, became, on the contrary, conspicuously hers. Once initiated into the tricks of the "Great Essay" style, she could use it with a dexterity strangely in contrast with the flat and fumbling manner in which poor Milly had been wont to express her ideas. (Wood 1907: 57)

People who had known Milly Flaxman in earlier days were surprised to think how little they had noticed her beauty or guessed what a fund of humor, what an extraordinary charm, had lurked beneath the surface of her former quiet, grave manner. (Wood 1907: 80)

It is hard for the reader to understand which one of the two selves the narrative voice sympathize more with. Although at the end Milly, the traditional submissive woman, seems to win over the new model, the 'invader' is never described negatively by the narrator or by other characters. On the contrary, she is always portrayed as a fascinating personality, so that the shift from one perspective to the other conveys an ironic effect: "Oh, that brute! That idiot!—she [Mildred] was thinking of Milly—How I should like to strangle her!" (Wood 1907: 73). Milly's split personality is represented through multiple points of view (Tims, her future husband Ian Stewart, Aunt Beatrice, Miss Bunt etc.) and inner focalizations: the narrator is less involved in directly judging the characters, and more inclined to detachment, thus making the reader forever wondering which side it is that one the narrator is supporting.

What is most striking in *The Invader* is the display of the complex discourse that provide the cultural framework in which the female varsity novels are embedded. The novel tries to problematize critical aspects, such as, for example, the women's admission to university, mental troubles deriving from excessive study, medical treatments of dubious nature, multiple female paradigms (the angel in the house, the masculine girl, the femme fatale, the New Woman, etc.), a concern with the psychic dimension (automatism, double mind, hypnosis, etc.).

Both *The Master of St. Benedict* and *The Invader* can be considered among the best examples of female varsity novels, as they stage a polyphonic conflict between opposing discourses and between antagonistic fields of power, allowing ideologemes to be traced. In conclusion, although female novels are often built upon stereotyped patterns, similar to those of 'male' master discourses, a more ambiguous and nuanced depiction of the cultural debate, perceived through the lens of gender, often emerges in these neglected example of the genre.

CHAPTER III

The Campus Novel Paradigm: David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury[42]

1. *Prefiguring the Campus Novel: Institutional and Cultural Changes in 20th century British context*

'Campus novel', the best known label attached to university fiction, designates a genre that reached the peak of its popularity in Britain between the late 1960s and the 1980s[43]. In order to understand the passage from the 19th century varsity novel to the more contemporary literary form it is necessary to take a brief look at the important cultural, institutional and political changes that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century.

Until the end of the 1950s the Oxbridge mythology remained unchallenged in Britain: Oxford and Cambridge were seen as the places where the elite and national identity would be shaped. Such supremacy was further reinforced with the publication of Frank Raymond Leavis's triumphant study *The Great Tradition*. Published in 1948, this book drew the boundaries of an authentically English literary canon. Moreover, designed by the author as a moral guide for the middle class elites of the country, the study can be considered as fulfillment of Leavis' longstanding mission in the field of literary criticism. A mission which he had taken upon himself already in the 1930s when, together with his wife, Dr. Queenie Leavis, he started publishing *Scrutiny*, perhaps the most influential literary journal in the period between the two world wars. That the British middle class should be the bearer of the torch of civilisation, fighting against the barbarian assaults of mass culture, and that Oxford and Cambridge should be the bulwarks of English resistance against the invasion of continental and overseas

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[42] Some parts of this chapter have appeared in a different form in my article "Retracing the Dyanmics of 'University Fiction': Formula and Hybridazion in David Lodge's 'Campus Trilogy'" (Seligardi 2013).

[43] A number of novels 'halfway' between the 'varsity novel' and the 'campus novel' were actually written in the 1950s. The most popular writers were Kingsley Amis, the author of *Lucky Jim* (1954), and C.P. Snow, famous for his novelistic rendering of the 'two cultures' opposition (see in particular *The Masters* and his book *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*).

literature were the main predicaments of Leavis' unabated teaching at Cambridge and elsewhere. Actually, such predicaments partly still relied upon Matthew Arnold's pathbreaking revisitation of the notion of culture in the 1860s. Leavis' radical change, however, lay in the emphasis which shifted to the middle class, a selected minority entrusted with the task of safeguarding the literary tradition, represented as the repository of national and moral values.

Given the increasing number of redbrick universities after the end of World War II – a process that culminated in the 1960s, after the Robbins Report (1963) and the Harold Macmillan commission (1961)[44] – it is not surprising that the aura of Oxford and Cambridge gradually began to lose some of its splendour, and that Leavis' approach simoultaneously strated to lose a lot of its appeal. Undoubtedly the diminution of Leavis' influence was also one of the direct consequences of the theoretical flourishing which took place in Europe in the late 1960s and 1970s, when the critical thought of such eminent *maîtres à penser* as Saussure, Jakobson, Barthes, Foucault and Lacan became the focus of recurrent debates in the English departments.

Much of this new emphasis on theory, and on what is now generically labeled as a postmodern wake, also ensued from the teaching and from the critical writings of such influential academics as Frank Kermode, Barbara Hardy, David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury. It cannot be coincidental that both David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury, possibly the two best known authors of campus novels, have also contributed to significant changes of perspectives in the field of English literary criticism. At the same time this also explains why campus fiction often performs what has been debated by theory. In particular a traditional conception of realist novel is put under discussion, as well as the ethically oriented criticism typical of Leavis. What should be developed, in Lodge, Bradbury's and other critics' point of view, is a critical reflection upon literariness in literature, in general, and the novel, in particular. Metafiction, fabulation,

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[44] As regards the report, in particular, it «proclaimed the 'Robbins principle', that higher education places should be provided for "all those who are qualified and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so", and it provided formidable statistical backing for a decisive growth of higher education» (Anderson 2006: 131).

fictiveness, textuality are the new terms under which the new wave of sperimentalism is explained.

However, it must be said that British literary critics, including Lodge and Bradbury, could never completely reject the link between language and its referent. So, it should be pointed out that, far from being indiscriminately appropriated, the new theoretical input from the Continent often became the object of a skeptical revision and refashioning. No doubt the new theories, such as formalism and structuralism, were taken stock of, but, as campus novels amply show, these theories were often treated with a peculiar ironic detachment. In campus novels, just as in real British academia of the late 1960s, the target of irony was mainly the American 'theoretical frenzy', seen as the distinctive feature of a facile – and typically American – academic approach to continental novelties. Unlike the English, the Americans – it was argued – would swallow up any glossy theoretical package, provided it was attractive to large audiences of students. With their humorous and often satirical treatment of American academia, English campus novels show that, in Britain, the persistent reservations about theory are hardly distinguishable from an anti–American mood, which had prevailed since the start of the Cold War despite the British-American political alliance against Communist countries. Facing the post-war economic growth of the United States, British culture reacted defensively by playing the card of Englishness.

2. *Configuring the Campus Novel: the Main Patterns*

Even at first sight, campus novels look very different from their nineteenth-century predecessors in many respects. First of all, the protagonists are no longer undergraduate students, but researchers, lecturers and professors, or more generally scholars who work (or would like to work) in academia. Moreover, the university environment is no longer Oxbridge, but the new redbrick universities set in anonymous, often dreary, industrial areas. What remains crucial for the configuration of the genre and for the modes of representation is the recurrence of shared stereotypes. In her brief excursus on what she

calls 'academic novel'[45], Elaine Showalter tellingly expands on the predictability of the genre:

> Ian Carter says that academic novels are all predictable and indeed are mind-bogglingly repetitive: "I would pick up a novel newly discovered in a library stack or decayed second-hand bookshop," he writes. "It could belong to one of many genres; comedy of manners, thriller, whodunit, romance. After a couple of pages, I would discover the awful truth. *I had read it before*. After a couple of years, I had read all before." But Carter is a sociologist, who embarked on his reading of academic fiction out of annoyance with Malcolm Bradbury's portrayal of sociologist in *The History Man*. For English professors, this repetitiveness also means that the novels operate on a set of conventions, themes, tropes, and values. (Showalter 2005: 3)

Romance, which is still the main emplotment strategy, no longer serves the purposes of a pedagogical 'marriage plot' in the context of the English Bildung. What takes central stage in campus novels is, instead, the parodic report of the adulterous love affairs of male professors with undergraduates or colleagues. The academic world, a cornucopia of conferences and lectures, is the background of sexual encounters and sophisticated flirts, humorously recounted by the narrators in a witty, light style which bears little resemblance with the heavily pedagogic mode of previous university fictions[46].

As far as discourse and narration are concerned, self-reflexive strategies such as quotations, intertextual references, pastiche, and *mise-en-abyme* abound. This self-reflexive turn is an integral part of the surge of metafiction in the context of

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[45] It is worth remembering that Showalter deliberately overlooks the distinction between 'campus novel' and 'academic novel': «Of course, students have long been important characters in fiction; coming-of-age narratives and *Bildungsromane* have been numerous from early days. To me, however, the most interesting academic novels are about the faculty, the lifers – what one critic has called *Professorromane*» (Showalter 2005: 2).

[46]: «[...] what appeals to me the most in academic fiction is its seriousness, even sadness. Perhaps we professors turn to satire because academic life has so much pain, so many lives wasted or destroyed» (Showalter 2005: 3). Showalter's opinion seems paradoxical: on the one hand, she claims that academic fiction makes use of a serious mode of representation, which, however, is contradicted by the satirical mode highlighted in the following sentence. If we consider the term 'serious' in the sense that has been attributed to it by Auerbach (1946), it is difficult to include satire in its realm, while satire, according to Hutcheon (1985), has more in common with parody and irony as regards their comic effect.

postmodernity and, more specifically, of the debate on critical theory which made its entrance into the Departments of English in the 1970s, following the publication of a number of seminal essays by new French critical theorists. The ways in which theory came to be discussed in the British academia, and the ways in which it affected entrenched critical approaches become pivotal in shaping campus novels in the light of the postwar British cultural context:

> The genre has arisen and flourished only since the 1950s, when post-war universities were growing rapidly, first to absorb the returning veterans, and then to take in a larger and larger percentage of the baby-booming population. The nature of the higher education in American and Britain has a lot to do with it too. Most of our universities act in loco parentis for students, creating a complete society on the campus, with housing, meals, medical care, and social life all provided communally and institutionally. (Showalter 2005: 2)

Since, like university fiction in general, campus novels still rely on mimesis and are still closely related to the contemporary cultural contexts, the new protagonists are predictably the very academics who, at the time, were steeped in theoretical controversies within the precincts of their university departments. Like the real British academics, the new 'heroes' are frequent flyers, whose teaching is 'exchanged' with American universities following new international programs of teaching mobility.

The persistent bulk of stereotypes presumably accounts for the popularity of these novels. With the plots of Lodge's and Bradbury's novels being paradigmatic examples of stereotyping, we might be entitled to speak of a Lodge-Bradbury paradigm, definable as a set of shared and distinctive conventional features. An overview of the main narrative modes will help identify shared narrative patterns: as we shall see, the most predominant strategy is a specific kind of hybridisation – the blending of traits belonging to diverse genres – which conveys a frequent mixing of high-brow and low-brow cultures.

2.1 *Romance, or Having Fun in Academia*

If we look at the plots of both Lodge's and Bradbury's novels, romance is the predominant mode of representation, but, as mentioned above, it is completely different from the nineteenth-century marriage plot. From literary theory we have learnt that romance is a highly polysemic term. In English this word means several things: it refers to medieval chivalric poems as well as to common love stories, but it also identifies the opposite of 'novel', i.e. a kind of narration that takes a distance from mimetic realism and contains 'fantastic' or at least not-realistic elements. Northrop Frye (1957) considers the romance mode as one of the fundamental human strategies to understand and organize stories. When romance enters the realm of postmodernism, its meaning is further problematised. Postmodern romance, in Elam's definition, is understood as a syncretic form that combines all the different aspects of romance in a highly self-reflexive and ludic form[47], within a mixture of elements that belong to several genres. As regards the specific case of campus novel, we will see how the way in which romance is performed incorporates a series of features and strategies that are linked both to highbrow and lowbrow literature.

'Exchange' is probably one the most important features of romance and it is also one of the oldest elements of Western literature, from Greek and Latin comedies to the comedy of manners, a genre which is an important source of inspiration for Lodge's novels. It is possible to split this motif into several patterns, namely geographical exchange, mistaken identity, love exchanges. Exchange can serve several purposes, of course, but usually its most pivotal function is that of disrupting the initial situation of a story and triggering the plot.

The most prominent 'campus variation' of this motif is the representation of geographical exchange. It can be related, at first sight, to a realist mode: sabbaticals, visiting professorships, research periods abroad are characteristic elements of the academic world and life. However, through the lens of romance these referential traits

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[47] In *Romancing the Postmodern* (1992) Elam traces the affinities between romance and postmodernism from an epistemological point of view. Both terms elude simple definitions. Postmodern, according to Elam, reveals a specific attitude towards knowledge and representation by avoiding any attempt of full comprehension and control. Romance, on the other hand, is read as the tension of a text towards what Derrida calls 'the law of literary genres', i.e. a process through which genres are contaminated and the boundaries between them are blurred. A new idea of reality is proposed, seen as «a natural state of existence» and not as a mere referent.

are comically transformed and deformed in a way that sheds light on cultural stereotypes and creates grotesque effects, also thanks to the presence of sexual interactions between the characters. This device can be best explored by looking at the most famous novels by David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury.

Lodge's best known campus novels – *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses* (1975), *Small World: An Academic Romance* (1984) and *Nice Work* (1988) – are usually seen as a trilogy because of their recurring characters and places. *Changing Places* tells the story of a six-month academic exchange between two fictional universities, the British Rummidge and the American Euphoria's State Plotinus. The exchange involves two academics in their forties, Philip Swallow and Morris Zapp. The story is desely interspersed with funny episodes drawn from the 1969 turbulent academic life, troubled, both at Rummidge and at Plotinus, by the students' upheavals. Equally funny is the portrayal of the academics' sex-life in what looks like a world of newly achieved sexual freedom.

In this novel exchange means, first of all, the encounter and hybridisation of two different cultures. The representations both of the two campuses and of the two protagonists play with British and American cultural stereotypes. In light of this, space acquires a narrative function in shaping the cultural dynamics that affect the fictional world of the novel. If we look at the description of the two campuses, we may notice similarities and dissimilarities in their architecture. This play of resemblance and difference obviously produces a comical effect:

> Between the State University of Euphoria (colloquially known as Euphoric State) and the University of Rummidge, there has long existed a scheme for the exchange of visiting teachers in the second half of each academic year. How two universities so different in character and so widely separated in space should be linked in this way is simply explained. It happened that the architects of both campuses independently hit upon the same idea for the chief feature of their designs, namely, a replica of the leaning Tower of Pisa, built in white stone and twice the original size at Euphoric State and of red brick to scale at Rummidge, but restored to perpendicular in both cases. The exchange was set up to mark this coincidence. (*CP*: 13)

The description of totally different spatial environments such as Rummidge and Euphoria already indicates a significant opposition of the cultures the two protagonists belong to, but this cultural clash affects also (and most of all) the characterisation process as well. The introduction of Morris Zapp and Philip Swallow is constructed through two rhetorical processes: binarism and opposition. It is fundamental that the point of view remains external, attributed to an omniscient narrator who keeps the right distance in order to create a comical effect:

> Zapp was distinguished professor, and Swallow was not. Zapp was the man who had published articles in PMLA while still in graduate school; […] who had published five fiendishly clever books (four of them on Jane Austen) by the time he was thirty and achieved the rank of full professor at the same precocious age. Swallow was a man scarcely known outside his own Department, who had published nothing except a handful of essays and reviews, who had risen slowly up the salary scale of Lecturer by standard annual increments […]. In this respect both men were characteristic of the education systems they had passed through. (*CP*: 15)

A paradigmatic example of the binary structure that dominates the novel is the second chapter entitled *Settling*, where the two characters experience symmetrical situations (the arrival at the new university, the entrance in the office, the view from the window, the conversations with the secretaries etc.).

> When he [Philip Swallow] drew back the curtains in his living-room each morning, the view filled the picture window like a visual tour de force at the beginning of a Cinerama film. In the foreground, and to his right and left, the houses and the gardens of the more affluent Euphoric faculty clung picturesquely to the side of the Plotinus hills. […] Morris Zapp was less enchanted with his view – a vista of dank back gardens, rotting sheds and dripping laundry, huge, ill-looking trees, grimy roofs, factory chimneys and church spires – but he had discarded this criterion at a very early stage of looking for furnished accommodation in Rummidge. (*CP*: 55-57)

Throughout the novel, the two characters face a number of experiences that force them to reconsider, under the influence of different cultural environments, their positions towards academia and life. The exchange between the two professors, therefore, can possibly open up a reflection on cultural diversity. However, the topic is always treated in a very light and amused way, thus diminishing its epistemological function.

The speculation about the cultural, social and political relationship between the British and the American environment assumes, in fact, a more comic and lighter tone by concentrating on the private aspects of the private protagonists' life. The characters' initial rigidity eventually turns into flexible and fluctuating *ménage à quatre*, with the entrance of the respective partners. From a binary structure, in which the single character acts in his counterpart's environment, we end up with a choral scene, characterised by an open ending: the reader is left wondering if the two couples will be restored, or if they will maintain the current arrangement.

Geographical exchange is also the core of Malcolm Bradbury's *Stepping Westward* and *Rates of Exchange*. S*tepping Westward* stages the American experience of an English writer – James Walker – at Benedict Arnold University, where he hass been invited to stay for one year as a resident writer and as creative writing teacher. Although his American counterparts take him for a sort of 'Angry Young Man', Walker is depicted as "a stout, timid, repressed writer and part-time lecturer from Nottingham" whose expectations about America are thwarted by a frustrating experience of the local intrigues of the university. The novel once again offers a comparison between the American and the British systems. The protagonist is portrayed as a naive old-fashioned English guy who explores, with a mixture of excitation and fear, the 'glorious' world of the American university. In this case, the opposition is not actually between the British academic system and the American one (like in *Changing Places*), but rather between certain ideas of Englishness and Americaness. This is also due to the fact that James Walker is a writer, and not a professor, and he is invited as a resident writer to a fictitious university in America.

The American and the British contexts are often compared as regards sexual habits. The cultural and sexual difference between American and British girls is a comical leitmotiv throughout the novel:

> 'Of course, these American girls are very demanding,' said Millingham. 'The thing is, they are so inexhaustibly verbal. Take an English girl out and if she's said "Ooo" three times that's a good conversational evening. But American girls talk about everything. […] And they want pleasure at all time.' (*SW*: 64)

> 'Is it right what they say about English women?' 'What do they say?' 'You know,' the cabbie said, 'they're frigid, don't feel nothing down there.' 'I hardly think so' 'Tell us what you know' 'Well, that's not been my experience.' 'That's what I like to hear. A guy whose had experience. Lot of experience?' 'Not terribly' 'How many?' 'How many what?' 'Different girls.' 'I don't know'. 'That's it, who's counting?' said the cabbie. 'Know that joke? That's a Jewish joke. Well, I'll tell you, you're a guy likes experience, there's plenty of it over there. All you gotta do is look a little. There's no girl like American girls, once you got'em excited. I can fix you up any time.' (*SW*: 108)

The first part of the novel takes place en route, while James is going to America in a very old-fashioned way, i.e. by ship. On the ship James has his first 'academic' experience: he meets some professors who are also going abroad, and he is involved in their parties, experiencing flirts and little infidelities, which are an inescapable component of campus novel as a genre. James is a writer, he does not properly belong to the university world: this is one of the reasons why at the beginning his gaze on the academic world seems so naive and innocent. The discrepancy between the protagonist's moral attitude and that of the academic world is the main strategy through which cultural clichés are satirically depicted:

> 'Am I going to like Benedict Arnold?' 'Ah!' said Jochum, 'that depends what you expect of it. No doubt you expect America to set you free?' 'I think I do, yes,' said Walker. 'Well, it is the duty of the young to go out and seek their misfortune. Perhaps you will find it; perhaps you will be set free'. (*ST*: 83)

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'My friend', began Jochum, 'universities are not better than life. They are just life. It is not you and I who make them what they are. It is the students, and the administration, and the computer, and the alumni, and the football team. Universities are places where people go to get acquainted with one another' (*ST*: 84)

'And what do you teach?' 'I am going as a sort of resident writer. Actually I've never taught before, not in a university'. […] 'You are a writer?' 'Yes' 'Oh, come on now, you are much too nice to be a writer. We have had writers at Benedict Arnold before. While they were, they undressed themselves, and their students and their colleagues' wives. Then when they went away they undressed them all at once, in their books. No, you are not like that.' (*ST*: 85)

Looking at *Rates of Exchange* (1983), another novel by Bradbury, the representation of the academic exchange can be seen as one of the narrative devices that develops a kind of mimetic representation of hybridity instances. The novel is an example of how the encounter between cultures, though comical, offers a critical perspective on social and political issues. The contrast between Western and Eastern Europe and the ideological implications of the Cold War, humorously depicted through Bradbury's funny play with cultural and linguistic stereotypes, takes here central stage.

Prof. Petworth has been invited to give some lectures on linguistics in the communist country of Slaka, a fictional Eastern country. The story is set in 1981, during the cold war. As it happens with many of Lodge's and Bradbury's campus novels, *Rates of Exchange* cannot be read without taking into consideration the period in which it was written. This close relation with a specific social, political and cultural context is one of the most prominent features of the campus novel as a genre, and, perhaps, also one of its limits. It can be difficult for contemporary readers to understand all the references to politics and politicians, and to the intellectual currents the reader encounters in these novels: they require a specific historical knowledge of both the period when the novel was written and the period when the novel is set. Usually, they coincide, creating, especially in Bradbury's case, a satirical effect against contemporary societies.

One of the strategies through which *Rates of Exchange* performs cultural and geographical exchange is language. The language used by the third-person narrator and by the protagonist is, of course, English. However, the characters who are native of Slaka and who try to communicate with Petworth use a simplified, ill-formed and broken English which emulates the syntactic structures of Eastern European languages:

> 'You see, this is our skyscraper,' says Lubijova, 'Of course you must not photograph. Now from here is a very good view, but we cannot really see it. I hope you do not suffer the vertige. Now, please, look on this side. Over there the power station, do you see it, through the mist, it is more than sufficient for our needs. […] Now we go this side, and here you see the old town. You can see the bridge Anniversary May 15, and the festung and the capella. At night you can go there and see a sound and a light. Is that how you say it in English?' (*RE*: 119)

Another way of representing linguistic, geographic and cultural hybridity, when hybridity can be understood as a theme in campus novels, is through the fictional Slakan language, which is a combination of elements taken from various languages spoken in Eastern Europe, and especially from Russian. A chapter entitled *Visiting Slaka: A Few Brief Hints* takes up the first few pages of the novel. These pages, like a guidebook, aim at introducing Western visitors to the distinctive traits of the country. Some typical words (rot'vitti, sch'veppi, vloska, bittii) are presented, but the very first encounter between English and Slakan takes place during Petworth's flight:

> More familiarities follow; at the front of the cabin, a small balletic display has started, conducted by two stewardesses, short fat ladies in high hard hats. 'Tenti sifti inburdi,' says, through the intercom, the voice of some unseen female impresario; […] 'Platzsci otvatu immerg'nicina proddo flugsi frolikat,' says the voice; the ladies suddenly rise up onto their toes, put out both their arms, rotate their wrists in a complicated gesture, and point with sharp fingers at various corners of the cabin. […] Familiarity breeds familiarity; Petworth puts on his hand and stops one of the stewardesses, overcome by a primal bodily urge. 'Ha?' cries the stewardess, a very heavy lady, with hair in her nostrils, looking down at him. 'Are you serving drinks now?' asks Petworth, 'I'd like one'. 'Va?' says the stewardess […], 'Kla?'. Perhaps it is language that poses the problem: 'Drinks

trolley,' says Petworth, raising an invisible glass to his lips, 'Whisky soda? Ginnitoniki?' 'Ah, na, na,' says the stewardess, looking at him critically, 'Is not permitted,' 'Not permitted?' […] 'Only permitted is a Vichy'. (*RE*: 41)

The misunderstandings between Petworth and Slakan community create a comic effect that acquires also an ironical aim: thus of destabilizing the Western power and cultural dominance.

Looking at how romance is treated in Lodge's and Bradbury's novels, it must be said that there is another important element that works both on the levels of themes and plots: adultery. Adultery, one of the main inflections of the theme of love, is another relevant and pervasive motif in the romance mode of campus novels, where it serves the purpose of depicting an elitarian and academic bourgeoisie. Both Lodge's and Bradbury's novels are full of adulteries, sex encounters, love affairs between professors and undergraduates, professors and colleagues, but also with colleagues' wives. The male protagonists get involved in adulterous affairs which, however, do not usually bring about any break up in the family. In spite of its subversive potential, adultery does not really affect family as an element of social normativity.

In *Changing Places* the exchange position between Zapp and Swallow also involves their private life. The relationship between Swallow and Désirée, Zapp's wife, is particularly funny and built upon the subversion of the general attributes of masculinity. Zapp has been previously described as a man full of sexual appetite, charming, voracious, libidinous, while Swallow is shy, less masculine, more impulsive and inexperienced. An example of the comical effect produced by playing with gender conventions is offered by the dialogue between the two lovers, Philip and Désirée, where Désirée, in a very unromantic way, compares the two professors' male attributes:

'You don't think it's on the small side?' 'It looks fine to me.' 'I've been thinking lately it was rather small.' 'A recent survey showed that ninety per cent of American men think their penises are less than average size'. 'I suppose it's only natural to want to be in the top ten per cent…' 'They aren't the top ten per cent, stupid, they're the ten per cent who aren't worried about it. The point is you can't have ninety per cent who are less than average.' 'Ah, I never was any good at

statistics.' 'I'm disappointed with you, Philip, really I am. I thought you didn't have a virility hangup. That's what I like about you.' 'My small penis?' 'Your not demanding applause for your potency all the time. Like with Morris it had to be a four-star fuck every time. If I didn't groan and roll my eyes and foam at the mouth at climax he would accuse me of going frigid on him.' 'Was he one of the ninety per cent too?' 'Well, no.' 'Ah.' (*CP*: 167)

The discussion around the size of the male genitals, which at the beginning seems to be in favour of Philip, turns into a scientific argumentation between statistics and sociological analysis, thus making irony of academic language when applied to trivial topics. Moreover, the final sentences about Morris' sexual ability undermine, as it happens in the whole novel, Philip's actual masculinity.

Nice Work is probably the novel mostly influenced by the romance mode represented through the adultery motif. The story, in fact, is based on the adulterous relationship between two characters. Although entirely set in Rummidge, *Nice Work* stands somehow apart from the previous novels *Changing Places* and *Small World*. Philip Swallow and Morris Zapp have in fact just walk-on roles, and the real protagonists are Robyn Penrose, a feminist scholar teaching at Rummidge with a specialisation in the Industrial Novel and Women's Studies, and Vic Wilcox, the manager of an engineering firm. Both are involved in the Industry Year Shadow Scheme, a governmental initiative to help academic thinkers understand the technicalities of local industries. The predictable sentimental affair between Robin and Vic is one of the main themes in the novel.

In *Nice Work* romance is considered a subgenre, parodied in order to provide a deeper criticism of society, the university and the state of humanities during Thatcher's era. The romantic aura of nineteenth-century romance, explicitly conjured up through references to Elisabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, is here completely capsized, especially from the point of view of gender. During their first sex encounter, it is Wilcox who would like to start a relationship with Robyn, while Robyn demystifies such romantic idealisation:

'I love you,' he says, kissing her throat, stroking her breasts, tracing the curve of her hip. 'No, you don't, Vic.' 'I've been in love with you for weeks.' 'There's no such thing,' she says. 'It's a rhetorical device. It's a bourgeois fallacy.' 'Haven't you ever been in love, then?' 'When I was younger,' she says, 'I allowed myself to be constructed by the discourse of romantic love for a while, yes.' 'What the hell does that mean?' 'We aren't essences, Vic. We aren't unique individual essences existing prior language. There is only one language.' 'What about this?' he says, sliding his hand between her legs. 'Language and biology', she says, opening her legs wider. 'Of course we have bodies, physical needs and appetites. My muscles contract when you touch me there – feel?' 'I feel,' he says. 'And that's nice. But the discourse of romantic love pretends that your finger and my clitoris are extensions of two unique individual selves who need each other and only each other and cannot be happy without each other for ever and ever'. (*NW*: 293)

It is no more the time of women dreaming about marriage and children: romantic love is perceived through the postmodern lens of cultural theory as part of those master discourses that affected the modern era, and now ready to be deconstructed.

The last quotation also introduces a central aspect in campus novels: gender. In varsity novels female characters were, most of the times, relegated in irrelevant positions or re-inscribed in the normative distinction between male and female roles. In campus novels women seem, apparently, to be more actively present in academia. They are not only ingenuous undergraduates ready to be seduced by voracious male professors; they are often feminist scholars who interpret life and love in a disenchanted, cynical and highly intellectual way. They have sex with their male co-protagonists, but do not fall in love with them.

A variation of this pattern is given by Bradbury's *The History Man*, which presents a lot of similarities with *Nice Work*. Set in the fictional redbrick university of Watermouth in 1972, when theory was blooming, Bradbury's most popular novel is also the one with the sharpest satirical sting. The main characters, Howard Kirk, a Professor of Sociology, and his wife Barbara make a point of looking 'radical' in spite of their upper middle-class lifestyle. Howard is "the Machiavellian product of a new era" who teaches a class on revolutions, has a love affair with his Victorian-inspired colleague, Miss Callendar, has sex with a bisexual student and an academic fight with one of his male students on

political issues. It is the Kirks' marriage that here becomes a paradigm of contemporary history and the object of a satirical insight into both social behaviors and critical thoughts.

When Howard Kirk commits infidelity with his new colleague in the English department, Miss Callendar, the latter is described as an old-fashioned Victorian scholar, who acts like a Victorian female intellectual, living in isolation and avoiding mixing up with the corruption of the male world. The dialogue she has with Howard at the party where they meet for the first time shows how this new modern woman is capable of recognizing "old techniques" of seduction and of destabilizing the protagonist's virility:

'I have a conscience,' says Miss Callendar. 'I use it a lot. I think it's a sort of moral conscience. I'm very old-fashioned'. 'We have to modernize you,' says Howard. 'There,' says Miss Callendar, 'you won't allow me anything.' 'No,' says Howard. 'Why don't you let me save you from yourself?' 'Och,' says Miss Callendar, 'I think I know just how you'd go about that. No, I'm afraid you're too old for me. I never trust anyone over thirty.' 'What about men under thirty?' asks Howard. 'Oh, you're prepared to vary, if necessary,' says Miss Callendar.[…] 'What are you frightened of?' 'Ah,' says Miss Callendar, 'the new man but the old techniques. Well, it has been very nice to talk to you.' (*HM*: 97)

To summarize, romance remains a fundamental strategy for the organisation of the plot from varsity novels to campus novels. It reveals the essence of campus novel as a genre, as it incorporates features belonging to different modes and genres. Hybridisation plays a fundamental role in shaping the romance motifs, but at the same time a process of stereotypisation is also at work. Plots are quite predictable and their level of conventionality is as high as to confer a popular appeal to the genre. The way in which this kind of romance emplotment interacts with the social forces portrayed in the novels, as well as with the cultural dynamics that shaped the British in the three decades of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, exhibits a changed view on love as a social and political power. Romance loses its normative function by exhibiting comical effects that derive, in particular, from the pervasiveness of sex and adultery as leitmotifs. Gender dynamics have undoubtedly affected the evolution of romance in university fiction: however, it

must be said that the dominant comical tone avoids a more in-depth analysis of the changes in women's conditions in the university world.

2.2 *When Theory Goes Fictional*

One of the most relevant differences between varsity and campus novel is the interaction between narration and literary theory. In Lodge's and Bradbury's novels characters are often seen discussing about literature or culture. The representation of conferences, lectures and seminars, a narrative device halfway between realism and self-reflexivity, prompts the reader's awareness of literariness even though it does not thwart the mimetic illusion. We might as well read this device as one of the instances of the 'covert narcissism' Linda Hutcheon has famously described[48].

Theory enters campus fictions in various ways: either through the characters' discussions and debates, or, more covertly, through narrative strategies themselves. Lodge's *Small World* is a perfect instance of how this interaction occurs in the first case. The novel, which is the second volume of the so called *Campus Trilogy*, still follows (from *Changing Places*) Philip Swallow's and Morris Zapp's itinerant lecturing among international conferences and academic circuits, but here the focus is on a new entry, the young researcher Persse McGarrigle, and on his love story with the feminist scholar Angelica Pabst. The novel opens with a dreary conference held at the unattractive University of Rummidge, where the star professor is Morris Zapp, the famous Jane Austen scholar who has now apparently turned to deconstruction. A version of his paper entitled *Textuality and Striptease* is offered through a first-person narrative which reproduces Zapp's voice, as if the conference were filmed on camera:

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[48] This term appears in one of the most important essays written on the postmodern literary phenomenon of metafiction, which is Linda Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative* (1980). As we know, self-reflexivity is considered one of the most important features of postmodernism. In this essay, Hutcheon defines both the more visible and evident expressions of this tendency (by relating them to the general auto-referentiality of literature itself) and the more hidden manifestations, to which she refers as 'covert narcissism': «Overt forms of narcissism are present in texts in which the self-consciousness and the self-reflection are clearly evident, usually explicitly thematized and even allegorized within the "fiction". In its covert form, however, this process would be structuralized, internalized, actualized.» (Hutcheon 1980: 23). In other words, according to Hutcheon, in the case of covert narcissism, auto-reflexivity is subsumed in the structure of a novel. In Hutcheon's point of view, this deals mainly with some genres and plot structures which are intrinsically self-reflexive to the extent that they engage the reader in a reflective and conscious construction of the narration. Such plot patterns are, for example, those of detective novels, fantasy fiction or erotic novels.

The reader plays with himself as the text plays upon him, plays upon his curiosity, desire, as a striptease dancer plays upon her audience's curiosity and desire. […] The classical tradition of striptease, which goes back to Salome's dance of the seven veils and beyond, and which survives in a debased form in the dives of your Soho, offers a valid metaphor for the activity of reading. The dancer teases the audience, as the text teases its readers, with the promise of an ultimate revelation that is infinitely postponed. Veil after veil, garment after garment, is removed, but it is the delay in the stripping that makes it exciting, not the stripping itself. (*SW*: 26)

This passage is clearly addressed at the external reader, who is invited to think of her own engagement with art. Nevertheless, such an address is also perfectly amalgamated within the 'realistic' narration of what is going on during the conference: the speech is thus overtly addressed to the conference audience as well.

Instead, the following passage, also taken from Lodge's *Small World*, provides a good example of how the process of diegesis includes references to literary theory by narrating facts and events in a way that recalls that theories and literary criticism. Here, the theme of adultery, a topical one in the genre, is both dealt with and exposed as a well known narrative topos:

At Heidelberg, Désirée Zapp and Ronald Frobinder find adultery virtually thrust upon them by the social dynamics of the conference on Rezeptionsästhetik. The only two creative writers present, they find themselves constantly together, partly by mutual choice, since they both feel intimidated by literary critical jargon of their hosts, which they both think is probably nonsense, but cannot be quite sure, since they do not fully understand it […]. And although not irresistibly attracted to each other, they are not exactly unattracted either, and neither wishes to appear in the eyes of the other timidly afraid of sexual adventures. Each has read the other's work in advance of meeting at the conference, and each has been impressed by the forceful and vivid descriptions of sexual intercourse to be found in those texts […]. Then of course there is no way of not going to bed together. Both know the inevitable conclusion of a narrative sequence that begins thus – to draw back from it would imply frigidity or impotence. (*SW*: 239)

Insofar as it is a familiar narrative core, adultery is put forward here as what allows the narrator to make sense of what happens between Désirée and Ronald. The law of the plot (two people who do not dislike each other and who are bound to stay in the same place for a certain amount of time will fatally have a sexual affair) is articulated by the narrator, who self-consciously sets about putting it into practice. But when the two writers actually decide to have sex, the fact that both of them know their fictional sex stories are based on their own real sexual experiences becomes funnily embarrassing:

> 'It's…hard to say' 'I mean,' says Désirée. 'I've never done it with a writer before.'
> 'Exactly!' 'And what I'm trying to say is…' 'That you don't want to read about it in a novel one of these days? Or see it on television.' 'How did you guess it?' 'I had the same thought.' Désirée claps her hands. 'So we can agree that neither of this will use this as material? Whether it's good or bad?' 'Absolutely. Scout's honour.' 'Then let's fuck, Ronald,' says Désirée, rolling on top of him. (*SW*: 240)

In *Changing Places* literary or theoretical self-awareness frequently returns as a motif in the plot. When Philip Swallow is asked to teach a course in creative writing, a subject he is not familiar with, at Euphoria State's University, he asks his wife Hilary to send him an old book called *Let's Write a Novel*. This is a book the characters often come across, and the short passages they read or quote always deal with the diegetic strategy performed by the narrator in that precise moment of the narration. In the third chapter, entitled *Corresponding* and showing the correspondence between Swallow and his wife Hilary and between Zapp and his ex-wife Desiré, Hilary writes to Philip:

> Do you still want me to send on Let's Write a Novel? What a funny little book it is. There's a whole chapter on how to write an epistolary novel, but surely nobody's done that since the eighteenth century? (*CP*:130)

In chapter five, entitled *Changing*, Philip reads in the same book a passage on Flashback:

> He managed to prise it open in the middle, however, and read: 'Flashbacks should
> be used sparingly, if at all. They slow down the progress of the story and confuse
> the reader. Life, after all, goes forward, not backwards'. (*CP*: 186)

And it is not a coincidence that right at that point there is a flashback narration. As in the previous example the character's voice creates a link between the world of fiction and the experience of the reader. Something similar happens in the very last scene of the novel where all the four main characters, gathered in the same room, are seen discussing their future and the reader is given the impression that romance might be restored. The dialogic exchange – rendered in a kind of film-script style – includes ironic comments on the responses to that very scene from the external readers:

> PHILIP: - You remember that passage in Northanger Abbey where Jane Austen
> says she's afraid that her readers will have guessed that a happy ending is coming
> up at any moment.- MORRIS (nods): - Quote 'Seeing in the tell-tale compression
> of the pages before them that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity'.
> Unquote.- PHILIP: - That's it. Well, that's something the novelist can't help giving
> away, isn't it, that his book is shortly coming to an end? It may not be a happy
> ending, nowadays, but he can't disguise the tell-tale compression of the page. […]
> But with a film there's no way of telling especially nowadays, when films are much
> more loosely structured, much more ambivalent, than they used to be. There's no
> way of telling which frame is going to be the last. […] it can just…end. - PHILIP
> shrugs. The camera stops, freezing him in midgesture. THE END. (*CP*: 251)

The very end of the novel coincides with a theoretical discussion on the formal structure of ending in literature and films: this strategy is in line with the metafictional and self-reflexive tendency of campus novels, thus demonstrating their relationship to the more general postmodernism.

Nice Work's Chapter Two offers another instance of the ways in which theory is represented as self-reflexive. At the very outset, Robyn Penrose is introduced through the narrator's perspective:

> And there, for the time being, let us leave Vic Wilcox, while […] we meet a very
> different character. A character who, rather awkwardly for me, doesn't herself

believe in the concept of character. That is to say (a favourite phrase of her own), Robyn Penrose, Temporary Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Rummidge, holds that 'character' is a bourgeois myth, an illusion created to reinforce the ideology of capitalism. As evidence for this assertion, she will point to the fact that the rise of the novel (the literary genre of 'character' *par excellence*) in the eighteenth century coincided with the rise of capitalism; that the triumph of the novel over all other literary genres in the nineteenth century coincided with the triumph of capitalism: and that the modernist and postmodernist deconstruction of the classic novel in the twentieth century has coincided with the terminal crisis of capitalism. (*NW*: 39)

The literary concept of character, which is put on display through the presentation of Robyn, is already criticised and problematised by the character herself, thus highlighting the self-reflexive attitude of the novel. Filtered through the narrator's ironic slant, Robin's concern for politicised criticism turns into an almost hysterical mania (i.e. the obsessive association between novel and capitalism) for a blend of poststructuralism and Marxism.

Lodge's *Nice Work,* for instance, mainly addresses the academic debate on structuralism, post-structuralism and the emerging Women's Studies. The representation of academic lectures, along with the record of the female protagonist's ruminations on theory, shows the ways in which literary theory can be mimetically rendered. At the same time such representation also works as a mimetic device for the fictional staging of cultural and institutional issues. Not coincidentally, one of the targets of *Nice Work* is also the appalling situation of British Universities during Margaret Thatcher's era, a situation which is in fact strikingly similar to the one experienced nowadays in some European countries.

In all of the cases mentioned above theory, with references to currents and schools, is not only openly addressed as a topic, but also self-reflexively presented as an experience that summons the reader's engagement. It should be pointed out, however, that theory is almost always treated ironically, i.e. seen from a distance[49]. Distance is actually kept

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[49] The discrepancy between two different images or elements, which is what triggers the readers' awareness of her own reading is one of the features that Ghiazza and Napoli associate with irony in a semiotic way. (Ghiazza-Napoli 2007)

both at the level of mimesis, as the characters usually treat theoretical matters in very comic and amusing way, and of diegesis, as the metafictional attitude performed by the narrative voice aims, primarily, at creating comic, entertaining effects. Literary theory, which is usually considered as a 'serious' matter, is often associated in Lodge's novels with sex and love affairs, a connection that adds to the demystification of the academic environment so typical of the genre. Structuralism (or what vaguely resembles structuralist theory) is presented as a set of stiff and mechanical rules superimposed upon the life of characters.

A distance is also invariably kept between the narrator and the story, since storytelling is always externalised regardless of whose voice is speaking. We actually have no access to the interiority of characters, but are only confronted with the oral or written records of their official opinions in letters, in speeches or conversations. And even when, as in the case of Robyn, we feel we are allowed to access the mental space of a character, indirect speech puts us at a distance from both the narrator and the character.

Malcolm Bradbury's way of representing theory resembles Lodge's in many respects, but with significant variations. In Bradbury, like in Lodge, theory is always in the foreground, even though with a greater emphasis on sociology and philosophy. What is different is the fact that theory is mainly the narrator's business, not the concern of characters, which means that the narrator always positions himself within a theoretical framework when it comes to the description of the fictional world. Unlike Lodge, however, Bradbury offers a satirical view of academia. Instead of being parodied, theory is treated as the medium through which the contradictions, the stereotypes and the fallacies of the academic world become visible. In the first part of *The History Man*, for instance, the story of the Kirks is told through flashbacks, a typical device in Bradbury, and is treated sociologically, with a critical approach that mirrors Howard's own critical style. We actually find out that the protagonist has just written quite a popular book of criticism based upon his own experience of life with Barbara:

> He had been at work on a book, an argumentative book, about cultural and sexual
> change, which urged, as you might expect, that there had been a total restructuring

of sexual mores in Britain, that sexual roles had been totally reassigned, and that the use of the traditional concepts of 'man' and 'woman', to designate stable cultural entities, was irrelevant. (*HM*: 40)

Cultural studies, sociology, gender studies, psychology are the theoretical grids through which both Howard and the narrator perceive and render the story of the Kirks. A good example is when the Kirks decide to squat in what looks like an abandoned building on the basis of their anti-bourgeois style of life and on the basis of their belief in Marxism and materialism. Bradbury's narrative, however, points to self-contradictions: not only do the Kirks get married (which is not exactly an anti-bourgeois choice), but they also use their new place as the location for a number of parties and social gatherings. Such intense social interaction becomes the ideal narrative background of sociological discussions where Bradbury's theoretical expertise comes to the forefront.

Rates of Exchange is, instead, Bradbury's 'structuralist' novel. Petworth, the main character, is an academic scholar and an expert in structuralist linguistics. The jargon he uses becomes the target of overt satire:

> Petworth also possesses a rich international sub-language – he would call it an idiolect – composed of many fascinating terms, like idiolect and sociolect, langue and parole, signifier and signified, Chomsky and Saussure, Barthes and Derrida, not the sort of words you say to everybody, but which put him immediately in touch with the vast community of those of his own sub-group, profession or calling in all parts of the world. (*RE*: 47)

What stands out here is the fact that, even if the narrator shares the character's theoretical expertise, he exposes academic theory as a narcissistic business, divorced from the real world. It must be added, however, that a certain degree of narcissism, or self-complacency, can also be ascribed to the narrator and to his own expanding on theory. Theory eventually emerges as the language of an elite to which the characters, the narrators and the author, ultimately belong.

In both Lodge's and Bradburys's novels, intertextuality serves the purpose of such covert narcissism. It appears as a fashionable postmodern strategy, but it also works in

terms of mimesis since it helps stage theoretical debates that were circulating at the time of the story and of its writing.

3. *Hybridisation and the Modes of Representation in Campus Novels: between Realism and Metafiction*

To conclude the analysis of the campus novel form, a reflection on the dynamics affecting the modes of representation that shape this literary genre must be provided. Looking at the Lodge-Bradbury corpus, it becomes clear that the institutionalisation of this genre results from hybridisation processes on several levels.

Firstly, we can say that campus novels deal with the representation of the university as a hybrid world, so campus novels are hybrid thematically speaking. A contrast between the English and the American worlds is a recurrent leitmotif. This cultural clash is narratively staged through academic exchanges between characters that enable the narrator to represent, usually in a parodic way, the idiosyncratic and stereotyped traits of the two cultures. Another strategy to show the hybrid features typical of the representation of the university as a space of experience is the interaction, in the fictional world, between narration and literary or cultural theory. The representation of lectures is a mimetic device which contains, in itself, a self-reflexive potential. A general self-awareness is also made explicit on the level of narration through comments and interventions of the narrative voice.

On the structural level, the romance plot is dominant. With regard to hybridisation, this kind of structuring is particularly interesting in so far as it is linked both to highbrow and lowbrow literature, a mixture which is one of the most recognizable characteristics of postmodern literature.

Moreover, the campus novel is inherently built on the hybridisation and reformulation of other generic patterns: formulaic patterns such as romance, mystery and adventure are incorporated into its structure, and the reference to other texts, both literary and non-literary, a particularly poignant phenomenon in David Lodge's novels. Of course, the blurring and mixing of genres have always been present in the history of

literature. However, it is only in postmodern fiction that hybridity becomes a prominent trait, perhaps the most distinctive one. This is what Ihab Hassan points out while commenting on Jacques Derrida's *The Law of Genre* (Hassan 1987). Ansgar Nünning reminds us that "the contemporary novel is not only more cannibalistic than its […] fore-runners but also shows that there is a marked proclivity [in contemporary fiction] to generating [hybrids]" (Nünning 1993: 282). Transgression, contamination and appropriation of institutionalised genres result in the creation of composite and heterogeneous literary forms. These hybrid forms overcome both canonised modes (tragedy, comedy etc.) and popular emplotments (crime fiction, romance plots etc.).

The connection between the campus novel and the other genres it re-elaborates is not only incorporated in the structure of the novels, but is also made explicit through several intertextual references that populate both Lodge's and Bradbury's novels. This form of intertextuality involves, in particular, the structure, i.e. the generic self-reflexivity exhibited thanks to the combination of different features. If we look at Lodge's *Campus Trilogy* in particular, the role played by intertextual references to other genres becomes immediately clear.

Changing Places, for example, presents the diegetic mimesis of different literary and non-literary genres. Chapter Three, *Corresponding*, is narrated as an epistolary novel, by presenting the epistolary exchanges between Philip-Hilary and Morris-Désirée; Chapter Four, *Reading*, is composed of pieces of newspapers, slogans and reviews that deal, in particular, with the students' protests on both campuses; and the last chapter, *Ending*, as we have already seen, simulates a film script. The titles of the chapters are an immediate reference to the narrative or cognitive processes experienced by the author, by the characters and by the reader. The subtitle of the novel, *A Tale of Two Campuses*, is itself a clear intertextual reference to Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Small World is the novel which most explicitly plays with genres. The novel's plot has the typical *entrelacement* structure of chivalric romances, and the whole fictional world created by the narrator is also patterned through references and elements which belong to this recognizable hypogenre. Just a few examples: the name of the protagonist, Persse, is a clear reference to Percival, one of the heroes of the Arthurian

saga; Angelica, the protagonist's love interest is a modern rewriting of the eponymous heroine of Ludovico Ariosto's chivalric poem; the whole story can be seen as an ironic rewriting of the gestures of a modern knight, the scholar, who goes through the world searching for the love of his life.

Nice Work is strongly connected to the Victorian Industrial novels which are at the core of the story, in particular Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* but also *Sybil*, *Jane Eyre* and Dickens' novels, as the epigraphs taken from these novels at the beginning of each chapter testify.

What emerges from this brief overview is that intertextuality serves the purpose of hybridisation by connecting intra-literary and extra-literary facts. The intertextual play with genres takes the notion of parody into account, especially, as it happens in this case, when intertextuality is combined with a patent comical intention. Parody, from Genette's point of view, is one of the ways in which a text can establish a dialogue with another text, the hypotext. Literary parody involves, intrinsically, a process of self-reflection concerning the cultural and literary dynamics of texts.

The very combination of comicality and metafiction forces us to consider the reader's response to campus novels. Reading Lodge's and Bradbury's novels helps us observe two main aspects. On the one hand, both the characters and the narrators of campus novels show a high level of awareness when it comes to literature and literary theory. These novels are written by writers who are involved in teaching literature at university, and this has an overt influence on the use of metafictional devices. On the other hand, however, historical contingencies are also important in the construction of the fictional world, and this aspect seems to be more related to a realistic mode. It would be difficult, for example, for the contemporary reader, to understand ironic references or jokes that are constantly used in these novels without having a proper knowledge of the social and cultural contexts that surround both the material composition and the fictional world of the text. We can consider, for example, *Nice Work*: this novel plays with the conventions of the Industrial novel and with the mode of romance, literary phenomena that are equally influential as parodic hypotexts and that are mentioned in the story as well. But it would have been impossible to understand

why such an industrial environment had been chosen without having Thatcherism in mind, i.e. the historical period which decisively inspired Lodge's process of worldmaking. Bradbury's *Rates of Exchange* is full of linguistic jokes; structuralism informs the way in which the Slakan language is constructed and the characters' awareness of their linguistic medium. But *Rates of Exchange* exhibits its jokes only because it was written during a specific period, the Cold War, making the comparison between Western and Eastern Europe comical.

The relationship between self-conscious elements and realism is fascinating but, at the same time, it presents contradictory aspects. It is not possible to talk about self-conscious realism in the terms used by A.S. Byatt, for example. Self-conscious realism, in fact, implicates an awareness of the limits of realism as a strategy of representation, a temptation to reflect on its features but still with a strong belief in its potentialities. Realism, in both Auerbach's and Moretti's analyses[50], is marked by seriousness. The same mode is shared and performed, as we will see later, in Byatt's novels, and this is precisely what is different in Lodge's and Bradbury's novels. The choice of parody, irony, satire, and the tendency to suggest a comical response by the reader reveals a certain degree of disbelief in the critical potential of seriousness. This can be read as a consequence of structuralism and poststructuralism, and it goes without saying that this is one of the most important features of postmodernism in general.

The kind of realism that affects campus novels seems to belong to comical realism, where grotesque, satire and parody are especially employed to criticize social or political aspects. Nevertheless, comicality is not only used as an instrument for critical reflection, as manifested by the implicit criticism on academia and society that both Lodge and Bradbury propose: comicality is first of all a strategy to appeal to the public, to entertain the reader. Comical and romance aspects are probably the two features that are mainly responsible for the success of this literary genre among a wide audience. David Lodge's and Malcolm Bradbury's novels are quite famous in the British context,

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[50] We refer to Auerbach's study on mimesis (1946) and his definition of the serious mode as the mark of modernity, a new awareness of the role played by daily life considered in its seriousness. This is the innovation that characterizes modernity related to bourgeoisie. The same implications are described by Moretti (2008).

but their readers are not only professors or academics: the fact that their stories deal primarily with love stories treated, in most cases, in a funny way, gives the campus novel a popular allure. The common reader, who is not familiar with the academic world, will hardly realize which real professor is behind *Small World*'s Fulvia Morgana, but will almost certainly laugh at Morris' erotic adventure with her.

Nevertheless, the play with pop culture and with popular genres such as love or detective stories is paradoxically related to a very self-reflexive and sophisticated idea of literature. Even if they are described while they are drunk or they are having sex with undergraduates and colleagues, the characters of campus novels belong to an elite. An elite composed of people who, while having sex, talk about structuralism or Freud, often intellectually analyzing the 'normal' or grotesque situations in which they are involved. Parody is a *trait-d'union* between comical realism and this way of playing with literature. A sense of general lightness dominates the representation of the universities portrayed in these novels, thus overcoming the potential critique against certain social dynamics that belong to the academic world. Even if parodied or satirised, the university appears as a microcosm where life is vibrant, stimulating, only sporadically tragic, but most of all funny and adventurous.

PART TWO

CHAPTER IV

Refiguring University Fiction: The Dramatisation of the University Imaginary in the Novels of A.S. Byatt

In the first part of the present work, an original interpretation of literary genres as part of a process of configuration has been exposed. University fiction, with its own dynamics between the varsity novel and the campus novel, is an example of such a process when we look at how the university imaginary is represented through literature. As we have already seen, all the processes of configuration are subject to changes of various nature: the passage from an Oxbridge based university system to the more democratic structure of the redbrick universities, the encounter between the Arnoldian elitist idea of culture and the continental literary theories, the advent of postmodern tendencies instead of the Bildungsroman model are the crucial turning points that explain the passage from the 19th century varsity novel to the 20th century campus novel.

In this second part we will try to argue that the literary configuration of such a cultural imaginary, i.e. university fiction, can be refigured and transfigured in a way that overcomes the boundaries of the genre itself. The case of the novel written by the English author A.S. Byatt will be taken as a paradigmatic example that shows precisely how is it possible to refigure cultural and literary *topoi* of university fiction in a very original way. A.S. Byatt's novels, in fact, cannot be totally comprised within university fiction, as it is impossible to circumscribe the generic limits of her works. This impossibility is due to the level of complexity that characterizes Byatt's novels, where complexity

> is to be regarded as the critical and interpretative movement towards the re-capturing of a 'unified sensibility' involving intellectual, emotional, and (meta)linguistic components. […] Literature promotes metaethical judgment by requiring an interpretative and communal response. Interpretation is a

quintessentially choice-based situation and a challenge to received meanings, which cannot dispense with the knowledge of history and critical tradition. (Locatelli 2009: 69-71)

As we will see through the analysis of Byatt's novels, her texts are definitely challenging, as they include a huge numbers of cultural references, plays with literature and historical reconstructions of the cultural paradigms of specific historical periods. However, even if it is not possible to call them university novels, in most of A.S. Byatt's work the university imaginary is crucial not only as a theme or leitmotiv, but especially as a structural pattern that informs the whole process of world-making. The novels taken into consideration will be *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964), *The Game* (1967), *Possession* (1990), *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), *Still Life* (1985), *Babel Tower* (1996), *A Whistling Woman* (2002). With a special attention devoted to the so-called *Frederica Quartet*, it will be argued that the representation of the university imaginary is enacted through the process that we have called in Chapter I 'dramatisation': what is dramatised in her novels is precisely the university imaginary. The university imaginary is, in fact, not always directly represented in her novels: it is subsumed into the structure of the work of art, internalised, structuralised, folded back on itself.

As we will see during a closer analysis of the novels, this type of dramatisation presents a self-reflexive attitude that is related to the interaction between literature and literary or cultural theory. However, this relationship takes shape in a different way from the common postmodern self-reflexivity exhibited in campus novels. A difference between campus novel's parody and Byatt's serious mode has been already announced. As shown, literary theory, theoretical debates, and the penetration of structuralism and post-structuralism are often mimetically shaped and diegetically performed in the genre of campus novel. Taking into consideration, for example, the structure of *Changing Places*, the experimentation with different generic styles of literature can be interpreted as an opportunity for the reader to reflect on the issue of literary genres. But even if the presence of self-reflexive instances is relevant in the configuration of the campus novel, it is hybridisation, and not dramatisation, that is at work. In *Changing Places* the reader is induced to reflect on literature in general, the process of reflection is overt,

immediately recognizable, and it works through the proximity of generic features that belong to different genres. Instead, in A.S. Byatt's novels dramatisation works, first of all, specifically on the structural and narrative patterns generally present in university fiction. The process of auto-reflection is concentrated on the university/campus imaginary, which is (counter-) narrativised in the process of world-making of the fictional world.

Of the four novels of the tetralogy, only two (*Still Life* and *A Whistling Woman*) deal more overtly with a direct representation of the university world. Apart for these evident links to the university imaginary, all the novels exhibit more intrinsic and structural narrative strategies which can be interpreted in terms of the dramatisation. When applied to university fiction and looking specifically at Byatt's example, by dramatisation we refer to all the mimetic and diegetic mechanisms through which the university imaginary (and the traditional way into which it has been configured, i.e. university fiction) is refigured: on the one hand, the university imaginary is internalised into the structure of the novels, in particular, through the choice of specific themes and characters; on the other hand, dramatisation works on a more textual level, i.e. through the employment of specific narrative processes that will be retraced throughout the analysis of the single novels.

Moreover, as it will be cleared out by the reading of Byatt's works, her novels stage the struggles encountered by women when they approach not only the university world, but life of the mind in general[51]. Even in the 20th century, to be an intellectual is still

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[51] This is one of the reasons why we decided to not include *The Biographer's Tale* (2001) in the chapter. This novel, in fact, presents many aspects that makes it less homogeneous if compared to the other novels taken in examination. First of all, the story is told by a first person narrator, which is quite an exception for Byatt, who generally employs third person narrators. The narrator coincides with the protagonist, Phineas G. Nanson, a postgraduate who decides to give up with post-structuralism and literary theory and to write a biography, because, in his point of view, biography deals with 'facts'. He decides to write a biography on a biographer, Scholes Destry- Scholes, who wrote a monumental biography on Sir Elmer Bole. However, Scholes Destry-Scholes reveals to be a mysterious man, who left some cryptic notes on three historical characters (Carl Linnaeus, Francis Galton and Henrik Ibsen) that are related to the material of his biography. The core of the story is a meditation on the relationship between facts and fiction, and on biography as a genre. Most of these aspects are already present in *Possession*, a novel that we are going to analyse in detail. In *The Biographer's Tale*, the academic context is therefore only a starting point for the dynamics of the plot, and it does not invest any other specific role. Moreover, this is one of the few cases in which the protagonist is a man, while my second line of inquiry focuses on a theme, women and their intellectual life, which is a key topic in Byatt's fiction.

challenging for a woman. This is the reason why gender will be a second important line of inquiry in the analysis of Byatt's novels.

1. *Women at Cambridge: Bildung-form and Female Hysteria in* The Shadow of the Sun *and* The Game

At the beginning of her writing career, Byatt's interest in the academic world is confined to a thematic level that involves, in particular, the characterisation of her female protagonists. Her first two novels, *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964) and *The Game* (1967), both take issue with women's problematic relationship with university. The attention paid to the interconnection between women, body, and the life of the mind is evident in her *Introduction* to the new edition of *The Shadow of The Sun*, where the writer explains how her first two novels are influenced by her own experience at Cambridge:

> I remember getting the idea for it [*The Shadow of the Sun*] during one of John Holloway's lectures on D.H. Lawrence. [...] The novel does have its ideas about what was and wasn't interesting about Lawrence, in Leavis's Cambridge. [...] The other thing I wrote at Cambridge, over and over, was the story of Cassandra who was loved by the sun god, also Lord of the Muses, and wouldn't give in to him, so couldn't speak, or not to be believed by anyone. (*SS*: viii)

This quotation already shows how the university imaginary, filtered through her own personal experience, is relevant for Byatt's creative process. As the writer points out in the same *Introduction*, a central topic for her first two novels is the condition of being an academic and intellectual woman in the '50s and in the '60s:

> We wanted marriage and children, we wanted weddings and romantic love and sex, and to be normal. [...] We had fought, much harder than the men, who outnumbered us eleven to one, to be allowed to study at Cambridge, and we were fatally torn, when thinking of our futures, by hopes of marriage, and hopes of something, some work, beyond getting to university at all. (*SS*: ix)

In *The Shadow of the Sun* and *The Game*, the experience of university is essential, but also contradictory and at times painful, to both the female protagonists. The characters

enter the hallowed grounds of Oxbridge because that seems to be the only way to develop their personality and their creative skills. But the academy turns out to fail the promise of a proper environment for the female mind.

If we read *The Shadow of The Sun*, Byatt's very first work, alongside the tradition of the female varsity novel, it becomes clear that the novel can be interpreted as an anti-Bildungsroman. The central character is a seventeen-year-old girl, Anna Severell. She is the daughter of Henry Severell, a brilliant writer, famous for his sublime and visionary style. Anna lives in the shadow of his intellectual glory: the only thing that she can think of doing is writing, but the inescapable comparison with her father prevents her from any really creative act. During the first half of the book, we see Anna during the summertime at her parents' house. Henry and Caroline invite a couple, Oliver and Margaret, to join them for holidays in the countryside. At this stage of the story, Anna has been expelled from school and has no clue about her future. Her parents (especially Caroline, her mother) think that she is simply incapable of doing anything, while the only person who believes in her is Oliver, an academic scholar who admires her father's work. Oliver trains Anna for the whole summer in order to prepare her for the admission to Cambridge.

In the second part of the novel, we see Anna at Cambridge, but she does not seem to develop any interest in an academic career. Cambridge is supposed to be the place where Anna can find her aspirations, as both Henry and Oliver did. What Anna achieves, instead, has a much narrower scope. Cambridge is where she can go on having the secret affair she had started with Oliver the previous summer. After a conversation with Henry, she decides to break up with her lover. When, later on, Anna realizes she is pregnant, she decides to marry Peter, a fellow who is in love with her and who is aware of her condition. However, in the end she runs away from Peter, since she realizes that being on her own is the only way to find her own voice and writing. Although she seems to have gained some kind of independence, we see her at the end of the novel in a hotel room with Oliver again. The open ending does not allow the reader to predict the significance of that scene in view of future developments.

What is interesting in relation to the focus on the refiguration of the university imaginary is, firstly, the analysis of the (counter)*Bildung*-process Anna undergoes. The failed achievement of Anna's identity as an artist mimetically problematizes the evolution of women's life, when it comes to their education and their future. Secondly, the novel's engagement with the artistic vision also puts on the narrative stage the relation between literature and criticism.

Female artistic creativity, a recurrent topic in Byatt's oeuvre (Neumeier 1997), is here seen in its relationship with the academic world. In the Western tradition, women as intellectuals, and not simply consumers of culture, have traditionally been portrayed as liminal (Lang 2001). Female liminality as a cultural category presents contradictory aspects: although female artists are marginalised by society as they usually do not submit themselves to gender or social rules (like getting married, being mothers etc.), they are often seen to opt for self-confinement which is perceived as the only strategy to achieve self-expression (Gilbert, Gubar 1984).

What the title of the novel, *The Shadow of the Sun*, suggests is that the liminal condition of women is symbolically represented by the metaphor of shadow. Byatt's oeuvre is particularly receptive to this cultural iconology. The mythical relation between moon and women, the Lady of Shallot, the spider who weaves her web in the dark, the reflection of mirrors and glasses, are just few examples of recurrent images in her novels. But if loneliness and anti-sociability assume a positive connotation in her later novels, in her first work they are more related to the anti-heroic attitude of the protagonist. The symbolic role of the dark shadow Anna lives in is only half positive. The whole novel is in fact built upon a metaphorical opposition between light (the sun) and shadows, where Henry represents the sun, as his epiphanic moments occur in hot

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[52] In the *Introduction* to *The Shadow of the Sun*, Byatt explains the relation between her characters and heliotropic images: «The visual image that always went with the idea of 'The Shadow of the Sun' was that of Samuel Palmer's Cornfield with the Evening Star – an image I now associate with Van Gogh's Reaper, working his way through a seething furnace of light and white-gold corn. The Palmer is nocturnal, warm but bright, lit by a reflected moonlight which nevertheless contains the partial sickle within the possibility of a complete circle of light. I see suddenly that images of harvest are also an intricate part of my private-universal imagery. When I was writing *The Shadow of the Sun* I read a wonderful article in the Manchester Guardian about the turbulences in ripe corn, and incorporated it into Henry Severell's vision of harvest fields». (*SS*: xvi)

sunny fields[52] or resolve into hallucinatory visions of burning and flames, while Anna lives in his shadow, i.e. merely in the reflection of his own light.

And yet shadows occasionally engender creative power as witnessed by the two visionary moments Anna experiences, significantly, during stormy nights. The first experience takes place in the bathroom of her parents' house, where Anna looks through the window at the dark stormy landscape, a sight that she refashions into a vision built upon metaphors of light:

> [She] came to the white closed door of the bathroom. [...] Tonight, with the soft light from the summer moon leaning gently on the corner of the bath, propped triangularly like another pane of paler glass between the window and the floor [...], it was a drowned world, a sunken secret world, with pillars and planes of light shining gently in its corners, [...] shadow of transparent shadow, reflected and admitted, block geometry made ideal in light, under the brittle circular shadows of the glasses, which rested on them and through them. Shadows of light, Anna thought, thickness on thickness, all these textures of light, caught and held in glass. [...] Nothing she had ever seen had been more exquisite, or more unreal. She felt balanced and complete, between all this trapped, plotted light and the approaching storm; she said to herself, turning the glass round and round, over and over again, not knowing herself quite what she meant, 'I can do something with this. Oh, I can do something with this, that matters.' It was all so extremely important and she would, any moment now, know clearly why. (*SS*: 133-134)

A thick cluster of contrasting images – light and darkness, light and shadows, direct and reflected light – builds up Anna's private scenery where external elements are transfigured into a cognitive subjective experience through metaphors. Anna's imagination and her ability to translate visual images into literary constructs, such as metaphors, open up the possibility of an artistic experience. It is not a mere case that the

climax of Anna's vision corresponds to a moment of self-recognition ("I can do something with this"), which is highlighted by the passage from a third person narration and indirect/free indirect speech to a monologue in first person narration. Shadows seem to disclose the possibility for the female self to achieve self-awareness and more confidence into her artistic capacity. However, like all epiphanies, Anna's too are as momentous as they are brief. This one comes to an abrupt end when Oliver steps into the bathroom.

The same occurs during Anna's second vision at Cambridge when, on her way back to the college after a visit to Oliver's late at night, she is arrested by the interplay of reflected lights against the darkness of the night:

> Over this orange, reflecting and containing it, long pale clouds were moving, torn and elongated by the wind, multiplying quite rapidly and disclosing through ragged gaps now and then a blob of concentrated light that must have been the moon. [...] A large dark green bottle came down from the direction of the mill bridge, bobbling like a shadow [...]. She thought, this is going to be important, this is one of the times when I can see, and held herself for it, still and gathered to meet it. [...] This will change me, Anna thought [...]. Everything came at her with the lightning, everything insisted, bridges, surface of water, fall, trees, light from the pub [...]. I must put all of myself into seeing, she told herself, holding herself to meet it; I must know what it is this time. She remembered something she had once read: 'The earth still pulls at us because it is not ourselves – it is still the source for our moments of glory and our sense of brilliance; the visionary experience is still a real thing [...]'. It took Anna a moment to remember that her father had written it [...]. And then the cutting edge of the vision melted, the mill race no longer sliced her whole landscape but was only a fall of water [...]. I don't think I am going to know, she thought [...] I shall never make it. (*SS*: 237-238)

The storm and the moonlight are again the main sources of Anna's visionary capacity. The shadow, here directly mentioned in the green-bottle scene, is another time linked to light, more precisely with lighting and storms. It seems that Anna's capacity can take shape only in this symbolical circumstance, when the light of artistic visions is mingled with the shadows, a symbol that stays both for Anna's condition and for female

creativity. The relevance of this moment for Anna is highlighted by the narrator's incursions into the character's mind through direct monologues integrated into the indirect report. The use of first person narration is here much more pronounced if compared to the previous passage, which testifies the emotional climax perceived by the protagonist. However, instead of confirming Anna's potential, the moment of vision is disrupted by her reminiscence of her father's work. This particular shows that being at home or at Cambridge does not make any difference: she is still unable to achieve her own individuality, she is still a shadow.

Even if Cambridge does not bring any redemption but only failure, the role it plays in the novel is crucial. In the first part, when Anna is not yet there, Cambridge is considered by all the other characters the place for self-discovery, self-achievement and self-realisation. Everybody at home and at school expects Anna to attend University and read English. It seems that nobody cares about what does Anna really want: a writing career, preceded by an academic formation, is a common opinion that does not take into account Anna's opinion:

> It was to be expected that she would want to write. People who met her, knowing that she was Henry's daughter, assumed it, and it was certainly true that at school she had shown no interest in, or aptitude for, anything but the Arts subjects, particularly English. She had been good enough at those for it to be assumed that she would go to the University and read English, at least before the trouble with the school, after which she had left under a cloud. It was still assumed that this was what she would do, but nothing was done about it. Anna did no work, and expressed no interest in applying to colleges or preparing for examinations. (*SS*: 15)

The use of impersonal verbs ("it was to be expected, it was certainly true, to be assumed, it was still assumed") or generic subjects ("people assumed it", "nothing was done about it") stresses the social connotation of the opinion according to which Anna should emulate her father's career. The anaphoric repetition of the passive verb "to be assumed" achieves an ironic tone when compared to the last sentence, which expresses, both in terms of verbs and content, quite the opposite: the subject is here explicit

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(Anna), but instead of conveying and idea of action, it is accompanied by two negative verbs ("did no work, expressed no interest") that mark, in their dryness, the fact that every decision about Anna's future does not depend from her will.

It is clear that Anna experiences a lot of social and familiar pressure about her attendance at Cambridge. Oliver, who comes from the working class and who believes that Cambridge is the place where somebody has to face her or his role into society, forces Anna to study and to compile applications for the two most prestigious British universities. They spend the whole summer together, and even if Oliver is a pedant, Anna senses for the first time that "she is someone". This condition, however, goes hand in hand with an opposite feeling of inadequacy. When for example Oliver asks Anna to give her opinion on her father's writing, she refuses to express any personal thought. Passiveness seems to be Anna's response when she is asked to voice her opinions. From the narrator's perspective and from the inner focalization of Anna's, the reader learns that no matter how clever, Anna is incapable of any public performance of her intelligence.

The relation between Anna and Oliver is, at first, a teacher-student one. He exerts his power as a man, as an academic and as an older person. But when he tries to seduce her during the last night at Severell's, Anna seems to be more self-confident than him:

> Anna congratulated herself on her own sophistication in being quite unperturbed over having been passionately embraced by a married man and wrung her wet nightdress out of the window. Men are funny about sex, she told herself, as she climbed into bed. [...] One has to learn about it, by experience. I'm learning all sorts, she told herself. [...] She smiled herself. 'Poor Oliver.' (*SS*: 139)

Emotional detachment characterizes also Anna's experience at Cambridge. The narrator does not indulge in the description of her academic activities, which shows that Anna is not concerned with them. Throughout the novel, Cambridge actually looks like a shadow. It is always mentioned by all the characters as a space of experience, where people grow and understand what they want. This opinion is not shared by Anna. As a matter of fact she does not enjoy collective moments. Nor is she particularly interested

in literary criticism which she resents as a hindrance to personal involvement with literature. In fact, she has no intention of becoming a literary critic. Like her father, and unlike Oliver, she believes that literature and literary criticism stand in opposition: the visionary power of literature is constrained by the pale shadow of criticism.

This opposition is also embodied in the contradictory relationship between Henry, the supporter of the light of literature, and Oliver, the representative of the greyness of criticism. In the passage below, for example, Oliver asks Henry what he is writing at the moment:

> 'I am doing a little academic work.' 'On what?' 'Oh – Coleridge – ' said Henry, unwillingly, thinking that it was a curious intimacy, between a writer and his intelligent reader. […] He and Oliver had been so explicit on paper; he about his world and Oliver about his intelligent reading of that world; they knew, in this one area, more than most men ever knew about each other, so that to talk was ridiculous. And yet, as men, they had no touch. (*SS*: 33)

As the conversations between the two testify, Oliver's reading of Henry's novels is driven by a kind of 'love-hate'. On one hand, Oliver, in fact, admires Henry's capacity of sublime transfiguration. And yet, on the other, he is jealous of Henry's talent, as he feels he is incapable of seeing the way Henry sees, incapable of sharing his visions. Even if they are appreciative, Oliver's reviews of Henry's novels unsurprisingly upset Henry who feels that, in their characteristic 'greyness', they are diminishing of his own brightness[53].

The problematic encounter between users and producers of literature, as well as the relationship between the female subject and the academic world, are also thematised in Byatt's *The Game*, her second novel, whose subject is the dramatic rivalries between siblings in the fields of creative art, academic performance, and romantic attachments.

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[53] In her *Introduction*, Byatt explains that the creation of Oliver as a character was inspired by her 'real' Cambridge experience: «My friends were not angry young men, the best of them were just sure that the silliness of the British Class System were withering into irrelevance. They were the meritocracy, and the literature class was the pulpit, in schools, in evening classes, in colleges. But there were others who felt aggressive, scornful, assertive of 'working-class' values. Oliver comes out of that – someone with a chip, who can think, who is thinking, who makes too much of literature in one way, and doesn't understand its too-bright aspects. […] He represents a kind of public vision of what I was about, a scholar, a critic, a *user* of literature, not a maker, a natural judge» (*SS*: xi).

The title is a reference to the private card game played by the main characters, Cassandra Corbett and her sister Julia, when children. The game, whose object is the creation of a fantasy world inspired by Medieval myths (in particular Malory's *La Morte d'Arthur* and Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*), and mainly developed by Cassandra, is interrupted when, at the age of twenty, Julia wins a prize with a story inspired by it. Julia and Cassandra are also both involved with the same guy, Simon Moffitt. When the sisters break up, Cassandra becomes a medieval scholar at Oxford, while Julia writes women's novels in London. A temporary reconciliation, achieved after Julia's visit to Oxford, is abruptly thwarted by the publication of Julia's novel *A Sense of Glory*, inspired by Cassandra's life at Oxford and by her relationship with Simon. The novel ends with Cassandra's suicide.

Cassandra is another example of a failed artist. Her fictional character, echoing Priamo's daughter on one hand and on the other Tennyson's Lady of Shalott, openly acknowledges – and resents – the influence of these 'failed artists' on her own similar failures:

> An image for myself? [...] Cassandra. Not Cassandra Austen, sisterly supporter of the expressive Jane. Cassandra who was Apollo's priestess, and – since she refused intercourse with the Lord of the Muses, and was thus no artist – incapable of communication. Unrelated to the world of objects around her. [...] Cassandra, like myself, a specialist in useless knowledge. (*TG*: 141)

Unlike Julia, Cassandra is unable to convert her fantasies into art, but her frustration is partially softened by her entrance into the academic world. In the opening of the novel, we see Cassandra, aged thirty eight, working at a new edition of *La Morte d'Arthur*. It soon appears that her earlier decision to venture into an academic career has ensued from her involvement in the Game. In fact Cassandra is unable to differentiate the fictional world of her imagination from reality. It is impossible, for her, to ignore the rules and the characters of the medieval stories that enthralled her when a child. Cassandra's life at Oxford, the place where she has confined herself in search of an alternative world, turns out to be a sort of secular monastery. The passage below shows

the progressive entrance of Cassandra into the academic life. Like Anna, Cassandra as well seems to be not completely aware of her choices, even if more passionate and interested in literary studies:

> She had come to Oxford hungry for the absolutely worked drama of Lancelot and Guenevere, Tristan and Iseult; she had slowly transmuted this into a passion for the symbolic possibilities of the Grail Legend. [...] She had elaborated, and believed, a network of symbols which made the outer world into a dazzling but comprehensible constellation of physical facts whose spiritual interrelations could be grasped and woven by untiring intellect. [...] Cassandra remembered the root of this passion in the wash of romantic feeling with which she had first seen Oxford, having read indiscriminately Walter Scott, Tennyson, Morris and Malory, looking for a life as brightly-coloured as books. [...] She had come, not from Ritual to Romance, but in the other direction, from romance to ritual. Her feeling for completeness had betrayed her to a way of life she had not quite chosen; the academic life had become almost accidentally a branch of the contemplative life. (*TG*: 18)

Her academic career, even if brilliant, turns out be a failure. The use of an external point of view in the passage above, and the choice, in particular, of the verb "betray" and the adverb "accidentally" highlights unequivocally Cassandra's immaturity. The narrator seems to suggest to the reader that, nevertheless Cassandra lives in Oxford, pursuing literary studies, that was not what she wanted really.

Cassandra's behaviour, like the protagonist of *The Shadow of the Sun*, manifests clear aspects of female liminality as well: the loneliness she had experienced as an undergraduate resurfaces in her daily routine as a don. A stern professor with no sentimental affairs, she makes a point of avoiding contacts. Her plain, unadorned clothes, her sparely furnished room contribute to a sense of rigorous austerity which is set against the turbulence of her spiritual life, witnessed by haunting nightmares. A combination of male and female attributes, of sexlessness and hysterical responses, the character of Cassandra owes a lot to her predecessors in nineteenth century female varsity novels. Common society, represented in the novel by her fashionable and extroverted London-based sister Julia, still perceives her as a monster/artist, in search

for self-seclusion: "Julia knew that Cassandra, in her draughty college, felt like Charlotte Brontë, cut off from Branwell and Zamorna, like Emily, silently pining for another world" (*TG*: 101).

Despite her evident anxiety, Cassandra seems in the first part of the novel to have found a kind of balance between her imagination and the 'real' world in the academia. But her view of Oxford as a secluded and protective hiding place changes as soon as Julia comes to visit her. When the two sisters have dinner together with some colleagues of Cassandra's, the campus life turns into a world closer to Lodge's arena of flirts and love affairs:

> Cassandra had always, like Charlotte Brontë incurably romantic, nourished a vision of herself, the epic written, arriving with all her integrity in the literary world to be belatedly *fêted* by the Thackeray of the day. She saw now that this world was not what she had thought and was forever closed to her, and, worse, Julia's incursion into her own world revealed to her that that too had, and must always have had, dimensions she was incapable of apprehending. She looked at her brick-red colleague with Storrin's and Julia's eyes, and her stomach contracted with fear for herself. (*TG*: 118)

The contrast between Cassandra's process of worldmaking and the external reality is further fictionally mediated when Julia, stuck in the writing of her last novel, decides to change her usual subject (autobiographic portraits of female characters confined to domesticity) with a new narrative inspired by her brief experience at Oxford. The new novel on her sister's life at Oxford – Julia believes – will also be a way to come to grips with her relationship with Cassandra and with the Game.

> There's a theme for a novel, there, she thought: a novel about dangers of imbalance between imagination and reality. [...] She remembered Storrin's voice. 'You will have plenty of material for an authentic book about academic life.' [...] It would be a good novel, because it would not be about herself. [...] Julia smiled. (*TG*: 123)

A Sense of Glory, the novel that Julia eventually writes, is a fictional academic novel, a *mise en abyme* of *The Game* itself. The protagonist is "Emily, the lady don, cherishing and repressing an imaginative life on the scale of Charlotte Brontë's passion for the Duke of Zamorna. [...] Miss Corbett's weird heroine sees everything with a steady lunatic" (*TG*: 220). While fictionalizing Cassandra's 'monstrous' features, this redoubled female character shows up as also based upon literary models like the Brontës. As a result, *A Sense of Glory* surfaces in Byatt's novel as a merciless portrait of academics and of their obsession with "the unreal" and "the unattainable":

> There are a galaxy of minor Oxford characters, all equally obsessed by the unreal, the unattainable, and their obsessions reflect and illuminate each other. There is the suave don who wants to be a television idol himself, and produces deliberately, as the epilogue does naturally, a false charm. A spinsterly, vulgar passion for the erotic works of the earl Rochester balances, and lights up, the antithetical purity of Emily's unreal world. (*TG*: 220)

Beside the upset response of Cassandra's colleagues to the book, is Cassandra herself who feels that her personality has been mercilessly exposed. Moreover she senses an intolerable gap between her life in Oxford and the fictional account her sister has produced. Suicide stands as her only escape from her blending of fiction and reality. Byatt has claimed her novel to be a critique of the women's novel genre and to be, more generally, a warning against the risk of appropriating and feeding upon people's lives through writing[54]. But *The Game* can also be read as a critique of campus novels: as the the roman à clef model and its combination with romance elements are characteristic of the 20th century campus novels, it seems that *The Game*, with the tragic consequences after the publication of *A Sense of Glory*, illustrates the risks of such a genre, based on the close relationship between facts and fiction.

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[54] «*The Game* […] is about the fear of 'woman's novel' as an immoral devouring force» (*SS*: xii).

2. *Literary Theory and Academic Characters: a Metacritical and Metatextual Representation in* **Possession**

Possession is probably the closest of Byatt's novels to the tradition of campus fiction, as well as the most acclaimed work of Byatt's writing career. Published in 1990, it won the Man Booker Prize and tells the story of two young researchers, Roland Mitchell and Maud Bailey, who run after two dead poets, Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte. The two Victorian poets fell in love in an adulterous relationship during the second half of the nineteenth century. A parallel love story begins between the two scholars during their research, while a number of other academic characters are depicted.

The novel is directly related to the representation of the academic world, and it is probably the most engaged with the campus novel form. Even if the main actions do not take place on a campus, the strategy of emplotment is close to the campus novel model with regards to two main patterns: romance and detective story. Also self-reflexivity, which is typical of Lodge's and Bradbury's novels, is here clearly performed, although through a wider spectrum of strategies including the blurring of literary genres. However, as far as romance and intertextuality/self-reflexivity are concerned, *Possession* is somehow different from the campus novel model to which, nevertheless, it belongs.

We discussed about the importance of romance in Lodge and Bradbury. As for the detective story, it is a plot structure particularly used in low brow campus novels. These two characteristics have been identified as typical of a literary form close to university fiction: the romance of the archive. The definition is given by Suzanne Keen in her *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (2003). To Keen, *Possession* is a paradigmatic example of what she identifies as a genre: in fact, Keen retraces the features of the romance of the archive on the basis of Byatt's novel. Keen also makes a point of distinguishing between romances of archive and university fiction:

> Romances of the archive typically validate the insight and abilities of popular writers, amateur researchers, graduate students, detective and (in general) those lacking professional certification in scholarship or permanent academic posts. […]

the quester in the archive is less bound by conventions, less hampered by respect for hierarchy, and less concerned about career and reputation. For these reasons, romances of the archive rarely overlap with 'university', 'academic', or 'campus novels', interchangeable labels for those works satirizing the follies of professors and academic administrators on both sides of the Atlantic. (Keen 2003: 30)

However, this opposition seems to be less valuable specifically in the case of *Possession*. In fact, it is because Maud and Roland are scholars that they are able to discover the truth about the relationship between Ash and LaMotte. Moreover, *Possession*, to a certain extent, constitutes a satire of the academic world, as demonstrated by the description of the American characters, Mortimer Cropper and Leonora Sterne, who embody two critical tendencies (biography and feminism) strongly parodied in the novel. For these reasons, in the case of *Possession*, we are more inclined to consider the romance of the archive as a system of emplotment, instead of an independent genre. Such list exposed by Keen, in fact, shows that the characteristics of the romance of the archive can be summarised in a few points that concern plot and characters:

- characters-researchers, endowed with the corporeality and 'round' psychology of the realistic novel;
- romance adventure stories, in which research figures as a kernel plot action, resulting in strong closure, with climactic discoveries and rewards;
- discomforts and inconvenience suffered in the service of knowledge (actually part of the romance plot, but so played up as to deserve separate emphasis);
- sex and physical pleasure gained as a result of questing (these stories about 'brains' are always also stories about bodies);
- settings and locations (such as libraries and country houses) that contains archives of actual paper;
- material traces of the past revealing truth;
- and evocation of history, looking back from a postimperial context (Keen 2003: 35)

As the above list illustrates, romance is central to the way in which the university imaginary is represented in *Possession,* and the subtitle of the novel, *a romance*, reveals also a nostalgic dimension of the past. Diane Elam, in her *Romancing the Postmodern*,

underlines how postmodernism and romance share a specific attitude towards history and the past,

> an affective relationship to history [that] re-members the past, re-situates its temporality, in order to make the past impossibile to forget, […] to point out that it is impossible fully to remember, fully to come to terms with the past (Elam 1992: 15).

What emerges from this reflection is the definition of what some critics have called 'postmodern romance', that is :

> representation of what is purportedly impossible; a refusal to accept linearity and chronology as 'natural' direction in a story; a concern with the nature of love and its fulfillment; and a strong nostalgic component. (Boccardi 2003: 111)

Many critics have debated whether *Possession* can be considered a postmodern romance as regards its attitude towards history and epistemological truth. What becomes clear throughout the novel is that the university world plays a crucial role in the construction of a specific relation to the past. As Wells has pointed out, the fact that the past is reconstructed through academic research witnesses to "a high degree of literary self-consciousness to focus the reader's attention on the inevitable processes of fabrication and interpretation involved in reconstructing historical events in narrative form" (Wells 2002: 669). In particular, Maud's and Roland's interpretative process stands out as countering the flourishing tendencies of literary theory (Lacanian post-structuralism and feminism) satirised in the novel, as argued by Wells:

> the community of twentieth-century scholars in the novel embodies the intellectual "barbarism" of Vico's last time-form. Both scholarship and sexuality have become brutal struggles, with predatory types such as the aptly named Fergus Wolff exploiting others for their own gain and pleasure. These characters flourish in the poststructuralism climate of destabilized language, for it allows them to manipulate ideas in selfish ways. […] In contrast, Roland and Maud appear as figures that can succeed in their interpretive projects, creating the circumstances in which

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postmodernity can experience the benefits of the ricorso. To bring about the positive historical influence, they must learn to think of themselves and the past as participants in a dialogue or "conversation". (Wells 2002: 675 – 77)

Parody and pastiche play a crucial role in the way in which the link between past and present is mingled with intertextual strategies. In particular, parody is the mode through which *Possession* rereads the detective plot[55], while pastiche is the strategy through which the novel incorporates a variety of other texts. From feminist criticism to Victorian poetry, from biography to diary, a wide spectrum of genres are included and exhibited. The polyphony performed by the novel comes from the author's playing with literature conventions in ways that are, however, less humorous than in the Lodge-Bradbury campus novel form. What the reader faces here is more a phenomenon of textualisation that informs the whole structure of the novel, i.e. the textual dimension of the novel is increased by the continuous incorporation of other fictional texts. The result is a text made by a web of other texts, which makes the reader think of the textual, linguistic and literary aspects of the narrative.

As we have seen, the presence of different generic forms includes metatextual remarks on the scope of genre, and on the blurring and mixing genres. Looking at this phenomenon along Genette's definition of architextuality and parody (Genette 1997), we may say that parody, in the case of *Possession*, is directed less towards a specific author or text (as said in Genette's definition) and more towards genres and styles, while the intertextual reference takes the form of a quotation, an allusion, or pastiche.

As to the mixing of genres, the detective novel and the romance work as models for the emplotment system, while poetry is the object of an original pastiche. The poems of Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte are incorporated in order to recreate and

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[55] See an interesting essay by Gutleben (1997: 2) on the relationship between pastiche and parody in *Possession*. In particular, he says that «Compris dans le traitement parodique se trouve le roman policier avec la comparaison explicite entre les universitaires et les détectives et la recherche du secret des poètes victoriens conduite par Euan Mac Intyre qui se prend pour Albert Campion, l'inspecteur de Margery Allingham»; or Steveker (2009 :131): «The novel is repeatedly determined by various elements of detective fiction such as the finding of 'clue[s]', an eaves-dropping scene and a case of 'grave robbery'»; and finally Mari (1996 : 18): «*Possession* utilise non seulement la dynamique du roman polizie mais aussi sa terminologie. Blackadder est comparé à un policier "poring over bits of hair and skin"; Roland s'efforce de dépister Sir George Bailey […]. Les chercheurs sont également associés à des chasseurs qui jouissent de leur poursuite: Mortimer Cropper, enfin "sur la piste" ("on the scent") resent "la joie pure et intense de la chasse"».

represent, in an academic, archivistic or textual way, the cultural and literary echoes of the Victorian era. As Gutleben has rightly argued:

> Qu'il s'agisse de poésie, de roman épistolaire ou de journal intime, les genres littéraires qu'imite le pastiche font l'objet d'une recherche d'harmonisation entre contenu et contenant et non d'une quête d'effets comique: les pastiches poétiques visent au choc estétique, les lettres aux échanges d'idée et les extraits de journaux aux révélations pathétiques. (Gutleben 1997: 4)

Beside the fictional texts written by the two Victorian poets (fictitious as well), *Possession* includes quite a number of cultural allusions, most of which related to English culture and literature[56]. Lena Steveker has interpreted this phenomenon along Aleida Assman's theories of cultural memory and reads *Possession* as:

> [an] 'imaginary museum', in which both texts belonging to the 'high' canon of (predominantly) British literature, and paintings of the 'high' canon of not only British, but also pictorial art are continually present through the intertextual reference. (Steveker 2009: 112)

What Steveker does not highlight is the fact that this cultural knowledge is performed in the novel through the characters who belong to the academic world. The relationship between the university imaginary and cultural heritage, however, is not as simple as it might look at first sight. On the one hand academic knowledge and theory are heavily satirised, i.e. comically criticised in the characters of Mortimer Cropper, Leonora Sterne

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[56] *Possession* includes a large number of intertextual references; there are, for instance, both direct and indirect allusions to Robert Graves (*P*, p. 12, p. 149), the Bible (*P*, p. 17, p. 139), Tennyson (*P*, p. 39), Spencer (*P*, p. 45), Shakespeare (*P*, p. 105, p. 482), Virginia Woolf (*P*, p. 244), Herman Melville (*P*, p. 251), D.H. Lawrence (*P*, p. 278), John Keats (*P*, p. 510), and John Milton (*P*, p. 510) (See Steveker 2009: 111).

and Fergus Wolff. Leonora Sterne, the lesbian and feminist critic, has been recognised by the critics and the most prominent object of satire[57]:

> Qui dit parodie satirique, dit éxagération et moquerie, deux traits qu'illustrent idéalement tous les extraits de critique littéraires – qui sont autant de pastiches. L'outrance parodique concerne d'abord le langage, ou plutôt le jargon, des différentes écoles critiques. Á (sic) ce jeu, Leonora et la critique féministe se retrouvent en point de mire. (Gutleben 1997: 5)

However, the representation of theory is less funny and more contradictory: regarding , for example, the novel's attitude towards feminism, the female protagonist, Maud, a feminist critic, is described in a definitely positive way. What is different from Leonora is the way in which Maud approaches the problem of femininity in her research.

Maud's interest in Christabel LaMotte derives, in fact, from a personal engagement that takes the shape of genealogic affiliation: at the end of the story Maud discovers that Christabel is one of her ancestors. The characterisation of Maud as a female intellectual is based on three prominent features: textuality, liminality, reduplication. Maud's name derives in fact from the homonymic poem by Tennyson, whose Lady of Shalott is an important reference for Maud through the mediation of LaMotte. Liminality defines Maud's personality: spatially, the character privileges small and narrow spaces, like

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[57] Elaine Showalter underlines the comic effect of the character, while Christien Franken is more inclined to consider Leonora a satirizing counterpart of Lucy Irigaray, the 'real' feminist critic, who is author also of an essay on Melusina, one of the most important hypotexts of *Possession*: «the satire in Leonora Stern's portrait is, indeed, direct at a butt outside *Possession*, namely feminist literary criticism of a very specific kind; in description of Leonora's writing the narrator ridicules the ideas of Luce Irigaray, the French philosopher of sexual differences […]. One can find the clearest example of the novel's satirical approach to Leonora in the description of her analysis of LaMotte's poem *The Fairy Melusine*. Leonora's reading of LaMotte's poem contains direct references to Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One* and can, therefore, be considered as a form of pastiche» (Franken 2001: 89-90).

Lady Marian's Tower[58], Lincoln Library[59] or her apartment[60], where, however, she experiences an enormous sense of freedom and power. A consequence is that Maud's critical production focuses on problems of Victorian female liminality[61]. Finally, several parallels between Christabel and Maud contribute to a self-reflexive characterisation of Maud[62]: the two have many aspects in common, like blonde hair, green eyes, coldness, the appellative "Princess", a close friendship with a female character, seductiveness. The relational construction of Maud's personality is also built on the literary model of Melusine and Dahud, the protagonists of Christabel's most important poems. These legendary characters are both symbols of female power (they build castles and cities) and separateness. The architectural metaphor is precisely the topic which Maud addresses in her research, which aims to revive neglected female figures in literature. In light of this, literary criticism is seen to achieve a crucial role whenever it eschews aseptic theories through individual interpretation and personal engagement.

If read from this angle, the role played by Maud would help to classify *Possession* as a 'subversive' form of archive. The restoration of (fictitious) neglected literary texts written by a female artist like LaMotte, together with 'real' references to fundamental

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[58] «Her room was walled on one side, and lined floor to ceiling with books on the others. The books were arranged rationally, thematically, alphabetically, and dust-free; this last was the only sign of housekeeping in that austere place.» (*P*: 40)

[59] «The Lincoln Library could not have been more different from the Ash Factory. It was a skeletal affair in a glass box, with a brilliant doors opening in glass and tubular walls, like a box of toys or a giant ConstructoKit. […] The Women's Archive was housed in a high-walled fish-tank» (*P*. 43).

[60] «Maud's living room was not what might have been expected of a Victorian scholar. It was bright white, paint, lamps and dining-table; the carpet was a Berber off-white. The things in this room were brilliantly coloured in every colour, peacock, crimson, sunflower, deep rose, nothing pale or pastel. Alcoves beside the fireplace held a collection of spotlit glass, bottles, flask, paper-weights. Roland felt wakeful and misplaced, as though he was in an art gallery or a surgeon's waiting room. […] He moved gingerly inside the bathroom, which was not a place to sit and read or to lie and soak, but a chill green glassy place, glittering with cleanness, huge dark green stoppered jars on water-green thick glass shelves, a floor tiled in glass tiles into whose brief and illusory depths one might peer, a shimmering shower curtain like glass waterfall, a blind to match, over the window, full of watery lights» (*P*: 51-56).

[61] In the novel, Maud is in fact the author of an essay entitled "Marginal Beings and Liminal Poetry" that is about «agoraphobia and claustrophobia and the paradoxical desire to be let out into unconfined space, the wild moorland, the open ground, and at the same time to be closed into tigher and tigher impenetrable small places, like Emily Dickinson's voluntary confinement, like the Sybil jar» (*P*: 54).

[62] Christien Franken and Lena Steveker have underlined the importance of female genealogy as a process for the formation of female identity: «women undergo specifically female process of socialization which are determined by categories such as 'carrying', 'responsability', and 'interpersonal relationship'». (Steveker 2009: 49).

literary and cultural texts in British and European tradition, seems to call the reader into a process of critical revision which points to the relevance of literary criticism.

3. *Dramatisation as a Mimetic Strategy in* **The Frederica Quartet**

Set in Britain between the '50s and the '70s, the tetralogy known as *The Frederica Quartet* (*The Virgin in the Garden, Still Life, Babel Tower, A Whistling Woman*) is a highly significant contribution to Byatt's engagement with the academic world. In the following pages, the four novels will be read in the light of their relationship with the university world, in order to show the ways in which the process of worldmaking relates to the cultural resonance of the university imaginary. The representation of the university in the *Quartet* is generally less evident than, for example, in *Possession*. Of the four novels, only two engage with a straight representation of university life. In *Still Life*, the reader follows Frederica's experiences at Cambridge, while in *A Whistling Women*, the organisation of a conference at North Yorkshire University is one of the pivots of the plot. Apart from these overt references to the academic world, however, all novels deploy narrative strategies that can be interpreted in terms of what has been defined as dramatisation. As we shall see in a close reading of these novels, the university imaginary is refigured through dramatisation: characters, plots, structures and diegetic instances embody on a narrative level the development of British academia during the 20th century.

3.1 *Performing Academic Literary Discourse:* The Virgin in the Garden

The Virgin in The Garden, published in 1978, is set in the 1950s and opens the huge quartet project, portraying a group of characters in the England of the second part of the twentieth century. This first volume tells the vicissitudes of the Potter family and of the people who surround them. Even if Frederica, a brilliant seventeen-year-old student, can be identified as the protagonist, the novel gives equal space to a number of different characters. Among these, we find Frederica's elder sister, Stephanie, a Cambridge graduate who disappoints her family's expectations by falling in love with the local vicar, Daniel Orton. Another important character is Alexander, a young colleague of

Frederica's and Stephanie's father, who teaches at the school attended by Frederica. He is engaged in writing and performing a verse drama called *Astrea*, on the life of Queen Elizabeth I.

In the first analysis of dramatisation, we can look at the structure and at the pivotal leitmotivs that permeate the novel. As stated by Byatt herself [63], the very structure of the novel significantly relies upon two well known essays by Frances Yates, an academic scholar renowned for her revisiting of cultural memory in the light of Aby Warburg's theories. In *The Art of Memory* (1966) Yates retraces the development of mnemonics from the classical period to the 17th century, while in *Astrea: The Imperial Theme in the 16th Century* (1975) she investigates the imagery and symbolism of European monarchy in the Renaissance by focusing in particular on the iconographic and symbolic glorification of Queen Elizabeth I. Yates's idea of cultural memory permeates Byatt's novel, where each chapter specifically refers to places, times or events in ways that resemble the different stages of a ritual, much like the Mystery Plays mentioned by Byatt in her essay *Memory and the Making of Fiction* (1998)[64].

The entire structure of *The Virgin in the Garden* can actually be taken as the narrative enactment of Yates's essays which are openly alluded to or, as in the case of Alexander, even mentioned as sources of inspiration of his theatrical project entitled *Astrea*. Alexander's references to the 'real' essays constitute a narrative *mise en abyme* of the 'real' process of creation experienced by the 'real' author. The passage where Frederica and Alexander discuss the part of *Astrea* in which princess Elizabeth pronounces her speech reveals the mimetic strategy informing the whole structure of the novel. The motives taken from Yates' essays are not only mimetically integrated in the fictional

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[63] «I did study the iconography of Elizabeth I, especially in the works of the great scholar Frances Yates, who found that the Virgin Queen had managed to substitute herself, or be elegantly substituted by her poets, for both the Queen of Heaven and for Virgo Astrea» (Byatt 1998: 62).

[64] Critics have analysed some aspects of the relationship between Byatt's novels and the issues investigated in Yates's essays. Mara Cambiaghi (2004), for example, has pointed out how the construction of chapters is indebted to the Renaissance tradition of the theatres of memory, which is one of the topics dealt with in Yates' *The Art of Memory*. Others have also referred to issues such as cultural memory and identity (Cambiaghi 2004, Steveker 2009). According to Steveker, the constant reference to the iconography of Elizabeth I and to the Darnley Portrait works as a leitmotiv on which the construction of Frederica's identity is partially built. In particular, she speaks about Warburg's pathos formula «which does not only present Elizabeth I, but which serves as a general signifier of female virginity» (Steveker 2009: 90).

world, but also enacted through the mediation of meta-literary references. Intertextuality also serves as a link between the references to the academic world and one of the most important themes of the *Quartet*, i.e. the relationship between women and academic knowledge:

> She liked, she said, the colours. The red and the white. […] He had, he told her, taken the red and the white from a little poem about Elizabeth the Virgin he had incorporated in the text. *Under a tree I saw a Virgin sit. The red and white rose quartered in her face.* […] Quartered had made him think of hanging and drawing there, as well as heraldry, and so the red and the white, blood and stone, had grown. […] Was she interested in the iconography of the idolization of Elizabeth? Elizabeth had acquired many of the traditional attributes of the Queen of Heaven. Rosa Mundi, tower of ivory. *Ego flos campi*, said Frederica, and all that bit about the fountain sealed. That, she said, was on their school blazer. 'Knowledge is now no more a fountain sealed'. Where was that from, then? […] *That*, he informed her, was from Tennyson's 'Princess' about the feminist academy. The poet was more or less mocking the virginal aspiration of the Princess Ida, the bluestockings and all. Before that, long before that, of course, the fountain sealed came from the Song of Songs, and was highly erotic. […]. In *that case*, said quick-witted Frederica, […] Tennyson was being emancipated or obscene since he was suggesting that common knowledge, far from being an original Sin, was a good thing. (*VG*: 132-133)

The indirect dialogue between Frederica and Alexander dramatizes the iconographic and symbolic patterns underlying the whole novel. The reference to "the red and the white" is a particularly relevant detail and one of the most crucial leitmotivs in the novel. The symbolic association of these colours with virginity and sexuality has been seen as one of the clues that allow to identify Frederica as Elizabeth I (Steveker 2009), while in her *Astrea* (1975) Yates explains that the "red and the white roses" stand for the symbols of the York and the Lancaster dynasties. In the above passage the first intertextual reference is to the lines of a real Renaissance poem whose topos is quoted by Yates in her essay with a slight variation: *Under a thrown I saw a virgin/ The red and the white rose quartered her face* (Yates 1975: 51). In *On histories and stories* (2000) Byatt explains that, although she is well aware of the historical meaning of such lines (as underlined by Yates), she also glimpsed connections between this image and the

condition of women facing power, art and knowledge[65]. The same topic is dramatised in the above passage through the second intertextual reference to Tennyson's poem *Princess*, which tells the story of a heroic princess who forswears the world of men and founds a women's university. With a Chinese-box effect, this reference introduces a parallel between the patterns of Elizabeth's iconography and the problematic relation between women and high culture. Even though in the '50s, the time when the story is set, women were allowed to go to university, they were not expected to remain in that world: the domestic environment was still seen as the most suited to them. As shown in the passage above, the issue of gender is brought into the university imaginary not only on a mimetic/paradigmatic level, but through a complex interplay of structure and discourse. For these reasons, the narrative rendition of Yates's theories falls under the category of dramatisation: academic knowledge is translated into a fiction which is related to themes and motives mimetically connected to the university imaginary.

The process of dramatisation finds its narrative climax in the performance of Alexander's drama, actually a meta-drama that is the core of the entire novel. The performance is explicitly thematised, especially in the third part of the novel, evocatively entitled *Redit et Virgo* (a quotation from Virgil's fourth eclogue, which Alexander uses in his drama), in which four chapters describe the rehearsals and the performance of the drama. The latter draws our attention to space, a narrative dimension which is evidently indebted to the imaginary of the university world. *Astrea* is performed at Long Royston, a huge mansion belonging to Matthew Crowe, the patron in charge of the production. Early in the novel we learn that Matthew wishes to transform his estate into a university, a wish that will be fulfilled in the last novel of the tetralogy,

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[65] «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 whom came down the ice mountain and tried to be passionate and powerful simultaneously. A poem written about her: "Under a tree I saw a Virgin sit/ The red and white rose quartered in her face" was ostensibly about her combination of York and Lancaster in the Tudor Rose, but I read it as a combination of Snow White and Rose Red in one self-sufficient person. She wrote a love-lyric, I read, when turning away from her suitors: "I am and am not, I freeze and yet am burned,/ Since from my selfe another selfe I turned". She was unchanging, *semper eadem* as her motto said, a kind of Snow Queen. She made the opposite choice from Snow White's mother and the Lady of Shalott. And she wrote wonderful prose and good poems; she was clever and self-determined» (Byatt 2000: 158-159).

A Whistling Woman, where the reader discovers that Long Royston has become the University of North Yorkshire.

The celebration of this place through the fictional drama *Astrea* achieves what Judith Butler would call 'performativity' (Butler 1997). To Butler, performativity concerns any linguistic and social act which, besides having a specific impact on reality, performs a major reassessment of the specific configuration shaped by dominant powers and discourses. Here, the theatrical performance is fashioned as a communal event, with cultural and political resonances that elicit a deep emotional response in the audience. The national feeling that permeates the last scene of the drama, i.e. the monologue pronounced by the Queen before her death, acquires a deeper meaning if we interpret it in the light of the cultural significance of the space where the performance takes place: the future University of North Yorkshire is a cultural repository, whose value is enshrined in its spatial dimensions.

Moreover, the motif of the theatrical performance is in itself related to the university world: in fact, it is a common practice for university students to play Shakespearean roles in university companies. The performance connects the celebration of the future University of North Yorkshire to all the other motives (female separateness, historical and national memory, etc.) presented in the novel. For example, the already mentioned red and white colours, analysed by Yates in relation to the iconography of Elizabeth I, are included during the fictional performance through evident references to Darnley's famous portrait of Queen Elizabeth. The presence of drama in the narration exposes, as shown by the references to Yates' essays, an intrinsic 'academic' feature.

The college of Blesford Ride where most of the characters live or work is another prominent setting. With its characteristic towers and residential areas for teachers, Blesford Ride can be compared to a Georgian campus, in whose architecture the plot's complex relations of space, gender, culture and power are inscribed. Frederica, the main character of the quartet, is a young student who struggles to achieve top marks in order to be admitted to Cambridge and who plays young Princess Elizabeth in the first act of *Astrea.* Frederica's drives towards culture and sex enforce the dynamics of her plot. Both drives converge into the desire for Alexander, with whom Frederica eventually

falls in love. The characters' movements from Frederica's house to the tower where Alexander lives can be interpreted as the spatial staging of these drives.

The process of dramatisation is further enacted through characterisation, i.e. the fictional strategies employed to depict the characters' manners as well as their thoughts and emotions. In Byatt's tetralogy the representation of these external and internal dimensions is heavily mediated by the intertextual presence of literary references. Not only are the characters constructed as textual beings, but they also perceive themselves as such. The texts that weave their identities (Shakespeare' dramas, D.H. Lawrence's novels, Racine's verses etc.) belong to a culturally established literary canon. Moreover, the characters' approach to literature is definitely scholarly: what is appealing to them is the aesthetic impact of literary forms, the intellectual flavour of literature. Even if they are no longer or not yet literature scholars, they all behave as if they were. Seen through the lens of their sophisticated approach, literary texts are thus openly and metafictionally exposed as components of literature, seen as a self-reflexive system as well as the cultural product of a tradition grounded in the university world.

The fact that most of the characters have decided to work with literature, which is for them a source of intense pleasure, and that each of them has developed a special attachment to individual authors or genres, adds to a metaliterary, textualised characterisation. Alexander Wedderburn, the dramatist, is obsessed with Shakespearean drama, while Frederica is haunted by the alexandrine verse, Racine and D.H. Lawrence; Stephanie scans Wordsworth's poetry all the time, while Daniel, her future husband, sees *King Lear* as the literary version of his own life. A telling example of the characters' entanglement with literature, and of a further kind of dramatisation, is the following passage where Frederica ruminates on the differences between Shakespeare's and Racine's prosody, one of the topics of her admission exam to Cambridge:

> It was to do with the Alexandrine. You had to think differently, the actual form of your thought was different, if you thought in closed couplets, further divided by a rocking caesura, and if you thought in French, in a limited vocabulary. […] *Ce n'est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée./ C'est Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée*. […] The outer ripping up the inner. But the verse form separated the

clutcher from the cluched whilst linking them inexorably. Something like that. Now if one wrote, Frederica thought, on the thought processes of the Alexandrine – one might get somewhere – see how argued comparatively the images were, not fluent as in Shakespeare. She grinned a grin of pure pleasure, sitting staring out at what was by now a distinctly moorland landscape. (*VG*: 265)

Frederica's reflections on Racine's verses are thematically related to two aspects. On the one hand, her passion for Racine testifies, in the whole novel, her intellectual aspiration to become a literature fellow at Cambridge. On the other hand, the quotation from Phedra's monologue, in which she reveals her insatiable passion for her son in law, seems to refer to the unacceptable love between Frederica and Alexandre (and the assonance between alexandrine and Alexander might not be by chance). The deep connection between literature, emotions and erotic desire constitutes, in the case of Frederica, a tapestry of interwoven motives that are difficultly separable. The dominant emotional feature of the character is represented by a kind of intellectual, physical and verbal aggressiveness and voracity. The critical hypothesis of a possible cognitive interpretation of the alexandrine verse causes her a feeling of intense pleasure, which is comparable to an erotic force. The representation of the aesthetic effect of literature on the character can be interpreted as a meta-aesthetic device, which induces the reader to consider her own emotional engagement with literature. But if literature produces desire, the mechanisms of desire implicate literary references and remembrances. Literature is used by the characters as a cognitive device in an attempt to elaborate the contingent experience, but at the same time their feelings are provoked by the resonance of literary echoes in their fictional minds. Sometimes is the narrator who uses these literary references as a mimetic framework in order to make the reader aware of the cultural influence of this shaping.

The quotation above shows also how dramatisation, not only on the thematic level, but on the diegetic level as well, works as the capability to make the reader aware of on the narrative construction through the combination of shifting external and internal focalizations, metaliterary references and a self-conscious realistic perspective. The incipit of the passage "It was to with the Alexandrine" introduces a free indirect speech

that immediately turns out to be an interior monologue carried through a second person narration, while at the end the perspective returns into a more comfortable external point of you. The excerpt above is traversed by multiple shifts of focalization: from internal to external focalization, from indirect discourse to free indirect speech or to an apparent monologue. Besides challenging the readers' cultural competence, the multitude of metaliterary references produces a meta-aesthetic effect resulting from the interaction of the narrator's fictional world and the reader's real one. Focalization is not only the perspective from which the story is told, viewed or experienced. It is, instead, a space of intersubjectivity, where author, narrator, character and reader interact.

3.2 *Metaphor Dramatised and Women at Cambridge in* Still Life

Still Life and *A Whistling Woman*, the novels which most directly deal with the representation of university in *The Frederica Quartet*, put forward two different perspectives: that of a young woman who experiences Cambridge in the '50s, and that of the entire environment of the new, utopian, University of North Yorkshire. *Still Life*, the second volume in the quartet, takes up the choral structure of *The Virgin in the Garden* and the same group of characters (Frederica, Stephanie, Daniel, Alexander, Marcus) with a number of themes: Frederica's admission to Cambridge, the birth of Stephanie and Daniel's children, Marcus's mental rehabilitation, Stephanie's death, Alexander's new drama on Vincent Van Gogh.

The novel relates to the university imaginary in two ways. First of all, we find a description of women's life in British universities during the '50s, filtered through Frederica's three year experience at Newnham College, Cambridge. This specific plotline, which covers several chapters, is probably the most important in the novel, especially if we look at it in relation to the other books in the tetralogy. But the novel can also be read as the narrative dramatisation of the notion of metaphor. The narrative enactment of theoretical concepts is performed in the novel by using representational strategies that, well beyond the boundaries of Frederica's plot, add an 'academic' connotation to all the subplots. These two aspects will be analysed separately, in order

to show the multiple levels – thematic and diegetic – of this novel's engagement with the representation of the university imaginary.

3.2.1 *A Woman at Cambridge*

The narration of Frederica's experience at Cambridge, taking up more than one third of the whole novel, seems at first sight to rely upon the Bildungsroman model. In particular, it looks like a rereading and a refiguration of the themes and topics addressed in the traditional female varsity novels. Frederica's academic life begins with two letters, one from Cambridge and one from Oxford announcing that she has passed the colloquium in both universities. She is excited not only for her accomplishment, but, above all, for the acknowledgements awarded during the examination:

> I've never talked so much *in my life* and they were interested, they were. I got all sorts of things in, *Britannicus* and *Henry VIII* and *The Broken Heart* and *The Winter's Tale* and feminine endings and they didn't stop me, they said go on – oh, and Satan's speech to Eve in the garden – I was in a place of my own – oh, *glory* –
> (*SL*: 595)

The university looks like the ideal place where a thinking woman can be accepted and recognised for what she is: "I was in a place of my own" evokes in the mind of the reader Virginia Woolf's famous essay on female independence and creativity, and that is precisely what the university means to Frederica. The anaphoric repetition of "and... and... and", the syntactical fragmentation and the final old fashioned exclamation bear witness to Frederica's feelings: a mixture of self-assurance and excitement.

The passage from school to adult life is marked, according to the anthropological model of initiation, by a ritual performance. Frederica receives *The Oxford Companions to English and Classical Literature* from her former school. After the public ceremony, a social rite of passage, Frederica looks for a more private and different kind of celebration:

> 'Where are you going, Frederica?' [...] 'Oh, to perform a rite. You might disapprove. If you don't, you can participate [...]'. 'What sort of rite?' 'A kind of

oblation. Of Blesford Girls' Grammar'. [...] 'What is?' 'Blesford Girls' Grammar. Shirt, tie, beret, skirt, ankle socks, and gym kit' [...] There was nothing remarkable about Blesford Canal. It was decayed and decaying, darkly full of a strange, fine black weed, like tendrils of soot, tipped with faded moss green. [...] The sisters stopped on a narrow bridge over it [...]. Frederica hefted the paper parcel onto the ledge. 'This is a plain rite. No words, no prancing around. I'm a grown woman. I just want someone to know that this – all this *stuff* – has been a burden and nothing but a burden from the start to finish and that I feel no twinge of regret at coming out of that place, and that I shall never go back into it, ever, so help me Frederica Potter. No more group life. I won't belong to anything, ever again. I stand for *me*. Do you want to help shove?' [...] 'Yes, I think so' 'Okay. One, two, three, ready. Over she goes'. The parcel splashed heavily, soughed, and sank in a trail of thick, slow, glutinous bubbles. 'What ceremony else?' 'None. I told you. This is a gesture that simply means itself and no more.' (*SL*: 599-600)

We know from the Bildung model that the passage from adolescence to adulthood is marked by a rite of passage. However, it is also true that, as regards the female subject, the passage does not mean the entrance into the world outside the protective boundaries of her parents' house: the culmination of femininity, even in female varsity novels, is represented in switch between the father's house and the husband's one, as exemplarily shown by Moretti with reference to Jane Austen's novels. What Frederica seems to stress with her linguistic choices is that the rite she is going to perform does represent a break from the concept of belonging: "I won't belong to anything, ever again. I stand for *me*". This is the vindication of a place of one's own. Even if Frederica says that she does not want to make a speech, her words sound like self-affirmation. She says that she wants to be independent and she claims a space for her own intellectual life. The declaration "I'm a grown woman", followed by the act of throwing away the symbols of her belonging to school, stands for a theatrical self-fashioning.

On the mimetic level, Frederica's life at Cambridge is rendered through performative strategies in the scenes – crucial for her self-fashioning as a young intellectual – where she takes part in the university's social rituals. On the level of diegesis, the most prominent narratorial device is a shifting perspective – from inside to outside – on the character's mind. Prolepsis, i.e. the anticipation of future events, is another one of the

most important narrative devices in the representation of Frederica's inner intellectual life.

At the outset Frederica's perception is seen to be largely affected by her literary knowledge. Literature holds a real power on her because it influences her way of shaping expectations and of organizing experiences:

> Her image of Cambridge was partly gleaned from Stephanie (who had talked more about literature than life) and partly from the smart chatter of Wilkie and his girl. Beyond these and more powerful were two conflicting yet related images of a way of life. There was the Cambridge of Ansell in *The Longest Journey* in which thought and cows coexisted in harmony, were indeed (unlike Tennyson and Browning) somehow undissociated. And there was the Cambridge of *Dusty Answer*, a place of violent, suppressed, hopeless female passion and carefree golden young men. It is a town thick of words, wrapped in shining folds of word, alive with the history of words. (*SL*: 705)

Occasionally Frederica herself becomes painfully aware of her dependence on literary formulas, clichés and styles, as when, after rereading the text of the interview she has released to two fellow students for the campus magazine *Varsity*, she finds out that her answers are socially and culturally biased and that her literary education affects her behaviour to the point of betraying her personality. Frederica's sharp insight into this textual rendering of herself allows her to mediate her angry response to Alan and Tony – the interview's authors – who will actually become her closest friends.

Frederica's public self-performance is the first of a number of collective experiences which are typical of Cambridge students' life. Unlike *The Virgin in The Garden,* where the emphasis was on Frederica's lonely mood, *Still Life* dwells on the heroine's exploration of the university world, which includes masculinity. Frederica's intellectual Bildung is, in fact, entangled with her sentimental and, above all, sexual experiences, favoured by a considerably high percentage of male students (in the '1950s the Cambridge population counted ten men for each woman). Cambridge is the place where Frederica experiences a lively social life made of relationships with men, intellectual discussions, and a sense of belonging. Besides being the place where to develop a social

behaviour and a public personality, Cambridge feeds Frederica's thoughts on her own condition as a woman.

Two passages in the novel point to the conflicting paradigms, similarly to the 19th century varsity novel, between the woman as an intellectual and the woman as a domesticated mother and wife. In the first one, the narrator expands on Frederica's expectations about love, sex, and marriage:

> The language with which I might try to order Frederica's hectic and somewhat varied sexual life in 1954-5 was not available to Frederica then. She had the physically and intellectually classifying adjectives but she did not believe herself to the primarily conducting research, but looking for love, trust, 'someone who would want her for what she was'. […] She came, after all, not in utter nakedness but cocooned by her culture in a web of amatory, social and tribal expectations which was not event coherent and unitary. […] She believed unquestioningly, with part of herself, for instance, that a woman was unfulfilled without marriage, that marriage was the end of every good story. […] She was conditioned to desire to be abject. This desire was reinforced by the behaviour of Rosamond Lehmann's heroines and of Ursula Brangwen (whom some other part of Frederica was ready to despise heartily). And there was the knowledge gleaned from agony columns, where abject women asked for help with indifferent, the unfaithful, the only-wanting-one-thing, the other women's husbands. (*SL*: 723-724)

The use of a first person narration in the first sentence reinforces the reader's perception of the historical distance from the time of the story, and at the same strengths the reader's attention towards the historical and cultural paradigms that affect Frederica's thoughts. Like her impressions on Cambridge, also Frederica's conceptualisation of womanhood resents of literary echoes: female writers, while disregarded by Frederica from a critical point of view, are still influential in shaping her social life as a woman. And these models are definitely less subversive than Frederica's initial statement of independence. In the following passage, Frederica compares her tutor's life to that of a female student forced to leave Cambridge after getting married:

> Down the corridor a quiet brown girl who never spoke to anyone […] was found the same term to have quietly married a restaurant proprietor, a Sardinian, who

sang in the church choir and cooked, gossip said, like an angel. This married woman was indeed sent down […] simply for being married. (Unsuitably married). And yet what are really being prepared for, Frederica asked herself, thinking of her tutor, a formidable woman with a rasping tongue […] In later years […] it became possible to see both Miss Chiswick and little brown Signora Cavelli née Brill as heroines of some kind, upholders of different principles. Miss Chiswick had sacrificed something at least for the life of the mind: Miss Brill had had it taken from her against her will. In 1955 Frederica felt contempt, mixed with fear, for both of them. Surely, surely it was possible, she said to herself in a kind of panic, to make something of one's own life *and* be a woman. Surely. (*SL*: 793)

Here two extremes female positions are depicted: on the one hand, the woman who sacrifices her sentimental life to her academic career, on the other, the woman who is forced to abandon Cambridge because of her marriage. What stands out is the culturally determined gender and social bias underlying the configuration of the university and the character's point of view. Frederica's ambition is challenged by a gendered Victorian imaginary which sticks to old female paradigms: the angel in the house and the monster. Unlike her fictional predecessors, however, Frederica is never confined to just one of these paradigms: her characterisation shifts from the monster (she does not socialize with other women and frightens most of the men she meets) to the femme fatale, even if a very particular one, whose seduction power is an intellectual one. And her utopian idea of female life of the mind would comprise both intellectual commitment and familiar engagement.

3.2.2 *The Dramatisation of Literary Theories about Metaphor*[66]

The dramatisation of the theory of metaphor is the second line of inquiry concerning the relationship between the novel and the university imaginary. In "Still Life/ Nature morte", an essay included in her volume *Passions of the Mind* (1991), Byatt sheds light on the artistic process behind the novel by looking at Flaubert's, Genette's and Ricoeur's theories of mimesis. Such an emphasis on mimesis starts – Byatt says – from

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[66] Some parts of this subchapter appear in a different version in my article "Reframing the Concept of Dramatization through Literary Fiction: an Analysis of A.S. Byatt's *Still Life*" (Seligardi 2014).

her initial project of a fully mimetic novel, without any cultural or symbolic interference:

> 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" without the infinitely extensible cross-referencing of *The Virgin*. […] I had the idea that I could emphasise contiguity rather than analogy. I found that this was in fact impossible (Byatt 1993: 22 - 25)

The failure of this project leads to highlighting the intrinsic power of metaphor as a highly cultural instrument that informs, overtly or covertly, our perception and representation of the world. In *Still Life* Byatt self-reflexively rephrases the same concept by making the narrator, who uses at some points first person narration, address the reader on the issues of mimesis and metaphor:

> 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. This turned out to be impossible: one cannot think at all without a recognition and realignment of ways of thinking as seeing we have learned over time. (*SL*: 701)

The complex relationship between mimesis and metaphor is dramatised in the novel through two processes respectively belonging to the level of structure (and themes) and to that of narration. The first way of narratively representing not only metaphor as a theme, but also the theory of metaphor, is that of creating characters who reflect openly on metaphors (and names)[67]. Searching for the *mot juste* means coming to terms with the intrinsic metaphoricity of language. Being culturally determined, language is

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[67] Byatt has highlighted the tension between metaphor and the so called *mot juste* in Flaubert: «I felt that something might be learnt of what I wanted from Flaubert and the *mot juste* so admired by Ford and Pound. […] 'Words *as mimesis* of things' begs a lot of theoretical questions but the phrase meant something to me about how to write my bare book, my still life. The idea of not only demythologizing but dispensing with metaphor came from reading Proust's defence of Flaubert's style» (Byatt 1993: 24).

nourished and innovated by the speaker's or writer's metaphorical perspective, a lens that inevitably modifies the represented world. This is a problem that three of the characters in *Still Life* (Alexander, Stephanie, and Raphael Faber) have to face.

As in *The Virgin in The Garden*, in *Still Life* Alexander is working on a drama. Even if it is not, strictly speaking, a *mise en abyme*, this play, entitled *The Yellow Chair*, dramatizes all the theoretical issues at the core of the novel, as if it were a play within a play. This new drama focuses on the life of Van Gogh, whose intimate conflict with light, colours and forms Alexander tries to stage. Alexander's main concern is about how to narrate the relationship between mimesis and visuality:

> How would one find the exact word for the colour of plumskins? [...] A writer aiming for unadorned immediacy might say: a plum, a pear, an apple, and by naming these things evoke in every reader's mind a different plum, a dull tomato-and-green specked Victoria, a yellow-buff globular plum, a tight, black-purple damson. [...] You may use the word 'bloom' for the haze on this plum, and it will call up in the mind of any competent reader the idea that the plum is glistering, overlaid with a matt softness. [...] But you cannot exclude from the busy automatically-connecting mind possible metaphors, human flesh for fruit flesh, flower-bloom, skin bloom, bloom of ripe youth [...]. Analogy was a way of thought and without it thought was impossible. [...] Both metaphor and naming in paint were different from these things in language. [...] Language might relate the plum to the night sky, or to certain ways of seeing a burning coal, or to a soft case enwrapping a hard nugget of treasure. Or it might introduce an abstraction, a reflection, of mind, not mirror. [...] Paint too could do these things. Gauguin made a woman from two pears and a bunch of flowers. Magritte made bread of stones and stones of bread, an analogy operating a miracle. Van Gogh's painting of the Reaper in his furnace of white light and billowing corn said also 'Ripeness is all'. But the difference, the distance, fascinated Alexander. Paint itself declares itself as a force of analogy and connection, a kind of metaphor-making between the flat surface of purple pigment and yellow pigment and the statement 'This is a plum'. [...] It is impossible *not* to think about the distance between paint and things, between paint and life, between paint and the 'real world' (which includes other paintings). It is not at all impossible, it is even common, not to think about the distance between words and things, between words and life, between words and reality. A *trompe-l'oeil* painting is admired for its skill in mimetic deception. You

cannot have a *trompe-l'oeil* in writing, or any other form of pleasurable mimetic titillation and deception. Language runs up and down, through and round things known and things imitated in a way paint doesn't. [...] No one ever imagined the house at Combray, the dwelling of Père Goriot, Bleak House or Fawns with the *same* sense that they were seeing them and they were not real and not there that one has seeing the Yellow House, Las Meninas, or Vermeer's still woman, bathed in silent light, forever reading letters forever unfinished. Even those who have fallen in love with Mr Rochester or despaired with Mme Bovary have not grasped those phantoms in their imagination as wholeheartedly as they have – separately – imagined Saskia or Manet's Berthe Morisot. We have always known that these creatures are made of words as the Sunflowers are made of paint, but words are our common currency, we all have words, we may not be able to paint an apple but we certainly utter a view or why Elinor liked live yogurt or the young Proust was neurasthenic – they are less real and more immediate. (*SL*: 768-771)

Even if the formal texture of this passage might remind one of a theoretical discourse rather than a realistic novel, this is, in many respects, a narration imbued with realistic features. The narrator is describing a scene of daily life, with Alexander watching some plums over breakfast and wondering how to describe them. This is the starting point of Alexander's stream of thoughts from the breakfast scene to his own drama. However, the quotation above is not a mere digression, since it dramatizes a central point of the novel, i.e. the difference between verbal and visual representation and the relationship between word and image. While painting performs its analogical power explicitly, language suggests connections and private imagery in a more abstract and implicit way: as language is our common medium of communication, it is more difficult, in our daily life, to think about the distance between name and things, and to realize all the possible connections that names establish between themselves. However, this is what literature does: the poetic function of language performed by literature does precisely mark the multiple associations provoked by the connections between different nouns and images. "You cannot exclude from the busy automatically-connecting mind possible metaphors, human flesh for fruit flesh, flower-bloom, skin bloom, bloom of ripe youth": we are entangled in a thick web of references that comes from the cultural, sensitive and imaginative capacity of the writer and the reader, and it is this power of echoing other

things that make possible the 'see something as' process. Language fulfills its epistemological function when it is capable of adding something new to the sensible world: this surplus is conveyed by the metaphorical attitude of poetry and literature.

The content of the passage above is highly difficult, as it refers to questions about mimesis, reality, the relationship between reality and literary and visual arts, metaphors etc. It is clear that such topics are more related to a lesson about aesthetic or literary/art theory, instead of a breakfast scene. However, the power of dramatisation is to render theory and philosophical speculations in flesh and blood through the characters.

As regards diegesis, dramatisation is conveyed through an experimental use of narrative voice and focalization. Actually it is impossible to tell for sure who the subject of the enunciation is: is it Alexander (internally focalised) or is it the third-person narrator who, at times, reveals herself? Moreover, when and if the point of view seems to be the narrator's (especially when the first-person narration, singular or plural, is used) the narrative seems to metamorphose into a lecture or an essay, whose scholarly author dramatizes theoretical issues by directly addressing the reader[68]. The sporadic use of first-person narration, singular or plural, reveals the presence of the narrator, thus making the reader aware of the storytelling level. The narrator can then be seen as another fictional character who is telling a fictional story about fictional characters. But what is more relevant, is that, like in the quoted passage about metaphor and the composition of the novel, the narrator sometimes refers openly to the process of writing a novel, thus breaking the mimetic illusion.

Theoretical speculations are also dramatised elsewhere in the novel, for example when Stephanie, Frederica's elder sister, explains Wordsworth's *Ode On Immortality*, or when, soon before and soon after giving birth to her first son William, she thinks of metaphors of life and soul, with references to Coleridge and *The Bible*. In the passage below, what might be seen at first sight as a scholar comment on Wordsworth's poem, is integrated into the experience of the character. Stephanie looks at the text she had studied at school years ago with a new eye: her new condition of mother and wife lets

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[68] We will find this strategy further developed in *Babel Tower*, where the reader finds Frederica teaching courses on the European Novel to adults and students.

her argue about the symbolism behind the 'Child' actor, and about Wordsworth's consideration on thoughts and life. Her domesticated life is both what has enabled her to understand correctly Wordsworth's passage, but also the prison that confines her in a life in which she has more things to do, and less to think about.

> The 'Immortality Ode' is, among other things, a poem about time and memory. [...] She than read more attentively those passages in the midst of the poem about the Child which, as a girl barely put of childhood, she had read more perfunctorily [...]. There were two successive stanzas about the Child. The first describes him learning ceremonies and parts, from his 'dream of human life', acting wedding and funeral, the Persons of Shakespeare's seven ages of man. [...] The next stanza, the one Coleridge had found frightening and unsatisfactory, is a run of metaphors describing the life of the soul in terms of depth and confinement. The child is, to Coleridge's exact distaste, an 'Eye among the blind/ That deaf and silent read'st the eternal deep.' Stephanie saw suddenly that the reiterated, varied 'deeps' of this stanza were part of a Wordsworthian vision of a darkness that was life and thought, a contrasted image as true as the human habits and roles of the preceding description of the Darling of a pigmy size. The two came together in the final lines of the second stanza where the poet assures the child that 'Custom' shall 'lie upon thee with a weight/ Heavy as frost and deep almost as life.' The 'eternal deep' of the waters of Genesis has become the depth to which the root reaches, just beyond the constrictions, the weight of frost. She was only just old enough to see that 'custom' could so bear down. (*SL*: 757-58)

Diegetically shaped as an academic lecture, Chapter XV *Wijnnobel* is another interesting example of this kind of dramatisation. The chapter is a meditation on colour and light in paintings through the ambiguously shifting points of view of the narrator, Wijnnobel and Alexander. The form of the dialogue increases the dramatizing effect, but its function is also relevant on the level of plot. In fact, this part is an anticipation of the last novel of the quartet, *A Whistling Woman*, where the reader finds Wijnnobel at the head of the University of North Yorkshire.

> After this lunch Alexander took Wijnnobel to his office to discuss the last talk, on Mondrian. [...] On his desk was the little print of the 'Breakfast Table', to which, after dealing succinctly with Mondrian, Wijnnobel turned his attention. Alexander

explained his play, and said that he liked the picture because of its stillness. How could one dramatise stillness? Wijonnobel drew on a large pipe and laughed. 'I have a friend – an excitable friend – who could make a psychic drama of your picture, Mr Wedderburn. [...] What shall we make of the coffee-pot? A blue French *cafetière* in two parts. My excitable friend would say that the upper male portion is fitted into the globular female [...]. Even the touch of light has been read erotically. Vermeer's ladies are solid, remote and untouchable, and held in a warm light [...]. Light is what makes our stony, inorganic world stir with life, light calls up and holds together complex forms. [...] In Freud's vision things secretly resent the calling to life of light: they wish to return to the state in which they were [...]. Maybe we could see our fascination for still life – or *nature morte* – in these terms? Maybe the kind of lifeless life of *things* bathed in light is another version of the golden age – an impossible stasis, a world without desire and division? [...] Is that dramatic?' (*SL*: 786-87)

The theory of metaphor is dramatised and directly related to the academic world through the encounter between Frederica and Raphael Faber. Shifting focalizations, with frequent jolts from past to present, are once again the distinctive feature of the narration about Frederica attending Faber's lecture on Mallarmè:

Language, he said, had once been thought of as Adamic naming, words had been thought of as somehow *part* of the thing they named, the word Rose flowering on the rose as the rose flowered on the stem. Then later – he gave examples, a neat and brilliant history of words unfitting themselves from objects – men had become more self-conscious about language, had seen it as an artifact, torn loose from the world, a web we wove to cover things we could only partially evoke or suggest. And metaphor, our perception of likeness, which seemed like understanding, could be simply a network of our attempted sense-making. We were a long way from Plato and his hierarchy from the painted flower to the real flower to the Form of the flower. He quoted Mallarmé who would, in one stanza, name Rose and Lily, in another evoke them poetically, unnamed, metaphors, pourpre ivre, grand calice clair, whose words pointed more and more precisely to an area of vagueness, absence, silence. He seemed to be celebrating and mourning a garden once full of imagined blooms, colours, lights, solidity, now inhabited by the ghosts of these things. (*SL*: 815)

On the level of plot and themes, the theory of metaphor is further dramatised through what Frederica does in the wake of the lecture. Firstly, she devotes herself to reading Faber's highly metaphorical poetry, then she starts thinking of a doctoral thesis on religious metaphors in the seventeenth century, a project that she discusses with Faber but that will never be developed.

As all these examples show, in *Still Life* literary theory is dramatised in entirely different ways from Lodge's or Bradbury's parodic and characteristically academic representations. In Byatt's novel the issue of metaphor and its relationship to mimesis is embodied in the thoughts and actions of characters that, although they are not always immediately recognizable as belonging to the academic world, prove capable of animating theoretical concepts. In light of what has been argued, *Still Life* reveals itself as the most interesting example of dramatisation in Byatt's tetralogy, since it combines a direct representation of the undergraduate world with the dramatisation of academic and theoretical speculation. Dramatisation is diegetically represented through a self-conscious narrative voice, quite often a replica of the typical style of academic essays or lectures, including direct addresses to the reader. Literary criticism and theory become part of the fictional world in a balanced combination of self-consciousness and realism.

3.3 Babel Tower *and the Dramatisation of Literature Teaching*

Babel Tower, the third volume of the tetralogy, abandons the academic setting of Cambridge, but not the particular mixture of academic and romanesque styles that we have encountered in the previous novels. Published in 1996, it is entirely and remarkably devoted to a complex meditation on language (Cambiaghi 2003). Auto-reflexivity on literature is extensively thematised throughout the novel, but the very process of dramatisation invests the narration through the introduction of two narrative mechanisms, or *dispositifs*. Although, in comparison with the other novels in the tetralogy, this one does not include many overt references to the university imaginary, *Babel Tower* puts forward two narrative patterns closely related to the academic world: the staging of literature lectures and Frederica's recollection of *Laminations*, a play within a play.

3.3.1 *Literature Lectures*

A topical feature in campus novels, notably in Lodge's and Bradbury's, the mimesis of academic lectures achieves in *Babel Tower* a new depth and different meanings thanks to dramatisation, which is discursively conveyed through focalization. The *mise en scène* of Frederica's lectures on the British and European novel, addressed to the students of an Art School and to adult workers, apparently shows a tinge of nineteenth-century realism. Nevertheless, since the subject of the lectures is literature, such a portrayal also results in a metaliterary reflection on the novel as a literary form, including *Babel Tower*. This effect is diegetically enhanced by the omniscient narrator's cryptical and continuous shift from external to internal focalization through oscillations from the third to the first-person narration (with no quotation marks) or through free indirect speech. Whatever the case, the narrating voice seems to be in full control of the diegetic process, which contributes to an effect of authenticity and candour, as if the narrator were directly addressing the reader. We are therefore faced with a form of self-conscious realism, where mimetic devices combine with self-reflexive narrative techniques. The issues foregrounded in the discussion of and ruminations about literature highlight the ways literature has always been studied, interpreted, shared, taught: since Frederica has developed her own idea of literature at and through Cambridge, her own teaching emerges as a meta-comment on the idea of literature shaped by the Cambridge university imaginary.

The scene portraying Frederica's first impact with her new class at Samuel Palmer Art School is exemplary in many respects, since it sheds light on the subtlety of the novel's narrative strategies[69]. In order to arouse the love for literature and for aesthetic pleasure in her non-specialist students, Frederica compares the appeal of literature to that of a painting or a sculpture. As a vehicle of this comparison Frederica chooses the metaphor of knitting, a characteristically Byattian visual concept:

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[69] In her *Uses of Literature* (2008), Felski discusses the potential knowledge of literary works by pointing to the characteristic hermeneutic power of metaphors. Making reference to writers, poets and critics, she recollects some metaphorical images (such as lamp, window, mirror, map, eye), with which they have tried to explain the relation between literature and reality.

She tries to seduce them into seeing that books are complicated formal structures. For they do not like books for the most part. For them, brightness and meaning are elsewhere, are in the studio, in the pub, in bed. A novel, *Women in Love* for instance, she says, is made of a long thread of language, like knitting, thicker and thinner in patches. It is made in the head and has to be remade in the head by whoever reads it, who will always remake it differently. It is made of people whose fates are more interesting to its maker than those of his friends or lovers – but who are also an attempt to understand his friends and lovers probably. The people are made of language, but this is not all they are. A novel is also made of *ideas* that connect all the people like another layer of interwoven knitting. (*BT*: 212-213)

Here the undecidability of the point of view diegetically dramatizes the argumentative and meta-reflexive core of the lesson. In particular, the balance between the narrator's voice and Frederica's internal perspective prompts the external reader to identify with the fictive audience of students. We are faced with a kind of *mise en abyme* of the reading activity. Readers are suggested that they should trace the idea of literature yielded by the novel in their own experiences. This dynamic is effectively exemplified in a passage, where the narrator's/ Frederica's voice explores the ways in which the imagination of the reader works, by expanding on the fact that the literary rendition of material details generates visual images in the mind of the reader.

The novel is made of visual images – the lanterns, the moon, the white flowers – which you might think were like painted images, but they are not for they have to be *unseen visible images* to be powerful. They are made out of language but this is not all they are. We must all imagine the broken moon, and she takes her power from *all our imaginations* and their sameness and their difference. She is trying to make the painters and sculptors see how novel is a work of art and is not a painting. She is trying to understand something herself. (*BT*: 213)

Frederica's case study is a selection of linguistically relevant passages taken from D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*. What is at stake is one of the central paradoxes of the literary event, i.e. the fact that what is being described in literature needs to be imagined in order to be experienced. Frederica's description of this imaginary recognition results in a paradoxical – or second-degree – ékphrasis: students/readers are invited to consider

these verbal images in terms of 'painted images', whose specific, extraordinary power lies in the fact that "they have to be *unseen visible images*" (*BT*: 213). Lawrence's characteristic images – lanterns, moon, white flowers – are put forward as typically literary images, in so far as their literary/ linguistic shape is divorced from the visual shape they achieve in the readers' minds. Needless to say, by embedding the narrative of this cognitive process in her novel, Byatt highlights the crucially formative power of literature, i.e. literature seen as what feeds human imagination and contributes to world-making.

3.3.2 *Characterisation*

Frederica's dramatised characterisation in *Babel Tower* is closely related to her own engagement with teaching literature, a subject that largely influences her own self-cognition and self-fashioning. It is not by chance that she chooses love and marriage in Lawrence and Forster as the topics for a lesson in her adults' course:

> Frederica thinks hard about these passages. There are complicated connections between literature and life. She may have chosen to lecture on love and marriage in Forster and Lawrence because she is snarled in death and marriage and the end of love: but the marriage was partly a product of the power of these books. Part of Nigel's attraction was Forster's incantation 'Only connect'. He had Mr Wilcox's attraction of otherness, but was not, is not, obtuse. (*BT*: 310)

It becomes clear that these topics touch upon Frederica's own private experiences and that her perception of herself in these fields has been shaped by the novels she prescribes to her students. Actually the novel shows that the research work Frederica carries out in order to prepare a lesson on *Women in Love* and *Howards End* is in itself a kind of hermeneutically productive self-investigation. We are thus faced with a textual and self-reflexive construction of the self which, in turn, further nourishes a consideration on the value of literature in light of its relationship with reading, empathy

and reality[70]. What is more interesting, the narrative of Frederica's introspection hybridizes the language of Lawrence's and Forster's female characters with a theoretical insight into Lawrence's and Forster's own poetics. This adds to the metaliterary effects of the whole novel.

3.3.3. _Laminations_[71]

Although it takes just a few pages of _Babel Tower_, _Laminations_ is central in the novel. Inspired by Burroughs' cut-ups, it is made of fragments and quotations taken from various literary works and essays collected by Frederica, who combines them with brief private anecdotes from her own life. In _A Whistling Woman_, the last novel, the reader will discover that these fragments have been published as _Laminations_. Actually, the word 'laminations' appears in Byatt's tetralogy earlier, precisely in _The Virgin in the Garden_. The episode of the first volume is recalled by Frederica in _Babel Tower_ when she tries to start writing. Laminations, to Frederica, stays for a moral and aesthetic dictum: "language, sex, friendship, thought" (_BT_: 312), all the things that matter to Frederica, have to be separated, laminated, in order to be experiences and understood properly. _Laminations_ represents, firstly, an opposition to Forster's and Lawrence's ideas of connection and oneness. But stylistically speaking, _Laminations_ can be read as the counter-narrative of academic discourses and of quotations as characteristically academic and authoritative discursive practices. Quotations usually act as references to a canon, which is itself the expression of institutional hegemonic forces and which powerfully contributes to the shaping of literary practices. What makes _Laminations_ a counter-narrative of male academic discourse is its juxtaposition of real quotations by canonical writers or theorists with fictional extracts invented by the fictional writer (Frederica). In the following passage, the reader witnesses the birth of the work: from

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[70] As Felski points out: «As selfhood becomes self-reflexive, literature comes to assume a crucial role in exploring what it means to be a person. The novel, especially, embraces a heightened psychological awareness, meditating on the murky depths of motive and desire, seeking to map the elusive currents and by-ways of consciousness, highlighting countless connections and conflicts between self-determination and socialization. Depicting characters engaged in introspection and soul-searching, it encourages its readers to engage in similar acts of self-scrutiny» (Felski 2008: 25).

[71] Some parts of this subchapter are contained, in a different version, in my article " 'Solo connettere'. Il frammento come dispositivo eccentrico in _Babel Tower_ di A.S. Byatt" (Seligardi 2012).

Mann and Laing, and then going through Nietzsche, Beckett, Blake and others, Frederica mixes famous quotes, or "cultural clichés", with her own private clichés, taken from her own experience:

> She writes down, slowly, under *Laminations*
>
> 'I found my own growing inclination, which I discovered was not mine alone, to look upon all life as a cultural product taking the form of mythic clichés, and to prefer quotations to independent invention' Thomas Mann. *Die Entstehung des Dr Faustus*.
>
> Quotation is another form of cut-up; it gives a kind of papery vitality and independence to, precisely, cultural clichés cut free from the web of language that gives them precise meaning. [...] You could quote other things, Frederica thinks, as the beginning of the form of what will be Laminations goes in and out of focus in her mind's eye. [...] That week she adds:
>
> 'James told of how, when walking on a summer evening in the park alone, watching the couples make love, he suddenly began to feel a tremendous oneness with the whole world [...]. He knew of no half-way stage between radical isolation in self-absorption or complete absorption into all there was'. (R.D. Laing, *Divided Self*, p. 91)
>
> [...] One night, on an impulse Frederica adds an anecdote [...]. Two days later, she adds another [...]. (*BT*: 384-387)

At first sight, it might appear no connection between the various quotations: however, a thin fil rouge emerges from what can be interpreted as a series of images of frustrated connection, dismemberment and cut. Mann's quotation, which opens up, like an incipit, the aim of *Laminations* as a reflection on cultural clichés, is followed by Laing's passage about the terrifying fusion between the individual into the Nature. Oneness is reprised in a contrastive way in Nietzsche's description about Dionysos's dismemberment. The idea of cutting is at the core of the two anecdotes Frederica includes, one about an accident with a bacon-slicer, the other about an autobiographical experience of haircut. The connection between the different passages is possible only through analogy, the logical process under metaphor, which links all the different images by maintaing them separated.

The subversion of male and academic power becomes more evident in the juxtaposition of essays to literature, anecdotes and stories. The fragment works here as a Deleuzian 'eccentric *dispositif*'. The definition of what might be understood as a *dispositif*, a Foucauldian concept, is particularly hard, as both Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben have pointed out in two different essays entitled respectively *What is a Dispositive?* (1988) and *What is an Apparatus?* (2006). Here we would like to refer to Deleuze's definition of *dispositif* or apparatus:

> What is an apparatus? First of all it is a skein, a multilinear whole. It is composed of lines of different natures. The lines […] follow directions, traces processes that are always out of balance, that sometimes move closer together and sometimes farther away. […] The first two dimensions of an apparatus[…] are the curves of visibility and the curves of utterance. […] Thirdly an apparatus contains lines of forces. (Deleuze 1992: 338-339)

Although Deleuze's "lines" evoke Bourdieu's field of power, we also need to keep in mind the intrinsic self-reflexive potential of the apparatus structure, a feature Deleuze himself has highlighted. Both aspects need to be taken into account: on the one hand, the fragment paradoxically keeps alluding to an abstract, de-centered unity; on the other hand, it claims to exist on its own.

The fragments composing *Laminations* prove to be eccentric, in many respects. The first examples included in the project are two excerpts Frederica has singled out from *Women in Love* and *Howard's End*, the novels she is teaching in her course on the modern European novel. The reader is familiar with the original passages, openly quoted while Frederica is preparing her lecture. The difference between Forster's page and the same page after Frederica's cut-up shows how fragmentation brings subversion:

> Howards End, Ch. 22
> It did not seem so difficult. She need trouble him with no gift of her own. She would only point out the salvation that was latent in his own soul, and in the soul of everyman. Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its

height. Live in fragment no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk,
robbed of the isolation that is life no either, will die... (*BT*: 309).
Passion is bad a belief that is at its highest. Live in fragments passionately.
Religion had connect, and the beast and the monk were aloud on Sunday, life to
either, will die. No gift of her own she would only connect! That was the form of a
'good talking'. The prose and the passion would be built and span their human love
which she was never prepared to give (*BT*: 383).

The fragments are about marriage, love and the romantic ideal of unity. Frederica takes
the extracts and then cuts them with a pair of scissors. What results from the cut-up is a
re-composition that apparently makes no sense, but which effectively deconstructs the
power of a certain kind of literature which is taught at university as well as the values
that the university (i.e., Leavis's thought) wants to exhibit. What emerges from
Frederica's experiment is the female attempt to subvert such master discourses as those
on marriage and academic knowledge. In the novel, Frederica is, in fact, an 'eccentric'
character, because she is both out of marriage (she is divorcing from her husband) and
out of academia (although she is trying to get back to intellectual life, she has given up
her career at Cambridge). *Laminations* can therefore be read as the narrative device
through which separateness strategically allows the female self to counter-narrate her
relationship to society and culture.

3.4 *The Theater of Academia: Dramatisation and Theatricality* in A Whistling Woman
A *Whistling Woman* is the last novel of the quartet and follows several subplots which
were already present in *Still Life*. Together with the second volume of the tetralogy, *A
Whistling Woman* directly engages in the narrative investigation of the academic world.
The novel develops two leitmotivs that appear relevant in light of the whole tetralogy:
the foundation of the new University of North Yorkshire, and the relationship between
the female subject and the university world seen through the eyes of Frederica and of
another character, Jacqueline. The narrative strategies performed by the novel reveal
how the process of worldmaking is still affected by the university imaginary. As we will
see later, dramatisation is acted out mainly through two devices: shifting and ambiguous
focalization and the academic style employed in situations apparently distant from the

university world (like Frederica's TV programme). By looking at the different modes of representation, what will emerge is that both the direct representation and the dramatisation of the university imaginary are characterised by a certain degree of theatricality.

If *Still Life* performs a dramatisation of the theory of metaphor, the pivot of *A Whistling Woman* is a meditation on the idea of culture. Since the 19th century, British academia has been the place where several intellectuals, such as Matthew Arnold or F.R. Leavis, have reflected on the meaning of culture. The separation between humanities and hard sciences was one of the key points of such models, where literature played a central and privileged role. What emerges from *A Whistling Woman* is a new ideal, embodied by Gerald Wijnnobel, the head of the University of North Yorkshire. Wijnobel brings a new point of view on culture by offering an interdisciplinary approach that puts sciences and humanities together. The aim of such conceptualisation is to satisfy a human need and curiosity for universal knowledge. The last characteristics are peculiar to intellectuals that work at the university, as Frederica points out in this passage of the novel:

> She looked at the assembled academics, and saw, not as Hodgkiss did, the windings and manoeuvres of small territorial jealousies and large ambitions, but an angelic group of humans dedicated to thought, to thinking thinks *thought* (*WW*: 326).

The novel shows how this ideal results from the influence of Cambridge. However, what the reader realizes throughout the novel, is that the university is definitely less idealised than what Frederica believes.

The University of North Yorkshire is in fact portrayed as a field of power, the place for the battle between different social and political forces. Historical realism seems to be the dominant strategy of representation in order to witness the social, political, cultural and gender tensions that affected British academia at the end of the '60s. The inauguration of the University of North Yorkshire is already mentioned in *Still Life*, but its architectural structure is better described in the last novel of the tetralogy. The university building, in fact, consists of different towers, each symbolizing a different

discipline. All the towers are linked, in order to visually correspond to Wijnnobel's education project. Foreign languages and mathematics are mandatory for all the students, in order to give them a general knowledge in all fields. Wijnnobel and other professors decide to organize a conference entitled "Body and Mind", which is meant as an example of dialogue between experts coming from different fields (philosophy, biology, literature, art history, anthropology, mathematics).

Not far from this elitist community of intellectuals, another social group takes more and more power in the campus: the Anti-University front. It is not a chance that the story is set around 1968, the year of the students' revolution. Juvenile opposition is embodied in the novel by this Anti-University, described as a parallel university, completely different from the institutional one:

> The Anti-University did in fact have a base. This was two caravans and a dormobile, parked at a place oddly known as Griffin Street. Griffin Street was an almost derelict row of labourers' cottages at the edge of the original Long Royston Estate, where parkland met open moors. The University proposed, when funds became available, to make the renovated cottages into graduate accommodation. [...] In curious synchrony with the Vice-Chancellor's invitation to Body and Mind, and at this stage unaware of the synchrony, the nuclear Anti-University despatched invitations to potential teachers and students. [...] Bring your own food and bedding, they said. We shall make a free space for self-expression, for the breakdown of artificial limits. Whilst they waited, they painted caravans. The walls of the Romany caravan became a forest of silver fruits and crimson pomegranates. [...] Leaflets were printed, saying, come and share your knowledge, however profound, however elementary. All can be studied, from cosmology to marmalade, from so-called madness to vegetarian cookery, from mantras to armed resistance to the death of capitalism to growing sweet-peas. (*WW*: 84-85)

Situated at the edges of the campus, near the moors, the de-centration of the Anti-University is geographical, architectural and institutional al the same time. Instead of towers, there are caravans and a dormobile; instead of a conference, a free invitation to all the people interested in various disciplines, both academic (cosmology, the death of capitalism) and not (marmalade, vegetarian cookery, mantras). The aim of both the

University and the Anti-University is to achieve the most complete knowledge on the world, but their strategies are quite opposite.

The Anti-University organizes a campaign and a demonstration in order to sabotage the "Body and Mind" conference. What is particularly striking is that both the conference and the students' protest are represented in a theatrical way. The conference "Body and Mind" takes place in a theatre and the speakers are portrayed like performers. Their communication skills rely on their ability to catch the public's attention. For example, when Luk, a biologist, is giving his lecture on sexual reproduction in animals, the narrator highlights the performative quality of his speech through the eyes of Frederica:

> He was brisk, he was lucid. He was witty – he made jokes he had not intended to make. [...] They laughed. He felt them held to him by threads of attention and laugher, like and electric spider-web which he was spinning. [...] He was sharp, he was fierce, he made just enough reference to unknowns, the not understood, that might dilute, or shift his argument. [...] Frederica watched Luk, amazed and delighted. He seemed like some sort of small golden fire-demon, with sparks coming out of the ends of his fingers (which he used a lot, as he paced the platform, very effectively). She has been infected by his stage-fright, and was now infected by his joyous contact with his audience, which had become one attentive creature. She thought, he's sweeping around like a great peacock, showing off, and laughed to herself that he was doing this to demonstrate the wastefulness and pointlessness of just such male display. (*WW*: 357-59)

Most of Luk's speech is represented in the novel, thus testifying one of the most prominent aspects of *A Whistling Woman*, that is the penetration of academic discourses into the fictional world. A part from the style, what is interesting in the depiction of Luk's paper is its performative dimension. Through the eyes of Frederica, the reader has the impression to be in front of something that deals with shows and rituals at the same time. Academia has its own performances, but the same happens to the Anti-University protest, which takes place during the last day of the conference. A theatrical quality is evident in the description, as the event comprehends music and typical installations of

the late '60s, such as happenings. What becomes evident in the passage below is the reference to different forms of performances that belong both to rituals and theatre, like Luk's speech. There are maenads and carnival masks, characters from commedia dell'arte and from Nordic folkloristic traditions (witches, wizards). All these different figures deal with to subversion and the carnival upside down world, that is precisely the aim of the Anti-University:

> The hall erupted into a howling and baying, and, outside, Johnny Surtees's marchers swarmed across the campus, singing, shouting, dancing and making music. They had been organised to come in waves, from all sides, from the encampment and up the road from the village. They wore all sorts of costumes – they were maenads and tin soldiers, masked executioners and carnival demons, elves and witches and wizards and huge *commedia dell'arte* cockerels. There were drumbeats and clashing cymbals, pan-pipes and guitars. [...] They sang We are One We are Many, We are Many We are One. We are gun we are bullet, we are bullet we are gun. [...] The gibbets were set up outside the Evolution Tower, the Language Tower, and the Maths Tower. By the time the authorities had fought or wriggled their way to the Theatre, the effigies were burning brightly, amongst a stink of petrol and a lot of noise, musical and unmusical. [...] There were very small fires in the hall – slowly burning neat heaps of books, which Frederica recognised. Skoob. An art-form. (*WW*: 368-371)

Both the conference and the protest are filmed by the troupe of "Through the Looking Glass", a TV programme hosted by Frederica. It is a cultural format conceived and directed by Wilkie, a former friend of Frederica's. In each episode, the show brings together some experts who discuss a specific topic. The programme can be read as a *mise-en-scène* of culture, theatrical both in the format (the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewed) and the scenery. The latter is, in fact, highly intermedial and intertextual, as it is overtly inspired by Lewis Carroll's novel, from which it takes its title. The set mixes elements inspired by Carroll's text and elements connected to the discussed topics. The purpose is to reflect on different aspects of culture but, at the same time, to reflect on the potentiality of television as a new medium that combines words, images, discourses and performance. This self-reflexive potential

is highlighted by the architecture of the set, a box within a box full of glasses and mirrors:

> *Through the Looking-Glass* was, from the very beginning, a rapid and elaborate joke about the boxness of the Box. As it opened, the box appeared to contain the hot coals, or logs, the flickering flames and the smouldering ash, in the hearth which had been the centre of groups in vanished rooms before the Box came. The fire in its shadowy cave was succeeded by a flat silvery mist (or swirl of smoke), in an elaborate gilded frame. The mist would then clear to reveal the interior of the Looking-Glass world. There was a revolving Janus clock, a mathematical and a grinning face. There were duplicated mushrooms and cobwebs and windows. At the back of the box was what might have been a bay window, or a mirror reflecting a bay window. In the middle was a transparent box within a box, in which Frederica sat, into which the camera peered and intruded. All through the programme, round the edges of the contained space, from time to time, animated creatures and plants sauntered, sped, shot up and coiled. Roses and lilies, giant caterpillars and trundling chess pieces, multiplied by mirrors. (*WW*: 134)

The duplication of all objects reminds to the reader (or the viewer) the distance between objects and their representation, thus conveying an intrinsic reflection around mimesis. The same can be said about the mirror effect at the center of the stage. It is important to remind that at the time of the story the television was at the beginning of its evolution, and that the change of perception (to see something moving and talking in a Box) was a social, cultural and aesthetic innovation.

The visual Chinese-box effect of the setting is similar to the role played by the TV programme in the structure of the novel. In fact, the topics covered by "Through the Looking Glass" are quite similar to those investigated during the "Body and Mind" conference. Each episode introduces two guests who discuss with Frederica about three topics: an idea, a person, and an object. The first episode is about sense and non-sense, Charles Dodgson and a Victorian mirror; the second about free women in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, George Eliot and Tupperware; the third is on creativity, Sigmund Freud and Picasso's ceramics. The television performance dramatizes academic discourse in several ways. The guests are professors, writers, essayists: people

who reflect on culture at a high level. The language they use during the programme is exactly the same employed by the speakers during the conference. It is not a coincidence that one of the guests is Prof. Hodder Pinsky, also the first speaker at the "Body and Mind" conference. The comparison between the TV programme scene and the other regarding Pinsky's speech at the conference "Body and Mind" shows the stylistic similarity between the two:

> On air, Frederica asked them both to say what they thought creativity was. Pinsky gave a definition in scientific terms. Creativity was the generation of new ideas, new explanations. He was, he said, in agreement with Noam Chomsky that the human mind is born, to use a metaphor, *wired* to construct grammar, and other forms of thought, as beavers are born wired to make dams, or birds to make nests. A human child can make endless new sentences it has never heard before, precisely because it is physiologically formed and ordered to be able to do so. A creative person makes a new idea as a child makes a new sentence. (*WW*: 151-152)

> Hodder Pinsky gave the opening address. [...] His subject was 'Metaphors for the Matter of the Mind'. [...] Human beings could not think without such metaphors and analogies, the action potential for an electrical jump of comparison must be born with the branching of the grammatical forms in the embryonic brain to which he had just alluded. [...] He himself was interested in a science of mind that dealt with things that were only *approximately* objects of language, at all. We name them, but their names neither contain, nor confine them. (*WW*: 353)

Both of the passages are narrated through the shifting point of view that we mentioned when discussing dramatisation. The style used in both speeches is academic. In particular, quotations mark the scientific quality of both the interview and the conference. The discussion around metaphor adds to the importance of this topic through the whole tetralogy: in both passages, metaphor is inextricably linked to language in the possibility, for human beings, to perceive the world.

In light of this content and stylistic similarity, "Through the Looking-Glass" can be interpreted as a counter-narrative of the academic world. The two apparata are not overtly in contrast. Wilkie contributes to the popularity of the University of North

Yorkshire by filming the "Body and Mind" conference. Moreover, both Wilkie and Frederica attended Cambridge, and this common cultural background is evident in how "Through the Looking-Glass" is conceived and staged. However, when we turn to analyse Frederica's plot, the TV programme seems to deconstruct the power of academia. The reader knows, from *Babel Tower*, that she did not succeed in staying in academia because of her marriage with Nigel. In *A Whistling Woman* she is a divorced woman who lives in London with her son Leo and another mother-child couple. When she goes, together with the TV troupe, to film the conference at Long Royston, she reminisces about her past life, when she was a student at Cambridge and wanted to write a PhD thesis on metaphor in seventeenth-century literature. During the first working meeting of the conference,

> Frederica looked at the assembled academics and wondered why her own mind began to move so swiftly, so surely [...] An idea of herself in a library with time to pursue the nature of metaphor until she had understood it – well, until her understanding was quite other than it was now – overwhelmed her with sadness. She had made the wrong choice. (*WW*: 326)

Frederica's indecision of being inside or outside the academic world dramatizes, on the level of plot, the problems of women at the time when the story is set. If it is true that in the late '60s women are widely accepted in universities, it is also true that to be a 'thinking woman' is still not easy in British society. Gender matters are relevant in shaping women's careers and choices. In *Still Life* Frederica would like to pursue the life of the mind, but she is still influenced by the idea that marriage is an undeniable part of a woman's life. She is attracted by her opposite, somebody like Nigel, who uses the language of the body and who is not familiar with literature or academia. In *A Whistling Woman* she is in a complicated relationship with John, a computer programmer, another character who has nothing to do with literary discourse. John's jealousy and his attempts to control her life cause the failure of their love story. At the end of the novel she is pregnant by Luk, the biologist. Near the end, during a dialogue with him, she finally realizes what she wants to do about her life of the mind:

> Frederica said she had wanted to think out the nature of metaphor. She had thought of writing a thesis, once, on religious metaphor in the seventeenth century. [...] 'Well –' said Luk. 'You could go back to universities'. 'That's what John said. [...] But then I saw, I don't *want* to be in an English Department, stuck with Eng. Lit. I saw that when you were talking, when Hodder Pinsky was talking. I saw the world is bigger. [...] You know, the *new* metaphors, the ones now, are in that box. Wars are in the box, and beliefs, and persuasion, just as they were in *Paradise Lost* but infinitely more so. [...] It's harder for a woman.' 'And so? You must just whistle harder. Louder. You won't do either perhaps quite a successfully as you would have done a straight university "career". But you'll *know more*'. (*WW*: 410-411)

Frederica's final choice is to stay outside the academic world. This decision is due to the fact that universities, even the most open-minded, will always maintain some boundaries between disciplines. "Through the Looking-Glass" enables Frederica to overcome these boundaries. The cultural TV programme, far from the style of entertainment which will prevail in the last decades of the 20th century, is a counter-narrative of the academic world as it is capable of combining scientific and academic knowledge, from different fields, with pop-culture. Frederica's words mentioned above are, in fact, an implicit contestation of Leavis' *Education and the University*, "which she studied, and which has said that the English Department was at the centre of any educational endeavour" (*WW*: 364). The centrality of English Literature is called into question and subverted in a gendered way. Frederica represents a new type of woman who is capable of reconciling the life of the mind with the life of the body, but this reconciliation only seems to be possible outside the academic world.

The life inside academia continues to present problematic aspects for women. The character who problematizes the relationship between women and academic knowledge in the novel is Jacqueline, whom the reader had briefly encountered in *Still Life*. In *A Whistling Woman* Jacqueline has just finished a PhD in biology and wants to continue her research with a post-doctoral project. She is introduced quite early in the novel (Chapter II) as an ambitious woman, who has developed her self-awareness in a more progressive way than impetuous Frederica. At the beginning of the novel, Luk has fallen

in love with her, but she does not reciprocate his love. At some point, they have a sort of an affair, and then for a couple of weeks she thinks she is pregnant and considers the possibility of getting married to him. But when she discovers that she is not expecting a baby, she decides to leave Luk and to devote herself only to research. Jacqueline represents what Frederica would have been if she had decided to work on her project on metaphor. Her characterisation does not escape cultural clichés, affected as it is by the monster paradigm. The passage below clearly shows how Jacqueline's self-perception is influenced by social expectations (women are expected to marry and have children). However, she is aware of the fact that she does not want to conform to social standards:

> she wanted to go to Paris and work with French neuroscientists on the electricity and chemistry of memory. That is who I am, said Jacqueline. [...] she wanted to be herself, herself alone, which meant, Daniel must understand, not thinking about *herself*, but about the work, the experiments, the synapses and the axons that did the thinking. [...] I don't want to be a human being, said Jacqueline, feeling suddenly that she was very lonely in the world, that her choice of work had deflected or distorted her unthinking life. (*WW*: 414)

Jacqueline's experience is another example of how personal choices are forced to deal with imposed gender paradigms. These models not only shape her self-perception – she thinks about herself as non-human, as a monster – but also regulate the social and institutional aspects of her work. At the beginning of the novel, she has a job interview with Prof. Lyon Bowman, with whom she wants to work on her project about the physiology of memory. The dialogue between the two characters is modeled on the interview pattern. The whole scene is staged in a theatrical way, by alternatively using direct speech and indirect speech and presents the shifting system of focalization typical of dramatisation. Jacqueline's speech presents all the elements of the academic style: she defends her thesis carefully, she makes references to previous scholars, and she highlights the innovative nature of her research. But she is aware that the male professor in front of her is not taking her seriously because she is a woman. This is revealed by his body language: he does not look her in the eyes. Using irony, though, she manages

to tease her interlocutor, and in so doing she draws an interesting comparison between science and art:

> 'It would be an interesting physiological experiment to find out what it is in people's eyes that shows you they aren't really interested in you. It's like photographs. There's a moment when the face dies, and if you click the shutter just after it, the photo's dead. I don't know what it is. Eyes are eyes, and if they're alive, they're alive. How do we read that they're looking or not looking?' 'I see. I'm not looking at you. Or rather, I'm looking at you, but I am not attending to you'. 'Yes. And it's *my life* we're discussing'. [...] 'I'm obsessed. I work. I want to do real science. I want to do your sort of science'. 'Obsessive women make bad members of teams, in my narrow experience.' 'They don't get much chances.' [...] They had been playing some game with eyes and other minute, involuntary movements and probably with smells, she suspected, that she couldn't have played if she'd been a man, and also wouldn't have had to play, of course. She tried to see her sex – with some success – as a problem and an obstacle, to be solved and surmounted. (*WW*: 53-54)

Jacqueline's story brings academic research onto the narrative scene. The representation of research methods focuses more on the scientific and anthropological sides, and less on the literary. At the beginning of the novel the reader watches Luk and Jacqueline studying the population of snails at Dun Vale Hall. Dun Vale Hall is also the place of a spiritual group, the Spirit's Tigers, led by priest Gideon Farrar and by the visionary John Lamb. This is a sort of utopian community, where mysticism mixes up with madness and strange ritual practices. Among the participants, we find the undercover ethnometodologist Brenda Pincher, who is conducting a research on utopian communities. The reader learns about what happens among the Spirit's Tigers partly from the letters she writes to Avram Snitkin, a sociologist at the Anti-University, and partly from the letters that Elvet Gander, an experimental psychologist, sends to Kieran Quarrell, the head of a psychiatric hospital. In several chapters the narration is often interrupted by the letters exchanged by these characters. In both cases the style used is quite informal, but the comparison between the two different points of view sheds light on what is a happening at Dun Val Halle. In Brenda's case, in particular, it is clear that

the method of inquiry of ethnometodology requires an 'immersion' of the researcher into a very specific environment.

The interesting aspect about the representation of Luk's and Jaqueline's experiments on snails, as well as the anthropological research of Brenda and Elvet, is that both reveal issues that are at the core of the tetralogy and that have been investigated in the other volumes using literature as an instrument of analysis. For example, Luk's research involves a comparison between sexual and social behaviour in snail colonies and in human society. We find the same topic in *Babel Tower*, where Frederica investigates the nature of love in Forster and Lawrence. Utopian communities are another example of topic represented from humanistic and scientific perspectives: the University of North Yorkshire, the Anti-University, the Spirit's Tigers described in *A Whistling Woman* can be compared to another utopian group, i.e. the one portrayed in *The Babble Tower*, another play within the play that we find in *Babel Tower*.

The narrative motif of research suggests that it is epistemologically possible to investigate problems from different disciplinary perspectives. This does not mean to deny the power of literature, which has been at the core of the first three volumes and which still plays a pivotal role in *A Whistling Woman*. The reader is suggested, though, that academia, or more precisely, English Departments, must hold a dialogue with what is outside the sacred field of Humanities, and sometimes out of campuses.

CONCLUSION

The present work stems from the attempt to deal with the literary representations of the university imaginary by focusing on mimesis. The first part has investigated the literary and cultural dynamics that have affected the different articulations of what has been called university fiction. In fact, the most prominent way in which the university has been represented and constructed in literature is through a 'genre', with the term 'genre' being employed here to refer to, first of all, a fixed, structured form, characterised by repetitiveness and stability. In order examine the phenomenon of university fiction through the generic lens, specific literary forms have ben analysed in the context of the longstanding critical debate on their meaning and on the functions of literature. To a large extent, the existing scholarship on university fiction has tended to deal with thematic or contextual issues, whereas narrative dimensions have been systematically neglected. A concern with the cultural context of university fiction is certainly justified, and the present study has also taken of such cultural components. At the same time, differently from the previous studies, the reading of a selected corpus of novels – namely British novels written between the second half of the 19th century and the very beginning of the 21st – has privileged the focus on literary form, making the priority of the investigation.

The concept of mimesis has proved crucial for university fiction, which bends the established patterns of literary tradition to fit the representation of such an ideologically constructed referent as the university. In order to tackle the specificity of these narrative modes, an integration of Paul Ricoeur's mimetic circuit – pre-figuration, configuration and refiguration – with Ricoeur's notion of metaphor, as well as with Nelson Goodman's concept of worldmaking has been proposed. Metaphor has thus been understood as a device aimed at worldmaking, while analogy, the figure which underlies metaphor, has been taken as a strategy of re-figuration, a subjective reformulation of the cognitive understanding of the world. When used in a literary and poetical way,

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language fulfills an epistemological function thanks to the metaphorical configuration triggered by literature itself.

The modes and forms of university fiction have been investigated in the light of the theory of mimesis and with an eye to the specific problem of the representation of the university world. The concept of literary genre has undoubtedly proved to be a productive theoretical tool for the exploration of the literary representations of academia, whose frame has revealed itself to be generic from the very start. We have proposed to consider 'varsity novels' and 'campus novels' as historical variants of university fiction.

The paradigmatic phase of the varsity novel, a variation of the Bildungsroman model, coincided in Britain with a reform of university institutions based on the ideological project of reviving and reshaping Englishness, a project designed to provide a new educational model for the ideal English male citizen. The varsity novel form has therefore worked as a master narrative with a normalizing function. With its questioning of some of the paradigmatic patterns of the genre, the female counterpart occasionally highlighted some controversial issues, but this was a secondary phenomenon, which did not affect significantly the development of university fiction. The analysis of the varsity novel has led us to argue that, while, on one hand, the first form of university fiction was closely related to hegemonic forces, on the other hand the stereotyped features of the genre symptomatically shaped also its future evolution. In the investigation of campus novels, the 20th century counterpart of varsity novels, the concept of literary genre has proved very helpful as well: in spite of relevant thematic and formal changes, mainly due to contextual transformations, campus novels retain several patterns belonging to traditional representations (romance, comedy of manners, pop-literature).

The utilisation of genre as a methodological tool proved to be more problematic once the relatively stable structure of university fiction changes as if to take upon itself the increasingly variable facets of postmodern experience. It is not surprising, then, that the very concept of genre, both as an instrument of critical inquiry and as a conceptual frame for writers, is especially questioned when postmodern fiction is scrutinised. Paolo Bagni has rightly argued that:

attending the literary experience of modernity, and especially the novel, the question about the belonging of the work to a genre becomes an investigation into *the genres* of the work, into a multiplicity of genres operating in it, which the work itself dissolves, corrupts, intersects, acts and negates by appropriating them, so as to show, in its making, the installation and the need of defining a *new genre*: the unfinished definition of a genre as a *critique of genres*. (Bagni 1997: 127, my translation)

The case study presented in the second part of the dissertation lends itself as an exemplification of the situation described by Bagni. In A.S. Byatt's novels, whose multi-layered meta- and inter-textual sophistication defies all reduction to formulaic patterns, the investigation of narrative modes requires the deployment of a new set of critical tools. Therefore, once adapted to literary studies and seen as a narrative enactment of concepts, 'dramatisation' has been introduced as a fruitful alternative or complement to 'genre' as a tool of inquiry. With the help of the notion of dramatisation the specific mode through which A.S. Byatt refigures the university imaginary has been analysed: it is no longer (or not only) an immediate representation of the dynamics taking place in university departments, but a wide-ranging reflection on the role of humanities in the university world and on the influence of such culture on individual (especially female) and collective life.

The reading of A.S. Byatt has attempted to show that the analytical potential of dramatisation also contributes to a new perspective on mimesis in general. A.S. Byatt's example, indeed, shows the necessity to reconsider genre from a broader perspective. The forms and modes of a genre still represent a point of reference point which cannot be set aside, but the re-figuration of those forms and modes lies outside the boundaries of the genre itself. Genre, rather than an autonomous literary phenomenon with its own internal rules, should hence be considered in a more flexible way as a repository of the imaginary, which can be freely used. Byatt's dramatisation is meant as an example of that. Typical features of university fiction, such as the presence of literary theory, the subject's *Bildung* within the university environment, the academic citation, and the dynamics among departments, are re-interpreted through the characters' experiences, an experience which dramatizes two essential cores: a serious reflection on the centrality of

literature as an experience whose role in our life is fundamental, and the specificity of female experience with and in literature.

With regard to the seriousness which characterizes A. S. Byatt's novels, it is worth adding a few words on the modes with which the university world has been literarily represented in general. By analyzing all the novels taken into consideration in this dissertation, indeed, we can say that realism, romance and self-reflexivity are the main representative modes. Realism is constitutional in the early examples of university fiction, i.e. the fictional representations of really existing academic institutions. Self-reflexivity, typical of campus novels and intriguingly deployed in Byatt's works, is a strategy and a mode that belongs more to postmodern ways of perception and representation. Besides, considering that what is being depicted is the life of humanities departments and that talking or writing about literature is the main concern of those who live that life, it is no surprise that university fiction reveals the kind of self-reflexive mood that permeates academic experience. Finally, the structuring model of romance provides the most recurrent plot system in all the case studies presented in this dissertation, although in different ways: from the marriage plot proposed in varsity novels, we find a more entertaining inclination towards adultery and sexual experiences in campus novels, while in A.S. Byatt's novels both situations become subject to questioning and problematising.

As for the mode system, an important opposition exists between serious mode and comic mode. A dynamics between these two poles emerges from a comparison between the role of self-reflexive devices in Lodge's and Bradbury's works on one side and in Byatt's novels on the other. The parodic treatment of literary conventions and theory by Lodge's and Bradbury's characters is antithetical to the serious mode through which Byatt reflects on the influence of culture on the individual and social development. Moreover, Byatt's oeuvre has shown that a compromise between realism, self-reflexivity and seriousness is possible. The label of self-conscious realism, also used in this dissertation, is for the first time directly linked to the 'academic' aspects, which are an essential feature in Byatt's novels. The specific combination of realism and self-reflexivity also accounts for the use of the strategy of dramatisation.

We would like to conclude this work by suggesting possible future investigations in the field of university fiction. We said that during the second half of the 20th century the boundaries between literary genres started to become blurred. However, in the past decades other kinds of boundaries were also blurred: our way of life has been deeply changed by such processes as migrations on an unprecedented scale, post-colonial movements and globalisation. Thus the representation of social and cultural hybridity has become one of the main features of 21st century fiction. New social and cultural dynamics can therefore affect our way of looking at university fiction.

Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* (2005) is a fascinating case which can be fruitfully investigated to gain a better understanding of such new conditions and the way in which they affect literary forms. In current criticism the novel has generally been indicated as a campus novel; however the relation between this novel and the campus novel genre is definitely more complex when compared to the Lodge's and Bradbury's paradigm. The typical motif of academic exchange is pivotal in *On Beauty*, but it is much more problematic than the exchange depicted in David Lodge's *Changing Places*, to name just one example, as it involves the foregrounding of multiculturalism. Cultural hybridity is performed through the mingling and the encounter of the academic environment with other worlds, traditionally perceived as 'Other', such as pop, street, Afro-american and Haitian cultures. If we focus on the dialogues or on the representation of the characters' thoughts, we notice that the language used is modelled on the specific cultural worlds to which the characters belong or want to belong. The university is described as a place of power: such an idea is not new, but the stress is put on the ethical consequences of the actions and contradictions of the two protagonists (two professors), who actually do not always behave according to their ideological beliefs.

The narrative processes of hybridisation in the 21st century novels which deal with the university world suggest the idea that contemporary novels about academia should be read against the larger context of new cultural dynamics. In the last decades academia, like society, has considerably changed: campuses are no longer closed spaces, microcosms completely isolated from the rest of the world. A sense of permeability

between disciplinary boundaries has been stimulated by cultural studies, that have to a certain extent replaced literary theory and structuralism as the discourses with which campus fiction interacts. This permeability is related to larger social phenomena, of which multiculturalism and renewed attention to different cultures are two prominent examples. From the point of view of literary mimesis, in particular, it is worth noticing that these new processes of hybridisation and representation of cultural hybridity have affected and reshaped the modes through which academia is depicted in literature. Such radical changes seem to demand new critical perspectives, along with ethical and political commitment. University fiction seems to be moving on from literary self-consciousness towards cultural awareness of what is happening outside the ivory tower. It is hoped that a number of studies on fiction that deals with the university world will increase in the nearest future, so that these topics will be reflected upon more in depth.

In conclusion, novel that deal with academia have been and can continue to serve as a testing ground for a varied array of concepts: from literary studies to cultural studies, from mimesis to dramatisation, the literary representation of the university world continues to influence the Western imaginary as one of the most stimulating way of reflecting not only on the meaning of culture, but also on the way in which literature relates itself to reality and fictionality alike.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CP = Changing Places

SW = Small World

NW = Nice Work

ST = Stepping Westward

HM = The History Man

RE = Rates of Exchange

SS = The Shadow of the Sun

TG = The Game

P = Possession

VG = The Virgin in the Garden

SL = Still Life

BT = Babel Tower

WW = A Whistling Woman

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04/04/2016   Beatrice Seligardi