

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF AUTHORIAL IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY  
AUTHOR FICTIONS: A.S BYATT'S *POSSESSION*, DAVID LODGE'S *AUTHOR*,  
*AUTHOR* AND MAGGIE GEE'S *VIRGINIA WOOLF IN MANHATTAN*

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submitted by **NESRİN KOÇ** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature, the Graduate  
School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University** by,

Prof. Dr. Yaşar KONDAKÇI  
Dean  
Graduate School of Social Sciences

Prof. Dr. Çiğdem SAĞIN ŞİMŞEK  
Head of Department  
Department of Foreign Language Education

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elif ÖZTABAK AVCI  
Supervisor  
Department of Foreign Language Education

**Examining Committee Members:**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hülya YILDIZ BAĞÇE (Head of the Examining Committee)  
Middle East Technical University  
Department of Foreign Language Education

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elif ÖZTABAK AVCI (Supervisor)  
Middle East Technical University  
Department of Foreign Language Education

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nil KORKUT NAYKI  
Middle East Technical University  
Department of Foreign Language Education

Assist. Prof. Dr. Mustafa KIRCA  
Çankaya University  
Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies

Assist. Prof. Dr. Selen AKTARİ SEVGİ  
Başkent University  
Department of American Culture and Literature



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**Name, Last Name:** Nesrin KOÇ

**Signature:**

## ABSTRACT

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KOÇ, Nesrin

Ph.D., The Department of English Literature

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elif ÖZTABAK AVCI

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This study analyses *Possession* (1990) by A.S Byatt, *Author, Author* (2004) by David Lodge and *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* (2014) by Maggie Gee as examples of contemporary author fictions. By revisiting historical authors such as Victorian poets, Henry James and Virginia Woolf and juxtaposing these authors with contemporary author figures, these novels present a multi-layered discussion of authorship practices across centuries. The three novels analysed here all deal with the anxiety governing the work of the contemporary author: Is the Author dead? A.S Byatt challenges the death of the author through her Neo-Victorian tropes while David Lodge claims the authorial power as he negotiates the anxiety of influence he has over Henry James. Gee, on the other hand, establishes authorial power through imagining her heroine in a completely different setting as opposed to the historical reality. Due to the fact that these three authors are also novelists-critics, their author fictions also address the ambivalence caused by this double consciousness. Byatt, Lodge and Gee celebrate the author as a creator, an intellectual, a critic and a writer. Adopting a post-postmodern and reconstructive methodology, this study asserts that

in contemporary author fictions, the authorial identity is brought back to the textual world.

**Keywords:** author, author-fiction, A.S Byatt, David Lodge, Maggie Gee

## ÖZ

A.S BYATT'IN *SAHIPLER*, DAVID LODGE'UN *YAZAR, YAZAR* VE MAGGIE GEE'NİN *VIRGINIA WOOLF MANHATTAN*'DA ADLI YAZAR ROMANLARINDA YAZAR KİMLİĞİNİN YENİDEN KURGULANMASI

KOÇ, Nesrin

Doktora, İngiliz Edebiyatı Bölümü

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Bu çalışma, A.S Byatt'ın *Sahipler* (1990), David Lodge'un *Yazar, Yazar* (2004) ve Maggie Gee'in *Virginia Woolf Manhattan*'da (2014) adlı eserlerini çağdaş yazar romanı türünün örnekleri olarak incelemektedir. Viktorya dönemi şairleri ile Henry James ve Virginia Woolf gibi modernist yazarların yeniden ele alındığı ve çağdaş yazar figürleri ile bir araya getirildiği bu romanlar, bu özellikleriyle, okuyucuya, yazarlık kavramı ve pratiklerinin yüzyıllar boyunca gelişimi ve değişimini gösteren çok katmanlı bir tartışma sunarlar. Bu teze konu olan her üç romanda da çağdaş yazarların eserlerinde karşımıza çıkan endişeye rastlanmaktadır: Yazar ölmüş müdür? A.S Byatt yazarın ölümünü, kullandığı Neo-Viktoryen perspektif ile eleştirirken, David Lodge, Henry James'e karşı duyduğu “etkilenme endişesini” James'i kurgusal bir kahraman olarak sunarak aşabilir ve metin üzerinde otoritesini sağlayabilir. Maggie Gee ise romanının kahramanını tarihsel gerçekliğinden çok farklı bir mekân ve zamanda hayal ederek kendisini metin üzerindeki tek otorite ilan eder. Bu üç yazar, aynı zamanda akademisyen ve eleştirmen olmaları sebebiyle, yazar romanlarında bu çift bilince sahip olmanın

yarattığı belirsizliği de irdelemektedirler. Byatt, Lodge ve Gee; yazarı, yaratıcı, entellektüel, eleştirmen ve nihayet yazan kişi olarak yüceltirler. Post-postmodern ve yeniden yapılandırmacı bir yaklaşım benimseyen bu çalışma, çağdaş yazar romanlarında, yazarın kimliği ile birlikte metnin dünyasına geri getirildiğini öne sürmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yazar, yazar romanı, A.S Byatt, David Lodge, Maggie Gee

*To myself, whom I have neglected most, during this study*

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Every person who has ever crossed the narrow path of writing has dreamed of having Virginia Woolf's room for his/her own. I had the same dream once; but

when I actually had the room to write a dissertation over a couple of years, I discovered that a writer's room houses not only the bright sunshine, birds chirping happily, as Gee had imagined. The room is mostly inhabited by the despair and sloth caused by sleep deprivation and the paralyzing stress as the deadlines approach. My room often turned into a room of isolation, where I would lock myself to study. Creative or academic, writing, as I discovered by treading the thorny path, is a lonely business. I apologize to all the people, particularly myself and my son Oğuzalp Koç, whom I might have neglected during the course of this study. Like his father, Oğuzalp has witnessed the agony of my thesis writing process twice. I dragged him around the various corners of the university campus as soon as he was born, and never stopped since then. Now, after ten years of my M.A. and Ph.D. studies, hard as it may be to believe, a dissertation-free life awaits us.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*Quis es tu?*  
*Quo vadis?*

#### 1.1 Aim and Scope of the Study

This study analyses *Possession* (1990) by A.S Byatt, *Author, Author* (2004) by David Lodge and *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* (2014) by Maggie Gee as examples of author fiction<sup>1</sup>, which, by making use of the conventions of the biographical novel genre to present a fictional portrayal of a historical author, challenges Roland Barthes's ideas of authorship and writing, as presented in "The Death of the Author". Setting off from the question of how Byatt, Lodge and Gee, three novelist-critics, in their unique, albeit related, ways wrestle with the notion and symbolic implications of "the death of the author," this study first contextualizes the spatiotemporal background, post-postmodernism, which allowed these reconstructive novels to resurrect the writing subject; i.e. the author. This is followed by a discussion on the paradigms that shaped the perception of the author throughout the modern and postmodern history of Western literature. Locating these three novels within a post-postmodern framework, this study asserts that author fictions of the post-postmodern world, foreground notions of sincerity, "an aesthetic of trust,"<sup>2</sup> and thus designate a point "beyond" postmodernism, which might be reconciliatory or antagonistic towards the postmodern.

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<sup>1</sup> This term will be clarified in section 1.4.

<sup>2</sup> Hassan, Ihab. "Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust". As the title of Hassan's article suggests, he regards the move beyond postmodernism as an aesthetic move toward trust and sincerity as opposed to postmodernist scepticism.

This study started from the premise that the author, who was “killed” by Roland Barthes and the proponents of “the death of the author” thesis, returned to the house of fiction. The author’s return is not a completely new phenomenon; his/her absence-presence occupied the long history of scholarly criticism. What is new is the fact that this topic is being addressed by an ever-increasing number of novelists in their author fictions. Using the resources of the biographical novel genre, established authors like A.S Byatt, David Lodge and Maggie Gee, revisit both the life and the works of previous authors. Through fictionalizing authors, they set past and present forms of authorship against each other. A.S Byatt challenges the death of the author through her Neo-Victorian tropes while David Lodge claims the authorial power as he negotiates the anxiety of influence he has over Henry James. Gee, on the other hand, establishes authorial power through imagining her heroine, Virginia Woolf, in a completely different setting as opposed to the historical reality. Thus, with the aim of tracing this shift from postmodernism towards a “beyond,” particularly, regarding the question of the authority and the role of the author, this thesis will explore how the authority of the author is negotiated in response to Roland Barthes’s “The Death of the Author,” in *Possession* (1990), *Author, Author* (2004) and *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* (2014).

## **1.2 Methodology**

The real author’s triumphant return to the house of fiction, along with the denouncement of theory, are two recent developments that interrogate, if not threaten, the critic’s position and authority in relation to a work of literature. All three novels analysed in this study express salient criticism towards literary theory, and its executive, the critic. Especially in Byatt’s and Gee’s novels, through the satirical treatment that standpoint receives, the critic is severely antagonized. In the presence of such adversity towards literary theory and the critic, as presented in these novels, how would yet another critical study such as this one be positioned?

When I first began working on this topic, fresh from the exhausting study period for the Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam, I was determined to leave all the literary theory textbooks aside for a while, and read novels just for the fun of it, just like in the days before I enrolled in a literature department. As I was going to learn later,

my disillusion was the consequence of a syndrome, epitomized in the following question posited by David Foster Wallace: “What do you do when postmodern rebellion becomes a pop-cultural institution?” (“E Unibus Pluram” 68).

At that time, I found the remedy in pleasantly indulging in reading novels without the compulsion to write research papers on them. This kind of reading reminded me of the importance of that naivete, which tends to vanish gradually, as we become theoretically more knowledgeable. Then, to my relief, I discovered how in author fictions, particularly in the ones written by novelist-critics, as in the case of *Possession*, *Author, Author* and *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*, these exact feelings were reflected, and the ambivalence emerging from this double consciousness was addressed, as a major theme. For example, in *Possession*, Byatt’s scholars, Roland and Maud, voice their exhaustion due to ceaseless acts of deconstruction, demystifying, which are reflected as being akin to the acts of “murdering to dissect”<sup>3</sup>. In these works, criticism solely based on theory is depicted as ruining the simple pleasures to be derived from the text, and therefore, subordinating the literary work to theory is criticized for detracting literature from its Horatian function of *dulce et utile*, being sweet and useful.

Encountering characters like Roland, negotiating the same anxieties I had at the time, admittedly, was comforting. Over-excited by this peaceful submission to the author’s authority, for some time, I was like Byatt’s critics “possessed” by the authors, and discerning my own voice from the voice of such intriguing and domineering authors was the most challenging part of the study. Dealing with novelist-critics, who read their literary theory and blazingly employed it in their fictions to pre-empt possible critiques of their works, as will be seen in the following analysis chapters, obviously did not make it any easier. One cannot simply overlook Gee’s portrayal of academics as people “who laboured with passives, ‘It is sometimes asserted ...’, ‘It is believed ...’”. (VWM 466), and her view of criticism as second-rate writing. It was equally disconcerting to encounter similar debasement of a doctoral work straight from Gee’s mouth. For example, she tells McKay in an interview about her view of lengthy scholarly work such as a dissertation, as simply

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<sup>3</sup> William Wordsworth, “The Tables Turned”, 1798.

being invented to make people suffer. She relates her own experience within the academia as such: “I did stop writing when I did my Ph.D. because I just couldn’t do both at once. It was too hard. It’s the hardest work anyone does in their life” (McKay 218). I must confess it took me some time to remember one could be both academic and authentic; there are various “pleasures” to be derived from the text by embracing the agency and the uniting vision of the author, rather than disregarding it; and similarly, there are things those of us who do not write novels could still write about and contribute to literary pursuits and share the pleasure of the text.

Author fictions of Byatt, Lodge and Gee, problematize and nullify the death of the author via their playful treatment of it as a theme. These novels, thus, work from the reconstructive spirit of the post-postmodern period. In order to highlight and analyse these points, this study will mostly carry out textual analysis and close reading of these three novels. Other novels by the said authors will be referred to where necessary. In addition, *paratextual*<sup>4</sup> analysis (as the sum of *peritext* and *epitext*) will also be conducted in relevant places since paratextual elements tremendously impact both the general and the critical reception of the novels, even more in the case of hybrid genres such as author fiction. Within the context of author fiction, paratextual elements in these novels, such as A.S. Byatt’s subtitling *Possession* “A Romance” and David Lodge’s indication of *Author, Author* to be “A Novel” are significant examples of how authors exert authority by using paratextual elements to direct possible readings of their novels.

Authorship is a performative pursuit, and authors perform both through textual and/or extratextual statements. Unlike their predecessors, contemporary authors today are surrounded and bombarded by mass media, as well. Obviously, not every author follows this trend; some writers prefer to live in isolation and do not comment on their works at all, while some others constantly do it. However, it is

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<sup>4</sup> In “Introduction to the Paratext,” Genette calls these features through which “a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers, and more generally to the public” *paratexts* (261). Titles, prefaces, illustrations, might be examples of paratextual elements. He further formulates *paratext* as the sum of *peritext* and *epitext*. While peritext refers to the things inside the book such as chapter titles, small information notes, epitext is outside the book “generally with the backing of the media (interviews, conversations), or under the cover of private communication (correspondences, private journals, and the like)” (264).

undeniable that the publishing industry both eases interaction between the author and the reader, and, at the same time, it requires the authors to be celebrity figures, who “appear” at book fairs, sign books, and give interviews or tweet about their work. As much as a writer, the author now appeals to the masses, as the “person” behind the book, and people crowd bookfairs to see and get an autograph of their favourite authors. The interviews they give are celebrated as glimpses into the workings of great minds. In addition to increasing publicity, author-interviews and public appearances may impact not only marketing, but also the general reception of a work and even its scholarly analysis. Bearing all these aspects in mind, this study incorporates *epitexts* such as author-interviews as a part of the assertion of “the return of the author[s],” who through commenting on their work, thus direct and manipulate the work’s possible readings both by the scholars and the general public. While Byatt and Gee often gave short interviews and delivered a few talks regarding their work, Lodge went even further, and wrote a book, *The Year of Henry James* (2006), where he documents the publication process of *Author, Author*, in a novelistic manner. These epitexts are both consulted as a source of information about the novels and also read as manifestations of performative authorship.

Finally, given the fact that the authors of these three novels are also renowned academics who teach and write about literature, this study also benefits from the critical work produced by the authors in question. The articles or books they have written offer valuable insight both to their own novels and the larger world of the novel as a genre, which these authors contribute to. In addition, since their critical works both inform their fictional works and at the same time function as a defence of their aesthetics, this study treats such texts, as manifestations of authorial authority.

### **1.3 The Novel after Postmodernism: Post-postmodernism and Reconstruction**

One of the major paradigms of the second half of the twentieth century, postmodernism, enjoyed its dominant position in cultural studies and humanities ever since its popularization around the 1960s. Characterized by its critique of grand narratives, postmodernism is generally understood as the critique of essentialist and totalitarian approaches, and it advocates openness, multiplicity, irony, playfulness

and intertextuality. Yet, recently, “an aesthetic sea change in literature, particularly in fiction” (McLaughlin 55) has implied that postmodernism’s rule might have ended. “What once seemed a new and exciting way of looking at problems has now been absorbed to a greater or lesser extent” (Green 24). Having grown weary of “postmodernism’s main tune” (Huber 3), ringing through terms such as “unmaking (antipoesis) as deconstruction, decentering, dissemination, disruption, displacement, difference, discontinuity, demystification, delegitimation, disappearance,” as Ihab Hassan draws attention to, a new generation of authors claim postmodernism perhaps thus “became as rife as rock songs” (“Beyond Postmodernism?” 128–9). Postmodernism’s passing away is now a salient phenomenon and in *Rethinking Postmodernism(s)* (2008) Katrin Amian extends her condolences in her obituary as follows:

Postmodernism, it seems, is history. Born as a short-hand for the new contemporary in the 1960s and 1970s, grown to maturity as a lively disputed critical concept in the 1980s, and mainstreamed to the popular appeal of Dummies’ guides and Pepsi cola ads in the 1990s, the term appears to have exhausted its potential as a means of describing and understanding the shifting alliances of literary and cultural production in the new millennium.  
(1)

The word about its death has been spread as many authors, whose works expressed postmodernist themes and issues, have addressed its passing in their “epilogues”. Postmodernism, as implied by Amian’s use of postmodernism(s) in her title, was characterized by plurality; therefore, there was no consensus regarding what exactly the postmodern was in the first place. In an interview with Plumley, John Barth mentions his experience of the postmodern and its passing as such: “I attended a seminar in Germany two summers ago on the end of postmodernism, new beginnings, just when I thought I was beginning to get the hang of what the term postmodernism means” (15). Quoting from Connor, Irmtraud Huber also draws attention to that slipperiness of “the postmodern” as a term and adds that it has turned into “a kind of data-cloud, a fog of discourse, that showed up on the radar even more conspicuously than what it was supposed to be about” (qtd. in Huber 2). Given this elusiveness, Huber inquires about the feasibility of declaring the end of postmodernism, by burying it in the past. Claiming that declaring the end of postmodernism cannot go beyond a rhetorical move, due to the reasons stated above,

she warns against oversimplification by doing so. Nonetheless, she herself acknowledges that in order to move forward, to analyse the period after the postmodern, one has to proceed with it, in spite of the possible risk of oversimplification of the precedent, the postmodern. Huber hopes that the risk might be overcome, as possibly what comes after postmodernism will be defined through its relation to its precursor, just like modernism continues to live in postmodernism. As postmodernism will continue to haunt the period after postmodernism, its legacy is bound to continue, in the way identified by Hassan in “Beyond Postmodernism,” as “a collective interpretation of an age” (Hassan 305). While there is a need to move beyond postmodernism, it should also be acknowledged that postmodernism’s impact on humanities cannot just be undone at a stroke, since “we now see the world through postmodern-tinted glasses” (*ibid*).

Linda Hutcheon, who is one of the first scholars to establish a theoretical basis for postmodernism, addressed the same issue and conceded postmodernism as obsolete in the second edition of *The Politics of Postmodernism* (2002). Hutcheon, like Huber, affirms the urgent necessity to explore what lies behind the postmodern:

Let’s just say it: it’s over. The postmodern moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and its ideological critique continue to live on – as do those of modernism – in our contemporary twenty-first-century world. [...] Historical categories like modernism and postmodernism are, after all, only heuristic labels that we create in our attempts to chart cultural changes and continuities. Post-postmodernism needs a new label of its own, and I conclude, therefore, with this challenge to readers to find it – and name it for the twenty-first century. (165-6)

The challenge was met by various critics who attempted to define this period in their individual ways. For example, Gilles Lipovetsky, who regarded cultural practices of our age as meaningless, proposed the term *hypermodern* to designate the millennium, which, in his view, is characterized by excess. His hypermodernism addressed the sense of real experienced after postmodernism. Robert Samuels’s *automodernism* draws attention to “technological automation and human autonomy” (Rudrum and Stavris 219) as increasingly characterizing features of the age. Alan Kirby coined *pseudomodernism* in 2006, which he defines as such: “[i]n place of the neurosis of modernism and the narcissism of postmodernism, pseudo-modernism takes the world away, by creating a new weightless nowhere of silent

autism”. In 2008, he developed pseudomodernism into *digimodernism*, which owes its emergence and “pre-eminence to the computerization of text, which yields a new form of textuality characterized in its purest instances by onwardness, haphazardness, evanescence, and anonymous, social and multiple-authorship” (1). Kirby’s discussion of the digimodern text mostly applies to digital text forms such as the hyperlinks, but the relations between computerization and textuality, to which he draws attention to, can also be applied to printed text forms. Besides, digimodernity plays a crucial role in the ways literary works are produced, circulated, received and responded to. Digitalization puts the previously unavailable tools of the digital world to the service of both readers and writers.

In their *Remodernist* manifesto Billy Childish and Charles Thomson discard postmodernism due to its “failures to answer or address any important issues of being a human being” (10). One of these failures they referred to was addressed by Enrique Dusele, who put forward *transmodernism* to encompass theories from third-world cultures, which were overlooked by mainstream theories from the West. Similarly, Nicholas Bourriaud’s *altermodernism* aims to achieve a globalized version through the synthesis of modernism and post-colonialism. Pointing to the fact that modernity did not take place at the same time around different parts of the world and, therefore, it cannot be regarded as a simultaneous process, they invite the audience to reconsider the hegemonic rule of modernism. According to Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, while Bourriaud’s theory has points of assent epistemologically, it fails to merge and connect the questions of epistemology with concerns of ontology (7); therefore, in response to it, in 2010, they formulated their own definition through identifying our age as the age of *metamodernism*. Vermeulen and van den Akker situate metamodernism “epistemologically with (post)modernism, ontologically between (post)modernism, and historically beyond (post)modernism” (2), and characterize it oscillating between the modern and the postmodern:

It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naiveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity. Indeed, by oscillating to and fro or back and forth, the metamodern negotiates between the modern and the postmodern. (5-6)

In his “Trailing Postmodernism: David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*, Zadie Smith’s *NW*, and the Metamodern” (2018), Nick Bentley constructs the image of “trailing” to delineate the period in the aftermath of postmodernism. The novels of the age both trail the postmodern like a detective, scrutinize and dissect it, and, at the same time, maintain their general scepticism. Based on a discussion of these two novels, Bentley maintains that in this respect, they gesture towards a post-postmodernism that acknowledges a relativistic conception of the world but maintains the value of the individual’s search for concrete meaning and loci for collective identities (724).

In their renowned work *Supplanting the Postmodern: An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21st Century* (2015), David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris bring together the key texts engaging with the passing of the postmodern moment. According to Rudrum and Stavris, these terms have four main resemblances. Firstly, they oppose the postmodern view of subjectivity as a myth. Secondly, most of these new positions underscore sincerity in opposition to postmodern irony and scepticism. Thirdly, some of them, especially digimodernism and automodernism, claim that the technological changes marked a significant departure from the postmodern. And, fourthly, these new positions loosely agree on globalism’s homogenizing impact on postmodernism’s emphasis of difference and diversity (23). While these terms have their individual differences, their confluence is their desire to “supplant” the postmodern.

Each of these labels is useful in their own ways; but, due to their insistence on certain aspects of a particular sense of modernism, they fall short of providing a comprehensive and holistic approach that the reconstructive fictions of our age have been foregrounding. Of all the approaches, metamodernism is the most widely known and embraced one. However, while agreeing with metamodernism’s main premises, this thesis will use post-postmodernism as an umbrella term that encompasses other standpoints since the “post-postmodern” designates the sense of beyond, both thematically and temporally, more clearly and strikingly through the prefix of -post, which also functions to signal postmodernism’s passing as both an ironic and also an ambivalent case. This is where Bentley’s “trailing” and the post-postmodern intersect. Rather than the “metamodern” as oscillating between the modern and the postmodern, if our age is understood as trailing the postmodern,

then the contemporary novelists and critics can be grasped “to be in a position of external temporality to the postmodern and able to place it in an identifiable past from which it might be narrativized, historicised, parodied or perhaps even looked back upon with a wistful nostalgia” (Bentley 724), as the three authors these study focuses on, A.S Byatt, David Lodge and Maggie Gee, do.

In an interview with Willam Plumley, John Barth relates how in the formula he developed for his undergraduate students he would explain that “Enlightenment plus industrialism generates Romanticism, and that Romanticism plus catastrophe or revolution generates modernism and that modernism plus the threat of apocalypse may generate postmodernism and what does postmodernism and its aftermath add up to?” (Plumley 15). The answer to the question Barth posed might lie in what Rudrum and Stavris’s have to say about the aftermath of postmodernism. In their view, if we are to name this period as post-postmodern, postmodernism and post add up to “nothing but confusion and conceptual muddle” (20). In the introduction to their anthology, they assert that they do not find “post-postmodernism” as a term useful in any way; indeed, they refer to it as “worse than useless” due to its “lack of specificity”. Furthermore, they also assert that “its meaning is even more vague and elusive than that of the postmodernism it purportedly supplants” (*ibid*). Reminding Kirby’s denomination of post-postmodern as “a vile term consecrated by Wikipedia, they also claim that the term *post-postmodernism* is unimaginative, and in a mocking tone, they ask what the next term would be to denote the end of post-postmodernism: “post-post-postmodernism?” (*ibid*).

In *Post-Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (2012) Jeffrey T. Nealon acknowledges the fact that “post-postmodernism” is an ugly term, but nevertheless, holds onto his conviction that it is still useful to inscribe post-postmodernism as “an intensification and mutation within postmodernism (which in its turn was of course a historical mutation and intensification of certain tendencies within modernism)” (ix). In addition to Nealon, Bran Nicol, who is the author of *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (2009), also indicated in his speech, “Towards a Post-Postmodern Hermeneutics, for the IDEA Conference in 2017 that postmodernism is being replaced by “post-postmodernism”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bran Nicol delivered his keynote address “Towards a Post-Postmodern Hermeneutics” on the

This study chooses to proceed with the post-postmodern exactly for the “conceptual muddle,” to which Rudrum and Stavris refer. The post-postmodern engagement with the aftermath of the postmodern is “supplanted,” to borrow their term through various approaches, each having its distinct features. The existence of indeterminacy and ambivalence regarding the adoption of these terms to conceptualize our age, validates the use of the post-postmodern, at least as an umbrella term that accommodates a wide range of multiple approaches. Just like its point of departure, post-postmodernism, too, is an elusive term. It simultaneously addresses continuation and rupture. Josh Toth reminds that divergence from the postmodern echoes the postmodern break away from modernism; and “each epistemic break is always, or *only*, a reconfiguration because its formation is necessarily contingent upon the fact that something (a specter) always and necessarily passes on” (5). As will be seen in the following chapters of this study, there are many aspects of the novels that could be read as postmodernist and/or post-postmodernist because, in spite of its passing, postmodernism passes on as a specter as Toth indicated. Therefore, this move should be interpreted in the manner adopted by Irmtraud Huber, who remarks that there is a “new generation of writers sets out to do something different, [yet] the move is not so much *against* postmodernism but *through* and *beyond* it” (46; emphasis in the original). Hence, for the new generation of writers, for example, for David Foster Wallace’s generation, which foregrounds sincerity, being a part of post-postmodernism connotes “never quite being sure whether you are one, whether you have really managed to escape narcissism, solipsism, irony and insincerity” (Kelly “New Sincerity” 145).

In spite of those hesitations, Huber reminds, it cannot be taken for granted that there is a new group of writers, who do not have personal memories of the 1960s, but lived through intensification of the postmodern society. These authors have been exposed to intensive training in literary theory, and now they are trying to discover new ways of expression beyond the postmodern and the instability it cherishes (Huber 215). In the works written in the aftermath of postmodernism, it is

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occasion of IDEA 2017, an annual conference on English Literature. The 2017 conference was held in Çankaya University, Ankara, Turkey. In that speech Nicol also mentioned that he was working on a manuscript on the post-postmodern; but it has not been published yet.

possible to observe that the above-mentioned authors reconfigure postmodernist tenets “in spite of” the despair and sloth they might have caused. While in postmodernism deconstruction of language, master narratives and fragmentation were causes to celebrate, the new generation of writers approach them “as pervasive and deleterious elements of an increasingly fractious and isolating society” (McLaughlin “Exhaustion” 213). Aiming to challenge and change this, reconstructive fiction searches for ways of bonding, connection and understanding. As Josh Toth delineates, reconstructive works might be discerned by a certain “insistence on the possibility of what they paradoxically continue to expose as impossible: meaning, truth, mimesis, telos, communal understanding, and communication” (103).

In their manifesto for reconstruction, Benton et al. voice their motives for pursuing reconstructive aesthetics in their works. In the extract quoted below, a kindred reconstructive spirit running through the novels of Byatt, Lodge and Gee might be recognized:

I write to be human. Learning from Lacan and Derrida, I know that words are never perfect, but all the same there is a kernel of usefulness that enables me to connect with someone else. Whether or not I am doomed through the secular sin of a break with the origin, there persists the desire for community, which enlists perceived similarities for the negotiation of difference – a return to unity. (qtd. in Huber 49)

Having lived through the age of deconstruction, these authors acknowledge *différance*, slipperiness, yet still strive to return to unity, to connect and communicate, to be human, again, just like the authors (both fictional and real authors), in *Possession*, *Author, Author* and *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*, do. As Huber concludes in these new ways of expression, the emphasis is not on deconstruction or irrepresentability: “If postmodernism has replaced the modern antitheses of ‘either/or’ with the ambiguous and endlessly deferred ‘both/and,’ the reconstructive analogue can be found in a pragmatic attitude of ‘in spite of’” (223).

#### **1.4 Reconstructing the Author-Subject: Author Fiction**

The death of the author occurred in the aftermath of the death of the man and the God; therefore, it is no surprise that the return of the author coincides with the

rediscovery of the subject. The “continued proliferation of the producing and the consuming of auto/biography” (Saunders 286) proves that there was an apparent voracity for the consuming of lives as indicated by the interest in the upsurge in the sales of life writing and its related genres since 1960s (Hoffman 18). A renewed interest in “lives” was resurfacing in “bio-fictions,” a kind of “literature that names its protagonist after an actual biographical figure” (Lackey “Locating” 3).

Vanessa Guignery sees the biographical novel as the genre where ontological boundaries between fact and fiction, authenticity and invention, have tended to fade away (162). In relation to the recent trends in biofictional novels, Michael Lackey and Todd Avery also argue that biofictions “combine fact and fiction in order to create a literary symbol out of historical figure, a symbol that could expose and critique the culture” (“Virginia Woolf and Biofiction” 8). This criticism is usually carried out by having double plots, where the narrative shifts between the past and the present, with representative characters juxtaposed against one another. In most examples of this genre, the historical characters represent a more naive, pre-theoretical way of being, which is unattainable for the characters stuck in the “barren” contemporaneity. Through this “uncanny power,” Lackey argues, biofiction “tells us as much about someone from the past as it does about who we are and how we came to be in the present” (“Uncanny”).

In biofictions, the creative writer’s vision is the determining factor rather than the reality of the historical author’s history and biography (“Virginia Woolf and Biofiction” 9). In each rewriting, this metaphor is shaped by the motives and aspirations of the author who rewrites the precursor, the historical author. It is possible to encounter various, sometimes contrasting, portrayals of the same historical characters by different authors. David Lodge, who authored two biographical novels, *Author, Author* and *A Man of Parts*, as a novelist-critic, tells the story of how until the 2000s he did not consider writing about a historical author, even though he has dedicated his career to the study of such authors. He wrote one only when something in the atmosphere, as he suggests, made the writing of such novels an inspiring possibility. Only then, this famous author of campus novels, could start writing a biographical novel, featuring a historical author. In his *The Year*

of *Henry James*, he refers to the boom<sup>6</sup> in the Henry James novels as a zeitgeist of the time, which made the writing of biographical novels possible for him (*TYHJ* 8). Lodge sees this change of scene both as “a sign of decadence and exhaustion in contemporary writing, or as a positive and ingenious way of coping with the ‘anxiety of influence’” (*TYHJ* 10).

Novelists have long been engaging with various forms of biofiction, yet the critical discourse on it remained relatively scanty. Michael Lackey, who popularized biofiction studies within the academia, estimated that while more and more novelists engaged with biofiction, it would take some time before critics evaluate its real value. One of the reasons for the apparent lack of academic interest in biofiction is related to the point addressed by Lodge. Considered to be born out of the decadence and exhaustion of postmodernism and theory, biofictional novels are sometimes looked down on, as works where old material is recycled by the authors who do not have anything new to say. William Skidelsky in his article titled “It’s time to stop this obsession with works of art based on real events” criticizes the genre for what he perceives as lack of imagination, as a result of the novelist’s intense concentration on reality of the biographical data. Skidelsky relates this ever-increasing interest in biofiction to changing ideas about privacy and truth, and argues that now privacy is usually victimized to popularity.

In “‘Serv[ing] under two masters’: Virginia Woolf’s Afterlives in Contemporary Biofictions,” (2012) Monica Latham addresses some of these possible critiques directed at the biofiction genre. She notes that the opponents of biofictions claim that these novels may reinforce stereotypes about a famous author of the past and therefore, end up as simplified rewritings of the precursor’s work (369). Latham also states that some critics denounce the genre for the lack of creativity and originality, while on the other hand, there are many authors who feel stimulated by the many exciting possibilities, such as revisitation of the historical figures, the genre entails. In spite of the above-mentioned limitations, biofiction’s popularity is now acknowledged within the academia and its use and abuse is being

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<sup>6</sup> When Lodge published *Author, Author* in 2004, there were already several other novels about Henry James, and at least three of them were published in the same year. This topic is discussed in a detailed way in Chapter 4.

analysed by an ever-growing number of researchers. One such work, showing similarities with my study is Bethany Layne's dissertation "(Post)Modernist Biofictions: The Literary Afterlives of Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and Sylvia Plath" (University of Leeds, 2013)<sup>7</sup>. Layne's study has some parallelisms with mine in terms of the research questions and how authors are recovered through biofictions, but while she sees developments such as Neo-Victorianism as a part of the (post)modernist<sup>8</sup> quest, in this study, these developments are read as harbingers of the dissolution of the postmodern. In other words, I read the novels in question as examples of reconstructive fiction that explores "our possibilities for being human" (McLaughlin 67) through the story of the author.

As Nigel Hamilton recounts in *Biography: A Brief History*, "deconstructed and ridiculed as a mythical fabrication of 'discourse,' human identity, encompassed in an individual author's name, was thus trashed, and with it [...] biography and autobiography as anything more than incantations by imposters" (209). Hamilton goes on to suggest that while postmodernism enjoyed dethroning the author, it could not offer any "credible alternative to the *grand récit* of life chronicling" (211). In other words, postmodernists may be good deconstructors, but they fail as constructors (C. Butler 116). As Fokkema's labelling the author as postmodernism's stock character suggests (49), postmodernist construction is limited in terms of creativity, and reaching beyond the postmodern in reconstructive fictions might facilitate bridging the rupture between the author and the biography.

In *Postmortem Postmodernists: The Afterlife of the Author in Recent Narrative* (2009), Laura E. Savu argues that late twentieth-century fiction "postmodernizes" canonical authors in order "to understand them better but also to understand itself in relation to a past (literary tradition, aesthetic paradigms, cultural formations) that has not really passed" (10). This new interest in writing as a field, which makes the reader look for the author behind the words, has been addressed by other critics, too. Aleid Fokkema refers to this genre as "author fiction," while Franssen and Hoensalaars prefer "the genre of the author as character," to refer to

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<sup>7</sup> Layne is also the author of *Henry James in Contemporary Fiction: The Real Thing*, Palgrave Macmillan: 2020, and she has published various articles on biofiction.

<sup>8</sup> Layne uses the parentheses.

those works resting on the “crossroads between the historical novel, biography and the *Künstlerroman*” (18). This study incorporates the term “author fiction,” to refer to those works which feature historical and/or purely fictitious author characters. Author fictions can be closely affiliated with *Künstlerroman*, but the discerning feature in author fictions analysed in this study, is the critical self-reflexivity exhibited in the novels, as a result of the academic backgrounds of the writers, Byatt, Lodge and Gee. In the hands of these novelist-critics, author fictions surpass their potential as stories of authorship; they are moulded into arenas where the critic and the author engage in a sophisticated debate. Analysing *Possession, Author, Author* and *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* as examples of this genre, this study portrays how in their author fictions, Byatt, Lodge and Gee convey a reconstructive vision. By resurrecting the author, they defy the idea of “the death of the author,” and hence, aim to restore the authority of the author as both a creative genius and a public intellectual.

Author fiction is not a completely new genre; in fact, it is as old as the first author. Historically, it is generally agreed to be dating back to “the blind bard of Phaeacians, Demodocus, in the eight book of *Odyssey*” (Franssen and Hoenselaars 12). Homer often comes back in narratives, Virgil appears in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, and especially in the eighteenth century, the form called “the dialogue of the dead” became popular as writers resurrected authors such as Thomas More, in conversational narratives (*ibid* 13). In the nineteenth century, fictional biographies flourished and along with the rise of the Victorian novel, particularly biographical fiction and the *bildungsroman*, the novel, hence, developed in close relation to the biography. With the “impersonal” art of modernist and postmodernist periods, the interest in the biographical fiction did not disappear completely, but it certainly shifted shape, in accordance with the modernist view of subjectivity as fragmented and, therefore, unrepresentable through the tools of Victorian realism (Franssen and Hoenselaars 30).

Andrew Bennett claims that “postmodernism with its alleged intolerance for the sentimental humanism, the comforting essentialism, of authorship, is nevertheless -or perhaps therefore- fascinated by, fixated on, author-effects and author-figures” (109). Similarly, as in the novels such as Peter Ackroyd’s *The Last*

*Testament of Oscar Wilde* and *Chatterton*, Penelope Fitzgerald's *The Blue Flower*, Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*, which Savu defines as "postmodern author fictions" (12), it is possible to relate the renewed interest in the author to the re-evaluation of three categories: the subject, the author, and representation (13). In their re-evaluation of the past while reflecting on the present, postmodernist author fictions display the double consciousness of the postmodern subject. In post-postmodernist author fictions, this double consciousness is used for reconstructive purposes, as opposed to deconstructive examples of the genre. There are various possible forms of author fiction. In some novels, famous authors such as Virginia Woolf and Henry James are fictionalized whereas in others completely fictional author characters are featured. Franssen and Hoenselaars have a list of criteria for categorizing various appearances of the author as a character in novels. The first one is how far, or, to what extent, the author-character is relevant to the whole of the novel, and the second one is the ontological status of this author-character. Thirdly, they ask whether or not the author-character's life is narrated in a documentary fashion, and, fourthly, they question the extent to which the author character's works are used as biographical data to reconstruct his/her life in narrative, and, finally, they put emphasis on the attitude the writer of the fictionalized biography has towards the subject author whom she/he employs as a character (21).

Laura Savu argues that "author fictions extend the possibilities of straight biography, enriching it with strategies (perspective, voice, figurative language, episodic structure, character description and psychological development) that are intrinsic to the novel-making process" (44). Historically, while earlier biographical fictions, as Franssen and Hoenselaars underline, were almost "hagiographies"<sup>9</sup>, where the appropriated author is presented as an idealized model (25), in modernist and postmodernist fictions, author fictions emerged as more multi-layered spaces in which debates about politics, gender, ontology can be exercised, through a confrontation with earlier authors, which also entails "anxiety of influence". Later forms of biographical novels, however, differ from traditional biographies with their

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<sup>9</sup> Traditionally meaning the writing of the lives of saints, hagiography is also used in the sense of "a biography that treats its subject with undue reverence" (Lexico.com).

focus on “biographeme” to borrow Roland Barthes’s term, rather than a “full,” “complete” biography. Focusing on bits and pieces, author fictions, in Javier Marias’s view, are driven by the desire “to treat these well-known figures as if they were fictional characters, which may well be how all writers, whether famous or obscure, would secretly like to be treated” (qtd. in Savu 42). Savu, by referring to Barthes, finally concludes that in author fictions, “the identity of the body writing,” which Barthes dispelled, is brought back to the text (41). Reconstructive author fictions broaden this aspect by foregrounding the author, author’s identity as well as his/her function and authority.

Greaney cautions against the zealous embracement of the author’s presence in the text, seeing it as an anti-theoretical gesture. He argues that resurrecting the author as a character, albeit a stock one, may not be the most convenient way to validate author’s resurrection since it risks a suggestion “writers have always been simply figments of the literary imagination, that the author has always been nothing more than a plausible frontman for the quite impersonal operations of textuality” (59). That is why, as Fokkema, too, points out, the discussion should be directed not on the “death” of the author, but how the discursive author, the scriptor, can be reconciled with a real author in clear terms (40). Author fictions, particularly the ones that revisit historical authors as Byatt, Lodge and Gee do, seek answers to this question.

Byatt’s *Possession*, which was published in 1990, has generally been accepted as an exemplary postmodernist text in terms of its critical reception and has been canonized as such.<sup>10</sup> Quite often, works by authors, who self-identify as opponents of postmodernism, are read as examples of postmodernism;<sup>11</sup> and Byatt’s work and criticism around her work are impacted by the same attitude. Even though Byatt uses tools associated with postmodernism, such as intertextuality, historiographic metafiction and playfulness usually, she also parodies the lack of sincerity caused by continuous deferral of meaning in her fictional work. Her novel

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<sup>10</sup> Some examples include: Gutleben (2001), Limond (2017), Işık (2018), Madran (2016). This issue will be addressed in a detailed way in Chapter 3.

<sup>11</sup> Zadie Smith’s works might be a good example. She often rejected the postmodern label in spite of the frequent association of her work with it.

satirizes its poststructuralist critics, Roland Mitchell and Maud Bailey, as well as the feminist critic, Leonora Stern, who, through the course of the narrative, abandon their poststructuralist outlook and eventually accept that the author is not dead, by embracing the creative agency and the authority of the author.

Published fourteen years after *Possession*, David Lodge's *Author, Author*, too, expresses the same concerns, through the rewriting of Henry James's middle years. Lodge himself is one of the most ardent critics of postmodernism, and he regards literary theory after Bakhtin as lacking foundations, as, in his view, it only produces metalanguages, which do not contribute to "real" problems people encounter (*After Bakhtin* 90). In his novel, he depicts his protagonist, Henry James, as an author, who is, first of all, a human being with his fears, worries and failures. As the mirroring of "author" in the title *Author, Author* implies, James functions as a mirror through which Lodge's own anxieties are reflected. James's disappointments, sufferings and anxieties overlap with Lodge's own, as an aging author. Lodge presents us a picture of the artist, alienated due to the pressures of the market, but who, in spite of all the pressure he feels, still holds on to the higher purpose of art.

Maggie Gee's *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*, published in 2014, conjures the contemporary author's position inside and outside the text. By bringing Virginia Woolf back to life, not in her historical reality, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Gee challenges the traditional conventions of the biographical novel. Setting the novel at the intersections of academia and the publishing world, Gee avowedly asserts the supremacy of the creative author over the critic; and, reinstates the author both as a genius and a social intellectual. In addition, due to the spatiotemporal background it emerges from and using the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the setting as opposed to the Victorian and 20<sup>th</sup> century settings in Byatt and Lodge, Gee's novel is naturally more attentive to the digitalization of authorship. Gee's fictional Virginia is born into a century where everything, people, ways of being, art forms, etc., is new for her. Yet, the urge to write, as the novel portrays, conquers all, regardless of time and space.

In order to establish the theoretical basis on which the reconstruction of the author in these novels will be built, this study proceeds with the trajectory of authorship, which is presented in Chapter 2. By contextualizing and historicizing the A/author from the birth to the death and the return, this chapter reviews and

addresses the literature on the life of the author both as a person and as a narrative agent.

In Chapter 3, “A.S. Byatt’s Construction of Authorial Identity in *Possession: A Romance*,” *Possession* is analysed as a harbinger of the reconstructive turn in literature, through which, Byatt anticipates post-postmodernism. In her Neo-Victorian novel, Byatt has a dual plot that shifts between the Victorian world of two poets Christabel LaMotte and Randolph Henry Ash, and the twentieth-century world of two literary scholars, Roland Mitchell, who defines himself as an old-fashioned textual scholar, and Maud Bailey, a feminist scholar specializing in the work of LaMotte. Through Roland’s academic journey, Byatt first presents a trajectory of the changes of attitude towards the author within the academia. Then, by presenting Roland embracing his own creative impulses, Byatt recentralizes the author figure both in narratological and thematic terms, while ridiculing the critic.

Compared to *Author, Author* and *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*, Byatt’s novel, *Possession* (1990) has been studied more extensively, from a variety of perspectives. As indicated earlier, there is a general tendency to classify this novel as postmodernist, but this seems to have changed with the emergence of Neo-Victorianism as a critical discourse. One particularly relevant study is Kate Elizabeth Limond’s unpublished dissertation titled “Authorship and Strategies of Representation in the Fiction of A.S. Byatt” (University of Exeter, 2017). It focuses on Byatt’s use of author characters to convey her themes. Limond also underlines Byatt’s ambivalence towards postmodernism and acknowledges her position as a liberal-humanist author, citing from the sources that point to Byatt’s critique of postmodernism. Yet, she proceeds with the analysis of Byatt’s fiction in relation to postmodernist aspects. Furthermore, she studies *Possession* in terms of the construction of femininity and female reading and writing. In my analysis, I also comment on Byatt’s portrayal of a female author as opposed to male authors such as Roland and Ash in the novel. I acknowledge the caveats as well as possible shortcomings in Byatt’s treatment of her female characters, but, overall, I assert that Byatt, like Gee, offers a holistic view of the author-subject rather than specifically gendering it. Moreover, this hermaphrodite author, as presented in Byatt, and the androgynous author in Gee’s novel, do not hinder attentiveness to the thorny path

the woman author has had to tread throughout history, as suggested in some of the postmodernists and feminist readings of these authors. It offers a more holistic view of the author, as a person, who can connect woman and man in his/her persona and writing.

Chapter 4, “*Author, Author*: David Lodge’s Construction of Authorial Identity,” focuses on David Lodge’s construction of authorial identity through his author fiction on Henry James. Among all the three authors, Lodge is the one who perceives the biographical novel as a homage to the historical persona and keeps loyal to the biographical pact, established between the author and the reader<sup>12</sup>. Throughout his career, Lodge has been interested in various forms of life writing. In this chapter, Lodge’s interest in biographical author fictions is analysed as an expression of his desire to lay claim to authorial power through defying “the death of the author,” and asserting the author as a “living” presence in and out of the text. In *Author, Author* Lodge reconfigures authorial power through juxtaposing Henry James’s public and private lives in his representation of James as struggling to establish a secure place within the literary world. It will be argued that through rewriting Henry James’s life, Lodge writes his own story of authorship, and presents authorship not only as limited to the text, but also as being formed and defined within its material conditions that surround the production and circulation of literary texts.

The work of David Lodge, whose name is often associated with campus novels, have been studied extensively, too. However, *Author, Author* (2004) departs from Lodge’s former work. This novel also has a peculiar status, as being one of the many Henry James novels published in 2004, “The Year of Henry James”. This distinct case was addressed in various studies commenting on its peculiarity. In those works, *Author, Author* has been usually read in juxtaposition with Colm Toibin’s *The Master*.

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<sup>12</sup> Life-writing presupposes the existence of certain “pacts” between the authors and readers. Philippe Lejeune coined “autobiographical pact” to refer to unity between the subject of autobiography, narrator and author. The unity is regarded as an assurance of truth. Similarly, the biographical pact assumes the biographer presents a truthful and verifiable account of the subject. Lodge’s adding a detailed appendix about his sources strongly suggests his compliance with the biographical pact, even if he had the novelist’s licence to break it.

Maggie Gee, on the other hand, works from a view which sharply contrasts with Lodge's loyalty to the truth of the historical persona, as will be seen in Chapter 5, "Maggie Gee's Construction of Authorial Identity in *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*". Gee believes that biographical novels should be separated from the historical novel; therefore, she constructs a mostly fictitious account of the modernist author, Virginia Woolf. Gee's offbeat attitude towards the biographical subject is an example of various directions biofictional novels may move towards, in the hands of the novelists, writing *beyond* postmodernism. By rewriting an epochal figure such as Virginia Woolf, Gee aims to present authorship in a holistic vision, where authors from past (Virginia Woolf), present (Angela Lamb) and future (Gerda) are all connected and united in their common cause to write one's way out of the chaotic reality and guide the reader through fostering and strengthening the belief in the power of storytelling.

Gee's novel, *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* (2014), did not receive the positive reviews Gee might have been hoping for. As even a quick Google search reveals, the novel was not received very eagerly and the criticism around it seems to consist mainly of book reviews. The novel is explored in detail in an unpublished dissertation by Elisabetta Varalda (2019, Sapienza University of Rome). As indicated by her title, "Postmodernist Rereadings of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*," she views Gee's novel as a postmodernist rewriting. Besides, since her focus is on Gee's novel particularly as a rewriting of *To the Lighthouse*, her discussion naturally leaves out some other aspects of Gee's novel. In this study, I analyse this novel in the broader context of authorship, which is an ongoing concern in Gee's *oeuvre*, right from the start. She has explored authorship as early as her debut novel, *Dying in Other Words* (1981).

Finally, in Chapter 6, "Conclusion," a critical assessment of the current issues in writing and publishing is provided to wrap up the ongoing discussion of authorship conducted in this study. With digimodernism's altering the production and consumption of the book and the text, this last section also invites us to consider how recent technologies both aid and threaten the author and his/her authority.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONTEXTUALIZING AND HISTORICIZING AUTHORIAL POSITIONS WITH REGARD TO THE DEATH AND THE RETURN OF THE AUTHOR

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

T.S. Eliot- "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

Deemed to be the suicide note of the author, Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author," Hix maintains, is "an enigmatic one" given the fact that "this enemy of authors is himself preeminently an author, a writer whose varied products reveal a personal style and vision" (Hix 131). Pursuing this "enigmatic" case, where a highly established author perseveringly argues for the death of the Author once and for all, this section opens with questions about whether the Author is still dead or has he "returned" to the textual world, with the aim of establishing a theoretical background against which the construction of authorial positions might be discussed in the selected novels by Byatt, Lodge and Gee in the following chapters.

The author's "return" or "resurrection" has been discussed extensively in works such as *The Death and Resurrection of the Author?* (2002) by William Irwin, *The Empty Cage: Inquiry into the Mysterious Disappearance of the Author* by Carla Benedetti (trans. 2005); *The Death and Return of the Author* (2008) by Sean Burke and *The Deaths of the Author: Reading and Writing in Time* (2011) by Jane Gallop. Over the years, the importance attached to Barthes's essay has revealed that there is almost no literary theory that does not position itself in accordance with its view of the author. Especially, with the recent scholarly interest in not only the textual, but also material production of a literary text as a process involving numerous

stakeholders, including the literary agent, publisher and the author (Hadjiaxefendi and Mackay 2), the question of who writes the text has been re-evaluated and accordingly the author's position and his/her authority over the text has been redefined in new terms. For example, with digital technologies, the way we think about authorship has certainly been transformed tremendously. Digital age brought new text forms such as the hyperlink, and hence, it, at the same time created new spaces in which new forms of interaction between authors and readers could be carried out. Digital authorship also greatly affected the way authors are received by the public, in that sense. The contemporary author finds himself/herself a participant in the discussions of his/her work in online platforms, may use social media to join the readers and thus she/he may become a more active agent in "the afterlife" of the work; sometimes even guiding and directing the course of the critical study around his/her literary production. In relation to formation of such new text forms and new ontologies of authorship, in his article "The Rebirth of the Author" (2005), Nicholas Rombes proposes that Barthes's arguments against the author have lost strength, "not because the author is nowhere, but rather because she is everywhere" (Rombes). In his view, it could well be claimed that the plunging of the Author by Barthes into darkness resulted just in the reverse; as evidenced by the mushrooming of personal websites, forums, discussion spots, where we can all be "authors" (Rombes).

In his *Authorship from Plato to the Postmodern* (1995), Burke advocates the return of the author by drawing attention to the untenability of his death in the first place. He argues that even Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author," the most powerful attack on the author, could not totally annihilate the author's authority. According to Burke, while the death of the author was celebrated as the text's gaining freedom from the authority of the author, soon it was revealed, how the death of the author, would only serve "to remind us of the extent to which the history of our thought is bound up with conceptions of what it means to author a text" (*Authorship* xvi). With each remembrance, it is discovered, Burke claims, the author has never been dead. In Burke's view:

With unavoidable irony, the theory of authorial absence no more signalled a disengagement with issues of authorship than iconoclasm attests to the dwindling of the icons, or negative theology reflects an indifference to

Divinity. The ancient chimeras of origin and authorship reassert themselves in the very gestures that seek to have done with origin and authorship. (*Authorship* xvi)

“The ancient chimeras” as Burke calls them, surface in the novels that play around with the idea of the death of the author. Written from a position that is both haunted by the postmodern, but also includes a comprehensive critique of postmodernism by going *beyond* its main tenets, the novels by writers such as Byatt, Lodge and Gee speak directly to this paradox of authority. In their novels, through depicting how the author reasserts himself/herself in the exact moments, events when he/she is thought to be dead, these writers challenge “the death of the author”. Using the resources of author fiction, explored in the previous section, such novels playfully rewrite Barthes’s idea of the death of the author, and in its place, they offer a reconstructive version of authorship, which acknowledges the impact of postmodernism and poststructuralism, but shifts the paradigm from deconstruction to reconstruction. This form of authorship is based not only on the poststructuralist deconstruction of the writing subject, but, it at same time proceeds through a dialogue with the tradition of the English novel, speaking directly to tensions such as F.R Leavis’s moralist view of the author and Harold Bloom’s “anxiety of influence”. Overall, these novels show how the author continues to exert a central position, in numerous ways, ranging from his/her presence as the creative force behind the text to his/her absence-presence. The “returned” or post-postmodern author, is everywhere *in* and *out* of the text. In view of this, with the aim of presenting a trajectory of where the author gets this unprecedented authority from, this chapter opens with the history of the concept of the author, and then continues with the debate between the author and the critic, and finally concludes with the implications of these debates for Byatt, Lodge and Gee as presented in their novels.

## **2.1 Historical Overview**

### **2.1.1 The Birth of the Author**

Barthes defines the Author as “a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of

the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the ‘human person’” (*Image, Music, Text* 142-3)<sup>13</sup>, and with this definition he lays out the path to be followed while tracing the development of the concept of the author from the Roman ages to the present.

The etymological source for the word author is located in the Roman word “auctor,” which meant the bearer of certain rights. In his *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern*, Seán Burke further investigates the origins of the term and lists three possible words, “agere” (to perform), “augere”, (to grow), “auieo” (to tie) as possible sources for the word “auctor”. While Donald Pease also lists the same words in his entry “Author” for the *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, he does not fully engage with them. Burke, on the other hand, retraces the origins of these words and argues that they do not carry a sense of mastery over the text that is associated with “auctor” (xviii). While “augere,” implies that the text emerges simultaneously with its author, “auieo,” Burke contends, “referred to the connective tissue in which regard it is more prefigurative of the structuralist notions of bricolage and authors as assemblers of codes than the concept of the author as a creative potency” (*ibid*). He also mentions a Greek noun, “authentim,” authority, as the fourth possible root for the “auctor,” from which author might have been derived. Burke claims that among all four possibilities, only “authentim” might be considered as indicative of “authorship as hegemonic” (*ibid*). Even then, Burke further asserts, in the original word, authority is separate from autonomy, “since the ancient authors received their authority (*auctoritas*) in the first instance from their relation to tradition, and ultimately from the auctoritas of God as manifested inspirationally and in the Scriptural canon” (*ibid*). Thus, in the “auctor,” the source of authority is located in God, not in the individual as an autonomous subject, and the association of authorship with autonomy was yet to take place.

In *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (1984), Alastair Minnis also underlines that the “auctor” was often conceptualized as a figure of authority who takes this authority from God. As someone who evoked respect and belief, “the *auctor*<sup>14</sup> was

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<sup>13</sup> Subsequent references to this work are abbreviated as *IMT*.

<sup>14</sup> In *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*, the fictional Virginia questions Angela’s authority as an author, by alluding to this concept. She criticizes Angela’s claims to authority since in her view, Angela does

seen as producing or possessing “*auctoritas*,” authority, and as making authoritative statements” (Bennett 39). With these authoritative statements, medieval auctors also functioned as “founders of disciplines” (Pease 106), and, consequently, Donald Pease comments, such *auctores* were understood to have “established the founding rules and principles” for the various disciplines, and “sanctioned” the authority in terms of morality and politics. The author’s authority, with this sense of initiator or founder, is thus associated with “the inventor or founder of all of nature, with God” (Bennett 7), and the auctor, with his position as the inventor, now gains the title of “the genius”.

According to Pease, the semantic extension in the word “auctor” from founders of disciplines to writers of fictional texts might have happened in the Middle Ages again, but as the production of literary texts was mainly run by the monasteries, or in most cases, was either anonymous and/or collaborative, an individualized sense of authorship in its modern sense is not encountered in the figure of the Medieval auctor. Rather, the Medieval auctor drew his authority not from his “verbal inventiveness,” a trait associated with the literary author (Pease 105), but from his ability as a scriptor to “interpret, explain, and in most cases resolve” the problems by rewriting the *auctor*’s ideas (Pease 106). Overall, the perception of the Medieval auctor as deriving his authority from God, is the reason behind the “theologically coloured perspective” of the Book, as Burke terms it (*Authorship* xviii). This view, might have slightly changed with the Renaissance when according to Pease, the authority of the auctor as the sole originator began to wane (107). Pease claims that while the Medieval auctor relied on divine revelation for his claim to authority, with Renaissance individualism, authors claimed authority based on the “individuality” of their stories (107). In addition, the Renaissance was also the age when the material conditions of literary production were being tremendously transformed with the advent of the printing press, as a result of which, “a public sphere based on written language was established” (Schönert).

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not have the cultural background to lay claims to this authority: “Then I don’t understand why you don’t know Latin. And you write books- you’re an author- *Auctor auctoris*. You must know *some* Latin” (Gee 159; emphasis in the original).

The 18<sup>th</sup> century not only witnessed the rise of the novel, but also the rise of the author along with the novel. With a “new” and “original” story to tell, and with his name printed on it, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the author was transformed into a legal entity. He could now claim copyrights and also be held responsible for what he had written. In addition to novels, the satirical tradition in general and periodicals had a special place in the construction of the literary “voice”. As Manushag N. Powell maintains in *Performing Authorship in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals* (2012), periodicals also created a space for authors to express opinions about being a professional writer (3), as well as playing a role in allowing authors to write in different “voices” (8) as one would remember from Addison and Steele’s “The Spectator’s Club,” where a wide range of voices meet. The aim of discovering the “human person” behind the “voice” or the literary text, which was a heritage of Renaissance individualism, was thus further strengthened in the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as a valid reading strategy. Furthermore, in the Romantic period, the perception of the author as a “man,” in turn paved the way for the perception of the author as a “genius”.

The unprecedented celebration of the poet as the possessor of a unique power of imagination had important effects on how representation was conceptualized. Imagination was the new-God of the Romantics as understood from Shelley’s description of it. Imagination, Shelley states, “creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by repetition” (533). Burke questions the relation between this new emphasis on imagination and mimesis and concludes that while certainly mimetic representation does not completely disappear with Romantic poets, the function of imagination becomes more and more accentuated, over the Nature represented (xix). In other words, while poets before the Romantics portrayed Nature as a creation of God, and their main aim was imitation, in Romantic poetry, Nature appears as a resource that triggers the poetic creativity in man. Nature in Romantic poetics, as Burke further discloses: “is dependent upon the epiphanic power of the creative imagination for its poetic reproduction” (xxi). Thus, Burke maintains, in Romantics, “The author is no longer a privileged reader of the Divine script in nature, nor an elect who inspirationally mimes the Divine discourse, but is now seen as imitating the act of

creation itself" (*Authorship* xxi- xxii). With Romanticism, the authority that belonged to the God earlier, is transferred to the man, who, thanks to his creative faculty can claim the authority of the "creator".

The question of "What is a Poet?" was indispensable to Romanticism, as explored in works such as *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* and *Biographia Literaria*. As Bennett rightly argues, the difficulty Wordsworth and Coleridge have with answering this question testifies to the crisis prompted by the difficulty of defining an authorial position for themselves (Bennett 3). Bennett also reminds that the authorial crisis in Romanticism is significantly different in nature from that of earlier poets, in terms of the existential inquires it focuses on. For instance, while Sir Philip Sidney, Bennett claims, was interested in "what a poet does," Wordsworth asked questions regarding "who he or she is" (*ibid*). The poet, Wordsworth had announced, "is a man," but he is a man, "who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind" (*Preface*, para. 15), and it is exactly this "prophetic dimension [...] embedded in cultural representations of the poet" (Bennett 36), which Barthes is critical of. Hence, as Bennett concludes, "Romantic poetics mark a turn in poetics and literary theory away from a focus on the literary work towards the subject who makes or creates the work, towards the poet or author as a site of analysis and exploration" (3). Drawing attention to this point, Donovan claims that it is therefore crucial to understand that the attack against the author both in Barthes and other writers such as Foucault should be understood as directed against "the Romantic notion of the author as sole source of original meaning" (9).

The perception of the author as creative genius continued to exert its influence well into the Modernist Period. Burke sees the Romantic ideal of transcendence, as the source for the impersonal poet of the Modernist movement in literature, with the example of a parallel between T.S Eliot's "impersonal" poet and Keats's "negative capability" as two similar mechanisms of the poet's separating the man who writes from the one who experiences (*Authorship* xxiii). As quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, in T.S Eliot's view, the true poet knows how to distinguish between his own feelings and those he presents in his writing. Keats had explored a similar idea through claiming that a poet does not need to draw the material for his

poetry from his own life, he can experience and write about the feelings that are foreign to his own self. Accordingly, Keats asserts, the poet “has no self—it is everything and nothing—it has no character and enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—it has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen” (Keats Letter 76).

The God-like authorial power, which Barthes is critical of, paradoxically paves its way through modernist literature, as well. In relation to modernist authors, Brian McHale remarks that “the more they sought to efface themselves, the more they made their presence conspicuous. Strategies of self-effacement, while ostensibly obliterating surface traces of the author, in fact call attention to the author as *strategist*” (McHale 199). For many of the modernist authors, Flaubert’s description of the artist as someone who, “must be like God in his creation,” hence, “must be everywhere felt, but never seen” (qtd. in Bennet 67), was an unquestionable rule.

Barthes cherishes impersonal art, as his praising of modernist figures such as Proust, Mallarmé and Valéry as writers who could distinguish between the person who lives and the poet who writes, implies. Those writers can kill the Author, but whether they can kill the Author-God, who stands behind the text as the “creator” cannot be easily answered. Therefore, while Modernist literature moved beyond mimesis and authors impersonalized their works, the Author’s authority, as the creator of an original work, did not change much in terms of the God-like power he enjoyed. Even though the traces of the author’s biography were erased from the works, perhaps his “omniscience” has always remained intact, and perhaps this desire for omniscience, or the creative agency might be accounted for the exuberance “the return of the author” created, as is to be discussed in the following sections.

To sum up, when the sources for the author’s authority are investigated, it can be concluded that while the *auctor*’s authority in Barthes’s and Foucault’s theories was initially related to his position as the founder of discourses, in the Medieval period, this authority was perceived to be inherited from God. In the ages from the Renaissance onward to Neo-Classical and Romantic periods, gradually the author emerged as an individual who was asserting his own positionality, and

especially in the Romantic period, the author enjoyed a unique power as the possessor of “creative genius,” which was to be critiqued in the Modernist and Postmodernist movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as will be shown in the sections below.

### **2.1.2 The Death of the Author**

The genealogy of the author presented above suggests that the idea of the author has always been aligned with a certain sense of authority over the text, and Barthes is critical, specifically, of this authority, which, he believes, is exerted in the text through author’s biography and “intention”. When he challenges “the human person” behind the literary text, he is critical of the “positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the ‘person’ of the author” (*IMT* 143). As Greaney explicates, Barthes’s argument aims at not the historical author, it desires “to demolish a particular version of the author as it functions in the kind of literary criticism that subordinates work to life, achievement to intention, writing to psychology” (60).

While back in 1967, Barthes’s arguments seemed perfectly concordant with the poststructuralist school that was newly forming; in retrospective evaluation, perhaps, they seem complementary to an emerging perception of literature and subjectivity, rather than radically revolutionizing it. That is to say, Barthes’s ideas have to be viewed in the context of other developments both in art and art criticism. In the first place, modernist art had already purported itself to be “impersonal” as early as 1910, and then, even if Barthes believed that New Criticism could not go beyond consolidating the author’s position (*IMT* 143), New Criticism had already de-centred, if not killed, the author through disregarding “intention”. In France, where Barthes’s essay was born, Kristeva, Derrida and Lacan had already killed “the man”. Within this context, the death of the author seems almost a natural follow-up to the death of the subject. In view of this, what is revolutionary in Barthes is not exactly his announcing the death of the author within the confines of the literary text. The radical aspect of this claim is transferring the author’s authority to the reader. While due to the limitations of space, this study will not go into an analysis of the “birth of the reader,” its importance needs to be underlined here and its implications for the Author should be noted. This privileging of the reader above the

Author, as the source of plurality of interpretations in opposition to the closed perspective of the Author-God, is the part that differentiates Barthes's view from many other views on authorship, and this is the foundation on which Barthes's continued interest in the *text* is built.

To begin with, even though Barthes is mostly remembered for his argument "The Death of the Author," it should be noted that the author question in Barthes both dates back to earlier works and also continues after "The Death". In works such as *On Racine* (1963) and *Criticism and Truth* (1966), the path leading to the extirpation of the author is laid out, and in "The Death" the Author is killed, only to be allowed to return, albeit "in an amicable manner" in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973). Even after that, the author question has continued to occupy a central place in Barthes's thinking both in his critical works mentioned above and in his autofictional works such as *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975), *A Lover's Discourse* (1977), and *Camera Lucida* (1980). In his essay "Authors and Writers" (1960), Barthes distinguishes between authors and writers, through identifying the former as the "owners" of the language. In *Critical Essays* he states, "in France the uncontested owners of the language, and they alone, were authors; if we except preachers and jurists (enclosed moreover in functional languages), no one else spoke" (*Critical* 143), Barthes adds, "until the Revolution, when the author's language was adopted for political use" (*ibid* 144). After the adoption of the language for political ends, Barthes claims that "a new group is constituted and develops, a new custodian of the public language," and he calls them "writers" (*ibid*). According to Barthes, "author participates in the priest's role, the writer in the clerk's; the author's language is an intransitive act (hence, in a sense, a gesture), the writer's an activity" (*ibid* 147).

However, Barthes argues, even though the ownership of language was rescued from the author's dominance, as an institution, it lived on, until Barthes could eventually declare its death "as an institution" around 1968. In "The Death of the Author" he laments that "The *author* still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs" (*IMT* 143). Privileging the primacy of the language over the speaking subject,

Barthes desires a “modern scriptor,” who, in opposition to the Author who exists before the book, and “nourishes” and begets it like a Father, is “born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing” (*ibid* 145). However, for Seán Burke, who is the most ardent critic of “the death of the Author” this only testifies to Barthes’s formulation of the new authorial position as “a metaphysical abstraction, a Platonic type, a fiction of the absolute” (*Return* 26). In Burke’s view, the whole agenda behind “The Death” is palpable, because, instead of killing the Author as he had set out to accomplish, Barthes prepares the ground for its existence. Through removing the Author from the text and locating this centre as outside the text, Barthes might kill the Author, but at the exact moment he announces his death, he actually acknowledges that it exist(ed). As Burke states, “Whether we see the subject as constituted through a language, history or episteme, the postulation of a prior constitutive cause does not deny the constituted entity its existence, nor does it prevent that entity in turn causing something else” (*Return* 167). Thus, Barthes, Burke believes, “in seeking to dethrone the author, is led to an apotheosis of authorship” (*Return* 25). Structuralist criticism had left the “the actual intentions of the author and the actual effects of the narrative on real readers” aside, and focused on “the codes by which both narrator and reader are signified in the narrative” (Moriarty 96); however, poststructuralism was not satisfied with this systematic study of the literature as a closed entity, and for Barthes, as also is the case with Foucault and Derrida, it was indispensable that “the death of the author must connect with the general death of man” (Burke, *Return* 14). As a consequence, in “The Death,” Barthes first creates “a king worthy of the killing” (Burke 25) and calls this tyrannical figure around whom the current literature is centred, the Author-God. Barthes’s Author-God is treated as source and locus of meaning, he “begets” the text, and Barthes opposes the practice of literature as searching for the meaning of the *text* in “the man”. Accordingly, he writes, the text needs to be liberated from its status as “tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions” (*IMT* 143).

Barthes’s association of the Author with God owes its foundations to the theologically coloured perspective of the Book that had originated in the Middle Ages, as *auctor*’s authority had based itself on the divine power, as conveying a

secret message from the divine. Thus, Barthes says the act of writing, “by refusing to assign a ‘secret’, an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases- reason, science, law” (*IMT* 147). However, while Barthes challenges the theological activity, his description of “the modern scriptor” is carried out in the exact imagery he had used to detract the Author-God. According to Burke, Barthes’s proposition of language as the agent that does the speaking and acting “admits of very little distinction from the inspirational tradition of Classical, Patristic and Medieval theory” (*Authorship* xvi). Barthes describes language as “a field without origin - or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins” (*IMT* 146). In accordance with his claim that Barthes is in fact sublimating what he seems to be criticizing, Burke notes that in this formulation language is substituted for God. If “God” is inserted in the places saved for “language,” the analogy between language and God as without origin becomes fully clear (*Authorship* xvii).

As a consequence of the refusal of the Author-God, and offering “language” in its place, the view of the text in Barthes changes, as well. The text now is not the closed, monolithic product. As Barthes says:

[w]e know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture. (*IMT* 146)

According to Carla Benedetti, this new form of text as pastiche and/or recycling functions specifically to side-line the question of the creative agency (6), and without the agency, there can be no question of the author. In line with this, all through her monograph *The Empty Cage: Inquiry into the Mysterious Disappearance of the Author* (1999) (Trans. Hartley, 2005), she challenges this lack of room for the creative agency in poststructuralist criticism. For Benedetti, the “artistic intention” to create, which penetrates into every realm of the text cannot be ignored as easily as the intention understood as “to mean something” (13). Besides, in her view, it is simply impossible to push the artistic intention aside because

without acknowledging the existence of this artistic intention, a text would not be studied as a “literary” work (*ibid*). These explorations have emerged as responses to Wimsatt and Beardsley’s seminal essay “The Intentional Fallacy” (1946), and the fact that heated discussions around it still continue even half a century after its publication confirms that the “intention” question cannot be so easily left aside. It is after all the very ground on which two parties, the author and the critic compete most fiercely. In view of that, with the aim of tracing the beginning of the intention discussion, the next section will explore the separation of the author from the critic, the birth and death of biographical criticism as a methodology, and its use by the writers of author fictions.

## **2.2 The Author vs the Critic: From Biographical Criticism to Structuralism and Beyond**

In *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (1991), Jack Stillinger dates the emergence of literary criticism as a study of the works and life of an author to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially, to works such as Samuel Johnson’s *Lives of the English Poets*. Stillinger argues that with the introduction of “the lives” to literature, biographical criticism became the dominant approach to the study of literature during the Romantic period, when the poet’s life was understood to be essential to the understanding of his work. As the Romantic poet was a man distinguished by his imaginative capacity, the study of his life could offer a glimpse of this admirable creative mind. Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* are famous examples of this trend, with poets documenting their creative processes. Later on, this method continued to exert its influence well into the Victorian period, and many of the English departments and curricula were designed according to this approach (Stillinger 6-7). This approach, in Stillinger’s opinion, is perhaps best typified in Charles Grosvenor Osgood’s *The Voice of England* (1935), where works themselves are commented on only in little paragraphs, whereas the lives of the authors in the volume are reported in great detail over the course of six hundred pages (Stillinger 7). Osgood’s explanation of his own agenda as humanizing “the greater figures in English Literature,” through inclining to “the biographical part of literature” in the manner of Dr. Johnson, sheds light on the

perception of the “proper” study of literature, at the time (xi). With this “humanizing” trend, in the beginning of the twentieth century, biography itself almost fully replaced criticism (Stillinger 7). Stillinger presents the striking example of the Brownings lectures offered by W.L. Phelps, which had sent flows of students on pilgrimages to Florence (7), in search of the discovery of “the human” behind the literary work.

With the attempts to approach literature as a scientific, universal system, the place of biography in literary criticism began to be questioned. For instance, Boris Tomashevskii, in his 1923 essay had asked “do we need the poet’s biography in order to understand his work, or do we not” (Tomashevskii 82), and apparently, this question has been reconsidered with each new approach to literature. While, for instance, New Criticism argues against it, in feminism, post-colonialism, or Marxist criticism, the socio-historical context from which a work emerges, and along with it, the biography of the author often come into the discussion of the literary texts. But what was it exactly that had prompted Tomashevskii to question the place of biography in the study of literature?

According to de Man, the Formalist view of literature was established with the purpose “to safeguard a discipline which constantly threatens to degenerate into gossip, trivia or self-obsession” (*Resistance to Theory* 29). The aim to demarcate a clear-cut line between work and life asserts itself here. Tomashevskii begins with the question of how relevant biography is. In his view “we must remember that creative literature exists, not for literary historians, but for readers, and we must consider how the poet’s biography operates in the reader’s consciousness” (Tomashevskii 82). Like Barthes, Tomashevskii locates the meaning in the reader and questions biography’s relevance accordingly. Besides, he questions to what extent author’s biography affects the reception of a work and whether this impact is determined by the certain literary-historical period or not. While European art generally showed “a great tendency toward anonymity” (Tomashevskii 82), in the Romantic period, as Tomashevskii further elaborates, biography and authorship were taking a different shape as “[a] biography of a Romantic poet was more than a biography of an author and public figure. The Romantic poet *was* his own hero. His *life* was poetry...” (83; emphasis in the original). This model of authorship drew its inspiration from 18<sup>th</sup>

century poets, and, soon, the autobiographical form became the dominant mode, when readers, as Tomashevskii claims, demanded “the complete illusion of life” (84). The demand made by readers for a “real author” behind the work, Tomashevskii claims, gave rise to what he terms as “literature with an invented author, whose biography was appended to the work” (85). In some cases, such as when the author wanted to be away from public scrutiny, then “an invented narrator” would step in to create the illusion of reality (*ibid*). So, biography, whether real or “invented” was crucial to sustain the illusion of the presence of a real human being behind a literary work, the traces of whose life were expected to be reflected in that literary work.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tomashevskii further argues, the author was emerging as a more professional figure, and the interest in the persona of the author was waning. Unlike the situation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Tomashevskii underlines, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “works did not depend on the presence of a biographical background” (87), in the manner mentioned above. Ironically, the interest in the figure of the author, emerged once again in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; this time, however, with an interest in “good people” (*ibid*), with the author functioning as an exemplary “Victorian citizen”. Nonetheless, since not every author was an “acceptable” Victorian citizen, this resulted in the use pseudonyms, as a way to facilitate the entrance of the marginalized figures to the realm of publishing. Women authors such as Charlotte Brontë and Mary Ann Evans, for instance, adopted pseudonyms for themselves and wrote under the disguise of being a “publicly acceptable man”. With the decline in Victorian values and advent of modernism in literature, the perception of the author changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Tomashevskii, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “there appeared a special type of writer with a demonstrative biography” (*ibid*), which, he claims, came as a response to the exemplary good man of the previous century, and boosted the unconventional sides of the author.

Having outlined the major trends in the perception of the author and the relevance of his biography, in the concluding part of the essay, Tomashevskii distinguishes between what he calls documentary biographies and literary biographies. While the former belongs to the domain of cultural history, and should be referred to only as external reference, the latter, he argues, is the one that should

be of interest to the literary scholar. Thus, he asserts “the biography useful to the historian is not the author’s curriculum vitae or the investigator’s account of his life. What the literary historian really needs is the biographical legend created by the author himself. Only such a legend is a *literary fact*” (89; emphasis in the original).

The debates on whether an author’s life is relevant to his/her work are inextricably linked to the debates on “intention”. While Tomashevskii’s analysis of biography provides the ground for the construction of the author’s life in literature, with “intention,” this ground shifted from the author’s life, to the author’s mind. The intention debate has entailed the question of whether author’s intentions regarding the structure and meaning of a text could be retrieved through the study of the work. Biographical criticism had believed in its possibility; through the study of an author’s life, his mind could be understood as it was supposedly unfolding in his works. However, this interdependent relation between life and the work was criticized by many stakeholders. For instance, I.A Richards was highly critical of criticism’s reliance on biography and in order to prove his point, he conducted a series of experiments among his students at Cambridge University, which he published in *Practical Criticism* in 1929. In those experiments he found out that his students’ understanding of literature was confined to biography, and when students were not provided with the poet’s name and biography, they did not know how to analyse a poem (in Stillinger 7-8). Richards’s essay prompted many other critics to deal with these perceived shortcomings of biographical criticism.

In 1946, Wimsatt and Beardsley, in their “The Intentional Fallacy,” argued that the author’s intentions were illegitimate as “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (90). Intention, they believe, is present as only a “design or plan in the author’s mind” (*ibid*), but once the literary work is released into the world, intention becomes irrelevant as now “the poem is not the critic’s own and not the author’s (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it)” (92). After publication, “the poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge” (*ibid*). Similarly, Northrop Frye expressed his opinions against intention in his essay “Literary Criticism” in

1963 by calling it a “blunder,” which is to be avoided. According to him, “what did the author mean by this?” is always an illegitimate question because “[f]irst, we can never know; second, there is no reason to suppose that he knew; third, the question confuses imaginative with discursive writing. The legitimate form of the question is: ‘what does the text say?’” (59).

In *Validity in Interpretation* (1967), E.D. Hirsh reacted against “The Intentional Fallacy” and what he terms as the “banishment of the author”. Similar to Donald E. Pease, who saw the banishment of the author as “the rule of the critic,” Hirsh also held the opinion that it is the critic who benefits most from banishing the author. He maintains that “what had not been noticed in the earliest enthusiasm for going back to ‘what the text says’ was that the text had to represent somebody’s meaning- if not the author’s, then the critic’s” (110). He further argues that as a natural consequence of this approach, the study of literature has taken the shape of a certain critic’s “reading” of a text, and it has become a popular method (*ibid*). Having raised his objections to the banishment of the author, Hirsh argues that validity of the interpretation can only be sustained through acknowledging the arguments against the author as dubious and susceptible (111).

Even though Foucault denied a direct association between his “What is an Author?” and Barthes’s “The Death of the Author,” it has generally been regarded as a reply to Barthes. Barthes believes the author exists with the text, it is the language and writing that exist before the author. Therefore, according to Barthes, the writer “can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them” (*IMT* 146). Foucault, however, believes such exaltation of the writing only serves to perpetuate the “privileges of the author through the safeguard of the a priori” (120). Deriving from this point, he asks whether “[i]n granting primordial status to writing, do we not, in effect, simply re-inscribe in transcendental terms the theological affirmation of its sacred origin or a critical belief in its creative nature” (120). As pointed earlier, Seán Burke’s criticism of Barthes rested on the same premise. Burke thinks that through privileging writing/language over the author, Barthes is creating metaphysical abstractions that may reiterate the same theological critique of the author he had conducted. Foucault’s turn to author is

related to the attribution of discourse, and its punishability and accountability. Overall, Foucault endorses the tenacity of the author's presence, even if it is reduced to a function, and he analyses the author as a founder of discursivity. As Clayton and Rothstain maintain, whereas Barthes and Derrida deal with the textual world, Foucault draws attention to how the tissue of networks in which the texts exist, locate those texts within networks of power. Therefore, for Foucault it is important to understand how subjects became subjects in these networks of power (127). In spite of his divergences from Barthes and his insistence on discursivity and socio-historical contextualization, Foucault was also critical of literary criticism of his time, which he believed "employ[ed] devices strongly reminiscent of Christian exegesis when it wished to prove the value of a text by ascertaining the holiness of its author" (127).

Like Barthes's essay, Foucault's too begins with the question of the voice. Foucault explores how writing has always been associated with sacrifice and death, and questions how "where a work had the duty of creating immortality, it now attains the right to kill, to become the murderer of its author" (117). In Foucault's view, this unique relation of the author to his death victimizes him to his own writing. This singularity of his absence, as Foucault calls it, is the knot, through the untangling of which the author's death can be understood. In order to do so, Foucault, firstly, questions when exactly someone becomes an author, asking "[w]hat, for instance, were Sade's papers before he was consecrated as an author? Little more, perhaps, than rolls of paper on which he endlessly unravelled his fantasies while in prison" (118), and concludes that an author becomes one through gaining a "name". The name of the author, Foucault argues, is different from the proper name because due to implying ownership of a certain work, over time, the name of the author can change in function, as an entity attached to an oeuvre; author-function. In the beginning of the essay, Foucault urges the reader to change his/her perspective: "No longer should we bend our ear to the supposedly personal voice of the named, individual author; instead, we should attend to the anonymous murmuring of the collective *discourse*" (115), and closes the essay by emphasizing the need for new questions. Instead of "tiresome repetitions" such as "Who is the real author?" "What are the proofs for his authenticity and originality?", Foucault

argues, the questions such as “What are the modes of existence of this discourse?” are to be asked, in order to understand how discourses are controlled and circulated (138). This is, hence, a replacement of the question of “who,” with “what” (Wilson 342), which in turn transforms the discourse, which is purely linguistic in Barthes’s view, to an interplay of socio-historical powers in Foucault.

In his entry for “Author,” Donald E. Pease also asserts that in the aftermath of the differentiation of author from genius, the political and cultural realms were separated. While author continued to function as a perpetuator of the discourse, genius emerged as a man with the power to “invent,” which Foucault names as the “fundamental author”. According to Pease, with this differentiation, “the author’s function shifted accordingly - from that of producing an alternative political world, to that of producing a cultural alternative to the world of politics” (110).

The separation in these realms produced another figure: the literary critic, who further separated the author and the work from each other (Pease 111). Barthes himself addresses this separation and questions “the Critic,” who begins to act like the Author, or benefits from “the discovery” of the author. He says that removing the author is a necessity exactly for this reason because the prominence of the Author as the container of the sole meaning of the text has also legitimized the entity of the Critic:

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is ‘explained’ - victory to the critic. Hence there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic. (*IMT* 147)

While Barthes is critical of the critic, his denouncement of the Critic is based on the methods the critic uses for textual analysis. In the extract quoted above, Barthes criticizes textual studies that focus on the aggrandization of the Author, as the sole origin of the text, rather than the text itself. However, as reconstructive author fictions analysed in this study manifest, while with Barthes’s the death of the Author, the Critic might have left the important task of discovering the Author in the text, the result was “interpreting the work in such a way that the author seemed an

effect of the critic's interpretation rather than the cause of the work" (Pease 111). Believing the critic to be the one who benefits from Barthes's killing the author, Pease states "[t]he utterly textual milieu of the poststructuralists is ruled by the critic, or the authorless subject, as opposed to the author" (116). In this exclusive area, the critic is free to "kill" the author.

In this respect, Carla Benedetti's drawing attention to the fact that "The death of the Author" receives its strongest criticism from Foucault, a philosopher, whom Benedetti underlines, supports neither the Author, nor the subject (14-5), should be mentioned here. This, Benedetti further argues, certainly has some implications for the necessity of perpetuating the author function through historicizing it. In her discussion, she follows a similar methodology, but while Foucault historicized the author function by linking it to discursivity, Benedetti links it to all works of art, and thus extends its scope. Moreover, as her opposition to the formulations such as the implied author on the grounds that these make the author a "function of the text" lay bare, she is more interested in the author as a "function of the work" (13). For Benedetti, only such a formulation where the work is not coexistent with the text, and hence neither the text nor the author assumes priority, the communicative processes where a work becomes attributed to an author can be grasped better (12-14). With the aim of exploring these various "functions," the next section will focus on the implied author, which at the time of its emergence, seemed as the best solution for answering questions of "intent" without referring to the real author. However, as the discussion below suggests, in contemporary scholarship, the function and necessity of the implied author is being debated, as the fictional ground once more welcomes the real author, who returns to the text.

### **2.3 Dead but Cannot be Buried: Discussions around the Implied Author and its Implications for the Return of the Author**

The position of the author, as has been discussed above, has always been a central part of discussions about literature. Along with Barthes's death of the author, new questions were posited with regard to how to handle a body that was dead, but could not be buried. The implied author had already been "invented" by Wayne Booth as early as 1961, within the context of "the unreliable narrator" discussion,

but with poststructuralism and the ensuing debates about it, which still continue, the implied author needs to be re-evaluated within the context of the death and return of the author. If the real author returns to the textual world, what happens to the implied author?

In *The Blindness and Insight*, Paul de Man delineates the authorial question as a problem of different “selves”:

In the study of literature, the question of the self appears in a bewildering network of often contradictory relationships among a plurality of subjects [...] From the start, we have at least four possible and distinct types of self: the self that judges, the self that reads, the self that writes, and the self that reads itself. (39)

In narratological terms all these different selves correspond to different postulations of different narrative positions and functions. The implied author is one of the most important ones, which aimed to account for these different “selves”. As Marie-Laure Ryan notes in her article “Meaning, Intent, and the Implied Author” (2011), since Booth attempted to “restore to literature the human dimension that structuralism and New Criticism (and afterwards, deconstruction) denied, without falling victim to what Wimsatt and Beardsley called ‘the intentional fallacy’” (30) when Booth had first come up with the term, it came as a relief, a way out of the seemingly opposite ends of textual and contextual studies. Moreover, the implied author became a key term in narratological studies to such an extent that Gérard Genette, for instance, was criticized by some scholars such as Rimmon-Kenan (1976) for his lack of attention to the implied author in his book *Narrative Discourse*, published in 1972. Rimmon-Kenan regards Genette’s omission of the implied author as unfortunate, since, she asserts, it leads to the “creation of a partly false symmetry between the narrator and the narratee,” obstructing the analysis of “the ‘norms’ of the text, especially when they differ from those of the narrator” (Rimmon-Kenan 58). Apparently, her remarks must have reached their addressee because, afterwards, when Genette published *Narrative Discourse Revisited* in 1983, he devoted a large section to the implied author discussion. However, Genette still kept his critical distance towards the implied author, as can be understood from his ambiguity towards the concept. While he states that “the implied author is everything the text lets us know about the author” (148), he questions whether it is “necessary and

(therefore) valid agent between the narrator and the real author” (139). His response to this question is that while not an actual agent, the implied author is “the ideal agent,” who nevertheless should not be treated as the narrative agent.

In his article, “In Defence of the Implied Author” (1978), beginning with the question of “why a third, seemingly ‘ghostly’ being should be situated between the two” (74), Chatman sets out to list the reasons as to why the implied author should be kept in place. As can be seen in his diagram, while the implied author is inserted as an internal element of narrative text, the real author, and the real reader are placed outside the narrative text.

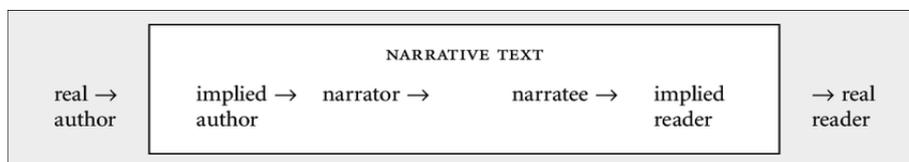


Figure 1: Chatman’s Diagram of Narrative Text

Chatman argues that the implied author is an indispensable narrative agent, because as a mediator between the real author and the text, the implied author helps critics resolve the question of intent, without referring to the real author. Similar to Foucault’s construction of the author as a function, whose name legitimizes the discourse, Chatman’s defence of the implied author is done for practical reasons. Therefore, as he states, his question is not “whether the implied author *exists* but what we *get* from positing such a concept” (75). In other words, Chatman, too, views it as “an ideal agent” as Genette does. The implied author provides the critic with the “way of naming and analysing the textual intent of narrative fictions under a single term but without recourse to biographism” (*ibid*), which was also Booth’s aim.

Chatman defines the implied author as “the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative” (85). The implied author is also the one “that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happen to these characters, in these words or images” (*ibid*). Chatman also affirms that due to these features, “the implied author has no ‘voice.’ The implied author only empowers others to ‘speak.’ The implied author (unlike the delegated speaker, the

narrator) is a silent source of information. The implied author ‘says’ nothing” (*ibid*). While this seems perfectly compliant with Barthes’s enunciated authorial position, where it is the language that creates everything, Marie-Laure Ryan opposes this formulation, on the grounds that this approach lays bare the exact reasons why the implied author is redundant. According to Ryan, the implied author has no real communicative function, and if this is the case, she asks, “[w]hy cannot the design of the text and the artistic intent be attributed to RA [Real Author] rather than to IA [Implied Author]?” (36). She further raises the question of to whom all the design belongs if not to the RA: “The narrator of a fiction is in charge of reporting what happened in the fictional world; but who is in charge of the higher meaning of these events, the meaning that forms the focus of speculative interpretations?” (38). Similar to de Man, in the place of the implied author, Ryan suggests regarding different fictional constructions of subjectivities as multiple selves of the real author, and asserts that in this way, the differentiation between the real author and the implied author will be demolished (40).

#### **2.4 The Return of the Author: “What Does it Matter Who is Speaking?”**

More than half a century after the publication of “The Death of the Author,” it might perhaps feel tiresomely repetitive to be still struggling with authorial questions. Yet, the author continues to occupy a central position in literary criticism, whether through her/his presence or through the discussion of her/his absence. After the 1980s, it is possible to observe how authors themselves write novels in which authorial presence and absence are portrayed through the use of “the death of the author” as a metaphor and a theme to explore questions about writing, identity and the self. Brian McHale is of the same opinion, and he notes that while the author has always been dead, it took a “rediscovery of his death” to fully engage with his absence-presence, or to accept that “[i]f the author is absent, he is not *newly* absent; he has been absent in different modes throughout history— or, it would be equally true to say, *present* in different modes” (201; emphasis in the original).

While the idea of the return began to be more accentuated around the 1990s especially with the reconstructive turn that allowed the return of the author, it was indeed Barthes himself, who had already signalled the return of the author in *The*

*Pleasure of the Text* (1973). Declaring that the author is dead “as institution,” Barthes contends, the author’s “civil status, his biographical person have disappeared,” and now being “disposed,” they cannot exert paternal authority over the text. However, Barthes continues, in a way, in the text the author figure is “desired”: “*I desire the author: I need his figure (which is neither his representation nor his projection), as he needs mine*” (27; emphasis in the original).

The author, thus, can return to the text, to fulfil the desire of the text. Accordingly, this conditional return is portrayed as the “amicable return” in *Sade, Fourier, Loyala* (1971). Here, Barthes allows the author, not the Author-God, to return, albeit on a firm contract. He recognizes the author as desired by the text and permits his return as a part of the pleasure of the text. “The pleasure of the Text also includes *the amicable return of the author*” (Sade 8; emphasis in the original). This amicable return is granted on the condition that this author who returns is dissociated from the one elevated by institutions of history, philosophy and literature. He cannot be the biographical hero, either.

The author who leaves his text and comes into our life has no unity; he is a mere plural of “charmes,” the site of a few tenuous details, yet the source of vivid novelistic glimmerings, a discontinuous chant of amiabilities, in which we nevertheless read death more certainly than in the epic of a fate, he is not a (civil moral) person, he is a body. (*Sade* 8)

As suggested here, the author can return; however, only in an “amicable manner,” and more importantly, the author must be dead, before he can return. Even though this coming from the dead evokes the mythical heroes, he is by no means a classical hero. He has his charms, but these charms are dissociated from the unified self of the Author. Actually, Barthes’s agenda in “The Death” was to overthrow the authority of the Author/God, and battle against the oozing of the author’s life into the text. He had drawn a very sharp boundary between the body that writes and the writing agent when he had delineated literature as the oblique “where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes” (*IMT* 142). Once the identity is dissolved, the author may come back, Barthes says; however, this body can enter into the text only as a paper-being, as a “guest”: “It is not that the Author may not ‘come back’ in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a ‘guest’. If he is a novelist, he is inscribed in the novel like one of his characters, figured in the carpet;

no longer privileged, paternal, aletheological, his inscriptions ludic” (*IMT* 161). Stripped of his authority, the returned author in Barthes becomes “a paper-author: his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work; there is a reversion of the work on to the life (and no longer the contrary)” (*ibid*). Barthes’s example for the reversal of life and work is Proust, who, in Barthes’s view, “instead of putting his life into his novel, as is so often maintained [...] made of his very life a work for which his own book was the model” (*IMT* 149). This proposition suggests that as long as the hierarchy between life and fiction is resolved, the author may be welcomed in the text. In view of this, as Burke reminds, “when the scene of representation has dissolved around him, Balzac can come back, an author of texts, no longer a scribe of reality; his work is no more ‘a channel of expression’ but a ‘writing without referent’” (Burke *Death* 48).

Barthes’ annihilation of the Author has been generally accepted as a *de facto* perception of the author’s position in contemporary literary studies. However, with the reconstructive turn, there is an increase in the number of the authors who revisit the question of the death of the author. This shows that the author question is being re-evaluated, and in this process, alternative authorial positions are being embraced, and the author is allowed to return. In this respect, McHale further asserts “[t]he author is no newcomer to our ontological poetics of postmodernist writing, s/he has been with us all along, more or less surreptitiously” (199). McHale believes that the author is one of the many tools that are employed by postmodernist narratives in the exploration of ontological questions (202). Stating that “oscillation between authorial presence and absence characterizes the postmodernist author,” he argues that the author flares in and out of the text (*ibid*). The postmodernist author, McHale asserts, hence functions at a minimum of two different layers of ontological structure; first “as the vehicle of autobiographical *fact* within the projected fictional world,” and, secondly, “as the *maker* of that world, visibly occupying an ontological level superior to it” (*ibid*). With these features, he concludes, “the postmodernist author arrogates to himself the powers that gods have always claimed: omnipotence, omniscience” (210). These claims to authority have been intensified in post-postmodernism and reconstructive fictions dwell on the analogy between the world making and the act of writing.

Particularly with regard to omniscience, through which the author's presence might be more profoundly felt in the text, the "return of the Author" or ever-presence can also be understood through revisiting the Victorian author, who has perhaps never really disappeared. According to Malcolm Bradbury, the Victorian novel continues to exert its influence on the novels of writers like David Lodge, Graham Swift, and Peter Ackroyd (4), and the social realist novel of the present, which certainly includes Maggie Gee's fiction. Claiming that Victorian novel did not disappear completely (5), Bradbury cites John Fowles to draw attention to the authorial position he offers. Fowles announced:

the novelist is still a god since he creates and not even the most aleatory avant-garde modern novel has managed to extirpate its author completely; what has changed is that we are no longer the gods of the Victorian image, omniscient and decreeing; but in the new theological image, with freedom our first principle, not authority. (qtd. in Bradbury 5)

When he later received questions about this statement from Rowland Molony in *Conversations with John Fowles*, Fowles responded that he found the question of whether an author could achieve freedom regarding his characters, quite problematic. He stated that he believed "there always comes a point when the writer is the man who has the blue pencil in his hand. You are in fact a dictator" (29). The author, thus, is the presiding force over his creation.

This debate regarding the author's position or arrogating omniscience as claimed by McHale, has been addressed by other scholars such as Jonathan Culler, who in his essay "Omniscience" (2004) responds to Barbara K. Olson's Author/God analogy as presented in Olson's book *Authorial Divinity in the Twentieth Century* (1997). Culler arrives at the conclusion that while a godlike, all knowing, omniscient narrator exists, one needs to think of more "accurate ways to describe these effects—particularly the presentation of characters' thought" (28), instead of the term "omniscience," which in Culler's view implies Author-God, and brings oppression to the mind (32). While Culler believes that the text should be freed from this theological connotation, Barbara K. Olson, in her article "Who Thinks This Book? Or Why the Author/God Analogy Merits Our Continued Attention" (2006), responds to Culler and concludes that the analogy between the Author and God is powerful and still valid since "authors experience writing as world making and

readers in turn experience reading as immersing themselves in the worlds of these makers” (344).

Paul Dawson exerts omniscience as “a further development and refinement of some of the technical experiments of postmodern fiction,” which he also sees as a response to “a perceived decline in the cultural authority of the novel over the last two decades” (Dawson 144). Arguing that the sense of all-knowing, God-like narration accompanying omniscience does not have to be taken literally, which Culler seems to be doing and, therefore, opposing, Dawson asserts contemporary omniscience as differing from classical omniscience, “not so much in terms of formal narrative features, but in terms of the specific claims for cultural authority which enable this narrative voice to function” (149). Dawson proposes, the contemporary omniscient authorial narration can only be carried out through the voice of “a public intellectual” (150), a voice, which, as will be discussed in the following chapters, Byatt, Lodge and Gee all assume in their novels. Dawson also believes that narrative authority is shaped by changing literary cultural conditions that have an effect on the novel’s position. He lists conditions such as multinational publishing houses, the rise of new media, increased interest in blogs, discussion forums, interest in memoirs, popular history, and asserts that the increased return to omniscience in contemporary novels is one of the responses the authors have given to the novel’s loss of power (150). For this reason, Dawson goes on to suggest that “a narratological approach sensitive to the anxieties about social relevance peculiar to the formal narrative voices employed by contemporary omniscience—voices which seek to assert the cultural authority of novelists as public intellectuals in the new millennium” is needed (*ibid*), which forms the core idea of the narrative position in Byatt, Lodge and Gee. What these novels aim to convey through the use of the biographical novel genre and exploration of the death of the author as a metaphor, is the novelist’s position, both as a creator and as an intellectual.

With the author’s return, fiction itself, too, returns to its communicative function. As Irmtraud Huber concludes, in spite of deconstruction, “the fictive still remains and is celebrated as an important anthropological means of communicating about one’s self-understanding and about the world. After construction and deconstruction comes reconstruction” (224). In the following chapters, three

examples of author fictions written with a reconstructive agenda, *Possession*, *Author, Author* and *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* will be analysed with regard to how they reconstruct both the author and fiction's communicative functions through foregrounding post-postmodernist concerns of sincerity and humanist aesthetics as opposed to instability and irony that characterized postmodernism.

## CHAPTER 3

### A.S. BYATT'S CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHORIAL IDENTITY IN *POSSESSION: A ROMANCE*

All the seminars, in fact, had a fatal family likeness. They were repetitive in the extreme. We found the same clefts and crevices, transgressions and disintegrations, lures and deceptions beneath, no matter what surface we were scrying (*Biographer's Tale* 4).

In his analysis of the contemporary novel scene, Nick Bentley points to the 1990s as the period in which “identity” was the major issue (11). Similarly, in *The Contemporary British Novel* (2007), Phil Tew identifies the dominant themes of contemporary narratives from the 1990s onwards as “British identity, the explicit notion of a culture in transition, late-capitalist or Thatcherized urban spaces, the use of mythopoeic and hybridity as renewing literary responses to such conditions, and finally a ‘traumatological’ uncertainty” (1). Both Tew and Bentley believe that from the 1990s onwards the literary scene has been tremendously changed by a “new sense of reality” (Tew 29). As the twenty-first century commenced, the need to engage directly with the “human” became more pressing than ever, and the return to the real initiated by this new sense of reality would be felt more profoundly in novels such as Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2005), Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005) and Carly Philips’s *Distant Shore* (2003) just to name a few. In this respect, in *Possession*, Byatt can be said to have anticipated an “aesthetic sea change” (McLaughlin 55) from postmodernism to beyond. Deriving from this point, this chapter argues that *Possession* is a novel which expresses Byatt’s discontent with postmodernism and hence acts out an aesthetic philosophy that reaches “beyond” postmodernist epistemology. In her Neo-Victorian novel with a dual plot that shifts between the Victorian literary world and the twentieth-century scholarly world,

Byatt presents a trajectory of the changes of attitude towards the author; and, eventually, through recentralizing the author figure both narratologically and thematically, she reclaims the prestige the author had lost against postmodernism and poststructuralism.

### **3.1 Shifting the Paradigm from Irony to Meaning and Sincerity: Byatt's Post-postmodernist Aesthetics**

Consisting of twenty-eight chapters, and a postscript, the narrative in *Possession* swings between the Victorian world of two poets Christabel LaMotte and Randolph Henry Ash, and the twentieth-century world of two literary scholars: Roland Mitchell, who defines himself as an old-fashioned textual scholar, and Maud Bailey, a feminist scholar specializing in the work of LaMotte. Byatt underlines that contrary to what is presented in the Hollywood edition of her novel, her *Possession* is not the story of modern lovers. She states that “almost all *readers* know that the story is an occluded story about the Victorian lovers, and the other two are there for finding it out” (Noakes 14; emphasis in the original). While the twentieth-century plot encompasses nineteenth-century narrative, twentieth-century characters, Maud and Roland, are portrayed as readers of Ash's and LaMotte's story which was “lived” rather than “read”. Except for Chapter 15, where an omniscient narrator depicts Ash and LaMotte on their way to York, the Victorian world is textually constructed through Maud's and Roland's focalization of the “possessions,” poems, letters, and diary entries that belong to Ash and LaMotte or to the people around them such as, LaMotte's companion Blanche Glover and Ash's wife Ellen Ash. Through this intricate narrative of who can have access to the *textual*, which texts can be read publicly, the questions pertaining to literature and criticism are handled from various perspectives. Is biographical criticism a complete scam as suggested by intentional fallacy? Can a letter change all the course of literary scholarship on a writer? How can theory be reconciled with literature?

Set out to explore all these questions, *Possession: A Romance* opens in the autumn of 1986 with the depiction of Roland Mitchell, working in a London library on his beloved Victorian poet Randolph Henry Ash. Roland is a part-time assistant employed under his supervisor James Blackadder, in his research centre “Ash

Factory”. While reading Ash’s own copy of Vico’s *Principi di una Scienza Nuova* Roland finds two letters addressed to an unknown female. Even though he had scorned biographical criticism earlier, realizing these letters were probably not discovered by anyone before, Roland feels overwhelmed with the desire to “possess” them and purloins the letters. After reading the letters he identifies a possible addressee, a Victorian poetess, Christabel LaMotte. This possibility drags Roland to Lincoln, where he meets one of the leading LaMotte scholars, Maud Bailey.

In Lincoln, Roland relates the content of the letters to Maud, and the two begin to work on the letters. Soon, they become “possessed” by the letters, and desiring to find the “truth,” Maud and Roland visit Seal Court, where Christabel LaMotte had lived. During their stay there, they discover more letters, hidden in a wooden doll. This discovery, like many other discoveries in the narrative, can only be made when Maud remembers and recites a poem “The Dolly Keeps a Secret” by LaMotte, and through such associations between life and work, *Possession* underlines the inseparability of the two.

Due to their hesitations regarding how to proceed with the discovery they have made, Roland and Maud return to their jobs, and do not contact each other for some time. Their awareness about the tremendous impact the letters would have on the scholarship on Ash and especially LaMotte, who had until then been analysed as a lesbian poet, Roland and Maud decide to take a trip to North Yorkshire, urged by the feeling that Christabel LaMotte might have accompanied Ash in his trip. Tracking Ash’s route and calling upon the imagery of Yorkshire landscape in LaMotte’s poems, they return feeling sure that the couple was together there.

As the quest for the “truth” of the Ash and LaMotte affair possesses Maud and Roland, other scholars begin to suspect them. Competing for the possession of the letters, Roland’s supervisor James Blackadder and Maud’s colleague Leonora Stern track Maud and Roland to Brittany, where Maud and Roland spent some time reading the diaries of Sabine, a distant cousin of Christabel. From these diaries, they learn that Christabel had a baby girl, Maia, whose whereabouts are not clear.

Maud and Roland return to London, to the midst of curious scholars who all fiercely crave for the ownership of the information pertaining to Ash and LaMotte.

Mortimer Cropper, the Ash biographer who collects every item on Ash and exhibits them in the Stant Collection, is the most aggressive one, and convinced that he might obtain valuable clues, he attempts to rob Ash's grave. Just as Cropper finds an unopened letter in Ash's grave, he is confronted with a group of scholars including Roland and Maud. This final letter is revealed to have been addressed from LaMotte to Ash, which she had apparently penned upon hearing Ash was in his death-bed. This letter, in which she explains how she had a daughter, Maia Bailey, whom Ash was unaware of, was received by Ash's wife, Ellen Ash, who had never delivered this letter to its real addressee. This letter was placed in a box and buried with Ash, which until Mortimer Cropper attempted to rob Ash's grave had remained unopened.

As revealed by this letter, Maia Bailey as it turns out, was Maud Bailey's great-great-great grandmother. Before that Maud had known about her association to Christabel, and while she always thought of herself as a distant relation, she now learns that she can be entitled to be the true heiress of the Ash-LaMotte correspondence. Meanwhile, Roland receives three different job offers from universities in Hong Kong, Barcelona and Amsterdam, and tries to decide, while Maud is preparing the correspondence for publication. This sense of happy ending peculiar to the Victorian novel is further strengthened by the consummation of the extended relationship between Maud and Roland. However, just at the moment the reader is offered the comfort of a happy ending, the narrative continues with a postscript, in which the omniscient, God-like narrator intervenes to announce a conclusion which reads "there are things that happen and leave no discernible trace, are not spoken or written of, though it would be very wrong to say that subsequent events go on indifferently, all the same, as though such things had never been" (552). In this postscript some of the earlier closures are supplanted with new details that are bound to change the reader's interpretation of the events. For example, the postscript reveals that the lock of hair found in the box buried with Ash, belongs not to Christabel as supposed by Maud and Roland, but to Maia, Ash and Christabel's daughter. Ash took the lock of hair from Maia, in exchange for a crown of flowers. The inclusion of this event, which no one knew about, hence proves, Ash had actually met his daughter Maia once, whereas Christabel died thinking she had been

extremely unfair to Ash for hiding this knowledge from him, until he was in his deathbed.

The choice on the part of Byatt to end the narrative with such a twist, through which she challenges the limited insights of each character and the narrative agent, is an indication of how she is asserting her own authorial power over the narrative she has created, while at the same time, conveying her messages about the impossibility of attaining “true knowledge”. Byatt utilizes what is one of the characterizing narratological forms of reconstructive turn in literature, in Dawson’s view: the omniscience. Byatt’s authorial statements in the interview she gives to Reynolds and Noakes, confirm her desire for omniscience. She relates the function of the postscript as follows:

The narrator tells the reader what happened in the Postscript. Nobody in the modern time knows that. And I think this is partly me saying ‘Look ... with scholarship, you think you will get to the end of the quest and find out what this person was really like, and what they really felt, and actually the chances are that the most important moment of their life, or most important moments, are forever hidden’. (7)

Ending the novel on such a striking note laying emphasis on the novel’s ability to offer more freedom and “truth,” in opposition to supposedly “factual” discourses of both biography and literary criticism, Byatt underlines the primacy of the creative work over the critical, through commenting on the fictionality of biography. In Byatt’s view, re-visitations of the past can be better carried out by novelists than critical scholars or historians because she believes “this is a kind of rewriting, or writing between the lines which fiction does with more tact, less whimsy and infinitely more power” (*On Histories* 100). Thus, Byatt, like Lodge, can be called a “literary historian,” (Dawson *TIN* 88) rather than a writer of historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction differs from the position a literary historian inhabits since, while the aim in the former is to question and undermine the authority of historical narratives, the mode the literary historian employs “displays a faith in the literary imagination to supplement the historical record, rather than undermine the narrative ‘truth’ of history” (*ibid*). Therefore, whereas historiographic metafiction deconstructs, a literary historian reconstructs through a belief in the power of writing. As Josh Toth notes in *Passing of Postmodernism*, “the postmodern

desire to claim that history is over, that nothing original can be said, that the Real is an illusion, becomes the very reason to continue writing” (Toth 128). As Doyle also suggests, this results in a battle fought at two fronts, the struggle is between resisting simplification or to preserve faith in meaning (260), and *Possession* is a panoramic exhibition of Byatt’s belief in the possibility of meaning, empathy and communication, which is also shared by Lodge and Gee.

As underlined in the previous section, “the end of postmodernism” discussions were getting a firm ground around the 1990s. For instance, as McLaughlin reminds around that time even the critics who were known as the founders of postmodernism began to refer to postmodernism as a thing of the past. Ihab Hassan stated that “we hardly know what postmodernism was” (Hassan 15), while Linda Hutcheon claimed postmodernism “may well be a twentieth-century phenomenon, that is, a thing of the past” (“Epilogue” 5). Ever since, numerous works have been produced to denominate this transitional period. According to Irmtraud Huber, there is a certain change of attitude towards poststructuralism, and while the labels to denote this change vary from “neo-realism” to “speculative realism” there at least seems to be a consensus on its general outline, which is related by Huber as follows:

Another point of general agreement is that these labels describe a shift of interest, rather than a rupture, that the literature they are concerned with holds on to much of what was postmodernist but looks beyond postmodernism’s constant endeavours to disrupt, to alienate and to subvert. It attempts to bridge the rupture (not to cover it), to be accessible (though not transparent), to create (but not to posit). After and because of deconstruction, it seeks to reconstruct. (6-7)

Reconstructing the Victorian literary world through ventriloquial voices of fictional Victorian poets, *Possession*, as noted by Becker, “offers a reassessment of the desire to possess something (something material, something emotional) beyond the intellectual pleasures of playful deferral” (29), perhaps something more in touch with the “human,” as underlined in Seán Burke’s suggestion that “however supernatural their final cast, literary works emanate from the human-all-too-human” (*Return* 193). Hence, following Paul Dawson’s definition, post-postmodern literature, which emerges from this need for new forms of expression, and characterized by a return to the real, can be described as that literature which “owes

some debt of influence to, or at least demonstrates a textual awareness of, the major works and characteristics of postmodernism, but which attempts to put this legacy of experimentation in the service of more humanist concerns” (Dawson 68).

Thus, the fiction of the age, as noted by Gerard Hoffmann in his *From Modernism to Postmodernism*, did not necessarily portend “a full break with postmodern art and culture, but it did suggest a new orientation in culture and art following political and social changes” (623). The novel after postmodernism is characterized by “the return to traditional forms of narrative and storytelling” (623), but it does not signify “a return to the belief system of traditional realism” (624). Hoffmann further maintains that in spite of its discursive construction as an opposite mode to postmodernist fiction, realism as a representational mode has never disappeared from fictional works; therefore, its “return” should be understood in terms of how realist modes are appropriated to go beyond postmodern concerns as experienced by the authors. As Huber concludes, the return to the real does not re-voke the notion of representation, it rather fosters “a belief in the power of communication” (Huber 28). According to Toth, as postmodernism passes, a shift “from ostentatious works of postmodern metafiction to more grounded, or ‘responsible,’ works of neo-realism” (3) can be observed. In this respect, “the return to represent the world constructively, to connect with others” (McLaughlin 215) becomes more and more accentuated. Furthermore, according to Franzen, novelists can thus preserve faith in the novelistic craft: “What emerges as the belief that unifies [novelists] is not that a novel can change anything but that it can preserve something” (qtd. in McLaughlin “Post-Postmodern Discontent” 62). The things they preserve may range from language to retrospective look, but above all, Franzen holds, novelists preserve the community of readers and writers. Thus, fiction once again emerges as a site where empathy can be created through imagination. Winfried Fluck believes this change of attitude could come about only when “people remembered, or rather finally dared to admit that they had continued to be interested in stories based on the illusion of the referent” (qtd. in Toth 119-20). From a broader perspective, these new “realistic” modes in fiction and the discontent with postmodernism might be said to have produced two main tendencies: to look up to the future in explorations of the post-human or to look back to the past and revive it

in the present. In Byatt's view, in the fiction of the 1990s, nostalgia arises as a natural consequence of living another "end of the century". She says "where we fear the chaos of the contemporary, with its bombs at airports and other uncontrollable threats, we turn to nostalgia for a past that suggests order and familiarity" (qtd. in Becker 24).

In Tim Gauthier's view as articulated in *Narrative Desire and Historical Reparations: A.S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie*, "the narrativization of history is propelled by two contradictory impulses - a desire to create a link with the past and a desire to break with it entirely" (11). In *Possession*, nostalgia is utilized as the motivating force behind the quest narrative, and it certainly aims to create a link between the past and present literary traditions. Byatt's handling of nostalgia in *Possession*, reaches far beyond a simple yearning for a familiar past; rather, it functions to highlight the desire of contemporary characters to return to a state where "ignorance was bliss". Maud's contemptuous remarks about their poststructuralist outlook evince her disillusionment and the ensuing desperation: "We are very knowing. We know all sorts of things, too- about how there isn't a unitary ego-how we're made up of conflicting, interacting systems of things- and I suppose we believe that? We know we are driven by desire, but we can't see it as they did, can we?" (290). As Maud confesses, her generation is "possessed" by the theoretical lens. For instance, it "has learned to see sex everywhere" (266), and habitually Maud and Roland are "children of a time and culture which mistrusted love, 'in love,' romantic love, romance in toto, and which nevertheless in revenge proliferated sexual language, linguistic sexuality, analysis, dissection, deconstruction, exposure" (458). Greaney proposes that as such, "they belong to a post-theoretical generation, fluent in the language of poststructuralism but impatient with its limitations and resentful of its oppressive ubiquity" (114). The overwhelming sense of impatience Greaney associates with poststructuralism, can be discerned from the narrator's tone, in the extract quoted below:

They were theoretically knowing: they knew about phallogocry and penisneid, punctuation, puncturing and penetration, about polymorphous and polysemous perversity, orality, good and bad breasts, clitoral tumescence, vesicle persecution, the fluids, the solids, the metaphors for these, the systems of desire and damage, infantile greed and oppression and

transgression the iconography of the cervix and the imagery of the expanding and contracting Body, desired, attacked, consumed, feared. (458)

This, as suggested by the narrator, is the only language available to Roland and Maud to talk about love and desire, whereas Victorians had the language of poetry and feeling before them. While the Victorians could talk about love, the twentieth century plot underlines that “speech, the kind of speech they knew, would have undone it” (459). Having stated they can never experience love as stripped of its ideological constructions, Maud enounces that it would take “a real effort of imagination to know what it felt like to be them, here, believing in these things— Love—themselves— that what they did mattered—” (290).

*Possession* is this effort Byatt makes to imagine what it would feel like to live, read and write like Victorians in a spatiotemporal plane where the signifier was not dissociated from the signified, where love was “felt” and “lived” rather than “analysed,” and fiction, as E.M Forster dreamed, had the potential to “connect” human beings. With this function, Victorian age was also a time when the author had enjoyed an unprecedented authority as a public intellectual. Interpreted from a post-postmodernist perspective, Byatt’s treatment of nostalgia is woven around a conspicuous problem surfacing in late postmodernism: the novelist’s imminent fear of loss of his/her authority as a public intellectual, and her attempt to restore this authority. In view of this, in the next section, the appeal of the Victorian practices of authorship, which foreground the author as a public intellectual, and Byatt’s Neo-Victorianism will be analysed in relation to Byatt’s construction of her authorial identity.

### **3.2 Meaning Making: Byatt’s Neo-Victorian Outlook and the Return of Omniscience in *Possession***

#### **3.2.1 Byatt’s Neo-Victorianism**

Along with John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, *Possession* has often been identified as the novel that has started a conscious engagement with the Victorian period, which was to be later examined in the broad category of “Neo-Victorian fiction”. Byatt states that her aim in writing *Possession* was to save “the complicated Victorian thinkers from modern diminishing parodies like those of

Fowles and Lytton Strachey, and from the disparaging mockery (especially of the poets) of Leavis and T.S. Eliot” (*On Histories and Stories* 78-9). She further continues with a well-known reference to Victorian poetry as “lesser” than Modernist poetry in the following words: “Tennyson and Browning were poets and they thought; but they did not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. Nonsense – but my generation believed it” (*ibid*). Being a key “neo-Victorian” novel in this sense, *Possession* thus captures the zeitgeist of the time both in its treatment of Victorian past and also through its critical stance towards the position of literature in the age of literary theory.

Even though various dates are pointed out as the beginning of neo-Victorian fiction, most critics seem to agree on the 1960s; and, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969) are highlighted as two important texts that mark the beginnings of neo-Victorianism. It is also generally agreed that with the popularity *Possession* (1990) gained, neo-Victorian fiction entered the mainstream (Hadley *Neo-Victorian* 2). Louise Hadley defines neo-Victorian fiction as “contemporary fiction that engages with the Victorian era, at either the level of plot, structure, or both” (4). According to Hadley, neo-Victorian fiction is a particular genre with “one foot in the nineteenth and one in the twentieth” (*Neo-Victorian* 15). Similarly, Heilmann and Llewellyn also note that the concerns in neo-Victorian fiction go well beyond the fiction set in the nineteenth century. According to them, “[t]o be part of neo-Victorianism [...] texts [...] must in some respect be self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians” (4). In Byatt’s view, neo-Victorian fictions allow the novelist to connect the past and the present, as well as harbouring the “aesthetic need to write coloured and metaphorical language, to keep past literatures alive and singing, connecting the pleasure of writing to the pleasure of reading” (*On Histories and Stories* 11).

In various places, A.S. Byatt voiced the idea that the joy of literature is now lost. For instance, in her essay “Reading, Writing, Studying,” Byatt explores how the “professional reader,” who studies the work at the university level emerged, which in turn paved the way for the academic study of fiction. However, complains Byatt, this form of critical study has forgotten its main purpose, which was to give

pleasure both to the author and the reader (“Introduction” xiii). Similarly, in the interview with Jonathan Noakes, she refers to her dissatisfaction with the contemporary theoretical climate. Byatt relates how she viewed “the neo-Freudian, neo-Lacanian discussion of sexuality ad infinitum, and the sexual analysis of every sentence, the gender analysis of every sentence of every book, of every poem as ‘murdering to dissect’” (Noakes 26). *Possession* concentrates particularly on the above-mentioned situation, through building a comparison between the textual scholars Maud and Roland, with the satirically portrayed poststructuralist Fergus Wolff, the lesbian-feminist Leonora Stern, and the biographer Mortimer Cropper. Byatt compares and contrasts the current theoretical studies with the way literature was being studied in her time. She argues that the criticism in her day was focused on “practicing *writers*, demonstrating their delight in their craft, and in the craft of their predecessors” (*On Histories and Stories* 5–6; emphasis in original). Byatt’s study of authors such as Henry James, Coleridge, T. S. Eliot and Arnold at Cambridge helped her join the “civilized discourse and communication between readers and writers” (*ibid* 6). Admiring authors who write about the “nature” of writing and referring to the study of such authors as communication in a civilized discourse, Byatt laments what she perceives as the overwhelming presence of theory in the critical studies of literature. According to Byatt, the over-presence of quotations from theorists such as Freud, Marx, Derrida and Foucault, at the expense of the novel in question, leads “critics and theorists to make writers fit into the boxes and nets of theoretical quotations,” leaving no room for the exciting possibilities fiction itself offers (*ibid*).

Byatt’s dissatisfaction with critical theory stems from the way it is used. Referring to Marxist methodology, she mentions how she feels threatened by its emphasis on ideology, which determines everything. For Byatt, privileging ideology over anything else implies that “what has been thought to be valuable in our literature was determined by class ideology and should therefore be knocked down and got rid of and expunged” (qtd. in Franken 15). She is particularly distressed about how scholarly readings approach a text from a certain methodological framework, and apply the language of this methodology to the literary work, even before the literary work is read and evaluated in terms of its literary qualities and

located in relation to other works that precede and follow it. With her Neo-Victorian outlook, Byatt aims to bridge this rupture, which she believes was created by the theory.

In Kirchknopf's view, Neo-Victorian fictions or "post-Victorian" fictions as she calls them are united in their particular features such as their volume, content and narrative. Neo-Victorian novels are as thick as their Victorian counterparts; they imitate and/or parody genres such as the social realist novel; and, "they typically employ narrative voices of the types dominant in nineteenth-century texts, i.e., the first-person character-narrator or the third-person omniscient one" (Kirchknopf 54). Hadley proposes that in the first place, due to their particular position as "[c]lose enough for us to be aware that we have descended from them and yet far enough away for there to be significant differences in life-styles" (*Neo-Victorian* 7), Victorians are like grandparents to us. Separated from them by a generation, twentieth and twenty-first-century generations can connect to their Victorian ancestors, freed from the Modernist anxiety of influence that characterizes the previous generation's view of their predecessors (*ibid*). Perhaps this attraction can also be explained through the argument that the world of the Victorians and the Victorian novel offers the reader "a sense of cozy familiarity" (4), as suggested by George Levine, one of the leading figures in Victorian studies. Levine believes that unlike the modernist novels, which, usually through the use of fragmentation, disrupt a unified view of the world, in the Victorian novel, the moral universe of the author and the character are one and the same. This effect was achieved mostly through realism, the quality for which Victorian novel has usually been regarded as an inferior form, by later generations of writers. However, as George Levine states "no major Victorian novelists were deluded into believing that they were in fact offering an unmediated reality; but all of them struggled to make contact with the world out there, and even with their knowledge of their own subjectivity, to break from the threatening limits of solipsism, of convention, and of language" (8). In other words, they aimed for sincerity, or "sympathy" as George Eliot would have put it. This sympathy can be achieved through "faithfulness," as famously declared by the narrator of *Adam Bede*, in Chapter 17. The narrator states that she/he aims to present

no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath. (168)

This passage, often quoted as an exemplary authorial outburst of Victorian realism, proves that Victorian realists generally were aware of the defectiveness of the mirror; yet, they continued in their earnest belief that the truth could be attained and thus told through narrative. As noted by Levine on his study of George Eliot's fiction, George Eliot, who has had great influence on Byatt's fiction, "was alert not only to the complications of society, but to the subtle difficulties of the medium, language, itself" (Levine *Eliot* 10), and Neo-Victorian novels further continue this interest in language.

In addition, the Victorians, Levine argues "inherited from their romantic predecessors (and contemporaries) an imagination of the organic connection among all things, connections natural, historical, religious, and ethical" (15), and he also asserts that Victorian novel is self-conscious about time, transition and history (17). In an interview she gives to Eleanor Wachtel, Byatt underlines that the novel is structured around one irony, or joke: "the dead are actually more alive and vital than the living" (82). Even though Roland and Maud possess literary texts, letters and diaries of the dead poets, in fact, the content of these written documents eventually haunts and possesses the contemporary scholars. In the same interview, Byatt further explains that Victorians felt self-assured about themselves and their existence: "They didn't have modern theories of there being no concrete personality, of everybody being just a kind of mixture of moments in time and voices of the language speaking through them; they really believed they were important people and that what they did mattered in the eyes of God and in their own lives" (Wachtel 82-3), and juxtaposes them in her novel with twentieth-century scholar-characters, who are possessed by the language within which they are confined. Only when they learn to pay due respect to creative power over the critical, can they fully grasp how Victorian authors speak directly to the reader's body and mind, which, in turn, leads the reader to discover the creative urge in himself/herself, as in the example of Roland, who, at the end of the novel, starts writing poetry.

Quoting from Humpherys, Kirchknopf claims that the reader of a post-Victorian novel “must interpret two texts at once” (52) pertaining to nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In order to maintain this distinction between the two texts, Neo-Victorian fictions overtly underline that they do not aim to “collapse the distance between the Victorians and us;” rather, their depictions of the Victorian past remain aware of the position of the twentieth-century author and reader, and, hence, are self-conscious about how the Victorian past is narrated in the present (Hadley 58). *Possession* is an excellent example of the productive clash between these two texts and hence two worldviews. Just like the actual reader of the novel, the protagonists of the twentieth century plot, Maud and Roland, who are the readers of the Victorian plot, become educated about the inadequacies of their theoretical methodologies, and by the end of the novel, they learn how to “read”. The lesson Roland and Maud learn is to respect the primacy of the author rather than the critic. For instance, at the end of this quest narrative, Roland experiences a thorough change. Roland, who had until then, “learned to see himself, theoretically, as a crossing-place for a number of systems, all loosely connected [...] his idea of his ‘self’ as an illusion, to be replaced by a discontinuous machinery and electrical message-network of various desires, ideological beliefs and responses, language-forms and hormones and pheromones” (459), now learns how to submit to the author, and thus he becomes an ideal reader/critic, as he recognizes the ideal kind of reading is the one that acknowledges the author’s authority over the text. The discovery of Ash’s letters initiates this process with their defying the closure as opposed to the fixity of the literary theories. “Letters tell no story, because they do not know, from line to line, where they are going [...]. Letters, finally, exclude not only the reader as co-writer, or predictor, or guesser, but they exclude the reader as reader; they are written, if they are true letters, for a reader” (145; emphasis in the original). The letters are also unique due to their ability to travel publicly from one private space to the other, and Roland has to learn to use different reading strategies since “[t]he truth was, Roland thought uneasily, these letters, these busy passionate letters, had never been written for him to read—as *Ragnarök* had, as *Mummy Possesst* had, as the Lazarus poem had.<sup>15</sup> They

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<sup>15</sup> *Ragnarök Mummy Possesst Lazarus* are works belonging to Byatt’s fictional poet, Randolph Henry Ash. Here Roland is referring to different reading strategies applied to public and private documents, by questioning our right to “dissect” letters in the same way we approach poetry and fiction.

had been written for Christabel LaMotte” (146). What he is doing is to “dissect” the contents of these letters to discover what he is looking for. However, the letters continue to surprise him in ways he could not have possibly imagined when he purloined Ash’s letter from the London Library. So, as Desblache claims, the use of letters, which have no clear beginning and end, and the content of which continually evades the voyeuristic reader, who is not the addressee of the letter, functions to highlight its quality as an open-ended text (91). In view of that, Roland realizes, his reading of these letters, significantly differs from the way “the reader” of these letters would have read them. Accordingly, in this quest, Roland comes to realize that

There are readings—of the same text—that are dutiful, readings that map and dissect, readings that hear a rustling of unheard sounds, that count grey little pronouns for pleasure or instruction and for a time do not hear golden or apples. There are personal readings, which snatch for personal meanings, I am full of love, or disgust, or fear, I scan for love, or disgust, or fear. There are—believe it—impersonal readings—where the mind’s eye sees the lines move onwards and the mind’s ear hears them sing and sing. (511-12)

As opposed to these different sorts of readings, where Roland constantly invokes the fallacies associated with the author, and transfers them to the sophisticated reader, the critic; the narrator of the novel continues to suggest that there are also other kinds of readings which give pleasure, bring out the creative energy in the reader, and connect the act of reading and writing: “Now and then there are readings that make the hairs on the neck, the non-existent pelt, stand on end and tremble, when every word burns and shines hard and clear and infinite and exact, like Stones of fire, like points of stars in the dark” (*ibid*).

As Roland reads Ash’s poetry, he experiences exactly the same feelings. Even if he has read it many times before, he is still moved by the language and imagery, and he can hear both Ash’s own distinct voice and the other voices, he has absorbed in his writing, such as Vico’s. In an ideal text, not only the author’s distinct voice is heard, but also all the voices that constitute the texts are heard individually; moreover, these voices speak to the creative urge in the reader. Reading Ash’s poetry -eventually prompts Roland to think about his own writing, to don the paper and pen not to deconstruct, but to construct a poem. In order to do so, he begins by “writing lists of words [...] that resisted arrangement into the sentences of literary

criticism or theory” (467). First, he has to get rid of his poststructuralist attire. Roland tries to achieve it via “resistance to theory,” as his list of words resisting into theorization suggests:

He wrote: blood, clay, terracotta, carnation.

He wrote: blond, burning bush, scattering.

He annotated this, “scattering as in Donne, “extreme and scattering bright,” nothing to do with scattergraphs.”

He wrote: anemone, coral, coal, hair, hairs, nail, nails, fur, owl, isinglass, scarab.

He rejected wooden, point, link, and other ambivalent words, also blot and blank, though all these sprang (another word he hesitated over) to mind. He was uncertain about the place of verbs in this primitive language. Spring, springs, springes, sprung, sprang. Arrow, bough (not branch, not root), leaf-mould, water, sky.

Vocabularies are crossing circles and loops. We are defined by the lines we choose to cross or to be confined by. (*ibid*)

At the end of the novel though, now these lists, consisting of words that resist theorization, can finally turn into poems: “[...] lists of words that arranged themselves into poems [...] He could hear, or feel, or even almost see, the patterns made by a voice he didn’t yet know, but which was his own” (515). Roland can become a poet only after he crosses the confining lines of poststructuralism and he acknowledges the authority of the author. Along with Roland, Maud too, becomes a good reader as she subjects to the genius of the writer. In Hadley’s view, the fact that Maud inherits the letters at the end of the novel is significant in this respect, as the last scene where Maud reads the letters to a group including Blackadder, the biographer Mortimer Cropper and the feminist critic Leonora Stern, singles Maud out as the rightful owner (130) hence as the ideal reader. LaMotte’s final letter read aloud by Maud functions as a *deus ex machina* as it reconciles several issues such as what happened to LaMotte’s daughter and the questions of inheritance. Maud seems to have found the greatest pursuit of her life, but while the novel ends seemingly on “full knowledge” of things on the part of the twentieth-century characters, the postscript challenges and parodies the naive belief of characters, and thus the readers, in their ability to finally “possess” knowledge. As the authorial narration of the omniscient narrator lays bare, facts might be hidden, distorted and misunderstood, it is the meaning, the ‘fiction’ we make out of them, which continues to live on.

According to Hadley, the use of authorial narration provides an authority to the narrator over the past she/he is narrating (*Neo-Victorian* 151). The most overt example of this in *Possession* is Byatt's powerful assertion that marks the postscript: "This is how it was" (522). Furthermore, as Hadley discusses, through authorial narration "unlike the partial and unreliable narratives of much postmodern fiction, then, Victorian novels encourage the reader to accept the narrator's perspective as the truth" (*Neo-Victorian* 151). As a result, "the reader's confidence in the narrative is enhanced by the fact that the narrator is a disembodied presence in the novel who is, therefore, assumed to be providing an objective, historical account of events" (*ibid*). As mentioned above regarding George Eliot, the reader knows realism is an illusion, but willingly submits to being lured by the "referential illusion," which has also been noted by George Levine in *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (1981). Levine claims that: "the great novelists of the nineteenth century were never so naïve about narrative conventions or the problems of representation as later realists or modern critics have suggested" (7), and through representing the Victorian world as more lively and sensual and "knowing" compared to the colourless, blank world of the twentieth-century scholars, Byatt is speaking exactly to this tension, as evident in the comparison Maud makes between the world of Ash and LaMotte and the world Roland and she inhabit.

Victorian literature viewed the "author" as the source and the centre of meaning, and this feature of the Victorian fiction accounts for the emergence of neo-Victorian fiction as particularly interested in the author question. For instance, in her analysis of what she terms as "post-Victorian fiction," Kirchknopf affirms that in novels such as Emma Tennant's *Felony* (2002), Colm Toibin's *The Master* (2004), David Lodge's *Author, Author* (2004), all of which focus on the life of Henry James, it is possible to observe how these novels consciously join in the "symbolic move of restoring authorship into the central position it assumed in the nineteenth century" (49). Victorian author is an authority over his/her text; she/he can enter a dialogue with the reader, and above all she/he is a moralist and social intellectual, which, Kirchknopf affirms, parallels the contemporary author's emergence as a public intellectual (51).

On the whole, Byatt's juxtaposition of the two worlds discloses anxieties about the identity of the author. In her book *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2012), Helen Davies proposes that Byatt's depiction of fictional Victorian poets Ash and LaMotte "does not disclose an *anxiety* about her own authorial voice" (144). In Davies's view, ventriloquizing the past shows Byatt's talent. Davies's claim might be taken to be partly true in that Byatt's anxieties about her authorial position and/or voice manifest themselves in her ironic and/or satirical treatment of contemporary author and/or scholar figures rather than in her appropriation of the voices of the Victorian poets. Victorian poets serve as comparison to contemporary scholars, with the juxtaposition between the liveliness of the former with the dryness of the latter. Thus, in *Possession*, rather than expressing authorial anxiety about her *own* voice, Byatt is expressing her dissatisfaction with contemporary state of things, particularly in the field of literary criticism. Byatt is profoundly self-assured about the strength of her authorial voice, but she still feels disturbed, rather than threatened, by the theoretical discourses that deny the author any textual authority. In order to emphasise all of these points, she writes *Possession* using Victorian literary conventions, and through re-asserting a central position for the author via the dead poets Ash and LaMotte, she challenges Barthes's "the death of the author". She believes that authors speak through the text, and they have a power that transcends both textual and physical time and space. Byatt explains this through "haunting". She states: "[a]s a writer I know very well that a text is all the words that are in it, and not only those words, but the other words that precede it, haunt it, and are echoed in it" – (*On Histories and Stories* 46).

Byatt explains this thought in her book *Passions of the Mind*, by referring to herself as a "greedy" reader and writer (xiii), who takes pleasure in this activity which she sees as inseparable. This view of the relationship between reading and writing is directly related to the way Byatt performs her authorship. She believes that an author writes what she reads, and as if to justify this, she writes novels about Victorian period, on which she has studied extensively. As in her other novels and critical work, when Byatt set out to write *Possession*, she had a very specific agenda: to give voice to Victorian authors, especially poets, who were first overshadowed by the dominance of the Victorian novel, and later completely left aside as Modernism

prevailed. Byatt explains how she decided to write *Possession*: “I said that writing Victorian words in Victorian contexts, in a Victorian order, and in Victorian relations of one word to the next was the only way I could think of to show one could hear the Victorian dead” (*On Histories and Stories* 46). However, Byatt defends, *Possession* is not only an “innocent evocation of voices, for the pure pleasure of recreating the Victorian rhythms by which I am haunted” (*ibid*). It has its own agenda to lay bare, critique and challenge. For example, Byatt asserts “Christabel LaMotte’s *Melusina* was written because I had heard a talk by the French feminist, Luce Irigaray, on powerful women who were neither virgins nor mothers. It was written to conform with a feminist interpretation of the imaginary poem – an interpretation I had in fact written before writing the text itself” (*ibid* 47). Accordingly, instead of simply evoking the Victorian voices, through the studies of her twentieth century characters Roland and Maud, Byatt creates a fictional world in which the plot proceeds through the poems, diary entries and letters of Victorian figures, LaMotte and Ash. In other words, Byatt re-creates the Victorian world through writing a “Victorian novel,” in every possible sense of the term, including the content, form and intention of the Victorian novels. While the presence of letters, poems, and documents about Ash and LaMotte complies with the “realist” method, the novel also presents itself as a “romance” and alludes to Gothic images and myths such as the maiden captivated in a tower, black magician and Melusine, the inspiration for *The Fairy Melusina* poem of Christabel LaMotte.

Byatt first refers to general perception of romance as inferior to the “rational” discourses of the nineteenth century through presenting the gendered perception of romance in the nineteenth century. The reader learns Christabel LaMotte’s view of romance from Sabine’s diary. Referring to Christabel, Sabine writes:

She talked of *Melusina* and the nature of epic. She wants to write a Fairy Epic she says, not grounded in historical truth, but in poetic and imaginative truth—like Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, or Ariosto, where the soul is free of the restraints of history and fact. She says Romance is a proper form for women. She says Romance is a land where women can be free to express their true natures, as in the Ile de Sein or Sid, though not in this world. (404)

The rest of the diary entry is even more interesting, where Christabel makes it clear that femininity is constructed by the male gaze, and in her work, she will play with this idea, in the only form available to her:

She said, in Romance, women's two natures can be reconciled. I asked, which two natures, and she said, men saw women as double beings, enchantresses and demons or innocent angels.

'Are all women double?' I asked her.

'I did not say that,' she said. 'I said all men see women as double. Who knows what Melusina was in her freedom with no eyes on her?' (*ibid*)

Noakes inquires Byatt about what possible versions of romance she had in mind when she subtitled *Possession* "A Romance", to which Byatt responds that once she had the idea she had set out "to include every conceivable version of romance" (11). These possible versions Byatt admits, start with Hawthorne's definition of romance as "a novel that didn't have to keep strictly to the truth and could include elements of fantasy" (qtd. in Noakes 11), and range from romance as historical novel to Victorian reworkings of Medieval romances. Then, continues Byatt, she felt propelled to parody modern romantic literature, and the result was *Possession*, a multi-layered novel.

### **3.2.2 The Return of Omniscient Narration**

Constructing her authorial voice has preoccupied Byatt at every stage of her writing career. Starting with her debut, *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964), where the protagonist strives to create a space for herself in the shadows of her novelist father, Byatt, like Lodge and Gee, creates various author figures in novels such as *The Game* (1967), *Still Life* (1985), *Babel Tower* (1996), *The Biographer's Tale* (2000) and *A Whistling Woman* (2002). This overt interest in the author figure corresponds to Byatt's admission that she has an agenda to reconstruct the author's authority. In order to comply with it, Byatt avoids certain types of narration while foregrounding others. For instance, Byatt certainly adores the panoramic 19<sup>th</sup> century novel and aims to recreate it in her novels, and she explains that she can achieve such polyphony through walking in the footsteps of two novelists, George Eliot and Iris Murdoch. Stating that she never liked the novels which were focusing on only one character, Byatt claims that George Eliot taught her how to "invent a world peopled by a large number of interrelated people, almost all of whose processes of thought, developments of consciousness, biological anxieties, sense of their past and future can most scrupulously be made available to readers" (qtd. in Franken 13), in opposition to the fragmented narratives.

Byatt often mentioned that in her decision to write *Possession*, she was driven by the urge to revive the “unfashionable” Victorian narrator, as explained below: “My instinct as a writer of fiction has been to explore and defend the unfashionable Victorian third-person narrator – who is not, as John Fowles claimed, playing at being God, but *merely the writer*, telling what can be told about the world of the fiction” (*On Histories and Stories* 102; emphasis added). Byatt carefully distinguishes between the Godlike omniscient narrator and Victorian third-person narrator, but her referring to this kind of narrator as “merely the writer,” underscores that authority she assigns to this kind of narrator, as being the same, or, at least a part of, the author.

The desire for the referential illusion resulted in the return of narrative forms and modes that were associated with Victorianism. In his book, *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator: Authorship and Authority in Twenty-First Century Fiction* (2013), Dawson identifies omniscient narration as one of the main tenets of post-postmodern fiction (4). He notes that literary omniscience is a term that connects the narrator and the author (14); and, therefore, the return of omniscience signals the return of the author, as has been analysed in the previous chapter on the death and return of the author. Rather than drawing clear-cut boundaries between the author and narrator, Dawson tries to understand how narrative authority is created through the amalgamation of the two significant components of the narrative communication (*ibid*). Dawson refers to omniscience not just as a technique, but also as a “figure of authorship embodied in the narrative voice” (9), and quoting from Russo, he concludes that “[o]mniscience means, of course, all knowing, and it favours writers who know things and are confident about what they know and generous enough to want to share their knowledge” (9).

In Victorian novel, in accordance with the novelist’s public posture as being endowed with the ability to grasp and represent all of human knowledge, the author emerges as the embodiment of God, as laid out in the narrator’s remarks in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*:

The novelist is still a god, since he creates (and not even the most laudatory avant-garde novel has managed to extirpate its author completely); what has changed is that we are no longer the gods of the Victorian image, omniscient and decreeing; but in the new theological image, with freedom our first principle, not authority. (41)

Over the years these words were frequently quoted to account for the return of omniscience. When questioned by Rowland Molony in *Conversations with John Fowles*, Fowles himself had agreed that the novelist is a “dictator” in the sense that after all it is the novelist who governs the fictional world (29). Byatt opposes Fowles’s view. She thinks this kind omniscient narrator “can creep closer to the feelings and the inner life of characters – as well as providing a Greek chorus – than any first-person mimicry” (*On Histories and Stories* 55-6). In *Possession*, she uses this kind of narrator, to preside over the narrative, to tell the reader things that biographers and historians fail to discover.

Consequently, in opposition to Fowles’s omniscient narrator identified with the God, Byatt offers the narrator as being similar to “the common human voice of the Chorus in Greek Tragedy” (*On Histories and Stories* 85). The chorus occupies a privileged position in the history of Greek drama due to its privilege to have an insight beyond that of any character. With this feature, the chorus shares a sense of solidarity with the audience. Byatt likens this to the author’s direct messages to the reader. The chorus in Greek tragedies also represents the moral universe of the society the play is produced in, and, similarly, Byatt’s choric narrator is the elucidator of her ethics regarding fiction and criticism. Dawson differentiates the omniscient narrator from other heterodiegetic narrators through checking the rhetorical performances of these two types of narrators. Accordingly, he concludes that in order to assume omniscience, a narrator must display this authorial narration through “overt displays of zero focalization (saying something no character could know) and extra narrative statements which establish the intrusive presence of the narrator (63). *Possession* has a heterodiegetic narrator, who is not present in the story she/he is narrating, and this narrator occasionally assumes omniscience, and becomes “capable like God himself of seeing beyond actions and of sounding body and soul” (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 209; emphasis in the original), despite Byatt’s opposition to Fowles’s perception of the omniscient narrator as God-like, and proposing the alternative of the Greek chorus. Moreover, as there are two story lines within the twentieth-century world and the Victorian world, the characters in the twentieth century become the narrators of the Victorian world. The focalization shifts between multiple and variable as the stories are first narrated through Roland’s

and Maud's focalizations of the Victorian world of Ash and LaMotte, and then through Ash's and LaMotte's own focalization, or through the allusions to their work, or their letters. Genette defines focalization as "a restriction of field" (ND 189), which suggests that focalization determines the extent and scope of the knowledge the narrator grants to a character. In *Possession*, the parts where Maud and Roland are employed as focal characters, point out to their limited views in contrast to an all-knowing omniscient narrator. Quite often, in the parts Maud and Roland bemoan their position, the narrator's tone becomes ironic, hence distanced from Maud's and Roland's. This sort of narrative distancing strengthens the author's position as all-knowing.

Byatt uses this kind of narration to indicate the author's authority. In *The Dictionary of Narratology*, Gerald Prince defines authority as "[t]he extent of a narrator's knowledge of the narrative situation and events," and argues that "[a]n omniscient narrator (*Tom Jones*, *The Red and the Black*) has more authority than one who does not provide an inside view of the characters" (9). In *Narrative Fiction* (1983), Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan identifies this authority as gained "precisely [through] their being absent from the story" (95). Thus, in self-conscious realist novels like *Possession*, through the use of the omniscient narrator, the author emerges as fulfilling Flaubert's definition "everywhere felt, but never seen" (qtd. in Dawson 167-8).

In addition to the postscript, the most overt examples of Byatt's assertion of her authorial power are the authorial commentaries where the third person narrator leaves the narrative situation and begins to talk to the reader, the most pertinent of which appears in Chapter 26. While describing the pleasure Roland takes in rereading Ash's "*The Garden of Proserpina* for perhaps the twelfth, or maybe even the twentieth time" (511), the narrator introduces a commentary on the act of reading, its nature and the power of creative literature, which continues over a couple of lengthy paragraphs. Below is an extract from this commentary:

It is possible for a writer to make, or remake at least, for a reader, the primary pleasures of eating, or drinking, or looking on, or sex. Novels have their obligatory tour-de-force, the green-flecked gold omelette *aux fines herbes*, melting into buttery formlessness and tasting of summer, or the creamy human haunch, firm and warm, curved back to reveal a hot hollow, a

crisping hair or two, the glimpsed sex. They do not habitually elaborate on the equally intense pleasure of reading. (510; emphasis in the original)

In addition to such authorial commentaries, the novel is mostly narrated through one of the indispensable constituents of authorial narration, free indirect speech, which Pascal identifies as “belong[ing] essentially to the third-person novel in which the narrator, depersonalised and impossible to name, has the right to enter into every mind and every closet” (qtd. in Dawson 168). Levine confirms this through his identification of free indirect discourse as allowing the author to disappear into the narrative. It not only creates the illusion that whatever happens in the novel happens without the intervention of the narrator, but also allows the author to place judgemental statements, in between the lines. Finally, it also aims to propel the reader to participate as a receiver of these judgements (*How to Read the Victorian Novel* 192).

In its rhetorical performance the narrator shifts between various speech forms, such as free indirect discourse, which Genette defines as the instance where “the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or, if one prefers, the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the two instances then are merged” (*ND* 172), to slip in an out of characters thoughts and words. Thus, in a third-person narrative, the narrator’s speech is combined with mimetic discourse.

According to Genette, the preference on the part of the narrator implies the narrator’s attitude towards the character. While “narrativized, or narrated speech,” (*Narrative Discourse* 170), which is the one most distant from the characters thoughts, the “transposed speech,” is “a little more mimetic than narrated speech, and in principle capable of exhaustiveness;” however, continues Genette, “this form never gives the reader any guarantee—or above all any feeling—of literal fidelity to the words ‘really’ uttered,” the narrator’s presence can still be felt (*ND* 171). Direct speech, the most mimetic and thus less distant of all, is the one where the narrator “pretends literally to give the floor to his character” (*ND* 172) as in the following passage from Byatt’s *Possession*:

‘Take a seat,’ she said crisply, indicating a low upholstered bright blue chair where students no doubt sat to have their work handed back. She handed him walnut-coloured Nescafe. She had not taken off the headdress. ‘Now, how can I be of help to you?’ she said, taking her own seat behind the barrier of

the desk. Roland meditated strategies of evasion of his own. He had vaguely imagined, before meeting her, that he might be able to show her Xeroxes of the purloined letters. Now he knew he could not. Her voice lacked warmth. He said, 'I am working on Randolph Henry Ash. As I wrote to you. It's just come to my attention that he might have corresponded with Christabel LaMotte. I don't know if you have any knowledge of such a correspondence? They certainly met.'

'When?' (46)

As indicated above, in some scenes Byatt mingles free indirect speech with mimetic representation through the use of direct speech; in many places Roland and Maud themselves confess their dissatisfaction with their theory-based educational background, and thus they are represented as having sharing the same ideological view with the author, Byatt, who had the theoretical training like Maud and Roland, but chose to write novels instead of staying in the academia.

Dawson draws attention to the implications of the fact that "the practice of asserting discursive authority through an intrusive third-person narratorial presence founded on the conventional 'privilege' of zero focalization" usually has been practised by a considerably larger number of male writers compared to few female writers (60) and godlike omniscience is usually associated with male point of view. Perhaps due to this association, Byatt has been accused of being anti-feminist due to the narrator's said distance from the female characters. In this respect, Byatt's belief in her narrator as representing the common voice of humanity acquires new meanings. For instance, Mark Llewellyn believes that Byatt challenges this perception through cross-gendered ventriloquial voice, which addresses the "questions of authority, authenticity and authorship" (186). Katherine Tarbox, in her article "Desire for Syzygy in the Novels of A.S Byatt," comes up with the idea that *Possession*, in such a treatment, expresses syzygy, which she defines as "an existential condition symbolised by the hermaphrodite – one who transcends gender by conjoining reason and passion (traditionally associated with maleness and femaleness, respectively) into fully realised humanness that is different from and greater than the sum of those parts" (177). In Tarbox's view, Byatt presents "the hermaphrodite as the only being who can be fully human and who can create a fully human culture" (177). *Possession* can be read in this light with its characters, who, in various ways, find themselves in positions in which they are forced to negotiate

traditionally defined gender roles. The narrative also underlines that the path to creativity lies in cherishing this hermaphroditic energy.

As mentioned earlier, Byatt has often been accused of ignoring the specific relation the female author has to the literary tradition, and in *Possession* Roland and Ash are certainly more on the foreground compared to Maud and Christabel. Byatt herself explains how she has created Ash as a mouthpiece for herself: “Ash carries my thoughts whereas Christabel carries her own” (Todd 43), but does it necessarily mean that Byatt overlooks Christabel and Maud? According to Steveker, *Possession* “marginalizes the only female poet it features” (56) since it denies autonomy to Christabel. While it is true that Christabel cannot achieve the public success she had desired, *Possession* portrays this as a consequence of the historical conditions of the era, rather than Byatt’s privileging the male poet. As shown below, Christabel is certainly aware of her own positionality, which suggests that what Byatt is doing in her narrative is to offer “a faithful representation”. In a letter to Ash, Christabel complains about Ash’s ignorance of the perceptions drawn around the female authors:

*You do not seem aware, Mr Ash, for all your knowledge of the great world I do not frequent, of the usual response to which the production of the Female Pen – let alone in our case, the hypothetick productions – are greeted with. The best one may hope is – oh, it is excellently done – for a woman. And then there are Subjects we may not treat—things we may not know. I do not say but that there must be—and is—some essential difference between the Scope and Power of men and our own limited consciousness and possibly weaker apprehension. But I do maintain, as stoutly, that the delimitations are at present, all wrongly drawn—We are not mere candleholders to virtuous thoughts—mere chalices of Purity—we think and feel, aye and read—which seems not to shock you in us, in me, though I have concealed from many the extent of my— vicarious—knowledge of human vagaries. (197; emphasis in the original)*

Christabel, as seen in this extract is a powerful woman, and through her choice to remain unmarried she can write poetry. In the twentieth-century Maud, too, struggles with similar problems. For instance, her relationship with Fergus Wolff exhausts her; she confronts sneering criticisms from feminist critics on the grounds that she dyes her hair to attract men, as a result of which Maud once shaves her hair and later always wears it covered under a scarf or headband. Through the portrayals of these two female figures who have to struggle with the similar pressure centuries

apart, Byatt lays bare the problems women authors have been facing. Evaluated in this context, the accusations towards Byatt for being anti-feminist seem very naïve, and they rather appear to be formed in response to Byatt's explicit confession of her dislike of feminism as a theory. In fact, this sneering attitude Byatt has to feminism is a part of Byatt's dislike of "pure theory," and for this reason it needs to be understood through an analysis of Byatt's relation to theory rather than a simple comparison between how Byatt presents male and female characters. Analysed from this narrow perspective, Roland naturally emerges as Byatt's favourite character. Roland appears to be *the* author, in the novel. In *Possession*, as noted by Lena Steveker, Byatt characterizes Roland in a way that seems to suggest Roland is the embodiment of two traditions that are associated with male genius: Romanticism and liberal-humanism (45). Steveker holds that by finally distancing himself from Ash, Roland represents "autonomous male individual conceptualized by liberal humanism; and by embracing his own creative potential, he embodies the Romantic view of the poet as a genius" (*ibid*).

In opposition to this, Christabel, for instance, is portrayed as a poet, whose *The Fairy Melusine* is "unreadable" (*Possession* 36) according to Blackadder. Fergus Wolff introduces the poem to Roland as "an odd affair – tragedy and romance and symbolism rampant all over it, a kind of dream world full of strange beasts and hidden meanings and a really weird sexuality or sensuality" (38). However, is Byatt's portrayal of female artistic creativity seen inferior by the poststructuralist critics, as simple as privileging Roland, or is it possible that Byatt perhaps aims at something else here? Through portraying Ash's and Roland's entry into the realm of creative writing as a smooth and effortless process as compared to Christabel's and Maud's, *Possession* actually lays bare the very problems feminists refer to, rather than reproducing them. While Roland's turning into a poet entails a celebration of male creativity over the female artistic vision, it also highlights the different relation the male and female artists have to the tradition, and how this relation affects their artistic creativity and their access to publicity.

Another reason why the novel has been read as anti-feminist is the caricatured portrayal of the feminist critic Leonora Stern. However, as the analysis below aims to show, what Byatt attacks in Leonora is not her feminist view; it is

rather her methods. For instance, when Maud visits Beatrice Nest, who works on the diaries of Ash's wife, Ellen Ash, Beatrice mentions the earlier visit she had from Leonora, in the following words:

A Professor Stern came. From Tallahassee. She wanted to know—to know—to find out about Ellen Ash's sexual relations— with him—or anyone. I told her there was nothing of that kind in this journal. She said there must be—in the metaphors—in the omissions. We were not taught to do scholarship by studying primarily what was omitted, Dr Bailey. No doubt you find me naive (341).

Maud answers to this insightful remark as follows: “No. I occasionally find Leonora Stern naive. No, that's the wrong word. Single-minded and zealous” (*ibid*). This exchange between Maud and Beatrice Nest manifests the critique of Leonora, and mirrors the author's view, which extends to all the scholarship as evidenced in the way Maud continues the dialogue. The narrator informs that “Maud thought of Leonora's ferocity, of Fergus's wicked playfulness, of the whole tenor and endeavour of twentieth-century literary scholarship” (241). Then continues Maud “I agree, Dr Nest. In fact I do agree. The whole of our scholarship—the whole of our thought—we question everything except the centrality of sexuality—Unfortunately feminism can hardly avoid privileging such matters” (241-2).

Moreover, this view of Leonora is also shared by the male figures in the novel, the chief of whom, is Roland. Roland is introduced to Leonora's work after his discovery of Christabel LaMotte's letters, and after reading one of her essays “Venus Mount and Barren Heath,” where she discusses Christabel's *The Fairy Melusina*, Roland feels overwhelmed (275), and asks Maud whether she feels submerged in the theory: “Do you never have the sense that our metaphors eat up our world?” (*ibid*). By metaphors, he refers to the language of theory and he imagines that if it was not for the metaphors, he could more easily follow the connections the literature offers to the nature of things. Letting free association take his mind over, he thinks about gloves, Blanche and Balzac, and questions why this richness, which could lead to other interpretations, is reduced merely to the discussion of sexuality.

I mean, all those gloves, a minute ago, we were playing a professional game of hooks and eyes—mediaeval gloves, giants' gloves, Blanche Glover, Balzac's gloves, the sea-anemone's ovaries—and it all reduced like boiling

jam to—human sexuality. Just as Leonora Stern makes the whole earth read as the female body—and language—all language. And all vegetation in pubic hair. (276)

Elsewhere Byatt voices opinions that parallel the narrative authority in *Possession*. While the narrator of *Possession* makes fun of Leonora, Byatt herself admits that she finds Leonora's style "revolting in the extreme". In an interview Byatt stated she cannot put up with "Leonora's style because she reduces everything to sex and gender as though there was nothing else in the world," by "cannibaliz[ing] several sentences from Luce Irigaray about the female sexual structure, 'ce sexe qui n'en pas un.'" in her feminist analysis of landscapes in Christabel LaMotte's poetry (qtd. in Franken 92).

The way Byatt's scholar characters Maud and Roland perceive Leonora parallels how Byatt herself sees Leonora. In her portrayal of Leonora in such a negative way, Byatt is particularly concerned with what she perceives as "the reductionist" methods feminism might sometimes use, and argues that through writing, the female writer can escape "the limits of being female" through alluding to Virginia Woolf's concept of androgyny (Franken 28-9). Byatt suggests that she interprets Woolf's words "it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex" (*A Room* 75), in a new light. In Byatt's reading, applying this as a rule directed only to the female writer, recreates the structures that confine her, and she insists anyone means both male and female, and a woman has claim to representing the human as much as her male counterparts. In accordance with this, Byatt's portrayal of female creativity aims to reflect both the female artist in her historical specificity and to challenge the stereotypical representations such as Leonora Stern's in *Possession*. In relation to this, Byatt refers to how *Possession* "wrote against the grain of what a feminist would have told," and continues "I made a feminist heroine, who since I'd invented her could be whatever I liked. So I made her a lesbian poet who turned out to have a heterosexual affair. I deliberately shifted the paradigm" (Walker 332).

Catherine Burgass points out that while Byatt's Neo-Victorian novels contemplate a female consciousness and vision, there is always domesticity added to it (9), and through this domesticity, Byatt can juxtapose the use of public and private spheres that were available to female artists. As a result, Byatt can portray different characters such as Ellen Ash, who can typically be described as "the angel in the

house,” devoting all her time and energy to her husband’s studies, and Christabel LaMotte and Blanche Glover, who only through their choice to remain unmarried, can remain artists. LaMotte and Glover share a house, they create “a room of their own,” to practise their art. As the decline in LaMotte’s writing poetry, noted by Blanche in her diary, testifies, any male “intrusion” in the female artist’s room disturbs the harmony of this room. This threat is replicated in the twentieth-century plot, too. In the first place, Maud can connect to Christabel because like her, who had said her solitude was her treasure (152), Maud, too, can only feel at peace in her flat which she describes as her “bright safe box” (151). Even though Maud eventually welcomes Roland, she feels threatened by his presence, and at the end of the novel, Maud is seen as unable to decide between following Roland to Europe, or to stay in Lincoln and continue her studies. Thus, the boundaries between the public and private spaces also determine the kind of literary production produced in and for these spaces. For example, Christabel, who chooses to be an outcast to sustain herself as an artist, is definitely against keeping a diary, which she associates with domesticity. As Maud relates to Roland, in a letter Christabel had warned one of her nieces, advising against it: “If you can order your Thoughts and shape them into Art, good: if you can live in the obligations and affections of Daily Life, good. But do not get into the habit of morbid Self-examination. Nothing so unfits a woman for producing good work, or for living usefully” (47; original format). However, in *Possession* this boundary is rendered problematic, as indicated by how “domestic women” eventually come to public attention after the discovery of Ash’s letters. The documents such as Ellen Ash’s and Blanche Gover’s diaries, which were never intended for the public eye, become sites of public investigation, exemplifying the interaction between the extra-textual and the textual.

Byatt thus also draws attention to epitexts as communicating with the text. For instance, the reason behind the assumption that LaMotte is a lesbian poet is an entry in Blanche Glover’s diary, where she expresses her anger towards the male lover Christabel has in a possessive tone. In the part she is writing about daily house chores, Blanche complains about how Christabel is becoming more and more estranged.

The Princess [Christabel] did not help us this year. She was getting her Literary Letter ready to post, though she denied this, and said she was hurrying to finish the *Glass Coffin* for the book of tales. I believe she is writing fewer poems. Certainly she does not show me them, of an evening, as we were used to do. All this correspondence is detrimental to her true gifts. She is in no real need of epistolary adulation. (52)

Two weeks later, another entry is jotted down, where Blanche expresses dissatisfaction with the arrival of letters, to which she has no access (*ibid*). In the following parts of the diary, the author of these letters, Ash, is described as a “Prowler” (52), “The Peeping Tom” (53), and “The Wolf” (54), whom Blanche wishes she could lock away (53). Blanche fears not only losing Christabel, she is also genuinely concerned about Christabel’s decreasing interest in writing poetry.

Through inserting these diary entries in the narrative, Byatt comments upon the complicated divide between the genres that are associated with the public and the private. In the first place, the diaries were never intended for the public eye, and while this suggests that in diaries the writers could be more sincere as opposed to the works intended for the public eye, through problematizing this, *Possession* suggests that the opposite case may also be true. In *Possession*, it is fictional works, Ash’s and LaMotte’s poems, that are more sincere, and “truthful” to their lived reality. However, their voice, appropriated by feminist readings, fails to convey the love affair that would speak through their poems.

Possessing one’s voice is thus a central concern in *Possession*, which, as famously known, originated from a real event, after Byatt’s encountering a famous Coleridge scholar, Kathleen Coburn while she was studying in British Library. The picture of Coburn, as dedicating her life to Coleridge, led Byatt to think of this sort of dedication as a demonic possession (Noakes 12). Byatt relates this event as follows: “I thought, ‘Does he possess her? Has this dead man taken over this living woman?, or has she taken possession of him, because we read his thoughts as mediated by her?’” (*ibid*). Coburn becomes an example for Byatt in more interesting ways as well. In the following parts of her interview, Byatt talks about Coburn’s editing Coleridge’s notebooks in a certain manner of her own, rather than simply presenting them as they were found, along with the discovery of Coburn’s having taken many of Coleridge’s notebooks to Canada and written to English scholars in a teasing manner that the documents will be safe in Canada, further prompted Byatt to

think about other possible connotations of “possession,” such as material possession of manuscripts and letters, as well as sexual connotations of “possessing” someone (Reynolds and Noakes 13), which Byatt explores in *Possession* through the obsessed biographer Mortimer Cropper, who not only wrote biographies of Ash and edited his correspondence, but also owns the Stant Collection, where he keeps “relics” of Ash.

In relation to this idea of “possession,” the ventriloquist nature of Byatt’s writing has often been noted in the critical studies on *Possession*. In *The Reader’s Guide to Possession*, Catherine Burgass extensively discusses it, and in several other studies such as “Forgery, Dis/Possession, Ventriloquism in the Works of A. S. Byatt and Peter Ackroyd” by Catherine Bernard, ventriloquism appears repeatedly. According to Hadley, “ventriloquism involves both ‘speaking like’ and ‘speaking as’ a Victorian; it can take the form of both impersonating a voice and ‘throwing’ your voice so it appears to come from somewhere else” (*Neo-Victorian* 160). In Williamson’s view “ventriloquism is certainly a means of resurrecting and establishing continuity with the Victorian past as a living, breathing presence, and not as an obstinately moribund form” (120-1).

Catherine Bernard, too, relates the appropriation of ventriloquism in writers such as A.S Byatt, Julian Barnes and Peter Ackroyd to the prevalent sense of “belatedness,” which almost all of the contemporary authors seem to be suffering from. For Bernard, this situation inevitably requires a re-evaluation of the author’s authority over his/her work/creation (11). This sense of belatedness inevitably impels the authors to re-evaluate their own position with regard to literature that was produced before them. In view of this, imagining the act of writing as “possession,” Catherine Bernard claims, complicates the relationships between the “original” and “the copy” (15). According to Bernard, the impersonal poetry of the modernists such as T.S Eliot and contemporary writing are different in their treatment of the past. While in Eliot, for instance, the poet’s relation to the past, or “the tradition” as Eliot puts it, implies the poet’s mastery of the tradition before him, contemporary authors’ “impersonal” writing and use of pastiche suggest acceptance of being “possessed” by the past (16). In *Possession*, this is how Roland, an embodiment of the disillusionment with the methodologies of postmodernism and poststructuralism, is portrayed by the narrator: “He thought of himself as a latecomer. He had arrived too

late for things that were still in the air but vanished, the whole ferment and brightness and journeyings and youth of the 1960s, the blissful dawn of what he and his contemporaries saw as a pretty blank day” (13), and now trained in classical literature, Roland finds out that the theoretical climate of the 1990s offer him no job prospects, even though he had brilliantly performed what was hoped from him: “He was now essentially unemployed, scraping a living on part-time tutoring, dogsbodying for Blackadder and some restaurant dishwashing” (14) whereas his rival Fergus Wolff can secure an academic job because he is in “the right field,” which is literary theory (18).

Ventriloquism is thus one of the main tropes of the neo-Victorian novel, and bringing back the voices certainly resonates perfectly with Byatt’s engagement with the “death of the author”. In all the different layers of the narrative, the idea of the death of the author is challenged through the over-arching theme of how past continues to haunt the present. Ash and LaMotte continue to “speak” through their letters, even from the grave, and thus they assert the primacy of the author’s word over the critic’s. In a commentary on the nature of writing and criticism, Byatt asserts that “modern criticism is powerful and imposes its own narratives and priorities on the writings it uses as raw material, source, or jumping-off point” (*On Histories and Stories* 45), and a result of this, she further asserts: “ventriloquism became necessary because of what I felt was the increasing gulf between current literary criticism and the words of the literary texts it in some sense discusses” (*ibid*).

The second epigraph to *Possession*, a piece from Robert Browning’s “Mr. Sludge, ‘The Medium’” adds another layer to the discussion of how the deceptive ventriloquism employed by the medium is juxtaposed to the “fictions” or “lies” told by poets, biographers and historians. The poem suggests that any narrative is selective as shown in the extract below:

But why do I mount to poets? Take plain prose—  
Dealers in common sense, set these at work,  
What can they do without their helpful lies?  
Each states the law and fact and face o’ the thing  
Just as he’d have them, finds what he thinks fit,  
Is blind to what missuits him, just records  
What makes his case out, quite ignores the rest.

From the old bards to “The Early Indians, the Old Country War,” the history is recorded “[a]ll as the author wants it.” The author, as the poem suggests, is a mediator like the medium, who possesses the voices and presents them through his/her own mediation, and the historian is not less guilty compared to the poet regarding “the lies,” each tell. While all authors and critics practise ventriloquism, they fear being haunted by the voices from the past. To illustrate, after Maud is revealed to be the true heiress of the Ash and LaMotte correspondence, Roland mentions how, now that he knows she is genealogically connected to Ash, he will always see Ash’s physical features in her. However, Maud finds it very unsettling. All this sense of “something unnaturally determined,” the “Daemonic” possession, threatens her, and she feels as if taken over by her ancestors (548).

Overall, the use of ventriloquism in *Possession* foregrounds the hierarchy between fiction and criticism that Byatt constructs in her novel. Accordingly, literary criticism based on theory is depicted as “bad” and “oppressive” ventriloquism (Davies 148). In view of this, the following section will explore Byatt’s negotiation of her own position as an author-critic as played out in *Possession*.

### **3.3 Negotiating Ambivalent Positions: Byatt the Critic vs Byatt the Author**

Among many other things such as romance, detective fiction, *Bildungsroman* and *Küntslerroman*, *Possession* is a metafictional novel, and, with its setting as the academia, it exploits the resources of the campus novel genre through engaging with literary theory. In relation to this point, in his review of *Possession*, Jean-Louis Chevalier remarks that “[t]here is little need to comment on a text that does its own textual commentary so neatly” (Chevalier 112), and for this reason writing on *Possession* is in fact an extremely challenging task since everything that can be said about the novel seems to have been already told in the novel itself, by Byatt. Thus, in Helen Davies’s view, the reader as critic, is “either placed in the role of belatedly mouthing the work of Byatt’s ventriloquial academics or is silenced altogether” (152). One overt example of how this impasse has influenced the critics is the fact that in spite of this overt critique of postmodernism, *Possession* has often been described as a postmodernist novel. For instance, in a *Washington Post* review,

Michael Dirda describes the book as “[a]t once highly traditional and eminently postmodern” (qtd. in Burgass 67). In *Nostalgic Postmodernism: The Victorian Tradition and Contemporary British Novel* (2001), Christian Gutleben reads it as a postmodernist novel, too. Even in the works that accentuate the novel’s Neo-Victorian outlook, the methodology used is that of postmodernism. On the one hand, with its multiplot structures, metafictional games, the novel indeed seems like a perfect example of a postmodern novel; however, this does not change the fact that it displays a harsh criticism towards postmodernism’s nullifying language and meaning. There are a few critics like Jackie Buxton, who note that *Possession* “exhibits a strong suspicion of that epistemic condition, even a condemnation of it” (212). Regina Rudaitytė in “(De)construction of the Postmodern in A. S. Byatt’s Novel *Possession*” proposes that while Byatt’s use of postmodern tools of reflexivity, parody and pastiche aids her art; consequently, the end product emerges as a critique of postmodernism (116). Susanne Becker, who in her article “Postmodernism’s Happy Ending: *Possession!*” draws attention to the same point, argues that in addition to bringing together two different worlds of the Victorian age and the twentieth century, *Possession* is a novel that “bridges the different intellectual climates of the two last decades of this last century: the emancipatory, seriously academic and theory-conscious nineteen-eighties and the emotionalised, nostalgic, millennium-ridden nineties” (17), and in her view *Possession* owes its success to its having captured this cultural and intellectual paradigm shift. With this feature, asserts Becker, “*Possession* marks the end of postmodernism” (17).

Byatt, as explained above, achieves this mainly by bringing back Victorian authorial narration. She designates a position for herself, which she calls “self-conscious realism,” as depicted in the following extract from her introduction to *Passions of the Mind*: “If I have defended realism, or what I call “self-conscious realism,” it is not because I believe that it has any privileged relationship to truth... but because it leaves space for thinking minds as well as feeling bodies” (xv), and *Possession* ends on the same note, with the narrator portraying Roland as follows: “What had happened to him was that the ways in which [things] could be said had become more interesting than the idea that [they] could not” (513), as they are educated with this new vision they are transformed from deconstructionist critics to

“writers” whose job is to “reconstruct”. Throughout *Possession* Byatt performatively asserts how storytelling played an important part in the return to “sincerity”. Byatt believes that “modernist literature tried to do away with storytelling, which it thought was vulgar, replacing it with flashbacks, epiphanies, streams of consciousness. But storytelling is intrinsic to biological time, which we cannot escape” (*On Histories and Stories* 170). Byatt also believes that with these “small artifices of elegant, well-made tales,” combined with “the vulgar satisfaction of narrative curiosity,” it is possible to “stand against death” (*ibid*). Reminiscent of Scherazade’s story-telling to defy death, Byatt believes as long as the author can tell a story, she/he can defy death. One curious thing about the stories is that with each reading the author and/or the story continues to speak even after the death of the author. Even if, from a poststructuralist perspective, the story is re-written with each reading, the changes to the “original source” do not alter the fact that it existed and was created by an author. What is problematic according to Byatt in poststructuralism is its search for an Author in spite of all its utterances against it, and in *Possession* through setting the critic and the author in a battle, Byatt shows how the Author is a category discursively created by the critics rather than the authors. All the authors as Byatt’s classical education taught her intrinsically know that writing is comprised “of several indiscernible voices” and “literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes” (Barthes “Death” 147). Byatt herself reminds how at the beginning of her writing career, she was preoccupied with the question of the self as articulated by T.S Eliot through the image of the impersonal poet. In order to explain his view of the poet as impersonal, Eliot refers to the platinum analogy, where while two gases mixed with platinum form sulphurous acid, the final product does not contain any trace of platinum, which in itself remains intact (39-40). Likening the poet to the platinum, Eliot declares that “[i]t may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material” (40). This viewpoint

and modernist aesthetics in general had tremendous influence on Byatt's perception of her authorial identity as she notes: "I spent most of my formative years as a writer, and indeed, as a literary critic, attempting to expunge the presence of the self, the presence of the 'I' from my idea of writing" ("Identity" 23). However, Byatt continues, later, she discovered new paths and ways of thinking: "I, who was much beguiled by Eliot's idea of the impersonality of the artist, much beguiled by the idea that art was not self-expression but looking out and seeing other things which you were not, have had to bring back into my own thinking an idea, that if you have no self, there are certain things you cannot say" ("Identity" 24). Rather than a ground breaking discovery, this convergence reads like a reconciliation with the precursors, who, while foregrounding the impersonal poet, had also remarked that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things" (Eliot 42).

As the older Byatt comes to acknowledge, she has been influenced by T.S. Eliot and other writers in ways more profound than she could have imagined. Even though Byatt conveys a negative view of Eliot's idea of the impersonal poet, actually their ideas are not greatly distanced from each other. Byatt's view of fiction is characterized by an ambivalence she has towards Eliot's and F.R. Leavis's views of literature in terms of a tradition. While, on the one hand, Byatt criticizes them as shown above, on the other hand, she cherishes the authority that is granted to creative writing and the power of language to "possess" its reader. While Byatt handles this intricate relationship between tradition and creativity through a postmodernist touch of intertextuality, she cannot completely isolate herself from the classical education she was trained with, and overall Byatt can be said to be negotiating two different positions, that of a postmodernist and a classicist.

In her *A.S. Byatt: Art, Authorship, Creativity*, Christien Franken analyses the battle Byatt goes through while negotiating an ambivalence between the Leavisite notions of authorship and poststructuralist and postmodernist views of the subject. While on the one hand, Byatt celebrates postmodernist breaking down of boundaries, she is at the same time disturbed by what she perceives as the

politicization of theory and privileging of theory over text. For Byatt, this is a contradiction inherent in postmodernism, since while postmodernism champions the idea that there is nothing outside the text, it employs a methodology that is often “outside” the text, to “interpret” what the text “actually means” and thus becomes a limiting frame that often ignores other qualities Byatt cares for, such as the function of literature or simple pleasures it affords to the reader. Thus, Byatt’s notion of authorship is also shaped by a traditionalist, perhaps, moralist vein, where both ethics of representation and author’s position and intention matter. Byatt locates the source for the traditionalist in her, in the Leavisite education she received. Analysing Byatt’s position regarding Leavis, Franken concludes thus: “Byatt simultaneously ‘knows’ two opposing things: first, that ‘most of one’s consciousness is a fiction and a tale’ and secondly that she must defend her sense of herself as a writer against the insecurity brought about by this knowledge” (18). Byatt admits it to as can be seen in the following remark she made: “I think, although all my books have also been fighting a more or less overt battle with Dr Leavis and the Cambridge-English school of moral seriousness and social responsibility, I have also been deeply influenced by it” (qtd. in Franken 2).

Leavis’s influence on English fiction was related to his distinguishing the great novelists in the English tradition from the rest by the frame of reference he creates. In his view, Jane Austen, George Eliot and Joseph Conrad are the great novelists because “they are all distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity” (Leavis 9). On the whole, Leavisite criticism is founded on the idea of the author’s greatness, which refers to his/her success in creating a moralistic universe. In his view, there are only masters, and one can only respect them, which Byatt sees as having very negative effects on the creativity of the following generations. She reveals to Hensher how she saw Leavis as “a kind of blockage to everybody who wanted to do what I wanted to do”. Byatt tells she stopped going to his seminars once she realized if she went on to “worship” him, she would have never written fiction. In *Possession*, she re-creates a similar scene through Blackadder, who is Roland’s supervisor, and the head of the English Department at his university and the head of “Ash Factory,” Ash research centre. This is how Leavis is depicted by the narrator of the novel, as he

discourages his students: “[H]e showed him the terrible, the magnificent importance and urgency of English literature and simultaneously deprived him of any confidence in his own capacity to contribute to, or change it” (32). As a result, “the young Blackadder wrote poems, imagined Dr Leavis’s comments on them, and burned them” (*ibid*). Trained by Leavis to recognize the greatness of the “great tradition” that stood before him, Blackadder becomes discouraged about his own creative potential, and he turns to literary criticism. His research topic, Randolph Henry Ash, is decided by a seminar offered by Leavis, and afterwards Blackadder becomes the leading figure in Ash studies. Blackadder is usually content with his job, but it is also implied by the authorial narrator that literary criticism can only be the second best to the creative writing. The best is always creative writing, and Blackadder is no exception to the rule: “[t]here were times when Blackadder allowed himself to see clearly that he would end his working life, that was to say his conscious thinking life, in this task, that all his thoughts would have been another man’s thoughts, all his work another man’s work” (33). The narrator notes that Blackadder was pleasantly settled with this “subordination,” and thus perhaps being possessed by another man’s thoughts did not matter so much, since he found Ash fascinating. Blackadder is not the only one “possessed” by the dead authors and their thoughts.

All the critics in the novel, including Roland and Maud are also portrayed to be “possessed” like Blackadder. For instance, Roland is seen to be feeling so closely connected to Ash that he regards him as a part of himself. Looking at a photograph of Ash’s death mask, he contemplates how “[h]e had always seen these aspects as part of himself, of Roland Mitchell, he had lived with them” (513). He then remembers talking to Maud about theories of subjectivity, conflicting selves, other(s), and he feels: “All and none of these were Ash and yet he knew, if he did not encompass, Ash. He touched the letters, which Ash had touched, over which Ash’s hand had moved, urgent and tentative, reforming and rejecting his own words” (*ibid*).

Similarly, Maud, who often voices ideas against biographical criticism, comes to realize she is able to find the hidden letters because she is so familiar with LaMotte’s poetic imagery, or that she has been possessed by her poems, which she

can recall effortlessly. This constitutes the paradox that gives motion to the plot. Two textual scholars of the novel, Maud and Roland, are the products of the poststructuralist world, which is portrayed in the novel as having a contemptuous attitude towards anything beyond the text, chiefly the author. As Roland meets Maud, she explains to him, how in her readings, she turned a blind eye to Christabel's biography: "I very rarely feel any curiosity about Christabel's life—it's funny—I even feel a sort of squeamishness about things she might have touched, or places she might have been—it's the *language* that matters, isn't it, it's what went on in her mind\_" (62). Similarly, the narrator notes, Roland, too, shunned biography: "Roland had never been much interested in Randolph Henry Ash's vanished body; he did not spend time visiting his house in Russell Street, or sitting where he had sat, on stone garden seats; that was Cropper's style" (24). In opposition to Cropper, Roland is portrayed as focusing on Ash's mind, "the twists and turns of his syntax, suddenly sharp and clear in an unexpected epithet" (25). The comparison between Roland and Cropper conveys the sneering attitude poststructuralism has towards biographical criticism. However, as indicated by the narrator's playful tone, with a note that this is just a beginning of Roland's symbolic "quest," Roland, the chivalric hero of Byatt's romance as his name suggests, will be "educated" through a slow, but extensive journey deep into the Victorian world, and Maud will accompany him, as his "trophy". The following exchange between the two takes place midway through their "education".

'I've never been much interested in places—or things—with associations'  
'Nor I. I'm a textual scholar. I rather deplore the modern feminist attitude to private lives.'  
'If you're going to be stringently analytical,' Roland said, 'don't you have to?'

'You can be psychoanalytic without being *personal*\_' Maud said.  
Roland did not challenge her. (230; emphasis in the original)

Even though, it seems to have ended on compromise, both parties know that the "personal" can neither be overlooked nor be fully relied upon. As Maud is to discover through the course of the narrative, every word Christabel uses in her poetry in fact corresponds to a lived experience, especially in her magnum opus *The Fairy Melusine*. This poem had been analysed by the feminist critics before;

however, as revealed by the heterosexual love affair between Ash and LaMotte, there are more aspects to *The Fairy Melusine* than just lesbian sexuality. Byatt suggests that if intentional fallacy still holds, criticism can be equally guilty of it. The critics arrive at the text, with their preconceived ideas and try to fit the text into frames of certain theories and *Possession* problematizes this. In the case of *The Fairy Melusine*, this resulted in readings which were cloaked in theoretical languages of psychoanalysis and feminism, but closed the reading in their assumptions of Christabel as a lesbian poet due to the relationship between her and Blanche Gover, who was an artist and a companion to Christabel La Motte. The nature of the relationship between the two still evades the critics, but the evidence about Christabel's relationship with Ash suggests that Christabel was either heterosexual or perhaps bi-sexual, rather than being lesbian, and hence the "liberating" readings of the imagery in the poem as euphemism for lesbian sexuality turn out to be very limiting, even misleading.

Overall, Byatt uses the parallelism between biography and fiction as two constructed narratives, firstly, to comment on creative writing as opposed to critical writing; and, secondly, to criticize theoretical studies, which, despite all their seemingly liberal standpoints, impose an Author on the text, often at the expense of the real author. In her fiction, she tries to affirm the "author as a concrete textual agent in the structure of narrative communication" (Dawson 24).

In *Possession*, the literary text emerges as a battlefield of the author and the critic, as Byatt constantly accuses critics of "possessing" the voices of the authors. In her view, all criticism can achieve is second-rate ventriloquism. For instance, Byatt problematizes the question of "intentional fallacy," through the biographical novel she writes. Via juxtaposing biographical evidence to critics' reading of this material, she portrays how, while the critics are encouraged to be wary of the intentional fallacy when analysing a literary work, when it comes to evaluating their own position, the critics simply turn a blind eye to the problem of authorial intent, and assert their own readings as "the truth". For example, through caricatured portrayals of Leonora Stern who projects her lesbianism on her critical study of Christabel LaMotte's work or Maud's and Roland's poststructuralist reading habits that often miss the essence of the work, Byatt challenges Barthes's construction of

the reader as “without biography”. Through their portrayal, Byatt seems to say, quite the contrary, just like the author, the reader too, has a biography, which affects the way they read the text.

In her article “Dead Authors, Born Readers, and Defunct Critics: Investigating Ambiguous Critical Identities in A. S. Byatt’s ‘Possession’,” Marie Ann Adams opposes the common celebration of *Possession* as a text of “the birth of the reader”. She argues that those critics who cherish the “readerly pleasures” that the text offers have in fact failed to realize “how this seemingly liberatory work actively constrains the readerly pleasures it affords” (107). All the pleasures the reader might derive are, in fact, subjected to Byatt’s narrative decisions.

*Possession* is also a quest for the “ideal” reader and writer. In their search for the ideal representation of a possible relationship between Ash and LaMotte, every character in the novel becomes a part of this quest, and in their journey through the letters of Ash and LaMotte, they become educated against the overwhelming presence of theory in literary criticism, which Byatt sees as a threat to the author’s authority, as pointed in the novel. In this sense, it is natural that while Blackadder remains content with his position and does not change at the end of the narrative, Maud and Roland go through a transformation, especially as Roland discovers the creative potential he has. At the beginning of the novel, like Blackadder, Roland, too, is seen as he is struggling to repress the urge to create rather than analysing someone else’s poetry, and this is depicted in the novel through the recurrent theme of the desire for simplicity. In fact, the entire novel can be seen as an exploration of this idea, which is signified by Roland and Maud’s desire for “An empty bed in an empty room. White” (291). This image could be read as a symbol for “the self” before it is “contaminated” by the modern theories of identity and desire. Roland wonders whether this is just Maud and him, or whether it is “symptomatic of whole flocks of exhausted scholars and theorists” (291). The novel seems to suggest it is just these two characters, or people like them, who can acknowledge the value of the literary work. *Possession* hence manifests Byatt’s critique of postmodernism’s incredulity to the author’s persona through juxtaposing the nineteenth-century world of novel and poetry with twentieth-century world of theory. Using the resources of the Neo-Victorian novel allows Byatt to comparatively explore changing

perceptions of authorship over the years, and through recentralizing the author both as a character and as a theme, she reclaims the cultural and textual authority the author had lost with poststructuralism and postmodernism.

## CHAPTER 4

### ***AUTHOR, AUTHOR: DAVID LODGE'S CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHORIAL IDENTITY***

I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art, so that everything I have experienced and understood would not remain ineffectual in my life. ... Art and life are not one, but they must become united in myself—in the unity of my answerability. (Bakhtin *Art and Answerability* 2-3)

David Lodge, best known for his campus novels, *Changing Places* (1975), *Small World* (1984), and *Nice Work* (1988), is the author of more than a dozen of novels along with several significant works on literary criticism such as *The Art of Fiction* (1992), *After Bakhtin* (1990), *The Novelist at the Crossroads* (1971) and *Consciousness and the Novel* (2002), just to name a few. Similar to A.S. Byatt, whose *Possession* has been analysed in the previous chapter in terms of the construction of authorship against the concept of “the death of the author” through the use of the biographical novel genre, Lodge’s work is characterized by his self-identification as a novelist-critic, who, like Byatt, after working at several universities, finally retired to concentrate solely on creative writing since he thought of himself primarily as a novelist. Like Byatt’s, Lodge’s decision was supported by his firm belief in the presence of a gap between literary theory and fiction, which was continuously expanding (*The Practice of Writing* 4). In Lodge’s experience, life writing in its various forms offered him the remedy he sought, as its versatility as interweaving fact and fiction allowed for the negotiation of two positions as manifested in the interest Lodge has developed towards life writing.

In *Author, Author* Lodge aims to address the question of authorship through the tropes of death and immortality, and in that respect the novel has an extremely symbolic opening scene with “the death of the author”. In the first few sentences of

the novel, “Henry” as Lodge prefers to refer to Henry James, since he thinks “the intimacy and familiarity of ‘Henry’ is more appropriate to the fictional focusing of the narrative through HJ’s consciousness and point of view” (*TYHJ* 82), is portrayed as lying on his deathbed, in London, December 1915, in the master bedroom of Flat 21, Caryle Mansions, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. The description proceeds with a comparison between “the distinguished author [who] is dying-slowly but surely” (*AA* 3) to those in Flanders, dying in war “more quickly, more painfully, more pitifully,” with “blank pages that will never be filled” (*ibid*). While those men will never have stories of their own, the distinguished author will continue to fill in the pages and he will outlive his own time.

After this short introductory part, which depicts the author as he lies dying, Part Two returns to the 1880s, focusing on James’s middle years. This part focuses on the friendship Henry James formed with George Du Maurier<sup>16</sup>, which actually had given Lodge the idea to write a novel about these two figures. The repetition of the word Author in the title of the novel refers to these two authors, Henry James and Du Maurier, (as well as Lodge himself and Henry James), who are compared and contrasted in terms of their perception of authorship and literature. For instance, Henry’s diminishing fame as a novelist is depicted as Henry tries his hand at the theatre, only to go through one failure after another, and his failure is juxtaposed with Du Maurier’s ever increasing fame, following the publication of *Trilby*. Part Two ends with a disillusioned Henry, who resolves to try his luck in the theatre only for one more year, and Part Three opens with the premiere night of *Guy Domville* exactly a year after where Part Two had left. The climax of the novel is the opening night of *Guy Domville*, when James was booed by the audience, a humiliation from which he could never recover, and ends with Henry’s increasing sense of failure that consumes him. Part Four is the closure, where the narrator turns back to Henry’s

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<sup>16</sup> George du Maurier (1834- 1896), portrayed as a close friend of Henry James in the novel, was a British caricaturist for *Punch*. The loss of his eyesight led him to turn to fiction and write a novel *Trilby*, which became hugely popular. In *Author, Author* Lodge revisits this friendship between two men to discuss issues of fame and transience through two different author figures du Maurier and James represent.

George du Maurier was also the grandfather of Dame Daphne du Maurier.

death bed, and this time Lodge himself intervenes in the narrative to grant Henry the recognition he could not get in his life time. Indulging in a time travelling fantasy, through positioning himself next to Henry's deathbed, Lodge ends the narrative on a note of optimism.

Throughout his career, David Lodge has always been interested in using autobiographical elements in his work. *Out of Shelter* (1970), for instance, has been denoted by Lodge himself as the most autobiographical of his novels. His campus novels, where he satirizes the academia, similarly draw on his own experiences as a professor of English literature. *Changing Places* recreates his time in Berkeley, where Stanley Fish parades as Morris Zapp in the novel; *Small World* and *Nice Work* continue to relate the adventurous tales of the academia. Lodge's oeuvre is also remarkable for its focus on "author-as-characters" (Franssen and Hoenselaars 10). Especially in works such as *British Museum is Falling Down*, *How Far Can You Go?*, *Thinks* and surely in *Campus Trilogy*, there is at least one author character, who is usually subjected to satiric treatment.

*Author, Author*, on the other hand, can be distinguished from Lodge's previous works on authors. Whereas his previous works aimed at satire, *Author, Author* is a homage to the master, Henry James. Following *Author, Author* (2004), which this study focuses on, Lodge published another biographical novel, *A Man of Parts*, in 2011, and then he published *Lives in Writing* (2014), a collection of essays where he juxtaposes the lives of various authors such as Graham Greene, Muriel Spark and Alan Bennett as spent in writing. Finally, he published two memoirs *Quite a Good Time to Be Born: a Memoir, 1935-75* (2015), and *Writer's Luck: a Memoir, 1976-91* (2018).

Deriving from this overt interest Lodge has in various forms of life writing, in this chapter, Lodge's interest in biographical author fictions as shown in *Author, Author* is discussed as an expression of his desire to lay claim to authorial power through defying "the death of the author," and asserting the author as a "living" presence in and out of the text. In *Author, Author* Lodge reconfigures authorial power through juxtaposing Henry James's public and private lives in his representation of James as struggling to establish a secure place within the literary world. Through rewriting Henry James's life, Lodge in fact writes his own story of

authorship, and presents the authorship not only as limited to the text, but also as being formed and defined within its material conditions that surround the production and circulation of literary texts. In view of this, first, Lodge's work will be contextualized; then, Lodge's treatment of the biographical novel about authors will be explored in terms of the anxieties Lodge seems to go through as an author. Finally, Lodge's position as a critic of his own work will be discussed in relation to his authorial stance.

#### **4.1 Contextualizing David Lodge's Life and Work**

Despite his broad fame as a conservative, in his trajectory as a novelist, Lodge did not always follow the same route. For instance, J. Russel Perkin, a renowned Lodge scholar, in his *David Lodge and The Tradition of the Modern Novel*, contextualizes Lodge's work as falling under more than a single category. Firstly, Perkin says, David Lodge gained fame as a novelist especially with his campus novels. Secondly, Lodge's novels can also be situated along the works of Catholic novelists such as Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh and Muriel Spark. Thirdly, in his comic novels he can be said to continue the tradition of the comic novel extending from eighteenth-century novelists such as Henry Fielding to H.G Wells and Kingsley Amis. Fourthly, after the 1990s, he has turned to historical novels based on the lives of authors.

David Lodge has also been particularly concerned with language both in his critical and creative works. In such works as *Language of Fiction* (1966), *Working with Structuralism: Essays and Reviews in 19th and 20th Century Literature* (1981), *The Art of Fiction* (1992), *The Practice of Writing* (1996), he explored the relationship between language and fiction, and in his novels, he practised it. In *The Novel after Theory* (2011) Judith Ryan refers to campus novels as major examples of literature that "knows about" theory, and suggests that "[t]he academic novel often satirises theory, appealing at once to an inner and an outer circle of readers" (2). Most of Lodge's novels refer to this double position since they almost always include an author character, but his campus novels are particularly relevant because through travesty academic discourse they parody it as a futile endeavour as exemplified in the motto Lodge's fictional poststructuralist academic Morris Zapp

adopts for himself, “Every decoding is another encoding” (*Small World* 29). Lodge returns to this motto whenever he purports literature over theory (in *After Bakhtin* for instance), and questions why deconstruction and defying the meaning automatically obliges us to completely deny and revoke the possibility of meaning. Believing in the possibility of meaning in spite of the floating signifier, he states that he returns to Bakhtin since “Bakhtin teaches us that this need not be a reason for denying the possibility of communicating meaning in discourse. To mean is precisely to take this condition into account when we speak” (*After Bakhtin* 90). With this feature, Lodge continues Byatt’s mission to exhibit the possibility of meaning through building empathy in fiction.

Lodge has been influenced by various novelists and critics throughout his career as a novelist critic; however, the figure who had a life changing impact on his fiction was Bakhtin, who both sustained Lodge’s belief in himself as a writer of fiction, and also enabled him to earn the comic aspect and the social realist outlook for which he is generally famous. In the Preface to *Consciousness and the Novel* Lodge relates this convergence as follows:

My quest for a poetics of fiction was at every stage furthered by exposure to some new, or new-to-me, source of literary theory. But the journey ended with my discovery of Bakhtin, partly because he seemed to answer satisfactorily all the remaining questions I had posed myself, and partly because as literary theory entered its poststructuralist phase it seemed to be less interested in the formal analysis of literary texts, and more interested in using them as a basis for philosophical speculation and ideological polemic.  
(x)

In this respect, through pointing to the speech genres and discourse in novel, Lodge asserts that with his theories, Bakhtin “has given new hope to literary critics who were beginning to wonder whether there was life after poststructuralism” (*After Bakhtin* 4). He further suggests that “to those of a Marxist persuasion he has restored a non-vulgar concept of the socially constructive function of language and literature; to liberal humanist scholars he has restored the legitimacy of a diachronic, philologically based study of literature; to formalists he has opened up new possibilities of analysing and categorizing narrative discourse” (*After Bakhtin* 4). Overall, Lodge believes “perhaps in the end Bakhtin’s greatest contribution to contemporary criticism is, through the historical irony of his long obscurity and

posthumous fame, to have made a timely reaffirmation of the writer's creative and communicative power" (*After Bakhtin* 7), which was taken for granted by anti-authorial standpoints.

As explained in the theoretical basis of this study, the return of the author in contemporary fiction is not just a re-visitation of the humanist perception of the author; it also entails reimagining of the authorship. For instance, in Aleid Fokkema's view, now, "[i]nstead of single and unique authorship, we appear to have an encoded subject position situated in discourse. With this substitution, however, the humanist predecessor cannot altogether be reasoned away; he sticks on as a residue that resists being swallowed up" (40). In his reimagining Seán Burke proposes that the return of the author inevitably comprises addressing the questions regarding the "intention," and therefore the return of the author is in many ways also a return to the intention (179). With their banishment of the author, Wimsatt and Beardsley had deemed both "the design" and/or "the intention" of the author "neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (90). Their argument was founded on their suggestion that the poet who writes and the persona the poet creates in his lyric expression were significantly different from each other. While proponents of New Criticism, as Lodge claims, saw this difference as a point to claim the author's death, for Lodge, this difference between the two is the proof of the author's existence. Comparing and contrasting Barthes's view of the author with Bakhtin's, Lodge concludes "Barthes says: because the author does not coincide with the language of the text, he does not exist. Bakhtin says: it is precisely because he does not so coincide that we must posit his existence" (*After Bakhtin* 99).

For Lodge, intent is inseparable from the text. Therefore, Lodge's opposition to Barthes's death of the author is founded on his view of literary production as an intentional act, supported by his position as a novelist as evident from the remarks in the following extract. In Lodge's view, "[w]riting, especially the writing of narrative, is a process of constant choice and decision-making" ("Structural Defects" 11).<sup>17</sup> Convinced of the inseparability of intention from the final product, Lodge

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<sup>17</sup> This essay was originally published in *The Observer* on 23rd March 1980. The extracts quoted here were retrieved from its printed version in *Write On: Occasional Essays*.

believes that for anyone trained in literary theory, who is at the same time a writer of novels, Barthes's preposition and Catherine Belsey's ensuing elaboration on the death of the author are unacceptable. Quoting from Belsey, who celebrates Barthes's "The Death of the Author" as "the liberation of the text from the authority of a presence behind it which gives it meaning," and thus allows the text to be "[r]eleased from the constraints of a single and univocal reading" (qtd. in Lodge 158), Lodge claims that this argument is founded upon the following faulty assumptions: "either (A) the text contains a single meaning which the author intended and which is the duty of the critic to establish, or (B) the text is a system capable of generating an infinite number of meanings when activated by the reader," (*ibid*) and in both premises, Lodge underlines, the author as the creator is taken for granted. He further asserts:

Works of literature – in our era of civilization, at least – do not come into being by accident. They are intentional acts, produced by individual writers employing shared codes of signification according to a certain design, weighing and measuring the interrelation of part to part and parts to the developing whole, projecting the work against the anticipated response of a hypothetical reader. (*After Bakhtin* 158)

Apart from the question of intent, Barthes's denouncement of the author was also related to his view of the author as a man who "is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child" (*IMT* 145). Regarding writing as "a kind of defiance of death, because our books live on after we have gone" as he is known to note on the occasion of the memorial service for his beloved friend Malcolm Bradbury (*Lives* 192), Lodge, in opposition to Barthes, takes pride in this position as "the begetter". He states that he feels "a kind of parental responsibility for the novels [he] write[s], that the composition of them is, in an important sense, [his] past, that [he] do[es] think, suffer, live for a book while it is in progress" (*After Bakhtin* 15). Convinced of the parental rights and responsibility for his books, for Lodge, hence, as he publicly announces in *The Year of Henry James: The Story of a Novel* (2006), the author is "[t]he person best qualified to give an account of a novel's genesis and composition" and "[h]e or she is also the person most affected by its reception" (xi). Therefore, as Lodge gladly quotes from Graham

Greene in various occasions, he wholeheartedly believes that “[e]ven the author, the poor devil, has a right to exist” (qtd. in *TYHJ* 220) and *Author, Author*, along with its critical sequel *The Year of Henry James*, manifests how Lodge exercises this motto in his own authorial journey. As an author, he sets out to exercise his right to exist. In the process of establishing an authorial position for himself, he goes through various anxieties regarding the construction, publication, circulation and reception of his work. With its interest in the professional life of an author, Lodge’s *Author, Author* is a dramatic documentation of all these anxieties embodied in the figure of Henry James.

## **4.2 Anxieties of Authorship in *Author, Author***

### **4.2.1 Anxiety of Influence**

Through his author fictions, Lodge, like Byatt and Gee, constructs an authorial position for himself via engaging with the anxiety of influence he feels towards the “masters”. This story, as indicated by the title, *Author, Author*, originally referring to the cries in the theatre by the audiences to invite the playwright to take a bow after a successful performance of a play, thus indicates the presence of two authors in the novel. Through setting Henry James versus George du Maurier, two forms of authorship are juxtaposed with each other, which in turn corresponds to Henry James and David Lodge himself, whose fictionalization of his precursor as “Henry” expresses his own authorial anxieties.

Harold Bloom bases his theory of anxiety of influence on poets and argues that paralysed by “belatedness,” the fear of having nothing original to say, poets start a deliberate misreading of the precursors when they embark on a task of challenging the previous generation of poets, “so as to clear imaginative space for themselves” (5). Drawn by the anxiety to surpass his predecessors, as Burke notes, “[c]aught within an essentially Oedipal, psychopoetic pattern of enthrallment and denegation, affirmation and denial, the ephebe will at some stage attempt the symbolic, ritual slaying of the Father in an attempt to carve out a space of authentic self-expression” for himself (169). Bloom’s theory was founded on poetic expression, but his general frame can be applied to the study of the novel, too. Furthermore, in his analysis of the return of the author, Seán Burke makes use of his

theory in the interpretation of the relationship between the author and the critic (*Return* 170). He interprets Barthes's rewriting of Balzac, for instance, as an example of the relationship where the critic emerges as the creative writer of his own texts. Similarly, in his analysis of Graham Greene's works, David Lodge foregrounds that "when the writer is also a critic it is easier to trace the anxiety of influence" (*TYHJ* 204) since the misreading of the precursor author is inescapably more overt and the critical stance against the precursor is easier to track in the critical voice.

Lodge underlines the fact that over the years the perception of influence has changed dramatically. While in classical and medieval literature rewriting the same subjects was perfectly acceptable, with the emergence of individualism as a consequence of Enlightenment, originality became an important concern (*TYHJ* 202). In *Write On*, Lodge noted that "[t]here is a kind of influence modern criticism calls 'intertextuality,' and it's inescapable" (57). This kind of influence has been welcomed again in postmodern forms of intertextuality, parody and pastiche, yet "the pressure to be original in form and content is intense," and this, according to Lodge, forms "the contemporary novelist's anxiety of, or about, influence" (*TYHJ* 206). In his novel *Thinks...*, Lodge reflects this view through his author-character Helen Reed, as she dates the anxiety of influence back to the rise of the novel. According to Reed, prior to the rise of the novel "there wasn't the same obligation on the storyteller- you could relate the old familiar tales over and over, the matter of Troy, the matter of Rome, the matter of Britain... giving them a new spin as times and manners changed" (83). However, now, the authors find themselves forced to produce something "original" and "new".

Lodge's thoughts on influence as disseminated in various places in his works can be best summarized, perhaps, through the analogy Bloom draws in his own work. "Influence is Influenza—an astral disease" (95), says Harold Bloom in his *The Anxiety of Influence*, pointing to the inevitability of it. In addition to the above-mentioned examples, Lodge dealt with this anxiety in most of his works, perhaps, most notably, in *British Museum is Falling Down*, which he wrote at the beginning of his career as a novelist. Lodge believes that a writer establishes his identity in relation to other writers. In his view, "if critics need a canon, novelists need a

tradition,” simply because “you cannot begin to write novels without having read at least one, and probably hundreds; without defining yourself in relationships of apprenticeship, discipleship, rivalry, antagonism with precursors and peers” (qtd. in Perkin 20). Accordingly, in “An Afterword” to *British Museum is Falling Down*, he admits writing this book was a way of coping with the “‘Anxiety of Influence’– the sense every young writer must have of the daunting weight of the literary tradition he has inherited, the necessity and yet seeming impossibility of doing something in writing that has not been done before” (165).

Evaluating the weight of past literary traditions on his fiction, Lodge once confessed in an interview that his appreciation and admiration of Henry James took place much later than his first introduction to his work in comparison to other figures such as Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Kingsley Amis and James Joyce, who had an enduring influence over Lodge’s oeuvre from the very beginning. Therefore, Lodge’s identification with Graham Greene’s Catholic fiction, or the comic visions of Evelyn Waugh and Kingsley Amis took place more easily and naturally as compared to Lodge’s appreciation of James, who was not Irish, Catholic or suburban, all those traits that characterized Lodge’s early fiction (Perkin 123).

In his analysis, Bloom identifies six revisionary ratios the poet goes through while negotiating his anxiety of influence. The first one, *Clinamen*, is the poet’s deliberate misreading of the precursor. The second one, *Tessera*, is the antithesis stage, where the poets use a fragment of the precursor’s work, but build their position as distinctively antithetical to it. The third one, *Kenosis*, means discontinuity and signifies a deliberate break with the tradition. The fourth revisionary ratio, *Daemonization*, is the stage where the ephebe assumes to be inspired by a daemonic power that surpasses the precursor. *Askesis*, the fifth ratio, is the stage where the ephebe frees himself from the influence. The last ratio, *Apophrades*, means ‘the return of the dead’. Having achieved *askesis*, the ephebe finds himself prisoned in his artistic solipsism, and attempts to hold his poem against that of the precursor. This final achievement indicates the poet’s strength as he now discovers his own poetic voice. Lodge’s relationship to James, as laid out in this study, manifests how Lodge went through all the stages of this development, and *Author, Author* is his achievement of *Apophrades*, where he welcomes “the return of

the dead” through his fictionalization of Henry James. By rewriting Henry James, Lodge can negotiate the anxiety of influence he feels towards the precursor author.

Previously, Lodge had noted “I didn’t really enjoy and appreciate James until I became an academic and started to teach him and write criticism about him” (Bergonzi), which suggests that initially perhaps James as a critic appealed more to Lodge than James as a novelist. As Lodge foregrounded his identity as more of a novelist than a critic, he found in James’s oeuvre a close ally, in the war he fought against theory’s domination over creative writing. While in his earlier novels Lodge negotiates the anxiety of influence through satire, which corresponds to the ratios of *Kenosis* and *Askesis*, in his author fictions *Author, Author* and *A Man of Parts*, Lodge writes from a position of artistic maturity, where he attempts to master the influence of precursors, and achieves *Apophrades*.

Even though Lodge states that his identification with James occurred late in his career, a retrospective look at his oeuvre unveils the fact that Lodge’s strong anxieties in relation to Henry James has been an on-going issue. Apart from the fact that he has written scholarly pieces on Henry James, the resemblance his work bears to James’s is too striking to be taken for granted. After all, how might his titling the collection of essays he printed in 1992, *The Art of Fiction*, be accounted for? In addition to his early engagement with Henry James in *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965), his novel *Thinks...* (2001) problematizes how to represent consciousness and its implication for fiction through featuring a cognitive scientist, Ralph Messenger, and the novelist Helen Reed as they attempt to make sense of each other’s worlds. Reed is so taken by Henry James’s fictional world that she enacts the same events that take place in his works. For instance, a scene from *The Ambassadors* is replicated in the novel. Similarly, Lodge’s theoretical work, which brings together the research he has carried out for *Thinks..., Consciousness and the Novel* (2002), abounds in references and allusions to James. As evident from the way Lodge characterizes the distinguished author as his Henry, Lodge sees himself as an heir to him encouraged by their shared experience of the double position of a novelist-critic.

David Lodge is widely known for his campus novels, in which he implements a parodic treatment of the academia. In view of this, when *Author*,

*Author* was published, it was described by *The New York Review of Books* as “a bold new departure for Lodge”<sup>18</sup>. Lodge himself admits this, and notes “my concept of what constituted a novel, especially my own kind of novel, did not then include the possibility of writing one about a real historical person” (*TYHJ* 11). In relation to this, Lodge’s confession that even though he had been teaching about and writing on Henry James for more than two decades, he could only come to write a novel based on him quite late in his own career sheds light on his view of the biographical novel as a kind of reckoning, questioning and coming to terms with one’s sense of self as a writer. Lodge documents this process in *Lives in Writing* as follows:

I have combined creative writing with the practice of literary criticism for more than fifty years, and I think of myself as primarily a novelist in the former capacity, and a critic and theorist of the novel in the latter. But as I get older I find myself becoming more and more interested in, and attracted to, fact-based writing. This is I believe a common tendency in readers as they age, but it also seems to be a trend in contemporary literary culture generally. (*LIW* ix)

In addition to Lodge, Cora Kaplan, too, draws attention to the popularity of the biographical novel in the following words: “[s]o much has it encroached on fiction that it has become a commonplace to say that biography has become the new novel” (37). According to Lodge, there might be several reasons why more and more biographical novels are written. Firstly, it might be related to a loss of belief in “purely fictional narrative,” secondly, it might be seen as a characteristic of postmodern pastiche, and thirdly it might be read as a mechanism of coping with the anxiety of influence (*TYHJ* 10). While this form is new to Lodge, he is indeed joining a group which might be implicitly called “a flock of exhausted scholars” (*Possession* 291) as denoted by Byatt’s Maud and Roland, to refer to those who are overwhelmed with postmodern forms and search for new forms of realist representation that could reflect their lived reality more effectively.

In the previous chapter on Byatt, the return of realism to contemporary fiction was analysed within the context of the critique of poststructuralism in *Possession* as a trend that has led to an increase in author fictions and the return of omniscient narration. Lodge is also greatly concerned with this issue both in his

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<sup>18</sup> Printed on the back cover of the Penguin 2005 edition of the novel.

theoretical and creative works. As he lays bare in “Mimesis and Diegesis in Modern Fiction” printed in *After Bakhtin*, the modernist quest for impersonality resulted not in the banishment, but in strengthening the authority of the author. He states that “[i]n pursuing mimetic methods to their limits, modernist fiction discovered that you cannot abolish the author, you can only suppress or displace him. Post-modernism says, in effect: so why not let him back into the text?” (*After Bakhtin* 41).

In his “The Author: Post-modernism’s Stock Character,” Aleid Fokkema acknowledges that “[t]he story of an author” is a recurrent theme in postmodern texts (49). Fokkema believes that the author character or discussion of authorship in the novel brings forward issues “about representation, querying its (im-)possibilities, its relation to knowledge, language and power” (*ibid*). These concerns aroused by postmodernism continued well into the period referred to as post-postmodernism; however, while both postmodernism and post-postmodernism problematize representation, post-postmodernism is driven by a more accentuated motivation “to write and live one’s way out of representation and into something more real” (McLaughlin 218). This change in the function of aesthetic, as McLaughlin further notes in his article “Post-Postmodern Discontent,” holds on to the vision “to reenergize literature’s social mission, its ability to intervene in the social world, to have an impact on actual people and the actual social institutions in which they live their lives” (McLaughlin 55), which overlaps with Lodge’s social realist vision.

With the return to realist forms of representation accompanied by his interest in fact-based writing, Lodge also works within the “aesthetic sea change” (McLaughlin 55) from postmodernism to alternative forms of representation that were surfacing in Byatt’s Neo-Victorian fantasises of authorship. This form is characterized by “its awareness of the main tenets of postmodernism, while aiming to employ them for more humanist concerns” (Dawson 68). As David James and Urmila Seshagiri argue “[a]t a moment when postmodern disenchantment no longer dominates critical discourse of creative practice, the central experiments and debates of twentieth-century modernist culture have acquired new relevance to the moving horizon of contemporary literature” (qtd. in Bentley et al 19). Re-visitation of history through the biographical novel genre is one of the most outstanding exemplary forms of these experiments. Perhaps, one of the best examples for the

popularity of the genre is the fact that there is at least a dozen novels published about Henry James. Lodge's retrospective evaluation of his experience of having written and published *Author, Author*, in his *The Year of Henry James*, as "the decision of several novelists, independently but at approximately at the same time, to write novels about James was a coincidence waiting to happen" (TYHJ 10) accounts for both the popularity of the genre and the particular appeal James has for the producers of author fictions.

The "phenomenal fictional wave" as Flannery indicates (294) officially started with Emma Tennant's *Felony* published in 2002. However, 2004 was the year that came to be known as "The Year of Henry James" as Colm Tóibín's *The Master*, Alin Hollinghurst's *Line of Beauty*, and Lodge's *Author, Author* were published in quick succession to one another. The interest in James was so remarkable as to cause Peter Kemp to argue that "[i]f anyone deserves to win this year's Man Booker Prize, it's Henry James. During 2004, he has been the originator of no fewer than three outstanding novels" (qtd. in TYHJ 3). There was yet another novel by Michiel Heyns, *The Typewriter's Tale*, which was withdrawn from publication at the last minute in 2004, due to the abundance of James novels. Since it has a peculiar story that competes with Lodge's story of "The Year of Henry James," it is worth remembering here. In his article "The Curse of Henry James," published in *Prospect*, dated September 2004, Heyns recounts the rejection letter he received as such: "My agent forwards me another polite letter of rejection: 'I am so sorry but timing is all – and there has just been a spate of fiction based on the life of Henry James published here. I don't know how these coincidences happen... something in the atmosphere? So regretfully I must say no'".

Lodge's account of the emergence of James novels one after another "as a coincidence waiting to happen" can only be explained through the special appeal Henry James has for the authors who aim to write about authorship. In the first place, as Lodge also confirms, James "has always been a writer's writer because of his technical skill and dedication to his art, a critic's writer because of the challenge his work presents to interpretation, and a biographer's writer because of the intriguing enigmas of his character and personal relationships" (TYHJ 5). As Colm Tóibín's title for his James novel, "The Master," suggests, in many ways James is

the “master,” in relation to whom authors in one way or another, position themselves. The interest in James’s work can also be explained by the trends in academia; theories such as feminism and queer theory certainly contributed to the revival of the interest in James (*TYHJ* 6). Eventually, the fact that James’s life has been made available to the public through very detailed biographies such as Leon Edel’s<sup>19</sup> makes him an attractive figure to be fictionalized.

James is also known as a transitional figure from Victorian realism to modernist impersonality, and that is why he is attractive for the post-millennial audiences, who make sense of the contemporary world through aligning the sensibilities of the *fin de siècle* with their own experience of living at the end of a century. With these features, or, as Kaplan puts it, being the “Last Victorian, first modern, both at once,” James functions as a “site of the anxiety about the futurity of authorship, now and then” (*Victoriana* 71). In this respect, as Ozick notes, “mysteriously, with the passing of each new decade, James becomes more and more our contemporary — it is as if our own sensibilities are only just catching up with his” (135).

While theorizing the anxiety of influence, Bloom stresses that “[e]very poet begins (however ‘unconsciously’) by rebelling more strongly against the fear of death than all other men and women do” (10). Portraying Henry’s literary life around the tropes of success and failure, as a mechanism through which immortality can be gained or lost, Lodge hence speaks to a wide range of authorial positions and critiques of the author, and asserts Author as a participant in the creative and critical act, whose authority, as opposed to Barthes’s claim, does not end with the completion of the work. Lodge’s author is not merely a *scriptor*; quite the opposite, he is a human being who suffers, begets, and gives birth to a text. For that matter, as underlined in Anthony Thwaite’s review of Lodge’s novel, “what interests [Lodge] is not the ‘secret life’ in any prurient sense, but the secret Professional life: the life of a writer who often feels himself to have been neglected, misread, read, for the wrong reasons” (“Curtains”). In his interpretation, what interests him is Henry James’s life as an author, with his fears, failures and anxieties, as evident in Lodge’s

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<sup>19</sup> Edel, Leon. *Henry James: A Life* (1953). Flamingo, 1996. This work is considered to be one of the quintessential examples of literary biography.

decision to organize the novel around Henry's writing career in such a way that closely resonates with Lodge's own.

In his treatment of the biographical novel genre, Lodge differs from the majority of the practitioners of the genre, with his emphasis on the balance he constructs between fact and fiction. In his *Lives in Writing*, he describes his work as "based on documented facts about historical persons, and does not invent any action or event with significant consequences for them, but uses fictional methods to explore and fill the gaps in our knowledge, which is primarily the subjective experience of the persons involved and their verbal interaction" (*Lives* 87). Lodge believes that through using techniques such as free indirect discourse, for instance, "a bio-novel can convey a more immediate sense of a person's life *as lived* than biography, representing it through his or her consciousness, and in their verbal interaction with others" (*Lives* 88; emphasis in the original). He sees the biographical novelist's job as not to invent things that do not have a base in history, but to imagine the gaps, or dialogues that are not recorded by the biographers. Hence, Lodge believes, the biographical novel does not pretend to replace biography, but complements it, offering a different kind of interpretation of real lives (*Lives* 90).

In spite of the powerful presence of the biographical novel in English literature, in Lodge's view, novels such as *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1986), *Chatterton* (1987), *Dickens* (1990) and *Lambs of London* (2004) by Peter Ackroyd might be differentiated from his own due to their interest in the wider historical revision. Lodge thinks that his own work belongs to a later phase, in which novelists embark on the biographical novel quite at a late stage in their careers, and focus exclusively on writers and writing as subjects as in Malcolm Bradbury's *To the Hermitage* (2000), for instance (*TYHJ* 8). Hence, Lodge's perception of the biographical novel is distinguished by his investment of personal anxieties of authorship into the subject matter of the novel as understood from his continuing to write another biographical novel, *A Man of Parts*, focusing on H.G Wells. In the following section, Lodge's fictionalization of Henry's "secret professional life" will be analysed as an expression of Lodge's anxieties pertaining to his own relation to the tradition and the contemporary literary world.

#### 4.2.2 Anxieties of Narration: Fictionalizing Henry James

Lodge describes his experience of writing a biographical novel in the following words as a challenging one: “writing, and preparing to write, *Author, Author* was an entirely new compositional experience for me: instead of creating a fictional world which wasn’t there until I imagined it, I was trying to find in the multitudinous acts of Henry James’s life a novel-shaped story” (TYHJ 31-2). His search for “a novel-shaped story” in Henry James’s life is one of the most overt aspects of Lodge’s treatment of the biographical novel genre. Unlike Byatt, for instance, who loosely bases her characters on real people and avoids using real names, Lodge works in utmost commitment to the historical figure he presents. Rather than creating a new, sensational story around James’s life, Lodge prefers to remain within the boundaries of the existing “novel-shaped story”.

In *Author, Author*, Lodge tries to mould the separate discourses of biography and the novel into a unified whole, guided by his definition of the biographical novel as “the novel which takes a real person and their real history as the subject matter for imaginative exploration, using the novel’s techniques for representing subjectivity rather than the objective, evidence-based discourse of biography” (TYHJ 8). Underlining this recreation process to be a play between selection and exclusion, Lodge proposes that as “the writer of such a book you are constrained by the known facts of your historical characters, but free to invent and imagine in the interstices between these facts. How free is a matter of individual choice” (TYHJ 31). In the closing scene where Lodge imagines himself conversing with James, he lays bare those anxieties regarding selection and exclusion. To illustrate, Lodge ponders how “pleasing” it would be to inform

... *James of his canonization as “the subject of innumerable postgraduate theses and scholarly articles and books (and of course biographies — but it wouldn’t be tactful to mention them, or the fact that he would be adopted by a branch of academic criticism known as Queer Theory, whose exponents claim, for instance, to find metaphors of anal fisting in the Prefaces to the New York Edition).* (375; emphasis in the original)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, the italics in the extracts from *Author, Author*, are Lodge’s. He uses it as a narrative tool to separate his voice from Henry’s.

Through such scenes Lodge portrays the experience of writing a biographical novel as an ethical act, and thus, as Hannah notes, Lodge fulfils “the fictional biographer’s task as an act of aesthetic devotion and not an unwelcome, desirous intrusion” (81). Quoting from his own notes, Lodge reminisces about the indecisions he had regarding his own authorial stance in the novel. In spite of his indecisions, eventually, when he wrote the novel, he used a “more traditional method: a past-tense, third-person narrative focalised through the consciousness of [his] main character” (*TYHJ* 53), which aimed at facilitating the bridging of the spatio-temporal distance between himself and his “Henry”.

Lodge’s dedication to factual detail definitely imposes a limiting frame on his imagining of Henry James. While Byatt’s choice to hide the real people *Possession* is based on allows her to freely imagine the interstices, and thus create a livelier and richer world, Lodge’s limiting himself solely to the available biographical information entails the risk of writing a biography rather than a novel, which was often articulated in reviews of the novel. Anita Brookner believes that this novel is a “compelling book, which reads seamlessly, organically, as a novel” (“Rising Far”), and thus points to the difficulty of sustaining a firm balance between biography and fiction, Kaplan, on the other hand, thinks the opposite and argues: “there is something stubbornly insoluble in what separates the two genres and that prevents them from being invisibly sutured; the join will always show” (65). In his essay “The Middle Fears,” Alan Hollinghurst, who himself has a biographical novel inspired by James, claims that *Author, Author* was “limited, as a novel, by its artless closeness to biography” (21). It seems Lodge sensed this possible caveat, and, in order to prevent it, he placed an explanatory note at the beginning of the book to ensure it is read as a novel:

*Nearly everything that happens in this story is based on factual sources. With one significant exception, all the named characters were real people. Quotations from their books, plays, articles, letters, journals, etc., are their own words. But I have used a novelist’s licence in representing what they thought, felt, and said to each other; and I have imagined some events and personal details which history omitted to record. So this book is a novel, and structured like a novel. (emphasis in the original)*

Similar notes are commonplace in postmodernist novels, but usually they convey the opposite idea through announcing maxims such as “everything in the text is

fictitious,” “the characters in the book do not correspond to real people and real events”. In such cases, through the ironic touch, the author of such a note rejects any responsibility that might arise from the book while at the same time pointing to its own fictionality. In Lodge’s case, however, his aim was to “enhance the effect of authenticity” (*TYHJ* 31). In addition to the above-mentioned note at the beginning, Lodge presents a long list of acknowledgements at the end of the novel, identifying the documents his narrative is based on, or the people he owes a debt of gratitude in the composition of the novel. Through this list, he creates a kind of works cited page for every single encounter he narrates in the novel. As has been mentioned above, while Lodge believes “laying bare the device” is part of his desire to ensure a balance between fact and fiction through self- reflexivity, it indeed reads more like a documentation of the resources for his novel, as a result of which, *Author, Author* was likened to biography rather than a novel, in a significant number of reviews.

In her overview of Neo-Victorian biographical novels, Kaplan considers *Author, Author* particularly problematic on the grounds that it reads more like a biography than a novel. In Kaplan’s view *Author, Author* fails to comply with postmodern forms and theoretical writings. Kaplan suggests that for instance, the minor characters in the novel are, “copies of copies” (68). She is particularly distressed by the way Lodge represents Henry through “a catalogue of his professional insecurities” (*ibid*). In relation to this point, she further laments, in a lengthy note, that *Author, Author* misses the target. “Lodge never brings either this historical milieu or the longer scenes with Du Maurier or Woolson to life; the dialogue is wooden and the relationships themselves often seem imaginatively untransformed from their historical sources” (*ibid*). She complains that Lodge’s portrayal of James’s life and mind is unfortunately, one dimensional, therefore superficial. By alluding to Tolstoy’s famous words about the alikeness of happy families, Kaplan claims the depiction of anxieties of authorship in *Author, Author* are, similarly, too alike, to form a biographical novel. Kaplan concludes her critique by suggesting that “[j]ust as James erred in thinking he could write for the theatre, Lodge, one of Britain’s most gifted comic novelists, and a skilled literary critic, has chosen a genre, historical fiction, for which he has no natural talent” (*ibid*). Having read Kaplan’s remarks, one cannot help questioning whether Lodge, one of the

major novelists and critics of contemporary literary scene, might have overlooked all these problems when he composed the novel. The answer is more likely to be a “No” than a “Maybe”. Indeed, the answer as to why Lodge chooses this form is offered by Kaplan herself, in her review. Kaplan argues that Lodge’s portrayal of anxieties of authorship is one-dimensional. By portraying the anxieties of authorship, the worries over reception, fame and legacy, as too alike each other, Lodge points to the similar experiences, authors have been going through. Hence, in his author fiction, by stressing uniformity, Lodge aims to draw attention to real authors, who, as people behind the book, experience very similar difficulties, failures or victories. James’s and Lodge’s anxieties are too like each other, to borrow Kaplan’s words, not because Lodge fails to pay attention to individual differences each author has, but because in *Author, Author*, Lodge foregrounds the similarities and the common anxieties that unite the authors across their journeys as authors.

Some critics, such as Vanessa Guignery, taking cue from Lodge’s declaration “I wanted to make clear how little I had invented by confessing what I *had* invented” identify Lodge’s novel as an example of postmodern historiographic metafiction (161); however, Lodge’s *Author, Author* could hardly be treated as such when judged by its agenda. Coined by Linda Hutcheon to refer to postmodern novels that “are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (5), postmodernist historiographic metafiction is revisionist and deconstructive texts. In well-known examples by such writers as Peter Ackroyd, Martin Amis, Julian Barnes and Graham Swift, the historical truth is deliberately juxtaposed and undermined by continuous references to its fictionality. By pointing to the constructedness of history as just another fiction, the novelist deliberately subverts the historical truth. However, as in the case of Byatt, Lodge’s starting point is not deconstruction, either. He revises the myth/cult of Henry James, performs his own revision and selection of historical truth, but, overall, he claims to be working in utmost faithfulness to the historical truth of James’s life. Lodge is a “literary historian” like Byatt, as he strives to exhibit strong belief in literature’s ability to complement historical record (Dawson 88).

This generic ambiguity further led Cora Kaplan to question whether Lodge’s narrative is praising James’s fiction or is it, under the guise of praise, in fact, once

again subjecting James to a similar treatment he had painfully encountered in the opening night of *Guy Domville*. According to her, the ending of the novel, where Lodge imagines “the spirit of Henry James existing out there somewhere in the cosmos, knowing everything I wished he could know before he died, observing with justifiable satisfaction the way his reputation developed after his death” (AA 382), beguiles “a mock-heroic version of the author as transcendent” (Kaplan 72). At the beginning of this paragraph, Lodge admits that this is “*a different and more pleasing fantasy than the one [he] indulged in earlier*” (382; emphasis in the original). Inviting Henry to “take a bow” is a desperate attempt to reverse the historical clock; yet, rather than a mock-heroic attempt, Lodge here indulges in what could perhaps be called the wishful thinking of imagining the author as defying death and in the ensuing fantasy, he fulfils his role as a faithful devotee:

*It's tempting therefore to indulge in a fantasy of somehow time-travelling back to that afternoon of late February 1916, creeping into the master bedroom of Flat 21, Carlyle Mansions, casting a spell on the little group of weary watchers at the bedside, pulling up a chair oneself, and saying a few reassuring words to HJ, before he departs this world, about his literary future. How pleasing to tell him that after a few decades of relative obscurity he would become an established classic, essential reading for anyone interested in modern English and American literature, and the aesthetics of the novel.*

...

*It was his misfortune to consort with and often befriend, writers far more popular than himself whose success only aggravated his own sense of failure, but time has rectified the balance. Of his peers and contemporaries probably only Thomas Hardy is more widely read today.*

...

*'You only contributed one word to the English language,' I would tell HJ, 'but it's one to be proud of: 'Jamesian.'* (375-6; emphasis in the original)

In his analysis of the author-function, Foucault noted “the disappearance of the author –since Mallarme, an event of our time- is held in check by the transcendental” (120), and through his presentation of the Author as transcendental, Lodge challenges the idea of the death of the author. In *Author, Author*, Lodge’s portrayal of the author via transcendental metaphors as defying death is balanced with the presentation of authorship as bound by material circumstances. In the following section, Lodge’s rewriting of Henry James’s public and private lives as an

author will be analysed in the light of Bakhtin's theory of the author-hero relationship in fiction, and hence the anxieties of authorship presiding over Lodge's characterization of Henry James will be outlined with regard to Lodge's own authorial outlook.

### **4.3 Author and Hero: David Lodge and Henry James in Aesthetic Activity**

Bakhtin's theory of the author, founded upon the self's relation to the other, along with his celebration of dialogism in the novel, has had great influence on Lodge's fiction. Even though Lodge does not specifically refer to *Art and Answerability* in his discussions of the Bakhtinian influence on his fiction, this work might well illuminate Lodge's characterization of Henry James as the hero of his biographical novel.

In his *Art and Answerability: The Author and the Hero in Aesthetic Activity*, Bakhtin foregrounds a theory of authorship in terms of answerability. Bakhtin explicates that the aesthetic activity begins with the projection of self into the other, as Lodge does to Henry James. In this relationship, the artist strives to achieve "the position of being situated outside" (15), while encompassing all of the hero. Bakhtin further asserts that in order for aesthetic activity to take place, the author must see the hero's world "axiologically from within him as he sees this world" (25). After experiencing the hero from his own position, Bakhtin argues, "[a]esthetic activity proper actually begins at the point when we *return* into ourselves, when we *return* to our own place outside the suffering person, and start to form and consummate the material we derived from projecting ourselves into the other and experiencing him from within himself" (26).

In the novel, one of the clearest examples of Lodge's construction of his own position as outside, but able to encompass all of the hero, is Lodge's marking out the parts he enters the narrative as the real author in italics. Having imagined the suffering caused by the agonies of failure James had gone through, Lodge returns to his own position, as imagining being present at the deathbed of Henry James, offering him words of comfort to ease his passing.

Bakhtin also introduces various relations between the author and the hero. He argues that "[i]f the author loses this valuational point of support *outside* the hero,

then his relationship to the hero can typically assume three general forms” (17). The first one is where the hero possesses the author. Bakhtin explains this case as follows:

The hero’s emotional-volitional attitude toward objects, the cognitive-ethical position he assumes in the world, is so authoritative for the author that he cannot see the world of objects through any other eyes but those of the hero, and cannot experience in any other way from within the event that is the hero’s life. The author is unable to find any convincing and stable axiological point of support *outside* the hero. (17; emphasis in the original)

He draws on the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of relation between the author and the hero. He asserts that in this kind of relation, where the author is driven by the admiration for the hero, he might focus only on one part of the hero. Bakhtin believes that “[t]he moments of consummation in this case have a scattered and unconvincing character” (18). As a result, in this kind of relation, “the background, the world behind the hero’s back is unelaborated and is not distinctly seen by the author/contemplator,” and, instead, “it is presented suppositionally uncertainly, from within the hero himself” (19). Bakhtin goes on to suggest that sometimes the background may be totally absent “outside the hero and his own consciousness there is nothing that has any stable reality. The hero is not connatural with the background that sets him off” (19).

This first case Bakhtin draws, corresponds quite closely to Lodge’s treatment of Henry. Driven by his admiration, and also aiming to exalt himself as the heir to Henry, Lodge, as the negative criticism he has received emphasizes, dwells on one side of Henry James’s life. The principle that governs the relationship between David Lodge as the author and Henry James as the hero is dedication to the art of fiction. Lodge portrays Henry as “chastely dedicated to art” (79), which was also criticised as being reductionist, especially in comparison to Tóibín’s portrayal of James. For instance, Hollinghurst notes that in these two portrayals Henry James is “at times barely recognisable as the same ‘character’”. According to Hannah, Lodge’s choices about Henry’s characterization are driven by the desire to disperse queer associations around Henry. Lodge decides the matter once and for all when he makes the following announcement: “If [Henry] has never experienced sexual intercourse, that was by his own choice, unlike the many young men in Flanders

who died virgins either for lack of opportunity or because they hoped to marry and were keeping themselves chaste on principle” (3). Dispersing any love relationship around Henry is portrayed as embodying his own maxim, “a writer shouldn’t have any ties, - except to his art” (371), which he had once uttered to his servant Noakes.

Henry is also depicted as having reformulated his relationship to men as decorous social relationship in the literary circles. Looking back into the past, in middle age, he tries to distance himself from the Wilde circle, “and the aura of sexual scandal that he carried with him, everywhere” (170). Besides, since now “having reached the calm waters of middle age, having survived all the perils and problems, the vague longings and physical disturbances, associated with sex in early manhood, Henry felt quite safe in cultivating the friendship of sympathetic young men” (*ibid*). Now in addition to his old comrades such as Edmund Gosse and George Du Maurier, he cherishes the pleasure he derives from “entirely proper” relationships of “deference of disciple to master” (*ibid*). This relationship is the model which Henry conveys to the reader, and which Lodge also assumes in relation to the master. In order to emphasize this point, Lodge dwells on Henry’s contempt for homosexuality, depicted through the distance he puts between himself and Oscar Wilde. Henry is portrayed as being disturbed even with the mentioning of the name. On the opening night of *Guy Domville*, as he roams the streets nervously on his way to watch *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Wilde instead of attending his own play, his encounter with some homosexual men is portrayed as “unpleasant” (238). As one of them asks Henry about Oscar Wilde, Henry is portrayed as being excessively distressed.

‘Aren’t you a friend of Oscar’s?’ said the young man.  
‘No, I certainly am not,’ he said. ‘Excuse me’ — and he pushed past.  
‘Well if you see him, give him my love!’ the young man called after him.  
(237)

Henry heads for the theatre, where he devotes all his love and energy. With such instances, the narrator, as mentioned above, distances Henry from the world of sexuality and aligns him more closely with the world of letters.

Lodge also presents the story of Henry’s love for Minny Temple as an excuse for his chaste dedication to the art. In an exchange between himself and Du Maurier regarding marriage, Henry relates the relationship between the two cousins

as a sad love story, and presents Minny, who died of consumption at a very young age, as the model for Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*. As he goes on to explain to Du Maurier that after Minny there was no other woman in his life, the authorial narrator intervenes and speaks through Henry who acts as a focal character: “This story was almost true, and Henry almost believed it himself. He had certainly loved Minny Temple, but if he had been ‘in love’ with her, he would not have gone off to Europe when he did, or he would have made more determined efforts to bring her across the Atlantic to join him” (62). This sad story, the authorial narrator continues, “both explained and sanctified his celibate dedication to art” (*ibid*).

Having established Henry as a fully dedicated artist, Lodge goes on to investigate a more personal, intimate, and “private” Henry. For this aim, Lodge dwells on Henry’s public dedication to art as running parallel to his fear of exposure of his private self. In his relations, Henry is portrayed as a man who, “liked to keep his friends in watertight compartments, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups, so that information about himself should not leak from one to another” (63). This delicate effort for privacy is juxtaposed with fiction writing, which, “however artful, was inevitably to some degree an exposure of the author’s own self, his own soul” (*ibid*). Believing “the fewer facts about one’s private life that one’s friends and the general public had in their possession, by the light of which to make comparisons and inferences, the better” (*ibid*), he leads a secretive life, and his relationship with Constance Fenimore Woolson is an example of this desire. Their relationship is described as being “literary” in nature, where two authors take pleasure in each other’s company as writers. Henry enjoys and appreciates her work even though he thinks “it was limited by a typically feminine concentration on the themes of love and marriage,” still, he finds in places it is “full of happy touches, acute observation of people and places, and the marks of genuine artistic integrity” (67). Besides, Henry also believes they are writing from the same position, “in the great aesthetic war in which Henry considered himself to be engaged: the effort to make truth to life, life as experienced on the pulses and in the consciousness of individual human beings, the main criterion of value in the English and American novel, as it was best French and Russian fiction” (68). As the narrative proceeds, Henry is portrayed as

pertinaciously dedicated to this purpose, and as indifferent to Fenimore's advances towards himself. For instance, visiting her apartment in Italy after hearing her suicide, in an act of redemption, he checks her belongings. Discovery of a sentence in Fenimore's notebook triggers Henry's memory. Reading the following note "imagine a man born without a heart. He is good, at least not cruel; not debauched, well-conducted; but he has no heart." (211), he wonders whether Fenimore had Henry in mind when she wrote these. He then remembers how once in a Sunday gathering Flaubert had mentioned her mother's accusations towards him "Your mania for sentences has dried up your heart", he feels guilty about Fenimore's death, which is recounted by narrator as such: "Even then, and even though the words were directed at another man, he had felt a little internal qualm of apprehension that they might one day be levelled at himself, for he shared Flaubert's mania for sentences" (211).

Henry James is in fact an interesting figure to explore the relationship between an author's life and work since he is famously known to detest biographical criticism. In the novel, Lodge recreates such scenes where Henry is presented as being obsessed with privacy both in his life and work. As Lodge's Henry works on "The Aspern Papers," he condemns the "essential depravity of this urge to uncover the secrets of dead authors, to possess their private thoughts and deeds, and to publish them to the world," and the idea revolts him as he thinks of "his own papers being rifled by strangers after his death" (86). To Fenimore's great astonishment, Henry tries to convince her to burn the correspondence between them, to eliminate this possibility. When Fenimore teases him "Are you afraid they may be read out in court at some future date?" (86), he responds with extreme uneasiness:

'Don't be absurd, Fenimore, of course not. They're not in the least compromising. But they are ... private. I hate the idea of people reading them after we are dead.'

'Dead! What a morbid thought.'

'And not only reading them, but publishing them, and making money out of them. It's the way things are going in this dreadful Americanised age of ours. There is no privacy, no decency any more. Journalists, interviewers, biographers - they're parasites, locusts, they strip every leaf. The art we lavish - the pains we take - to create imaginary worlds - is wasted on them. They care only for trivial fact. I feel it is our duty to deny them, to defeat

them. When we are dead, when we can no longer defend our privacy, they will move in with their antennae twitching, their mandibles gnashing. Let them find nothing - only scorched earth. Ashes.'

Fenimore moved on, in meditative silence. 'I can see you feel deeply about this, Henry,' she said at length.  
'I do.' (86-7; original format)

Through this exchange between Fenimore and Henry, Lodge comments both on the artist's peculiar position as shuffling between public and private spaces and also on his own position as a writer. Lodge aims to distinguish himself from the biographers, who, only care for trivia, through the homage he pays to the master.

Lodge's portrayal of Henry as fiercely against biographical criticism, which seeks to find the expression of a work in the person who creates it, ironically, functions to highlight the inevitability of life's permeation into work. In spite of all his criticism, Henry's works are shown to be autobiographical in a degree that cannot be taken for granted. His *The Portrait of a Lady* is presented as based on Minny Temple; his short story "The Middle Years" is about a novelist who chooses art over love; and, as he admits Mrs Peverel in *Guy Domville* is based on Constance Fenimore Woolson. Hence, imagining his Henry within a humanist model of authorship, where life inevitably penetrates into the work, Lodge defies the death of the author. In his novel Lodge shows how, when used as complementary to other methods, knowledge of life might enrich interpretation, and thus he asserts authorship as inevitably tied together with an author's life.

In Bakhtin's typology of author-hero relationships there are two other cases. The second case is where the author takes possession of the hero, introduces consummating moments into him, and "the author's relationship to the hero thus becomes, in part, the hero's own relationship to himself" (20). In this relationship, "[t]he author's reflection is put into the soul or mouth of the hero," and while in this case the hero is not autobiographical, "the author's reflection introduced into him provides the unity which actually consummates him" (*ibid*). Given Lodge's hero himself is an author, the relation between the two manifests strong anxieties of influence on Lodge's part. Therefore, Lodge definitely projects his own life onto Henry James, and apart from the above-mentioned portrayal of Henry James as chastely dedicated to his art, Lodge possesses Henry James in other directions, too.

Lodge's choosing James's middle years as the focus of his fiction essentially stem from his identification with him, as Lodge himself also confessed. In fictionalizing Henry, struggling with lack of attention to his plays and novels, he draws attention to the contemporary publishing scene. Of course, Lodge received a lot more attention and recognition than Henry had done in his life time, but often he is known to mention his feeling that he has not received his due recognition of fame. Quoting from his own notes in his diary, written down at the time of the composition of *Author, Author*, he makes the following confession in *TYHJ*:

*The end of every human life has inexhaustible pathos, poignancy, irony, if we know the person well enough. . . . Whereas [imagining] the last illness and death of a novelist, one whose work I am reasonably familiar with, whose life is recorded and recoverable in some detail, is a subject that stirs my sympathies, invites my speculations, no doubt in part because I am a novelist myself, not so far away from the age of Henry James when he died. . . .* (51-2; emphasis in the original)

In accordance with this identification, Lodge constructs the climax of the novel as Henry's being booed down at the opening night of *Guy Domville*, and through this event the artist's disillusionment is portrayed and linked, to a greater commentary regarding the lack of public attention to high art. The differentiation between low art and high art is first presented in the novel through Minnie, the maidservant. Throughout the first pages recounting Henry's deathbed scene, the reader encounters her as she struggles to make sense of James's story "The Beast in the Jungle". Being a traditional reader, she finds it hard to follow and grasp stories that do not have a chronological sequence of events. "Minnie blinks and reads the sentence again. She still doesn't understand it. She knows the meaning of all the individual words but she can't make sense of the way they are joined together. Can this really be the beginning of the story? [...]" (20). Unable to understand the story, in a symbolic act, "she closes the book, blows out the candle and falls instantly asleep" (21). Through a parodic treatment of Minnie's efforts to grasp Henry's fiction, the text foreshadows the negative reaction Henry would get on the opening night of *Guy Domville*.

That particular night, Henry is depicted as being so overwhelmed by the pressure that instead of attending his own play, he decides to spend time watching *An Ideal Husband* by Oscar Wilde. The popularity of Oscar Wilde's rough style

awakens Henry to the difference between his own play and that of Wilde. Leaving St James Theatre to attend his own play just in time for the closure, it suddenly dawns on him, and Henry senses his own failure. If *An Ideal Husband* was liked so much “then *Guy Domville*, with its old-fashioned manners and decorous language, its morally fastidious hero and suffering, reticent heroine, its genuine ethical dilemmas and final endorsement of self-sacrifice and renunciation, certainly wasn’t” (253).

Arriving at the theatre just in time to take the bow, Henry is unable to follow the flow of his play. Therefore, when he hears the usual calls “Author, Author!” he is wriggled out of his previous thoughts and feels “unspeakable relief” (256), thinking everything went well. However, things take a different turn. The omniscient narrator gives an account of these scenes where simultaneous events are taking place through the use of square brackets to separate the consciousness of characters from one another. When the cries of “Author! Author!” reverberate in the theatre, Elizabeth Robins contemplates:

[Elizabeth Robins immediately saw the danger. The cries of ‘Author!’ had come first from the gallery, and were then taken up enthusiastically by Henry’s friends in the stalls and circle, but the two groups had entirely different motives for wanting to draw him out into the open...] (256)

[As Henry James turned to face the audience, and prepared graciously to bow, a barrage of booing fell from ‘the gods’ on his defenceless head. ‘*Boo! Boo! Boo!*’ There was also some hissing, and jeers and catcalls, but it was the long vowel sound of ‘oo’ that dominated the cascade of sounds. [...] His outraged friends and supporters responded with more vigorous applause and cries of ‘*Bravo!*’ – which only provoked the boopers to louder efforts.[...] (*ibid* ; original format)

This discrepancy is evoked by other characters in the novel. Watching the play, and witnessing the author’s being booed, Arnold Bennett writes “*A battle between the toughs and the toffs!*” in his notebook (257; emphasis in the original). The scene continues with the portrayal of two men, who turn out to be Shaw and H.G Wells, discussing the play. Pointing to the flaws in the staging of the play, Shaw remarks still it is a “pleasure to hear language like that spoken in a London theatre. Henry James uses words like a poet, even though it’s written as prose,” to which Wells replies by asking whether it is really the language people use (261). Eventually, they arrive at the conclusion that the booing stemmed from the incongruity between the

audience: “Twas the people in the gallery who booed, and the pit and the cheap upper boxes. They didn’t understand or appreciate the play – how could they, when they’ve been fed for decades on a diet of class melodrama and coarse farce?” (261; original format).

Henry’s artistic superiority, which, the narrative implies Lodge shares, is further conveyed through the comparison between two different kinds of narrators Henry James and Du Maurier use. While Henry firmly believes “in the superior expressiveness and verisimilitude of the limited point of view” (230), his close friend, yet literary rival, is portrayed as using “the antithetical method,” who, with an

...authorial narrator, in Thackerayan fashion, took out his puppets from the box, and set them capering, and told you in his own confiding ruminative voice exactly what they were thinking at any given moment, and awarded them marks for good or bad motives, in case there should be any danger of the audience having to make some interpretative effort on its own part. (230)

In spite of Henry’s criticism, this kind of narrator brings great fame to Du Maurier, whereas around the same time, Henry is portrayed as having published “only one new piece of work so far that year, ‘The Middle Years’, and the sales of his books – those that were still in print – were depressing in the extreme” (186). Henry’s diminishing fame is contrasted to Du Maurier’s rising fame, and through such comparisons the narrator takes authorship from the textual to the material world of publication. Just as Henry tries his luck at the theatre due to necessity, Du Maurier, having lost his eyesight, and as a result of searching for alternative ways to make a living apart from his current occupation as a caricaturist working for *Punch*, begins to write novels (102). Below is an example of Henry’s concern about his position:

...‘the demand for my work is diminishing. It’s a frightening prospect - I tell you this in confidence, you understand,’ he repeated, clasping Du Maurier’s arm to impress the earnestness of his sentiments. It’s been weighing on my mind of late, and I have to tell somebody.’

‘Your time will come, Henry,’ Du Maurier said.

‘I feel it’s running out. I find it more and more difficult to think of plots.’(100)

While Du Maurier turned to novel-writing after he lost his eyesight which prevented him from drawing caricatures for *Punch*, Henry’s cure for failure was to write for

theatre, which unfortunately did not bring the success he was hoping for. Even though he secretly desires the fame and recognition Du Maurier receives, due to his dedication to art, he resigns never to write a popular book. He thinks as a consequence of the recent changes “in the culture of the English-speaking world,” it is now “impossible for a practitioner of the art of fiction to achieve both excellence and popularity, as Scott and Balzac, Dickens and George Eliot, had done in their prime” (348).

Through such scenes represented in a poignant language, Lodge constantly emphasizes the inseparability of the work and the material conditions that work is produced in. In opposition to the poststructuralist notion of the text that demands the death of the author, Lodge’s conception of authorship demands direct attention to the person behind the text. For example, when Henry learns that Du Maurier, who suffers from poor eyesight, dictates his novels to his wife Emma, he, too, hires a secretary for the same purpose, and this change has a significant impact on the narrative, which is related as follows:

He was aware that his sentences were becoming longer and more intricately wrought under this new regime [...]. He could form the sentences, order and rearrange the clauses, select the words, all in his mind, or as it were in the air, holding them there for contemplation before he uttered them; and later, with the transcript in his hand, he could dictate the passage again, adding and inserting new units of sense to thicken the richness of meaning. (99)

Changing the means, the tools of production, as seen in this example, has a direct impact on the text. Through such examples, Lodge constructs authorship in a text as intricately bound to the conditions around it. As seen in this example, even the way a text is written, such as using a typewriter or dictating it might be a determiner of the sentence formation. Similarly, material conditions, too, affect the production of a work. For instance, it is clearly stated that Henry’s attempts at play-writing have financial reasons. Writing plays, imagines Henry, would offer him many prospects; most importantly, it would allow him to write fiction under more comfortable circumstances:

Cushioned by moneybags fat with playhouse royalties, he need no longer haggle with publishers over their paltry advances, or bewail the paucity of discriminating readers able to appreciate his novels. With the proceeds of his

commercially successful plays he would buy himself the space and time to write real literature without having to worry about its marketability. (109)

Hence, through Henry, Lodge conveys the anxieties of authorship as being multi-layered. In his vision, apart from investing labour in his work, the author has to survive the pressure of the market as well as putting up with the negative criticism he receives after all the effort he gives. For instance, reading an unfavourable review of *Guy Domville* in *The Times*, Henry feels devastated. “Dismayed he let the paper drop. If he had retained any spark of faith in his play, any lingering hope that discerning theatregoers, other than his own interested friends, would appreciate its merits, they were crushed out under the vindictive heel of this nameless assailant” (269). The review deeply affects him; and, as he goes on with assessing his own position in English theatre, he arrives at the conclusion that “If *The Times* sided with those hooligans in the gallery, then there was no place for him in the English theatre” (*ibid*). The words in the review “‘*Painful and misdirected effort*’- the words stung like a slap across the face, but they could be the epitaph on his career as a playwright,” strike him, but also awaken him to the bitter reality. Henry says his efforts at the theatre “had indeed been painful, and it had manifestly been misdirected. He had wasted five years on the futile quest for an illusory Grail – five years in which he had neglected the art of which he *did* have some acknowledged mastery. And if he returned to that now, who would be interested?” (*ibid*; emphasis in the original).

Facing the risk of losing even the audience for his novels, Henry thinks the life of an author proceeds with its ups and downs. “With two plays accepted for production in the near future ... Henry felt he was on the brink of really making his mark on the theatrical scene, yet after so many disappointments he was well aware how fragile this happy state of affairs really was” (186). In his experience, one disappointment follows the other. Henry’s documentation of his experiences with *Mrs Jasper’s Way* further exemplifies this. Well into the rehearsals, Henry is told that his play is not good enough. “After all this time, after the play had been unconditionally accepted and an agreement drawn up, after so many revisions and deletions and fine adjustments to dialogue and stage directions, to be told after all that, ‘*it lacked story!*’” (195; emphasis in the original). Moreover, as his plays fail

one after another, he is portrayed contemplating his own situation as “in serious danger of extinction, not to mention bankruptcy” (270). Through such examples Lodge problematizes the boundaries around *the text*, and questions to what extent the author’s life can be excluded as completely separate from the text, under such conditions.

In the third case Bakhtin identifies, the hero becomes his own author, “and, as such, himself interprets his own life aesthetically – he plays a role. In this kind of relationship, consummating moments can be created through satire, humour or heroic representation (21). This might be extended to all of the story, since it is mostly narrated through Henry’s consciousness, where Lodge represents him as a hero who is eligible to defy death through his work. What is most important in Bakhtin’s typology and relevant to the analysis here is his joining aesthetic activity with ethics as separate, yet, adjoining in a text. Bakhtin concludes this analysis on the note that in the case of a convergence between the hero and the author, when they “coincide,” “or when they find themselves standing either next to one another in the face of a value they share or against one another as antagonist, the aesthetic event ends and an ethical event begins” (22).

Lodge compares and contrasts Henry James with Du Maurier as noted above. In this juxtaposition, Lodge also projects his own anxieties on Henry James. As implied by the title *Author, Author*, this novel is a story of two authors: Henry James and David Lodge. Lodge’s treatment of his hero with utmost reverence as testified by his attention to factual details and his anxieties about portraying Henry James as the master signify that in Lodge’s relation to his hero Henry, especially in the parts when Lodge and Henry “coincide” as middle-aged authors having similar anxieties, as Bakhtin suggested, the aesthetic activity stops and an ethical event begins. Therefore, in Bakhtin’s examination of the author-hero relationship, this last category is not preferable since it is the most distanced one from the aesthetic activity. Lodge, however, clearly aims to tie the aesthetic activity to the ethical one in his reconstruction of the author. Treating his biographical subject with reverence was Lodge’s main aim even if it cost Lodge the negative reviews by critics like Cora Kaplan, who, as noted earlier, criticized *Author, Author* on the grounds that Lodge’s insistence on facts hindered his creativity and the novel was unimaginative.

Kaplan's criticism is significant in terms of raising similar concerns and in a sense confirming Bakhtin. Yet, in spite of possible disadvantages in terms of Bakhtinian aesthetics, Lodge's making room for ethical concerns such as privacy and factuality of a historical author's life in his narrative is also noteworthy for creating new premises, through which authors can/need to imagine new relations between author and hero.

Barthes stated in "The Death of the Author" that, "[o]nce the author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (*IMT* 147), and Lodge gives it not one, but two authors, and hence deliberately imposes those limits on the text, through pointing to himself as the Author. During the presentation of Henry's deathbed scene, while the authorial narrator portrays the James household as anxiously waiting for the end, suddenly, he intervenes as the real author, and his entry into the narrative is marked by italics:

... But the author's fingerhold on life is extraordinary tenacious. He will not let go until he has to.

*...while for me, as I conjure up this deathbed scene, looking at it as through the curved transparency of a crystal ball, perhaps the most poignant fact about Henry James's life is that, having suffered professional humiliation and rejection in mid-career, culminating in the debacle of Guy Domville, and having triumphantly recovered his creativity and confidence, and gone on to write his late masterpieces, those foundation stones of the modern psychological novel The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl, he had to suffer the experience of catastrophic failure all over again, little more than a decade after the first ordeal." (373; original format)*

This intrusion reads more like a piece of criticism than a scene from a novel, where Lodge goes on to discuss the writing of biographical novel as an ethical activity, and through referring to his own choices from the raw material of James's life, he justifies his own decisions. Finally, sharing Henry's sense of belatedness or perhaps dismay at not having received the due attention he thinks he deserves; Lodge delivers a speech of praise to the master.

For Barthes, "the invention of the author" was an interstice; for Foucault, it was as old as the concept of literature. For Lodge, the concept of author is closely associated with the transcendental. The author thinks, begets, and suffers for his own

book. He repeatedly states that the works of literature require labour, as evidenced in his recounting of the assiduous research he has conducted while writing the novel. In view of this, in the following section, Lodge's unrequited labour devoted to the writing *Author, Author*, and sense of disappointment in the aftermath of the publication will be discussed as laid out by Lodge, in his *The Year of Henry James: Story of a Novel*.

#### **4.4 “Write On”: Anxieties of Reception and David Lodge’s Handling of Disillusionment**

Henry James is an appealing figure among the biographical novel writers due to enigmas around his fiction and life. This man of letters is famously known for his fear of public exposure. Apart from the examples given earlier from the novel, Henry's secretary, Theodora Bosanquet for instance, describes Henry as a man who “hates the idea of people prying into his life after he is dead” (363).

As discussed in the previous section in terms of the author hero relationship in aesthetic activity, Lodge writes with the agenda to insert ethics as a part of aesthetic activity. As a consequence of these ethical concerns that he raises through the aesthetic activity of fictionalizing Henry James, he takes great pains to differentiate himself from those biographers or novelists, who, in his view, pry into a dead person's life. In order to create this juxtaposition, Lodge presents Henry's nephew, named Henry after his uncle, as guided by antithetical motives. In contrast to Lodge, who assumes the position of a faithful deathbed company, young Henry is portrayed as wondering whether Henry has letters from the prominent figures of his time. Contemplating whether he could use them for profit, young Henry becomes disappointed with the discovery that his uncle Henry burnt all of his letters in a big bonfire he set in the garden (363). This event is related by the intrusive authorial narrator, who appears yet again at the very end of the novel, in the following words:

*The cumulative weight of all these disappointments was too much to bear. It was in the mood of black despair they induced that he made the first great bonfire of his correspondence in the garden at Lamb House, watched by his awed and uncomprehending servants. It was essentially an act of revenge against the uncaring, unsympathetic literary world that had scorned or ignored his work. If they didn't want his novels, he would do everything in his power to ensure that they didn't get his life- he would rather vanish*

*entirely from the literary landscape than become one of those 'interesting' minor figures who live on in biographies and collections of letters and footnotes to the works of more eminent writers. (374; emphasis in the original)*

Disillusioned due to the lack of interest in his work, Henry decides he will not allow his life to be pondered by the reading public, which failed to merit his work. With this suicidal gesture, Henry as the man behind the text apparently chooses to die into the abyss of the literary world and defies the literary voyeuristic interest. On the other hand, with his gesture, Henry might also be said to take the matters in his own hands as he frantically tries to control his future public image.

The disillusionment of an author is at the core of Lodge's portrayal of Henry's life as an author. As laid out in the anxiety of influence section, choosing to depict Henry as he struggles as an author, Lodge projects himself onto Henry, and constructs him as the other against which he can negotiate his authorial position. In her interview with David Lodge, published in *The Telegraph* (2004), Julia Llewellyn posits the question: "Does Lodge think he will be remembered in posterity?" to which Lodge replies "I can't think about it. That way madness lies". He then recounts while he could be deemed as a more commercially successful writer compared to Henry James, it is still important for him "to have good reviews and to be thought a writer of some importance". Lodge continues by suggesting that sometimes he feels he didn't receive the recognition he thinks he deserved: "I don't feel I've received the recognition I should, but then who does? Kingsley Amis said a bad review spoiled your breakfast, but it shouldn't spoil lunch. I think it spoils quite a few lunches" (Llewellyn). Negative reviews he has received about *Author, Author*, must have spoiled quite a few of his lunches indeed that as a result, Lodge probably felt obliged to write *The Year of Henry James: The Story of a Novel*, in 2006. Even as early as 1980, in "Structural Defects," Lodge hinted that authors can convey their own interpretations as the authorized version to the readers in the following words: "I would not claim that, because I could explicate my own novel line by line, that is not *all* it could mean; and I am well aware of the danger of inhibiting the interpretive freedom of the reader by a premature display of my own, as it were, 'authorized' interpretation" (11). Indeed, this is exactly what he does with publishing *The Year of Henry James: The Story of a Novel* (2006).

In the first pages of this lengthy essay, Lodge argues that no matter how hard one “tries to make one’s novel as strong, as satisfying, as immune to criticism as one can,” the novel “has an independent life which the writer can never fully anticipate or control” after its publication (x). Diverging from the critical positions which claim the death of the author, Lodge is convinced of the author’s claim to the “life” in and after the work. After having referred to the author’s limited control on his work following its publication, he quickly adds that writers always have the chance to comment publicly on the novels they have written (*ibid*), as he himself is doing, by writing a book which describes how a novel that aroused much controversy was written. In this sense, *Author, Author* is an interesting and perhaps even unique novel for the contemporary reader since it comes with what functions as a reading guide, *The Year of Henry James*. The reading guides about novels produced by scholars are not uncommon, but an explanatory essay of this length, written by an author on his own work, is, in many ways, unique.

*The Year of Henry James* is also an author’s confession. In *Art and Answerability*, Bakhtin warns against such author’s confessions since they are formed after the original act of creation has been carried out, and for that reason in an author’s confession, the author “voices his present relationship to [heroes] as already determined: he conveys the impression they produce on him now as artistic images and gives utterance to the attitude he now maintains towards them” (7). In order to avoid this pitfall, Lodge seems to structure his arguments around his notes or references to the events that took place at the time of the actual writing of the novel. In spite of certain limitations this essay has, it is impossible to ignore this epitext, where, Lodge self-reflexively comments on his own position as an author.

Genette formulates *paratext* as the sum of *peritext* and *epitext*. While *peritext* refers to the things inside the book such as chapter titles, small information notes, *epitext* is outside the book “generally with the backing of the media (interviews, conversations), or under the cover of private communication (correspondences, private journals, and the like)” (“Int. Paratext” 264). In this sense, *TYHJ* is incorporated in this study as an epitext because even if it is separate from the text, *Author, Author*, it speaks directly to the tensions raised by the novel, as well as being an example of how an author “writes on” with the aim of governing the

critical views regarding his own work. *TYHJ*'s presence provides a set of standards against which Lodge wants his novel to be judged.

In the majority of early reviews *Author, Author* was likened to biography and was regarded as a failure, whereas with Lodge's careful outlining of his aim and his philosophy regarding the construction of a biographical novel in interviews and in *TYHJ*, the later reviews sounded more sympathetic. For example, in *TYHJ* Lodge states that during the composition of the *Author, Author* one of the questions that distressed him particularly was how to maintain the narrative distance from Henry James. Through the use of the first name Henry, rather than the more official surname James, Lodge says he aimed to overcome the narrative distance between himself and his subject as well as avoiding the biographical effect the surname James might have created. This intricate balance as he calls it was of tremendous importance to Lodge. However, in an early review, a *Guardian* editor had changed all the Henrys to James in the extract published from the book. This review appalled Lodge. In *TYHJ*, he recounts it as follows: "It makes the discourse sound like biography, which was the effect I was trying to avoid [...] It undid with a single unthinking stroke the delicate balance I had striven to attain between fidelity to fact and imaginative empathy" (*TYHJ* 82-3). That review was later corrected with an apology, but it stands out as an exemplary case of both how an author had to intervene about a particular reading of his work; which is completely at odds with the plurality of readings, and also how an author's intervention might change not only the reception of a work, but also the future interpretations of the text. Most of the scholarly articles or later reviews written on *Author, Author* refer to this incident in their discussion of the novel, and continue their analysis of the novel from thereon.

Finally, *TYHJ* is also important for its inviting sympathy for its author, who was described as "the year's unluckiest good novelist" (qtd. in *TYHJ* 97) by *Entertainment Weekly*. Being published in 2004, "The Year of Henry James," *Author, Author* enacts Lodge's subtitle "Timing is All". *Author, Author* was inevitably read against other James-themed novels, but it has been juxtaposed particularly with Tóibín's *The Master*, which received more favourable reviews. *The Master*'s dominion over Lodge's novel had started even before the novel met the

public. In his usual comic tone, Lodge relates his feeling upon hearing The Booker list just before the book launch as such:

On Thursday, 26 August, a week before publication, the longlist for the Booker Prize was announced, and *Author, Author* was not on it. The shortlist is always something of a lottery, but omission from the longlist feels more like a snub. I would have minded less if *The Master* had not been one of the twenty-two novels selected. (TYHJ 84).

Then, the reviews of the book appeared. While Anita Brookner's was generally favourable, the following reviews, without exception, referred to *The Master*. Sophie Harrison from *New York Times Book Review* stated, for instance, "*The Master* casts a terrible shadow over this book" and goes on to imagine how Lodge would react to news of hearing Tóibín's novel: "It is hard not to imagine the awful emotions in the Lodge household at this point, the anguished telephone call: *He's written a what? About who?*" (Harrison; emphasis in the original).

When Lodge set out to fictionalize Henry James's life, he was well aware of the enigmas and famous curse Henry James had inflicted on future biographers, and as exemplified above in relation to Henry's fear of exposure, in various places in the novel Lodge dwelled on this issue. However, at the time of writing the novel even if Lodge might have thought his position was exactly that of a future biographer condemned by James, he could not have possibly imagined what was yet to take place following the publication of the novel. Call it fulfilment of the curse or just the expected consequences of the zeitgeist, this interest in James's life has created situations which could only appear in James's own fiction. For instance, the cruel ironies surrounding the James "exploiters" had started as all of these writers had decided to embark on a quest for "real James". Naturally, at the time of their quest none of them were aware of the future awaiting them. Only in a retrospective look can the ironies around their dealing with James be clearly seen. In a similar way to Byatt's scholar characters, Maud and Roland, in *Possession*, the novelists tampering with James's life become possessed and haunted by James's curse, with the result that writers who write on James, Lodge argues, inevitably all become Jamesian characters (TYHJ 39), as proposed in the example of Heyn's and Toibin's visiting the Lamb House on the same day, unaware of each other. This, as Lodge notes, reads as a scene from a James story. Lodge writes: "by daring to write imaginatively

about Henry James I entered a zone of narrative irony such as he himself loved to create, especially in his wonderful stories (which are among my favourite works of fiction) about writers and the literary profession” (TYHJ 39). Inviting the reader to visualize this scene as three different authors pace towards the same house, standing in the exact spot a rival novelist had stood, taking notes that will help to create James’s life, Lodge asks “Could anything be more Jamesian?” (TYHJ 40).

As a way of conclusion, let us note that what was even more Jamesian was not yet awaited by Lodge at the time. It would take him more than two years to awaken to his own awkward position, as fulfilling the exact curse he had depicted Henry to be suffering from. In *The Year of Henry James*, Lodge relates the impasse he had been experiencing as a result of the boom in the number of biographical novels on James as follows:

I had been aware for some time (and you, gentle reader, have no doubt made the same observation) that I had not only strayed into a zone of Jamesian ironies as a result of writing *Author, Author*, but I was in some measure re-enacting the story of my own novel. That was indeed the supreme irony, for me, of *The Year of Henry James*. Colm Tóibín was my Du Maurier, *The Master* his *Trilby*, and *Author, Author* was my *Guy Domville*. (TYHJ 94)

What started for Lodge as a rewriting of Henry James’s anxieties, as a mirror on which he could see his own and negotiate them, ended with Lodge “becoming” Henry James.

## CHAPTER 5

### MAGGIE GEE'S CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHORIAL IDENTITY IN *VIRGINIA WOOLF IN MANHATTAN*

Life, it has been agreed by everyone whose opinion is worth consulting, is the only fit subject for novelist or biographer. (*Orlando* 254)

Words beat on against death...  
Always beginning again, beginning against ending.  
(*The Burning Book* 304).

*Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*<sup>21</sup> (2014), is a powerful and flamboyant authorial statement by the acclaimed author, Maggie Gee, who has exhibited a keen interest in the practices and performances of authorship throughout her career as an author. The novel opens with the image of Angela Lamb<sup>22</sup>, the first author figure in the novel, on the plane, as she “flies to New York with Virginia Woolf in her handbag” (VWM 9).<sup>23</sup> Angela Lamb, as readers of Gee’s previous novels might remember, is Gee’s beloved fictional counterpart and mouthpiece. As an autofictional portrait, she appeared in Gee’s earlier novels, *The Burning Book* (1983) and *The Flood* (2004) and, now, she is portrayed as an established novelist, as indicated by her title as the winner of Iceland Prize. Angela Lamb of VWM is

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<sup>21</sup> Hereafter abbreviated as VWM.

<sup>22</sup> In the following section, a trajectory of Angela Lamb’s life as a novel character will be explored in a more detailed way.

<sup>23</sup> In order to avoid any confusion between real Virginia Woolf and Gee’s fictional account, unless otherwise indicated, the historical author will be referred to as Woolf or Virginia Woolf, while Gee’s fictional character will be referred to merely as Virginia throughout the chapter.

recently divorced, and her daughter Gerda<sup>24</sup>, whom the novel brings to fore as a future author, is sent off to a boarding school. Angela is portrayed as struggling between her duties as a mother and her career as a novelist. On her way to New York to conduct research in the private Berg Collection of New York Public Library for the plenary speech she is going to deliver at “Virginia Woolf in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Cross-cultural and Transformational Approaches” in İstanbul, Turkey, Angela reads Woolf’s *Professions for Women* on the plane and she indulges in a fantasy: “if I’d met Woolf, if she had met me, on the same loop of the ribbon of spacetime, what would she have thought of me?” (VWM 11). As Angela finally reaches New York Public Library to conduct her research, she feels disappointed after finding out the archives can be viewed on microfilms, the experience of which is “hardly the same” she complains, since Virginia Woolf herself “hasn’t breathed on that film, or used it, or touched it” (VWM 17). Her despair soon withers away, as the archives reveal to her, their well-kept jewel, Virginia Woolf herself, in person. The forlorn author materializes just in the right place; “from the depths of cold watery sleep into the warmth of a small dim room” (VWM 19), where her life is kept in the form of books, diaries and letters. The rest is an entertaining story as Angela Lamb finds herself guiding her literary heroine Virginia Woolf, around Manhattan and educating her about the ways of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through positing the question of whether the quintessentially English writer will mingle harmoniously with American culture, or will she remain a tourist there, Gee juxtaposes not only two different cultures, but also, the modern and the postmodern, writing and critiquing are set against each other. Such dialectic unfolding of Gee’s arguments allow her to address the production, circulation, consumption and possession of literature, by readers, critics and authors themselves, who are first and foremost, readers, too.

With the İstanbul Conference resonating at the background, Angela and Virginia know that they have limited time in Manhattan. As the conference draws near, Angela and Virginia try to live it to the fullest in Manhattan by shopping,

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<sup>24</sup> Gerda is named after her namesake in Hans Andersen’s *Snow Queen*. In an interview with Simon Thomas, Gee admits Gerda’s adventurous spirit inspired her. In the real story Gerda travels around the world to find her friend Kay, and in *VWM*, Gerda travels first to New York and then to İstanbul, in search of her mother, Angela Lamb. She is also bookish, and at the end of the novel, Virginia’s sympathy towards her indicates that the future author rests in Gerda’s creative vision.

sightseeing and exploring bookshops. While Angela is usually grumpy about the expenses Virginia causes her, Virginia turns out to be the resourceful author, she always was. As it happens, when she committed suicide, she had first editions of two of her masterpieces, *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando* with her; and hence these books accompanied her back to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Angela realizes how much money they could make if they sell them. After a few visits to the prestigious bookshops around Manhattan, Angela discovers that a signed, first-edition copy of *To the Lighthouse* might be priced as much as \$28.000 whereas a personalized copy, a copy signed for a special person, is priced a lot more. This discovery prompts Virginia and Angela to “personalise” the copies they have, by writing notes addressed to Vita and Leonard to increase the market value of the books. They succeed in selling the two books for \$90.000. Having secured financial freedom, Virginia can now embark on an adventure in İstanbul.

As Angela prepares Virginia for the İstanbul Conference, Virginia undertakes a journey via which she negotiates some dualities around her: past and present, old and new, women and men, author and critic. Virginia, being a lover of modernity gets the hang of new technologies such as the TV, computer and Internet quickly, but she finds it unbearably hard to come to terms with a variety of modern critical concepts. Virginia finds structuralist discourse utterly insincere and completely artificial, and she cannot accept “the death of the author,” to which Angela introduces her. She questions simply why she could not express opinions about her own work. With her vision of authorship, Virginia presents a stark contrast to the contemporary authorship represented by Angela Lamb. Even though Virginia is in many ways, “the modernist” writer, in *VWM*, Gee also draws attention to Woolf as a self-made writer, who did not go to the college and did not receive the formal university education her brothers had. In her talk “Virginia Woolf: A Female Genius to Whom Nothing was Alien”<sup>25</sup>, Gee, underlined that aspect and explicated that she found Woolf’s lack of formal training very liberating, in terms of how it allowed her to explore her surroundings as well as literature, with a fresh and bold outlook.

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<sup>25</sup> Gee, Maggie. “Virginia Woolf: A Female Genius to Whom was Nothing Alien”. *A Female Genius of Modernity: Virginia Woolf*. Ankara Science University, 27 April 2021.

In accordance with the real Virginia Woolf, Gee's fictional Virginia also represents a form of authorship where the author and the critic were not separated from each other whereas in the contemporary world of poststructuralism and deconstruction the author's authority over the text has been stripped off by the critic, who disregarded the intentions of the author, along with the subject, by shifting the authority from the person to the discourse. Angela briefs Virginia about Barthes, Bakhtin, and the theories of the death of the author, yet Virginia is not convinced and she will not give up her authority as the Author. As implied by her "return," the author strikes back, fully armed to re-establish the author's authority through reconstructive fictions like *VWM*.

To reconstruct fiction as a means of understanding and communication, Virginia and Angela have to reconnect with the creative faculty, which they can achieve only in İstanbul, through confronting and exorcizing their demon: the critic. When Angela and Virginia first arrive in İstanbul, Virginia is greatly touched by the memories she has of the bewildering city. She remembers the journey she took before, to aid her sister Vanessa, and how she wrote this in *Orlando*. Soon, she gets over the nostalgia and embraces adventure. She roams the streets carefree, has sexual affairs with a man and a woman. Finally, when the conference takes place, she delivers the important message she bore: Write, at all costs! Virginia carries this message across time and space, and it seems to be the very reason for her return. Once she feels she can now entrust Angela and Gerda, who will pass on her message through writing, Virginia can peacefully disappear back into the abyss.

In her *Postmortem Postmodernists: The Afterlife of the Author in Recent Narrative* (2009), Laura Savu points out that the majority of author fictions invite us to "reflect on how previous models of authorship, along with aesthetic and historical aspects of past texts, are continually being mediated, indeed revised, in light of recent critical thought on self, creativity, history, language and representation" (21). In his definition of biofictions, Lackey also draws attention to this function of the genre. He asserts that "[i]n biofiction, history and biography take their cue from the vision of the creative writer rather than from the reality of external world" ("Introduction: A narrative Space of Its Own" 9); therefore, in contrast to traditional biography's truth claims, the readers of biographical novels choose the genre for the

wide range of possibilities it offers. This thesis aimed to show three different ways in which these possibilities might be expressed and explored, and Gee's novel pleasantly compliments the spectrum of these possibilities which range from strict devotion to the biographical material to taking full liberty with it as in Gee's case.

The anxieties of authorship which surface in *Possession* and *Author, Author*; have been analysed in the previous chapters of this study. *VWM* shares these concerns, but it significantly differs from them, in its incorporation of biography. Both in Byatt's *Possession* and David Lodge's *Author, Author*, the revisionary mediations of previous models of authorship have been compared and contrasted with the contemporary forms; i.e. Victorian poets in Byatt's novel and Henry James in Lodge's novel. This juxtaposition between past and present subsists in *VWM*, as well, yet, with a more liberal use of the biographical material. In Byatt, the historical authors could not be located to one single author, due to Byatt's deliberate blurring of the biographical details, in accordance with her belief that it is not ethical to write fiction about a historical figure with a name and life. Lodge had similar ethical concerns, but he followed a different path than Byatt's: his hero is named after the historical figure it fictionalizes, Henry James. While Byatt chooses to obscure the name and invent the biographical details, Lodge's ethical concerns are negotiated in a different way. In his rewriting of Henry James's life, Lodge makes sure that every single detail documented in the novel can be traced to real historical events. Gee, on the other hand, inhabits a position that differs from both authors. Gee starts with a well-known author figure Virginia Woolf, like Lodge's Henry James. However, unlike Henry James, whom Lodge recreates in his own historical setting, Gee's Virginia is located in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As an anticipated outcome of this, her author fiction differs greatly from Lodge's strict sense of the biographical novel about an author. Gee's novel incorporates elements that align closely with fantasy and focuses more on Virginia Woolf's iconic status as an author, rather than her "life". She has a new life in Gee's hands.

In *The Theory of the Novel*, Georg Lukács points to "the historico-philosophical moment at which great novels become possible, at which they grow into a symbol of the essential thing that needs to be said" (88). The fact that Byatt's, Lodge's and Gee's novels follow each other almost by a decade is significant in this

respect, in terms of mapping out the changes in the perception of authorship and the way the authors portray this in their author fictions. Each novel bears the traces of the “historico-philosophical moment” that made the emergence of that specific work possible. For instance, Byatt’s novel, written around the 1990s, depicts the unease a modern scholar feels about the postmodern and endless deferral, and hence addresses debates about postmodernism’s exhaustion or obsolescence. In view of this, it could be said that by the time Lodge’s novel was published in 2004, the passing of the postmodern moment had already been agreed upon, and the search for reaching beyond it, trying to make sense of it, had already started. As part of the overarching desire to reach out to the “human” behind the text, it was in a way inevitable that the author would return to the text. All the legacies of the Romantic model of the author such as sincerity, authority, author as genius, which were sidelined by theories such as New Criticism, now found their way back to the text.

In many ways, Gee’s authorship constructs the author as someone is who is endowed with a distinctive gift. As much as the author is a discursive product of discourse, ideologies, society and culture, and surely of language, she/he still has her/his authority as the creative genius commanding language. The author emerging from these discussions is reminiscent of Wordsworthian model of the poet, “a man speaking to men,” one of the common people, yet distinguished from his fellows, by his capacity to have a more comprehensive soul than the ordinary man. Like Gee’s previous novels, *VWM* is, to a great extent, written from the same premise, and the same spirit subsists throughout the novel.

Lukács proposes that “[t]he inner form of the novel has been understood as the process of the problematic individual’s journeying towards himself [...] towards clear self-recognition. [...]” (80). In the genre of author fiction, the journey towards the self is undertaken through negotiating the anxiety of influence via rewriting the precursor. Just as Byatt and Lodge resolved their anxieties over the predecessors that haunt them through confronting them in their fictions, Gee had to confront Virginia Woolf, the modernist foremother, to position herself within the British literary scene, as an aging author. This novel was written in what could loosely be called as Gee’s mature phase, which can be described in terms similar to the way her author-character, Angela, sees herself: “I am successful, and I’m still quite young. Though

not as young as I used to be” (*VWM* 15). Lukács further expresses that “the immanence of meaning which the form of the novel requires lies in the hero’s finding out through experience that a mere glimpse of meaning is the highest that life has to offer” (*ibid*). In *VWM*, Gee has three heroines: Virginia, Angela and Gerda. Angela is the one to attain the glimpse of meaning. Angela identifies the purpose of her visit to New York Library, to revisit Virginia Woolf’s works, as “something more fundamental than the paper” (*VWM* 14). The “higher” purpose impels her Angela to return the author, Virginia Woolf, with whom her career as an academic had started. As Angela’s journey towards self-recognition proceeds, Gee’s voice resonates through the questions Angela asks herself: “Where was my life, and my writing, going? I thought it might help to be close to her” (*ibid*). Yet, Angela, hence Gee, gets closer to Virginia more than she could have imagined.

This desire Gee had to revisit, to be close to Virginia, was certainly challenging for Gee, as it took a rediscovery of herself and her position as an author. In spite of all the fun, sex, shopping and gossip trivia that takes place in the novel, *VWM* is about authorship more than anything else; and, its real author Gee is everywhere in the book. In an interview, she tells O’ Keeffe that this novel took her five years to write, which, Gee indicates, was longer than the writing period of her other novels. At various instances, she refers to how she was blocked and that she could resume writing only after her visit to İstanbul. Once the fog of anxieties cleared, Gee could bring the novel back to life again. Her statement where she refers to *VWM* as “a twenty-first-century love letter as well as an act of cheek, an attempt not to be afraid of Virginia Woolf” (*VWM* 474), divulges Gee’s tense relationship to Virginia Woolf as the precursor, oscillating between love and fear. Just as *Orlando* emerged “as a symbolic farewell love letter to [Vita’s and Virginia Woolf’s] bygone passionate relationship” (Latham 22), Gee’s novel might, in these terms, be viewed both as a celebration, yet, at the same time, ostracism, of Virginia’s influence on Gee.

Considering all these aspects, this chapter argues that through rewriting an epochal figure as Virginia Woolf and using digimodernism<sup>26</sup> both as the ontological

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<sup>26</sup> Alan Kirby refers to digimodernism, as “the successor to postmodernism” (2), which in the second half of the 1990s, “co-existed with a weakened, retreating postmodernism; [and hence] it’s the era of the hybrid or borderline text” (*ibid*). As much as it is an expected outcome of postmodernism, it is

premise and a literary tool to connect texts and authors, *VWM* posits the author, not just as a function of discursivity, but as a real person, who may be ever present in the text, with his/her intentions ostensibly inscribed in the text. Gee also aims to present authorship in a holistic vision, where authors from past (Virginia Woolf), present (Angela Lamb) and future (Gerda) are all connected and united in their common cause to write one's way out of the chaotic reality.

Gee's project differs from two previous novels analysed earlier, firstly by its imagining the historical author in a different spatio-temporality, and, secondly, by its ostentatious use of autobiographical elements from Gee's own life. Woolf's journey in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is intertwined with Gee's own authorial journey. Hence, through revisiting Virginia Woolf, Gee also revisits and re-evaluates her own position as well as her own *oeuvre* on the figure of the author. In lieu of these, this chapter will first begin with contextualizing Maggie Gee's works, and then the trajectory of authorship in her fiction will follow, with a particular emphasis on the author figure, Angela Lamb, as opposed to the critic Moira Penny.

### **5.1 Maggie Gee and *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* in Context: Locating the Author**

Maggie Gee, Professor of Creative Writing and the first female Chair of the Royal Society of Literature, is a prolific author with a dozen of novels she has published so far. Gee was chosen the Best of Young British Novelists in 1982, and since then, her work has been nominated for various literary prizes. She herself acted as the judge for the distribution of similar prizes, and Gee was granted OBE for her services to literature in 2012. Gee is also an active figure in literary circles. She was the First Female Chair for Royal Society of Literature, participated in Management Committee of the Society of Authors, the Government Public Lending Right Committee and worked in association with the British Council in various projects, including her academic visits to Turkey. In a 2010 article for *The Guardian*, Stephen Emms recounts how in spite of prestigious awards she received and the positions she held, Gee never caught the popularity of her more famous contemporaries such as

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also both a reaction and also a continuation, since it is "historically adjacent and expressed in part through the same cultural forms [...] suggesting a modulated continuity more than a rupture" (*ibid*).

Ian McEwan, Kazuo Ishiguro or Martin Amis, some of the names that were printed next to Gee's, back in 1983 for Granta's original Best of Young British Novelists awards. This is a point Gee herself addressed at that time, in her memoir *My Animal Life*. In this memoir, she remembers how disappointed she felt after her novel was rejected by publishers, one after another: "They turned it down ... I was Maggie Gee! On my sixth novel" (45). She was relieved only after she found a publisher interested in her novel and could restore her self-esteem as a novelist.

The same anxieties are echoed in *VWM*, with Angela as a "successful, and ... still quite young" author even though she is not as young as she used to be (*VWM* 15). As an aging author she finds herself on that point where one starts worrying about recognition and legacy. "Animal instincts," as Gee refers to them, such as jealousy as well as the sense of belatedness compel her mouthpiece, Angela, to evaluate herself in relation to the status and fame of Woolf:

I suppose in the UK I've got used to being treated with a certain – not deference, no, but people have been nice to me, since I won the Iceland Prize. And the Apple Martini Prize. My name has become quite well-known. [...] I'm a success. Success, success, that shiny slippery word, which I hope will never slip away from me.

Once people I met on planes or trains would ask 'Will I have heard of you?' and I would say, 'Probably not.' But now they say, with a dawning smile, 'Oh yes, you're quite famous, aren't you?' (*VWM* 15)

Angela is portrayed as having finally achieved the prestigious status she was aspiring for. Now, her novels are best-sellers, and she is an acclaimed author. Yet, as she has to admit, her name does not mean much in America "[w]hereas Virginia Woolf was huge [there] in her life time" (*ibid*), which hints at Gee's motives behind titling the novel *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*, while actually an equal share of the novel takes place in İstanbul, and the İstanbul Conference is the very reason why Angela visits Manhattan. This issue will be discussed in the following sections in detail, but for now, let us keep the possible motives Gee had, when she resurrected Virginia, not anywhere else, but in Manhattan and how it complies with her own position as an author, in mind.

David Lodge believes that the ever-increasing interest novelists have in the biographical novel, to be "a common tendency in readers as they age, [...] [which]

also seems to be a trend in contemporary literary culture generally” (*LIW* ix). In Gee’s case, fictionalizing Virginia Woolf can be related to both of the reasons identified by Lodge. Gee calls the recent upsurge of biographical novels in general and author fictions in particular as “a form of parasitism in other writers’ historical fictions” (Özyurt-Kılıç, Int. 171). Tentatively acknowledging she might be guilty of the same “parasitism,” given the fact that writing about Woolf automatically ties her fiction to that of Woolf, “a very powerful and charismatic figure whose audience may in some way perhaps increase [hers]” (*ibid* 170), Gee insists that her project is “totally different to historical fiction” (*ibid*). Even if some novels are still being judged in accordance with the generic conventions of the historical novel, the biographical novel’s difference from the historical novel is now generally accepted, especially after Michael Lackey’s theorization of the genre. The truthful account warranted by the trust both parties of the biographical pact have for each other, as the author and the reader, is the topic of a completely separate discussion. Therefore, rather than the degree of loyalty Gee has to Virginia Woolf’s real persona, in the following analysis, the emphasis will be upon the possible motivations behind Gee’s fictionalization of a well-known author, with a large, international audience.

Until a decade ago, Gee’s work was not widely recognized. Mine Özyurt Kılıç’s monograph *Maggie Gee: Writing the Condition-of-England Novel*, which was published in 2012, was the first book-length study of Gee’s work and made significant contributions to the critical acclaim Gee now has, as an author. In her book, Özyurt-Kılıç analyses Gee’s fiction from a social-realist frame and argues that Gee’s critique of contemporary society in her novels continues the tradition of the “condition of England novel,” which was one of the characteristic subgenres of the 19<sup>th</sup> century English fiction. According to Özyurt-Kılıç, Gee reconfigures her own positionality through the “leitmotif of being a writer, and English writer, in a globalized and transnational world” (3), through the Condition-of-England novel. Sarah Dillon, in her review of Özyurt-Kılıç’s book, also underlines the lack of critical attention to Gee’s work as well as her being out of the scope of the general reading public, in the following words: “[o]ne can end here with hope, as Gee’s novels so often do, that Kiliç’s attention to her work raises her profile, promotes wider reading of her fiction, and aids the enacting of its wish that it might change

readers' opinions and actions enough to have palpable effects on the betterment of humankind, in Britain and beyond" (305).

In the following years, Gee's recognition in the academic world has increased. In addition to the 1<sup>st</sup> International Akşit Göktürk Conference "Visions of the Future Now and Then" held at İstanbul University in 2010, where Gee delivered a keynote speech (the conference at Istanbul in *VWM* certainly resonates with this one), St Andrew's University held a conference on the work of Gee in 2012, and in the following year she delivered yet another plenary at the 7<sup>th</sup> IDEA conference at Pamukkale University, Turkey. In 2015, Sarah Dillon, who previously wrote a commentary on Özyurt-Kılıç's contribution to the field, published her own output, *Maggie Gee: Critical Essays*, a collection of essays co-edited by Caroline Edwards.

There are also a considerable number of articles and book chapters on Gee's work, mostly focusing on how Gee responds to issues such as feminism, racism, postcolonialism and some of Gee's novels such as *The Ice People* and *The Flood* have been scrutinized by M.A. and Ph.D. students for the eco-critical consciousness that pervades her fiction<sup>27</sup>. She was particularly popular among the students in Turkey<sup>28</sup>, perhaps as a result of the connections she has established with academics in Turkey, who, in turn, introduced Gee's works to their students.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Dillon, Sarah. "Imagining Apocalypse: Maggie Gee's 'The Flood.'" Düzgün, Şebnem. "Science and Society in Maggie Gee's *The Ice People* and *The Flood*". Johns-Putra, "A. Care, Gender, and the Climate-Changed Future: Maggie Gee's the Ice People" Öztapak Avcı, Elif. "Cleaning up the "Dirt": A Study of Maggie Gee's My Cleaner"

<sup>28</sup> Sepetoğlu, Selen. Women And Eco-Disasters in Maggie Gee's *The Ice People* and Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army: An Ecofeminist Approach*. Hacettepe University, M.S. 2014.

Topsakal, Gülşat. "Ecocritical Reflections in Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* and Maggie Gee's *The Ice People: Redefining the Center in Relation to Margins through Ecological Thinking*". METU, M.S 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Gee dedicated *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* to Mine Özyurt- Kılıç. Full dedication reads "For Mine Özyurt Kılıç, with love, and for my friends in Istanbul." Besides, in the podcast interview with Chamberet, her answer to the question "If you could go anywhere in time for one day, where would you go and why?" is İstanbul. She replies: "Right now I'd love to be on a boat in Istanbul with two friends I love very much from Turkey: Mine and Bülent". When Gee's novel was published, Özyurt-Kılıç was one of the first people to interview Gee. Moreover, Gee's lectures are often moderated and chaired by Mine Özyurt Kılıç, who is currently the head of Department of English Literature at Ankara Social Science University (ASBU), Turkey.

I was also introduced to Maggie Gee, back in 2011, as an undergraduate student at Bilkent

In the works mentioned above, Gee's authorship is either referred to in passing references within the discussions of other "bigger" issues such as feminism, racism, environmental crisis or social injustice, or rather than her view of authorship, her authorial position in relation to a certain ideology is the focus in those studies. However, when her *oeuvre* is read with a holistic approach, it can easily be seen that Gee has been preoccupied with authorship since the beginning of her career as an author. The concern Gee has over authorship pervades her fiction thoroughly. Furthermore, Gee was interested in the critical side of this debate, as well. Starting with her Ph.D. dissertation titled "A Study of Portraits of the Artist in Contemporary Fiction: Critical Self-Consciousness as a Characterising Feature of Twentieth-Century Writing," supervised by Prof. David Lodge – yet another example of connections and influences between writers – she has shown an ongoing interest in the figure of the author. This interest in the author has continued with her novels, populated with author characters. The fact that there is no comprehensive study of the author figure in Gee's fiction is definitely a significant short-coming, which hinders critical understanding of a prolific writer such as Gee, in more comprehensive terms.

In a recent dissertation titled "Postmodernist Rereadings of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*" (Sapienza University, Rome, 2019), Elisabetta Varalda analyses how *To the Lighthouse* was rewritten in Maggie Gee's *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* and Susan Seller's *Vanessa and Virginia*. As the title of the dissertation implies, Varalda reads these novels as postmodernist rewritings, and connects the impulse behind the rewriting to the "postmodernist disbelief in a universal truth" (100). However, in the present study, instead of a postmodern, a post-postmodern lens, which is understood as an umbrella term to connote the theoretical atmosphere after the passing of the postmodern moment, is adopted to analyse Gee's rewriting of Virginia Woolf. Even though Gee uses most of the familiar devices that came to be associated with postmodernism, such as intertextuality, pastiche and irony, she diverges from the ontological premises of the postmodern. Rather than writing

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University, as a part of Research Techniques course, taught by Mine Özyurt Kılıç. Over the course of my M.A. and Ph.D. education at Middle East Technical University, Gee's name always resonated in the background yet mostly within the context of ecocriticism.

within the confines of the disbelief in the universal truth, she focuses on what happens after that and how meaning and communication can be reconstructed with the help of the author and the power of storytelling.

Varalda also focuses on how Woolf's fiction is being rewritten, and explores the transtextual relations between the two novels and how *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* appropriates *To the Lighthouse* as a hypotext. However, in the present study, the focus will be on how and why Gee rewrites not just *TL*, but also "Virginia Woolf" the iconic English author. Gee appropriates the author both to comment on her own journey as an author and to reach international, particularly American, audiences. Furthermore, given that my focus is on how Gee constructs her own authorial identity through rewriting Virginia Woolf, other works by Woolf such as *Orlando*, *A Room of One's Own* and *Diaries* will also be addressed in the light of Gérard Genette's concept of transtextuality<sup>30</sup> to shed light on how Gee expresses and asserts the authorial power through building connections not only with Woolf, but also with her works. Woolf's life and her novels, particularly *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando*, are the most evident hypotexts<sup>31</sup> with which *VWM* *hypertextually* interacts. The hypertextual incorporation of Woolf's works sheds light on Gee's own journey as an author, while at the same time, demarcating Gee's place within the tradition.

The abundance of author figures in her fiction, in many ways, climaxes in *VWM*, with the presence of three generations of author figures as protagonists, Angela Lamb and Virginia Woolf are juxtaposed as two different, yet connected, author figures; with the addition of a third figure, an author-to-be, Angela's

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<sup>30</sup> Genette coined *transtextuality* with the aim of attending to "all aspects of a particular text" (1992 83-84), which intertextuality may leave out. He analyses *transtextual* relations under five categories: *intertextuality*, *paratextuality*, *architextuality*, *metatextuality*, and *hypertextuality* or *hypotextuality*. Particular importance on this categorization needs to be placed on *hypertextuality*, which allows a broader engagement with texts. Graham Allen also underlines that this is one of the main aspects of Genette's categorization and identifies its characterizing feature as being "intentionally inter-textual" (Allen 108).

<sup>31</sup> Genette asserts that hypertextuality signifies "any relationship uniting a text B (hypertext) to an earlier text a (hypotext)," (*Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* 5). He also states that "a hypertext and its hypotext are a sign of the past and the present as a unity of meaning," therefore the hypertext needs the hypotext to fully convey its meaning. Thus hypertext is "any text derived from a previous text either through simple transformation, which I shall simply call from now on transformation, or through indirect transformation, which I shall label imitation" (7).

daughter, Gerda, as well as countless other writers – academics, students of literature and readers. These various author/reader positions are negotiated against the background of an academic conference, where via confronting them, Angela Lamb discovers her own positionality both as an aging author and a novelist-critic, just like Maggie Gee herself. Even if all author figures in Gee’s work may not be analysed in detail due to space limitations of this study, still, as brief as it may be, the trajectory of the author in Gee’s fiction to be found below aims to provide an overview of Gee’s author characters who have accompanied her in her journey as an author and give a glimpse of Angela Lamb as portrayed in Gee’s previous novels. Angela Lamb is a mouthpiece for Gee. A caricature portrait at times, a doppelganger at others, she has accompanied Gee throughout her journey as an author. An overview of this ongoing engagement included here will hopefully provide a better understanding of Gee’s performative authorship as manifested in her fiction and culminated in *VWM*.

## **5.2 The Trajectory of the Author Figure in Gee’s Fiction**

In *Contemporary Novelists*, John Cotton argues “Gee can be seen, in spite of (or perhaps because of) her experimentation, to be in the tradition of Fielding and Dickens where the author is ever-present, ready to comment or intervene” (364). Gee maintains authorial presence inside and outside the text through various devices. First of all, she often has authorial and/or omniscient narrators. Secondly, she has author characters in almost all of her novels; and, thirdly, she comments quite a lot on her work. Regarding these characteristics Özyurt-Kılıç argues that in Gee’s fiction, the presence of the author in the text moulds “the texts into self-conscious narratives in which the author characters, like their kindred spirits in the campus novel, discuss literary ideas and become tools to convey Maggie Gee’s *ars poetica*” (*MG* 14). Just like A.S Byatt and David Lodge, whose works also qualify as campus novels, Maggie Gee addresses the academia in her novels. Byatt, as indicated in the chapter on *Possession*, left the academia to write fiction, while Lodge continued his career both as a professor and a novelist, and focused more on writing of novels, following his retirement. Until his retirement, he has written countless scholarly articles and supervised M.A. and Ph.D. theses, including Maggie Gee’s dissertation titled “A Study of Portraits of the Artist in Contemporary Fiction:

Critical Self-Consciousness as a Characterising Feature of Twentieth-Century Writing,” where she analyses the works of Woolf, Beckett and Nabokov, as examples of self-conscious novels, challenging the common perception of the self-reflexive novel as impersonal, and hence lacking the author figure. As Gee’s resistance towards postmodernism also suggests, she considers herself as a modernist: “I did three degrees in English literature, so I have read widely and I know what games I am playing, with the tradition, and up to a point how I would place myself in it. I am not a postmodernist, more of a modernist, though with more politics and jokes than the average modernist” (Özyurt-Kılıç Int. 170).

Before publishing her novels, Gee was intensively preoccupied with the question of authorship, and explored this issue in depth in her dissertation on the self-conscious novel, where she argues that the novel, or the artwork as she broadly refers to, emerges as a portrait of the artist who “creates” it. In relation to this point, she proposed: “He is a self-conscious, self-critical maker, and he creates his own portrait only through showing the difficult and fascinating nature of what he does in art, which again is just a concentrated paradigm of all human choice and control” (*Self-Conscious* 8). She further states, through referring to Bakhtin’s idea of the author, a self-conscious author “also knows he must himself be a critic of his work, for he is answerable to all the other critics who surround him, fierce professionals at that” (*ibid* 9), and she tells readers that self-conscious authors should be aware of “literary-critical piranha shoal waiting to feast upon their works” (*ibid*).

Gee’s belief in the genius and distinct nature of the author surfaces most assertively in her quoting the following passage from Woolf to underline the power of the artist: “The whole is greater than the part – being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog” (*ibid* 129). It seems her belief in the “superior” abilities of the author has not changed much since then, as her performative authorship manifested in *VWM* proves. Gee is self-assured about the author’s superior abilities and the responsibility and the sense of duty that comes with it.

The first author figure in Gee’s *oeuvre* is Moira Penny, who appears in *Dying in Other Words* (1981). She is a postgraduate student of literature, who is ironically

engaged with writing a novel about the death of the author. The novel proceeds through the accounts given by other characters about Moira's death. In a narrative that unfolds in a circular plot, these accounts are used to present the death of Moira, as a satire on Barthes's "the death of the author". At the beginning of the novel, Moira appears as an author who symbolically lives in the attic, which initially hints that she is like God, positioned above all others, watching, observing and writing about them. However, her entrapment in and confinement to the attic, also conveys a mock-heroic treatment of the author as a God-like figure:

Yet most of the time she stays in, stares down and stares in. Her name is Moira, your author. How many others, she wonders, are moving slowly about in the house below her like sleepy koalas, rubbing their morning lids pink and forgetting the ominous dreams which woke them, starting again and dreaming the books of their lives? (*Dying* 3)

Soon after this description, "our author," Moira, is found dead, and the author's story is now heard through the accounts provided by the other characters in the story. Each eyewitness tells a different story about Moira, yet, a figure in the attic who is constantly typing, suggested to be Moira, or, perhaps, Gee herself, presides over all these accounts of the dead author. Thus, Gee asserts that even if the death of the author is the matter of discussion, even if everybody is talking about the death of the author, the author is always there, watching and typing, as Gee has done throughout her career.

Overall, Gee's fiction has a socially and politically committed nature (Frankova 215). As a result of this, the discussion of authorship goes hand in hand with discussions of social and political issues. For example, in her Ugandan novels *My Cleaner* (2005) and *My Driver* (2009), Gee takes the discussion of authorship to transnational grounds and explores the means of production and circulation of literature and literary criticism by demarcating the discrepancies the authors from the third- and the first-worlds confront. The first author character in these novels is Vanessa Henman, a professor of creative writing, who actually did not produce a single solid creative work herself in spite of the fact she has been teaching creative writing. Through her, Gee addresses the material circumstances that have a direct bearing on authorship. For example, the fact that Vanessa only co-authored some books, which are not even literary, such as *The Long Lean Line: Pilates for*

*Everyone*, lays bare the novel's mocking attitude towards Vanessa. Vanessa's self-justification that in contemporary publishing world, non-fiction pays better and for this reason she feels obliged to opt for the better paying alternatives, is a satirical portrayal both of Vanessa and the publishing industry. In contrast to Vanessa Henman, Ugandan Mary Tendo, Vanessa's cleaner, is the one who actually "writes," even if she never comes to publish them. Mary secretly writes an autobiography, which she sneakily places between the drafts by Vanessa's creative writing students. This piece catches the eye of a publisher, yet in the sequel, *My Driver*, Mary does not appear as a writer because she had arguments with a publisher since the way she wrote was being questioned and challenged. As a result, she turns to hotel management and becomes successful at it. Through the juxtaposition, Gee allows us to peek into the world of writing and publishing, and its discriminatory treatment of the authors due to their racial backgrounds. Gee asserts that in her portrayal of these author figures, she aims to give voice to those authors who may not speak, or may not be heard: "About the relationship between Vanessa and Mary Tendo, the Ugandan woman who in the first book works for her: I am saying that as well as the writers we all know of, there are all these other writers, like Mary, who are not heard. They might have the talent but not the chance" (Özyurt- Kılıç Int. 174). Gee conveys the message that the journey of an author does not solely depend on the quality of the writing, it is in many ways, also, a matter of luck. Each battle an author fights is carried out on very distinct, individual battlegrounds and sometimes, simply, some authors have the luck whereas some others do not. What separates Vanessa and Mary, and makes one a successful author according to white British standards, is not having more intelligence, wit or skill, it is rather colour and class. Mary works as a cleaner due to economic and political circumstances. She has a university degree, and comes to London to pursue an M.A. degree, but cannot complete it following the cancellation of her grant by the Ugandan government, so she has to work as Vanessa's help whereas Vanessa has the money and means to live a much more privileged life. In other words, she has a room of her own, which Mary is deprived of.

Gee's meticulous attention to the material circumstances around authorship and publishing, is a result of her desire to foreground her own working-class

background, and in her vision, authorship is presented as inevitably bound to material circumstances and to what extent one has access to them. Therefore, in her treatment of her fictional representative, Angela Lamb, the working-class background recurrently surfaces. In addition to class issues presented in *The Burning Book* and *The Flood*, *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* continues to present Angela as excessively sensitive about her background, as will be discussed below.

### 5.2.1 The Curious Case of Angela Lamb: Gee's Use of Autofiction

Gee's fiction has the distinctive trait of recycling certain characters from her own works. Most characters from her early novels appear in at least two novels and fictional authors from earlier novels "return" to populate her future novels in sequels. The apocalyptic narrative of *The Flood* brings all characters from her previous novels together. Thus, most of the characters Gee created at early stages of her career still accompany her; they have their own fictional lives. While this extends to all of her novels, Gee is particularly keen on two figures: Moira Penny, the critic, and Angela Lamb, the author, who recurrently appear in various novels. Understanding the way Gee structures and builds the relations between Angela and Moira is crucial in order to explore the treatment of the author and the critic in Gee's *oeuvre*. These two figures have been life-long companions for Gee after all. While Angela represents her career as an author, Moira stands for the alternative career path of the literary critic, which Gee avoided. "Moira is the first, Angela the second, caricature of parts of me – not so much caricature as puppet-figure" (Özyurt-Kılıç Int. 173). Life is immanent to literature and, Byatt, Lodge and Gee all drew inspiration for their novels from their own lives and experiences as novelist-critics. For example, all three authors, base their biographical novels on those canonical authors, whose works they studied for their Ph.D. degrees and scholarly work. However, while the author is omnipresent in the texts as an authority, in Byatt and Lodge, the characters do not inhabit the same ontological plane with the real author. In Gee's fiction, on the other hand, Angela Lamb becomes a mouthpiece for the author.

With an attempt to define his own work *Fils* (1977), the French author, Serge Doubrovsky, coined "autofiction" to refer to the works that identify themselves as

fiction but include autobiographical elements. In this genre, in opposition to classical autobiography, one does not have to abide by the autobiographical pact, between the author and the reader, which was devised by Philippe Lejeune. Autofiction nullifies this pact by announcing itself to be fiction; hence, it allows for more freedom and experimentation. Doubrovsky has a distinct sense of autofiction, and he particularly dwells on maintaining homonymity between the author and the character.

In *Autofiction in English* (2018), Hywel Dix holds that autofiction is a useful tool or “a form of autobiographical writing that offers to fill the gap created when more traditional forms of autobiography are rendered sociologically unavailable by the status of the writer (which may of course be ‘real’ or perceived)” (3). Gee’s references to her working-class background might be thought in this regard, as rendering Gee, perceptively unavailable for autobiography. Or else, Gee could subscribe to autofiction since it “permits a degree of experimentation with the definition and limits of the self, rather than the slavish recapitulation of known biographical facts” (Dix 3). As a genre, autofiction is more prevalently encountered and theorized in French literature. *Autofiction in English* (2018) by Hywel Dix is one of the few endeavours to theorize it in relation to literature in the English language. J.M Coetzee’s novels, especially *Boyhood*, *Youth* and *Summertime* are some of the well-known examples, where the author himself appears as a character in the novel, “employing a novelistic pact by asserting fictitiousness, in spite of the tireless insistence of historical and personal reference” (Dix 51). The general lack of attention to autofiction in English might partly be stemming from Doubrovsky’s insistence on the unity of name among the character, narrator and author. Noticing this caveat, in *Autofiction* (2008) Philippe Gasparini reimagines and extends Doubrovsky’s definition of autofiction. Gasparini questions the indispensability of homonymity by foregrounding its limitation regarding the maintenance of consistent categories and asserts: “it is no doubt necessary to go beyond the rigid framework of homonymity. Why not admit that there are, besides nouns and pronouns, a whole series of ways of identifying the hero with the author: their age, their socio-cultural milieu, their profession, their aspirations, etc.?” (25). This call for action parallels Gee’s accomplishments through Angela Lamb. Even if Angela does not share the

same name with her author, she is in many ways a clone copy of her. She shares the same physical features such as having blonde hair and a tall, slim figure. She has Gee's own familial background, with a strong emphasis on working-class background, particularly regarding the bit about Angela's self-awareness about her grandmother, who was a servant. This point is brought up by Gee quite often, as well. Besides, like Gee's novelist daughter, Rosa Rankin Gee, Angela Lamb has a daughter, Gerda, who is represented as bookish and an author-to-be. Finally, Angela Lamb is presented as the author of certain works, such as *Lost Children*, and Gee has a novel by the same title. So, apart from the name, every other detail about Angela Lamb "besides nouns and pronouns" as Gasparini puts it, brings to mind the real author, Gee, and invites the reader to look for traces of this autofictional bonding between the author character of Angela Lamb and Maggie Gee herself.

The protagonist of *VWM*, Angela Lamb, first appeared in *The Burning Book* as a teenager, who was portrayed in words foreshadowing her future life as a novelist: "Yet a novel about Ange would have had its events" (245). *The Flood* and *VWM* narrate these "events". In *TF* Angela is portrayed as a bestselling author, whose sole attention is directed to her work. She lives with her parents, who seem to provide the love she fails to give to her daughter Gerda. Even though the shop assistants in American bookshops may not recognize her, when Angela and Gerda reappear in *VWM* we see Angela as a more accomplished author, who has won a prestigious award with her novel, "Lost Children,"<sup>32</sup> which is to be adapted into a Hollywood movie. Her daughter Gerda, who appears as a precocious child in *TF*, is now portrayed as a teenager sent off to a boarding school, struggling with the problems of puberty as well as lack of love and attention from her parents.

Moira, the dead author, who first appears in Gee's *Dying in Other Words*, reappears in *TF* as an established critic, who also writes on Lamb's fiction. In this novel, initially, Angela and Moira are portrayed in a more positive and professional relation that starts on amicable terms:

At first Moira was quite pleasant. Both of them were fairly young at the time; Moira was in her late thirties, still hopeful of fame and love and a baby or

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<sup>32</sup> Gee's novel by the same title was published in 1994.

two, Angela herself a decade younger. Moira was sure she had the upper hand. She could give this girl the patronage she needed – a sympathetic (and brilliant) reading, her work discussed at feminist conferences. (*TF* 60)

This illusion soon shatters as Angela starts to challenge Moira's authority as a critic and asserts herself as the author. Moira reacts with rage: "Moira, when challenged, swiftly changed the subject, and later when Angela tried to insist that some of the 'influences' couldn't be right, because she simply hadn't read those authors, Moira said, smiling, chin held high, 'Influences aren't quite that simple. I'm adducing a pattern of intertextuality, setting your work in its cultural context'" (*TF* 60-1). Such instances make Angela distance herself from Moira. As time passes, Angela becomes more famous and Moira gets more radical, as a result of which they become impossible to reconcile. "Moira was older and established. Angela was younger and prettier. Moira was a critic, with a Ph.D.; Angela, though, was the artist. When the chips were down, she was the source. The chicken came before the egg collector" (*TF* 61). Angela is portrayed as being able to continue her autonomous existence since she is the author after all and does not need the critic. The future and success lie all ahead of her: "Then Angela won the Iceland Prize. The Iceland meant the global big-time; even Hesperica<sup>33</sup> took notice of it" (*ibid*). Moira contacts Angela to inform her that she had been offered a contract to write the first critical biography of Angela's. However, at some point, their relationship becomes more contentious. Below is the description of this relation informed by the narrator's sneering attitude towards Moira:

Soon strains entered their relationship. Things had been going less well for Moira. The menopause found her still childless, loveless. Despite a good record of publications, she was only a reader, not a professor, because of prejudice, she insisted, against the female authors she wrote about.

Angela thought it was more likely to be because Moira was impossible to work with. Moira never actually agreed with anything, specializing in amused dissent, even to remarks about the weather, with a certain expression like a sneering camel that Angela began to anticipate, wincing. Moira never seemed to change her mind. To her, the author was a kind of appendage, useful to know, but not a source of knowledge. (*TF* 61-2)

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<sup>33</sup> Hesperica stands for America in *The Flood* and it is important in terms of laying bare how Gee has been concerned with her position and critical reception in America, which also seems to be the reason why Gee titled as novel as *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*.

Even though Gee refers to both characters as her caricature parts, the narrator's and the implied author's attitude manifests a close alliance between Angela and Gee. The favourable treatment of Angela can easily be discerned from the mockery Moira receives from Gee. Moira seems to be the embodiment of Gee's worst fears, the life she imagines she would have if she had stayed in the academia. She confesses she consciously made self-portraits through these characters, to present how she would be wretched, like Moira if she chose to be a critic (Özyurt-Kılıç Int 173). This account exhibits Gee's assumed superiority as an author over the critic, as well. The conflict between them, as Gee refers to it, is not actually a conflict since it does not exist between equal parties; the relationship Gee delineates here is more like one based on hierarchy. Since it is an ongoing issue in Gee's authorship, understanding the way Gee structures and builds the relations between Angela, the author and Moira, the critic, is vital to grasp the treatment of the author and the critic in Gee's *oeuvre* and in *VWM*. In many ways, the remark Gee made, accounts for Gee's harsh treatment of Moira. In *TF*, for example, in the narrator's view, what makes Moira a petulant critic is Angela's having a child, which Moira cannot have. Moira is depicted as the envious, hysterical academic, confined to the bigotry of her own world whereas Angela is portrayed as the creative one. Angela's being able to conceive a child in opposition to Moira's barrenness symbolizes this juxtaposition between the author and the critic by relating it to re(production). The critic "parasites" on other's works whereas the author "gives birth":

Then Angela committed the unspeakable crime. Two years after winning the big prize, she conceived a child, by a Danian writer of fairy- tales she met at a conference.

'Are you going to have an abortion?' asked Moira, when Angela confided she was six weeks pregnant.... 'You never said you wanted to be a mother.' (She meant, *It's unfair: I have longed for a child.*) (*TF* 62; emphasis in the original)

Perhaps, Moira did not mean it. Perhaps, she just wondered why Angela decided to be a mother and questioned its possible effects on her career as an author; however, the narrator's attitude towards Moira is characterized by mockery, which continues throughout the novel. Years later, their friendship is still a tedious one, tensed with the long overdue biography Moira is supposed to write, yet keeps delaying basically

because she cannot put up with Angela. Both parties try to maintain their relationship on professional terms given the fact that they need each other, but when they finally meet to talk about it, all they do is to argue severely and grow further apart, until they see each other again at the Virginia Woolf conference in İstanbul in *VWM*. This episode of the story will be discussed below in relation to Gee's construction and performing of authorship in *VWM*, a sequel to Gee's author sagas.

### 5.3 “A Virginia of Her Own”: Gee's Revisiting of the Virginia Woolf Icon

Building on Saussure's semiotics and Bakhtin's dialogism, Julia Kristeva coined *intertextuality* to refer to such relations between the texts. For her, “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (8). Barthes holds that “the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them” (*IMT* 146). This leads to a view of intertextuality, where “the modern scriptor, when s/he writes, is always already in a process of reading and re-writing. Meaning comes not from the author but from language viewed intertextually” (Allen 74). This sense of intertextuality borne out of the language itself leaves no space for the author since it transfers the possession and production of meaning from the person to the language. Such a formulation of discursivity, as Nancy K. Miller proposes, may not negate writing just because the author is dead, it unauthorizes “other discussions of the writing (and reading) subject,” as well (80). She further explains that this suppression is not simply the result of an arbitrary shift of emphasis:

when a theory of the text called ‘hyphology’ chooses the spider's *web* over the spider; and the concept of textuality called the ‘writerly’ chooses the threads of lace over the lacemaker ... the subject is self-consciously erased by a model of text production which acts to foreclose the question of agency itself. (*ibid*; emphasis in the original)

In author fictions this agency is reclaimed through displaying rewriting as a conscious and deliberate act undertaken by an author. By fictionalizing the process of rewriting an author's life, these authors put forward life-writing not only as “fundamentally intertextual” (5) as Saunders proposed, but also as a conscious, purposeful gesture aimed at foregrounding “the lace maker” over “the thread of

lace” as argued by Miller. Virginia Woolf, as an iconic author, was revisited in many works.<sup>34</sup> Some of them value the lace Woolf weaved, while the others highlight the lace maker. Regarding Woolf’s popularity among fiction writers, in his interview with Justin Spring, Michael Cunningham, who also has a novel on Virginia Woolf, suggested that he did not think “there’s anyone who’s inspired this level of devotion and fascination and adulation’ among authors”. In *Virginia Woolf Icon* (1999), Brenda Silver points to the mid-1990s as the time when interest in Woolf’s life and work escalated: “since she was not only appearing alongside Shakespeare whenever a ‘canonical’ woman writer was needed, but her novels, already subject to versioning for scholars and general readers, were increasingly being adapted or versioned for the stage or screen” (211). In addition to adaptations for the stage and the screen, she was revisited in many novels, too.<sup>35</sup>

In his editorial essay, “Virginia Woolf and Biofiction,” printed in the special issue of *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* (Spring-Summer 2018), Michael Lackey calls the presence of Woolf in contemporary biofiction as “usage of Woolf,” rather than “representation”. The choice is important in terms of its explicit suggestion regarding how Virginia Woolf is used and abused by writers of biofiction. The abundance of the interest in Woolf’s life affirms Lee’s point that “Virginia Woolf does not have a life, she has lives. In the [...] years since her death, she has been rewritten by each generation, and appropriated by different and competing readings” (107). Furthermore, in her article “Rewriting Woolf,” Hermione Lee, reminds “[n]o new version of a famous life can be written in innocence. There is no such thing as a neutral or objective biography, particularly not in this case. Positions have been taken, myths have been made. Everyone has a view of Virginia Woolf” (95) and Gee is not an exception to the rule; she has her own unique view of Virginia Woolf

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<sup>34</sup> Some of these works are Aileen Pippett’s *The Moth and the Star: A Biography of Virginia Woolf* (1953), Quentin Bell’s *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (1972), James King’s *Virginia Woolf* (1994), Hermione Lee’s *Virginia Woolf* (1996), Brenda Silver’s *Virginia Woolf Icon* (1999), Nigel Nicolson’s *Virginia Woolf* (2000); Julia Briggs’s *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (2005), Lyndall Gordon’s *Virginia Woolf: A Writer’s Life* (2006), Maria DiBattista’s *Imagining Virginia Woolf: An Experiment in Critical Biography* (2009) and Alexandra Harris’s *Virginia Woolf* (2011).

<sup>35</sup> Some examples of Virginia Woolf rewritings are Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours* (1998), Sigrid Nunez’s novella *Mitz: The Marmoset of Bloomsbury* (1998), Susan Sellers’s *Vanessa and Virginia* (2008), Priya Parmar’s *Vanessa and Her Sister* (2014) and Norah Vincent’s *Adeline* (2015).

inscribed in *VWM*. Gee declares that she would not write about Woolf in her own historical time and place since “this would be too near to stealing her soul” (Özyurt-Kılıç, Int. 170). Instead, she brings Virginia to the New York of the twenty first century, where Woolf had never been. So, by setting the novel in Manhattan and titling it as such, Gee reminds to the readers that “she is not the real Virginia Woolf”. She is a product of Gee’s imagination, as evidenced in Gee’s referring to the fictional Virginia as “my Virginia Woolf” (*ibid*; emphasis in the original).

In spite of her free spirit, when Virginia emerges all of a sudden in the novel, she has no option but to adapt to Angela and follow her lead, and she has to wear Angela’s clothes “that face shone out from my own blue coat, those white hands gestured from its wide blue sleeves” (*VWM* 67). Through suggesting how each rewriting is “clothing” the biographical subject in a certain image, Gee shows how in each rewriting, including her own, the biographical subject is “a phantasm, one of Thackeray’s fictional ‘puppets’, always and only [the author’s] own” (*VWM* 474).

Leaving the conflict between the historical novel and the biographical novel aside for a moment, let us inquire about the reasons that attract novelists like Gee to this particular form of life writing. Why do novelists, especially well-established ones, revisit historical authors? In his “The Literature of Replenishment” (1979), Barth revisits exhaustion debates and clarifies that he does not consider fiction itself “exhausted”; he rather proposes that previous literary conventions may be reinterpreted and thus transcended and transformed to form new literary texts. Referring to Barth, in *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning*, Moraru underlines that those writers “do not borrow from others because they have exhausted, in an unpleasantly decadent fashion, nonliterary sources of inspiration” (7) and, therefore, “rewriting is not a symptom of a cultural ‘dead end’, but conversely a new way to tell us who we are” (Moraru 8). In her rewriting of Virginia Woolf, Gee is driven by the same impulse. She revisits the historical author to discover herself, to find out who Maggie Gee is and where she stands as an author, and to offer her own answer to the question of how rewriting Virginia Woolf might inform and transform production, circulation and interpretation of fiction today.

When Gee set out to write a novel on Virginia Woolf, she was inspired by certain events recounted above in the discussion of Gee's use of autofiction through the characterization of Angela Lamb. In terms of the theoretical background and formal qualities of the novel, Gee's main influence and mentor seems to be Virginia Woolf herself. Gee harmonizes Woolf's writings on the art of biography and the novel, with her own view of fiction as a novelist with an academic background, and by using Woolf's novels as hypotexts, she revisits them in a manner that distinguishes itself from pastiche or parody, two main postmodern forms of hypertextuality identified by Genette.

Linda Hutcheon suggests that "pastiche usually has to remain within the same genre in its model, whereas parody allows for adaptation" (*A Theory of Parody* 38). *VWM* might have been read in these terms due to its use of humour and irony, but given its clear break with the postmodern, it should be distinguished from the postmodern pastiche, identified by Jameson as having sprung from the exhaustion and unattainability of stylistic innovation ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 115). Huber identifies reconstructive fictions by their "recalcitrant" attitude towards genre. She suggests that they are no more "ironic nor mere tired pastiches as Jameson diagnosed for postmodern parody" and therefore, "the novels employ various genres in ways that are both self-consciously conspicuous and surprisingly sincere (up to the point of being celebratory), even in those moments in which genre limits and conventions are exposed" (217).

Gee's reconstructive fiction has this self-conscious, celebratory attitude. Taking cue from there, it challenges the exhaustion debates and in a stylistically innovative way achieved through author fiction, reinstates the social function of fiction, as well as reminding us that the "great gift literature offers" is "[t]o find ourselves - new parts of ourselves, or parts of ourselves not fully expressed," or, "[o]ur unacted parts" (*VWM* 452) without resorting to mere parody.

*VWM* is, among many other aspects, significant in terms of how Gee negotiates her own formation as an author-critic by revisiting "the Author" Virginia Woolf, the topic of her own dissertation that had a considerable role in her formation as an academic. Gee got the inspiration for this novel from an actual visit she had paid to the Berg Collection. The novel opens with a re-enactment of Gee's visit to

New York Public Library by her authorized fictional representative, Angela, who visits the Berg Collection to read some of the primary sources by Virginia Woolf:

I wanted to sound up to date, that was all. Because my İstanbul paper was called ‘Virginia Woolf: A Long Shadow’, and I decided to look at the primary sources. I’d forgotten a lot since I first read her. So, I booked a last-minute package to New York, where Woolf’s manuscripts are kept”. (*VWM* 14)

When she arrives in New York, she is unsettled by how “these rich Americans had filched her” (*VWM* 18). She complains about the tragicomic situation by laying bare how, in spite of the fact that Angela and Virginia are both English, Angela has to go to America to see Woolf’s manuscripts. She bemoans it in the following words: “Odd thing – Virginia’s the quintessential English writer – but there they are, in the New York Public Library, all those famous manuscripts, *Orlando*, *The Waves*, *To the Lighthouse*” (*VWM* 14). The Berg Collection is the home to many other English authors, whose works and personal documents such as diaries and letters are exhibited. By choosing this space to begin the story, Gee draws attention to how literary artefacts and literature itself are circulated as items to be possessed by certain groups or institutions, a point which was also addressed in Byatt’s *Possession*. The strict rules the Berg Collection imposes make Gee imagine how Virginia Woolf would feel about the idea of private libraries if she was to visit her own collection: “But it’s quite creative, being forbidden to do something ... I thought: what if she came to life? What if she appeared here?” (Williams). In *VWM*, she explores this possibility by bringing Virginia Woolf back to life.

Each author has a personal approach to the biographical novel. David Lodge, for instance, believes that a biographical novel should be a tribute; whereas, Gee took more liberties in imagining “her” Virginia, which was a source of dissent among the reviewers. While Judy Swan adores and describes *VWM* as “the slickest literary fantasy you’ll read in a long time” in her review, Caroline Sanderson is of the opinion that “Gee has taken too many outlandish liberties in imagining how Virginia Woolf might think and feel if brought back to life”. In Lucy Ellman’s view, “the main object of the book seems to be to get Woolf laid, making this a sort of sex-and-shopping novel”. Overall, Gee’s remarks and comments about *VWM* demonstrate clearly that she anticipated such criticism, but, since she preferred

“getting away from reverence,” as she told O’Keeffe in a *Guardian* interview, she has nothing to feel apologetical: “Reverence isn’t good for a writer. Respect is important, and careful reading, but reverence doesn’t help anyone – and I think Woolf would have understood that” (O’Keeffe ). Gee’s belief in Woolf’s sympathy might be derived from Gee’s reading of Hermione Lee’s overview of Woolf’s writings on the art of biography. Lee states that she wished the biography “to be uncensored. She wanted it to be intimate, truthful and unreverential. She wanted it to involve social history, sharp details, talk and funny stories. She wanted it to be like gossip: gossip was one of her arts” (106).

The similarity between Gee’s description of biography and Woolf’s own can be easily discerned here. It is this knowledge and insight that guide Gee through her journey. The dramatic form of the novel and funny episodes on Virginia’s adapting to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even if they prove to be superficial and stereotypical representations, are all pierced together in the narrative to replicate Woolf’s vision as laid out in her essays on the art of biography and exemplified in works such as *Orlando* and *The Flush*.

In the previous chapter, Lodge’s rewriting of Henry James, and his personal association to him was discussed in terms of Bloom’s theory of the anxiety of influence. Author fictions negotiate this anxiety, and thus emerge as sites of conflict between two authors and they display different attitudes towards the precursor, i.e., the historical author whose life is the subject of the epebe’s work. Reflecting on the general qualities of the biographical novel genre, Priest suggests that the impulse a writer feels to fictionalize another author’s life might be akin to “an act of love” (304) therefore; “for a reader who is also a writer, the best way to consummate the reader writer relationship may be to enter into the beloved by writing a fiction of one’s own” (304). Virginia Woolf did this through writing *Orlando: A Biography*, and in her journey, Gee walks in the footsteps of her heroine, when she resuscitates Virginia Woolf in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Building on that knowledge, in her rewriting of Woolf’s life, she draws largely on Woolf’s own work.

As in many families of the Victorian age, biography writing ran in the Stephen family, too. As Anna Snaith proposes in *Virginia Woolf: Private and Public Negotiations* (2000), as much as Virginia Woolf’s own contributions differ greatly

from the previous works her paternal ancestors had laid out for her, young Virginia Stephen must have been affected by the natural tendency for the writing of autobiographies and biographies running in the family, which dates back to her great-grandfather, James Stephen and her father, Leslie Stephen (53). Soon, she developed the confidence to write about life writing in her own work.

In her essay “The New Biography,” Woolf defies the traditional perception of biography, as “the truthful transmission of personality” (“The New Biography” *Essays* 95). Woolf believes that this definition embodies the very dilemma the biographer confronts: how to reconcile truth and personality, and accordingly declares that

if we think of truth as something of granite-like solidity and of personality as something of rainbow-like intangibility and reflect that the aim of biography is to weld these two into one seamless whole, we shall admit that the problem is a stiff one and that we need not wonder if biographers have for the most part failed to solve it. (*ibid*)

It is an impasse which could only be sorted out by “the new biographer,” who, is portrayed by Woolf as writing from a position that is closer to the novelist. Rather than a mere recorder of events, the new biographer becomes an artist. Woolf holds that this new biographer is “no longer the serious and sympathetic companion, toiling even slavishly in the footsteps of his hero. Whether friend or enemy, admiring or critical, he is an equal” (*ibid* 97). Now, the biographer can write his own impression of his hero, rather than just following the biographical facts; and thus Woolf envisages new biography as a space where story triumphs over the history. The new biographer “chooses, he synthesises; in short, he has ceased to be the chronicler; he has become an artist” (*ibid*). This vision laid out years before by Virginia Woolf seems to guide Maggie Gee’s revisitation of the Virginia Woolf cult with the aim of choosing and synthesising “her own Virginia” out of numerous myths around the heroine.

In addition to her essays, Woolf’s ground-breaking ideas on the art of biography and life-writing in general transpired through her fiction. Back in 1927, Woolf was greatly excited about the possibilities offered by her plan for a novel like *Orlando*. Lee recounts how passionate Woolf was about the idea, as declared in a letter addressed to Vita Sackville West: “it sprung upon me how I could

revolutionise biography in a night” (qtd. in Lee “Rewriting” 101). Through the story of a poet who lives across three centuries, capable of sex change, she changes the whole idea of how one can write selves. In Snaith’s view, *Orlando* is the emblem of “a biography which masks and obfuscates rather than reveals” (52), and hence “*Orlando* is all about the self as contingent, determined by history, clothing and gender” (*ibid*). Gee projects this portrait onto her own remaking of Virginia. Gee is not the chronicler nor eyewitness of Virginia Woolf’s life. Rather, Gee can be said to appropriate *Orlando* along with *To the Lighthouse* and other texts by Virginia Woolf, as hypotexts. Taking its cue from these works, Gee hypertextually reimagines the author who wrote them liberally, as indicated by Gee’s statement that this is wholly *her* Virginia.

While in postmodern historiographic metafiction, the comic effect is created through parody of discourse, in *VWM*, Gee achieves the comic effect through a dramatic form where each character’s thoughts are given in separate fragments, which also creates the impression of reading fragments of gossip about the famous author. Gee mentions that she got the inspiration for this form at a playwriting course she attended at the Arvon creative writing foundation in 2010. This venturesome enterprise risks turning Woolf into a caricature, but Gee assiduously shuns from parodic treatment encountered in postmodernist novels since she consciously distances herself from the postmodern and foregrounds reconstructive function of literature. If anyone appears as a caricature at the end, it is Gee’s fictional counterpart Angela Lamb. In her rewriting of Virginia Woolf, Gee remains true, not necessarily to the factuality of Woolf’s life, but to the story that lies in her own heart and her own Virginia.

In *Virginia Woolf Icon* (1999) Brenda Silver addresses the emergence of Woolf as an icon and her appropriation as an author “whose name, face, and authority are persistently claimed or disclaimed in debates about art, politics, sexuality, gender, class, the ‘canon’, fashion, feminism, race, and anger” (3). Silver regards the iconization of Woolf as a “reduction to a human sound bite [...] a name, a face and an ideal” (7). Gee’s novel sprang from the same aversion about Virginia Woolf’s iconization, which she suggests, was carried out even at the expense of casting a shadow on other female authors, by foregrounding Virginia Woolf as the

Author. In *VWM*, Angela problematizes Virginia Woolf's canonical status and iconic fame:

Growing bigger and deeper in the seventies and eighties as all the other women were eclipsed. On every university women's studies literature course, first and dead centre: *Virginia Woolf and this*, *Virginia Woolf and that*, *Virginia Woolf and also-* rans. She's special, clearly, but all the same – isn't it just easier to fetishize one person? Then you don't have to think about the rest. (*VWM* 15-6; original format and wording)

Gee maintains that she aims to rescue Woolf from the grip of confining theories that arrive at the text with preconceived assumptions rather than respecting the text's own multiplicity. Even if some of her works such as *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas* and *Professions for Women* are habitually discussed solely in relation to feminism, Gee asserts that “[i]n her best work, she wrote for everyone. The clarity, the astonishing reach, the perception” (*VWM* 16), and in her portrayal of Virginia, she re-asserts Woolf's relevance to all audiences, to convey the novel's message that fiction has the ability to reconstruct lost human emotions of sympathy and understanding.

In “The Author is Dead, Long Live the Author” (2007), Priest notes that readers of biographical novels “remain devoted to that lurking human form” and concludes that “[t]o look for traces of the author in their work is a kind of reflex, one that dies hard even for sophisticated readers” (303). The Woolf readership is surely one of the best examples of this reflex to which Priest refers. In spite of modernism's foregrounding the impersonal author, Woolf's work has almost always been read in the light of her life. While modernist literature represented subjectivity in fragmented narratives, fragments from Woolf's works were gathered and patched together to offer access to Woolf's mind and life.

In *VWM*, Angela remembers how she used to think if she added all characters in Woolf's fiction, she would come up with Woolf, the real author. Similarly, towards the end of the novel, at the Istanbul Conference she asks the audience “how many of you, consciously or not, have superimposed Virginia's face on Mrs Dalloway's body?” (*VWM* 450). As the bulk of literature on Woolf's work would reveal, a great majority of the readers did it. There were obviously self-evident reasons for this practice. One of the main reasons is Woolf's use of autobiographical

elements in her works. The easy access to diaries, memoirs and letters, which are well-preserved and now available at a click in digital formats, allows researchers to use these documents to fact-check for the parallels between the life and work of Virginia Woolf. For example, there seems to be a general consensus regarding *To the Lighthouse*, suggesting it to be based on the Stephen family and their summer holidays in St. Ives, Cornwall. By raising these issues, Gee directs us to inquire why biography, which has been despised as a lower form of critical discourse, continues to allure us, as readers. Possibly because combining “bio” with “fiction” provides “the prospect of access, however limited or illusory it may turn out to be, to the workings of the creative imagination” (Benton 2). This enterprise is “a seductive invitation to readers, one greatly enhanced by the intimacy between the biographer’s and the subject’s shared medium of words, their common interest in the literary forms, and the particular closeness of fictional and historical narrative” (*ibid*).

As well as Woolf’s writings on biography, her fictional work is alluded to and appropriated by Gee in *VWM*. Virginia arrives at the new world with two books, *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando*. These books provide her with the financial freedom she is in need of, but also, they are the hypotexts upon which Gee’s characterization of Virginia and the structure of the novel rest. That Virginia has two of her books with her suggests the author’s second life, and, thereby, Gee’s revisitation of Virginia Woolf, is made possible by these books. Angela is astonished to discover Virginia has a first edition of *To the Lighthouse* with her: “My God. *To the Lighthouse*. What a glorious copy. I could hardly believe what I saw on the Bed [...] It’s a first edition” (*VWM* 72-73). Angela realizes there is another book, which turns out to be first edition of *Orlando*, which prompts Virginia to think “somehow my books came to find me” (*VWM* 73). Virginia is definitely right since through Gee’s reading and rewriting, her books find Virginia and bring her back to life.

As a part of her hypertextual appropriation, Gee models *VWM*’s three-part structure on *To the Lighthouse*. Even though there is a short fourth chapter, “Interzone,” the novel consists of three main chapters: Part One: “London-New York,” Part Two: “Time Passes,” and Part Three: “Virginia in İstanbul,” which both structurally and thematically correspond to “The Window”, “Time Passes” and “To the Lighthouse” sections of Woolf’s novel. Just like “Time Passes” in *To the*

*Lighthouse*, in this novel, this section functions as the “corridor joining two blocks,” Manhattan and İstanbul, and all that they stand for. Gee mentions how after completing the Manhattan section, she found herself going through a writer’s block and decided to go back to Woolf’s own writings. She resolved to model her own “Time Passes”, on “Time Passes”, the bridging section in *To the Lighthouse*. She was relieved, as she states, after resolving the technicalities regarding the form. She also tells that this structure boosted the narrative momentum, since “two parts is essentially a static form – whereas three is dynamic” (in Thomas).

In her hypertext, Gee also appropriates Woolfian forms and styles. The so-called “proper stuff of fiction,” or rather lack of it (“Modern Fiction” 9) occupied Woolf’s mind greatly in her own lifetime. In her own fiction she aimed at a style which would merge verse and prose to bridge the rupture. She describes this new genre, prose poem, as follows: “It will resemble poetry in this that it will give not only people’s relations to each other and their activities together, as the novel had hitherto done, but it will give the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude. For under the dominion of the novel we have scrutinized one part of mind closely and left another unexplored” (*Essays* 80). It may not be entirely appropriate to call *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* a prose poem in the exact sense Woolf envisioned it, yet, the aspiration is there, in terms of lyricism or other stylistic qualities such as the use of the dramatic form that allows the reader to see the story world through the perspective of each character separately in chunks. Often, these speeches function like soliloquies giving insight to the minds of the characters, modelled after Woolf’s stream of consciousness. Below is an exemplary passage of this form, from the opening sections of the novel:

VIRGINIA

... ‘Kaar, Virginia.’ A crow welcomed me back to the pavement where it pecked at a crack, pecked at the gap between the worlds.

ANGELA

She almost died before her new life started!

VIRGINIA

She dragged me - pulled me hard by the arm, I nearly struck for her impudence – into a place that smelled of fried meat. I have always hated

restaurants. Music I had never heard before – loud drumming & someone shouting – I placed my hands over my ears & said, ‘Where is the telephone?’

ANGELA

‘Please sit here, where you are safe. There are things I must explain to you, but first I will get some coffee – I don’t remember if you drank coffee?’

VIRGINIA

The woman spoke as if she knew me!

ANGELA

I mean, there’s been coffee since the eighteenth century, but God knows which modern kind she’d like, latte, cappuccino, Americano... Espresso seemed like the safest choice. Was there anything about it in the *Diaries*? (VWM 31)

This form resembles a dialogue, but, in fact, it can be better described as streams of consciousnesses shifting from one character to the other. Through this form, the omniscient narrator may maintain narrative distance from the characters. However, with Gee’s use of autofiction through Angela Lamb, the author is never much distant from her characters.

In her own analysis of Virginia Woolf’s self-conscious novels, Gee advocates that “in Woolf’s earlier work the artist is established as a source of endless curiosity” (*Self-Conscious* 147), and in her rewriting of Virginia Woolf, this curiosity is foregrounded as the most outstanding feature of Virginia, who is reborn into a new century. The choice of New York, to which Woolf never went, as she writes in her “America Which I Have Never Seen”: ““Of all places. I never went there! Never went to America. I never cared to, I loved Europe...”” (VWM 65), converges perfectly with Virginia’s characterization as possessing an enormous appetite for modernity. She comes back to life just in the right place.

With its focus on adventure, *VWM* bears traces of picaresque novels, which in their traditional form, depict the adventures of roguish heroes. Virginia’s middle-class background and highbrow art do not comply with the picaresque’s low origins. Nevertheless, a thread of picaresque spirit, continued in *VWM*, through Gee’s hypertextual rewriting of *Orlando*, can be discerned in the narrative. In accordance with this, Gee’s Virginia is intrepid and bold as Woolf’s Orlando was. It was crucial for Gee to construct her as ready to embark on an adventure in the “brave new

world,” expurgated from her fears. Note for instance how Virginia’s first encounter with the 21<sup>st</sup> century is presented: “A yellow car almost hit me. The wind knocked me sideways, and I saw the furious face of the driver. He had small wire glasses under his turban. Where was this place & who were these people? I stood quite still in the middle of the road & cars screamed past me & I wasn’t afraid” (VWM 30). Overwhelming stimuli startles Virginia, but the dominant feeling she has, is, lack of fear regarding the new experiences. She is fearless as she is ready to embrace the gift of second life presented to her:

I had been changed, because I wasn’t afraid. Perhaps the darkness had finally left me. Wherever I had been- for however many years- I had left my fear behind like a parcel, & something began in the midst of my confusion, although I was dazed, something started- a jolt of joy, which could not be stifled, small as a child set free in a hayfield, stunned for a second then gathering pace, dancing across, the yellow dust flying. (VWM 30-1)

Virginia soon embraces her new life, and she is overwhelmed by the joy she cannot suppress. However, as the excitement over her rebirth wanes, she confronts the stark reality: everyone she knew is dead, and she is all alone in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She finds it difficult to come to terms with her own suicide, and the death of her beloved ones. She has great difficulty particularly in acquiescing Leonard’s death since she feels she betrayed and let him down by committing suicide. Angela can convince Virginia about Leonard’s death only through making her read her well-known suicide note “*I don’t think two people could have been happier*” (VWM 36; emphasis in the original), and then the fog clears, she remembers exactly how she paid a visit to the doctor, took her fur coat, wrote the note, and finally put the stones in her pockets. Confrontation with her past eases Virginia’s relieving herself from the concerns that preoccupied her in her 20<sup>th</sup> century life. Despite being all alone in her new life and feeling nostalgic, she is enthralled by the fact that she is given a second chance in life, and this time she tries to live it to the fullest.

Virginia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has a sharp contrast to the sullen, pale figure that is familiar to us from her portraits. She is full of life, witty and enthusiastic, and this second Virginia, resurrected by Gee, aims to change our perception of the real Virginia Woolf, the author. Gee’s Virginia desires to be known beyond her suicide, as she thinks to herself after realizing she could have a different life in another place and another time:

No, I had never wanted it.

I myself never wanted to die. The self I knew, I self I owned, that loved the sunlight on the spine of the downs, loved Leonard, loved my Nessa.

Of course I didn't want to die. It was just the illness, the cloud of darkness, something outside me, tracking me. (VWM 322)

Gee grants Virginia a glimpse of that future she could see for herself if she had not died so early. As Virginia comes to terms with her past, her suicide and being reborn in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Angela, in turn, negotiates her own position. She comes to New York to work on Woolf, to discover where her own life and writing are going and now, she realizes her purpose in life as she watches Virginia: "For a minute she sat there saying nothing, kneading the bed-cover with big white hands. She looked-epic. I will never forget it. I did feel pity, but also ... the writer in me was trying to record it. How could I ever describe this moment? I was there. I was *chosen* to see it. Somehow I had to find the words" (VWM 46; emphasis in the original).

Angela, and hence Gee, is entrusted with the task of rewriting Woolf, but, as she soon discovers, this task will not be easy. Priest warns about the difficulties an author might encounter in the process of writing author fictions: "[t]o turn one's favourite novelist into a character in a novel is in a sense to master [...] the master. It is also to run the risk of transmuting one's subject into a version of oneself" (304-5). Gee's placing the author Virginia Woolf, in Manhattan, exemplifies this attempt to "master the master". In her version of the biographical novel about an author, the writer has all the authority over the historical author; she refers to her biographical subject as "my Virginia Woolf". Unconditional love manifested in the text in the form of hyperbolic praise such as Lodge's unreserved devotion to Henry James is not to be found in Gee's vision. Gee's biographical subject, Virginia, has to earn the love and respect, which is unconditionally granted to the biographical heroes in Byatt's and Lodge's novels, by proving herself still relevant and useful to the very author that fictionalizes her, Angela Lamb.

Angela's and thus Gee's mission in life is to write and re-connect Virginia Woolf to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Initially, Angela finds it way more difficult and painstaking than she thought. She cannot figure out how to deal with Virginia's "snobbery". Angela arrives at the Berg Collection with some preconceptions she has about Woolf as a privileged author as opposed to her own working-class

background. For example, while waiting for her admittance into the Berg collection, Angela, having received her membership card, thinks: "I like membership cards. They make me feel entitled. I haven't always felt that way. Virginia, of course, was born entitled. But part of me is still the daughter of Lorna and Henry, born in Wolverhampton" (VWM 17). Unlike Virginia Woolf, Angela declares, she is not a middle-class author. Angela professes feeling insecure, reminding the reader how, in a posh bookstore such as Goldstein's, she would feel very anxious: "I am a socially anxious person. Because of my background, which was working-class, despite my money, my house in Hampstead and daughter in Abbey, I try to behave, I try to fit in" (VWM 97). This anxiety to fit in makes Angela even more anxious about her financial status. Even if she has her own room and a substantial amount of money in her bank account, she has worked hard to earn them contrary to Virginia, who inherited them. Therefore, she cannot easily succumb to take care of Virginia for free. The exchange quoted below between Angela and Virginia takes place just minutes after their first encounter. As Angela tries to figure out what she should do about Virginia, who, suddenly comes back to life, she first takes her to a café. Virginia, who enjoys the creamy coffee Angela has actually bought for herself and, asks for another:

She said 'Could you bring me another, please? Then I will telephone my husband.'

*Bring* me another! Did she think it was free? Unlike her, I did not inherit money. She spoke to me as if I were a servant. Of course I would try not to hold it against her, but well – my grandma *was* a servant. (VWM 33; emphasis in the original)

Angela's self-reasoning that she will not hold it against her conveys a mockery of Angela, given that this is about thirty minutes or so after Angela found Virginia. Gee adopts a sarcastic attitude regarding Angela's sensitivity about matters of money. Angela is cynically portrayed as being always careful with her money in spite of having a stable position as a successful author and a best-seller. Angela's obsession with class and money and her belief that she did not have the privileges Woolf had, are offered as the reasons which shed light on Angela's grumpiness. As it becomes certain that Virginia came back to life for good and she will stay, Angela has to spend even more money, which makes her grow more and more restless. For

example, Angela thinks Virginia always opts for the more expensive or the more luxurious options even if she has the possibility of choosing more economical alternatives. Angela reminds Virginia, the incidents that took place when they went shopping to buy some new clothes for Virginia, who, still had the clothes that she wore before her suicide. As Virginia reacts with excitement over the blouse she tries on, Angela responds: “‘Why are you laughing?’ ... ‘Did you choose the most expensive one?’” (VWM 115), which turns out to be the case. This incident lays bare how their worlds are demarcated by class. Even if Virginia does not voice them, her thoughts about Angela’s worries over money reflect Virginia’s snobbery even if it she may not be conscious of it. As they are checking the price tag of the blouse Virginia wishes to buy, Virginia thinks that she had better not scorn Angela for her stinginess lest she may not be earning well: “It wasn’t her fault. Though she had good points, she constantly showed a side that was – common. I don’t like to use that word, of course one’s egalitarian, but Angela was obsessed with money. Perhaps she could not sell her books” (VWM 115-6). To Virginia’s regret, the blouse in question is really expensive for Angela: “It’s just, that blouse cost \$400,” she complains, “I’ve never spent that much on a blouse. I suppose you can’t understand our money. Perhaps you will, when you have some of your own. Before you know it, it will be gone” (VWM 117).

In *VWM*, Angela’s view of Virginia as incapable of dealing with money is shown to be based on the biographies of Virginia Woolf she has read and her perception of Woolf as a socially-privileged person. However, she was one of the first women to declare that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (*A Room* 2). With her husband Leonard Woolf, she founded the Hogarth Press and ran it successfully. In *VWM*, too, contrary to Angela’s view of her, Virginia desires to manage her own money. While in her real-life Virginia Woolf acquired this freedom through Hogarth Press, her second life in “a different world” was financially eased after selling the two books, *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando*, which Virginia has with her. As mentioned earlier, Virginia’s having these two books has a symbolic significance in that this connects it to Gee’s narrative, which borrows largely from these two novels by positioning them as hypotexts. In addition to this function, through portraying them as tradable goods, Gee lays bare

the commodification of literature as the ways in which authorship is practised has changed tremendously. In contemporary world, it is all about the sale, and even highbrow authors like Virginia Woolf participate in commodification or even fetishization of literature.

Angela's and Virginia's expeditions into the bookshops provide the reader with the insider's view of the publishing world: Angela is a best-seller, prize winning author, Virginia, on the other hand, was a representative of modernist art, and she herself had a press house, which allowed her to experiment more freely with her fiction. As these two authors who have different experiences of the publishing industry discover, books are not only texts; their status as books inevitably places them within the world of sales, and assigns a market value to them. After a few visits to the bookshops, Angela sees it for herself that the price for a book is set in accordance with other elements "outside the text". While a regular copy just costs a few dollars, a signed, first-edition of *To the Lighthouse* might be priced as much as \$28.000, and a personalized copy, which is a copy signed for a special person, costs even more. As mentioned earlier, this discovery prompts Virginia and Angela to "personalise" the copies they have by writing notes addressed to Vita and Leonard to increase the market value of the books. After they sell the books, the same Virginia desires to have today's equivalent of £500 and a room of one's own. In contrast to Angela's portrayal of her as ignorant about the matters of money, the display of her thoughts reveals a completely different Virginia, who is calculating and attentive to the matters of money. In the extract below, Angela can be seen as pondering over how to make Virginia pay for the expenses she has to cover:

Yet I was doing her many favours. How would Virginia have managed without me? It's true my time is valuable, too. My workshops cost \$1.000 a day.

Perhaps she should have offered me a small percentage?

Five per cent. Or maybe ten. Nine thousand dollars would have been most helpful, but obviously it was up to her to suggest it. I could hardly ask her directly, could I? The Wordsmiths Hotel cost a lot of money. Without her I would have stayed on in the Waddington, ghastly though it was, and got on with my paper.

Which would have been about Virginia, true, and for which the Turks would be paying me. (VWM 139)

Meanwhile, Virginia is calculating her own share. She may not be familiar with contemporary finances; yet, she has a very clear idea of how much she would need to write, to have a room of her own:

I wonder how much of the money is mine. After all, without Angela I would have nothing. So far she's given me \$500, and told me to be careful with it. I think it would be fair to split money in two, but she might not agree to that. So I 'll ask her to work out today's equivalent of £500, and a room of one's own. Then I will request it, bold as brass. (VWM 139-40)

Virginia, as seen here, surely cares about money, just like Angela does. Consequently, through rewriting Virginia's concerns about financial matters, Gee challenges a common perception of Woolf as a snob when it comes to financial matters. Yet, in challenging this perception, Gee does not deny the privilege and the comfort money afforded to Woolf, and through Angela's working-class background, she portrays the journey of an author, who did not have Woolf's opportunities. After all, Gee is famously known for her hypersensitivity about her working-class background. Her "Author Statement" on the webpage of British Council Literature reads as follows: "I write for the joy of the language and the form, and to pay the mortgage" (O'Reiley). At the end of the novel, two opposing views at strife with each other are reconciled as it is declared that while access to certain privileges definitely makes a difference, a writer with the desire to write, will surely find a way to overcome any difficulties that may arise, just as Gee, who in the rest of the above author statement proudly declared: "I also write because life is fascinating, beautiful, and short. I want to record my experience, and my brief attempts at understanding it, for others, while I can" (*ibid*).

Through comparing and contrasting Virginia's historical reality as presented in her writing to flesh and blood Virginia intruding Angela's life, Gee displays, how, in some cases, it may be not so easy to reconcile the images gathered from the perception of an author from her work and her life. In her journey with Virginia, across Manhattan and İstanbul, Angela unlearns her previous knowledge and succeeds in rediscovering Virginia outside the frame patched from her writing. This was only possible as Angela opened her heart and mind to the real author, instead of dwelling on the paper author. For example, after they receive the money for the book selling, Virginia thinks: "For the first time I felt this writer who came from the

future was pleased with me. Pleased with the real Virginia, not the dead Virginia she knew from the writing” (VWM 134). Virginia believes that Angela is drawn to the image of Virginia Woolf she has in her mind, and whenever the images clash with the real Virginia, Angela finds it unbearable and accuses Virginia.

In addition to the clash between the real persona and the image found in writing, the nature and the type of the writing, from which the image of the author is drawn, is scrutinized here. For example, Virginia’s presuppositions are based on her belief that Angela knows her solely through her novels since Virginia is not aware of the fact that her diaries were actually published by Leonard after her death. Virginia ponders:

I was not my everyday self in my novels, because they rarely allowed me to be funny.

In life I was always hooting with laughter, people were ridiculous, life was absurd. And so was I, and Nessa, and Leonard, and all my loves, Lytton, Ottoline, Roger, old Ethel Smyth like a charging shire-horse....

Of course I was myself in my diaries, but they were my secret, and never published. By now they are destroyed- I asked Leonard to do it. He would never reveal me to the eyes of others. (VWM 134)

As a matter of fact, her beloved Leonard betrayed Virginia in this respect. It is apparent that he also grappled with all the problems arising from publishing one’s private documents as noted down in the introduction to *A Writer’s Diary*; nonetheless, he went on with publishing. While he acknowledged publishing his wife’s diaries as a mistake, he believed that by presenting diaries as intact, he could protect the integrity of his wife (5). But, how could one reconcile integrity with privacy? For example, when Virginia finally succeeds in checking Leonard’s pictures on the internet, she affectionately sighs “Mongoose,” and Angela wonders how Virginia would respond if she answered ““Mandrill”? His name for her. His beloved baboon” (VWM 84-5). As she realizes she knows even the nicknames between the husband and the wife, pangs of conscience bother Angela even more. Dismayed by the burden, she confesses to herself and thus to the reader: “I knew her too much, we knew too much. Their secret bestiary of names” (VWM 85). Even if Virginia may be unaware, her diaries and letters have now become indispensable intertexts of the Virginia Woolf scholarship, and through scenes like the above one, Gee challenges the readers to question their own positions as readers of such private

documents, which were not originally written to be scrutinized by the curious eyes of the future readers or academics.

From Virginia's point of view, publishing one's diary is laying bare the most private feelings. She recounts how in her diaries she could display her private self as opposed to novels, destined for the public: "The diaries were the place where I laughed, and examined myself, and found myself and others wanting. And learned my craft. Most days I wrote something. Except when the shadow came upon me, and even then, I tried to track it, tried to record my fight to stay sane. Hundreds of thousands of words I wrote" (VWM 134). In contrast to the novels, her diaries were her refuge, providing shelter through all the tumultuous days of anxiety, fear and pain. Real Virginia Woolf, as noted by the fictional one, also used her diaries as journals to practice her craft in writing. Many of the passages we find in the novels were first sketched in diaries, or they have entries pertaining to the genesis of ideas in her mind. Having come back to life, she gives it a second thought, and again cannot decide whether it was a waste to leave them to fade in darkness, or whether it would be better if she had the opportunity to read them again: "Was it a waste, since no-one ever saw them? There in the diaries, I captured my world. The texture of hours and minutes: the shining lawns between day and darkness" (*ibid*). However, the fact that she could re-read them now meant everybody else could read, too. Angela is the one who makes it clear to the reader. Realizing how much she knows about Virginia, the knowledge acquired by the voyeuristic reading of her diaries becomes an overwhelming burden for Angela. More than anything else, Angela feels distressed about how she could possibly explain to Virginia all that information she has about her. Angela admits: "And because I had read the biographies, which told us more than anyone should know about another human being unless they are their parent, sibling, child, I knew what years were to follow the wedding- descents into madness, violence, depression" (VWM 84). Similar questions regarding the different selves of an author are also addressed by both Byatt and Lodge. In *Possession*, the events in the narrative unfold following the discovery of a love letter between the two Victorian poets. These letters are later used to support discussions of Christabel's and Roland's poetry in this new context of love, and in Christabel's case, who was previously thought to be a lesbian poet, this heterosexual relationship

proved by the letters, change the whole course of the scholarship on her. Overall, while discovery liberates the Ph.D. scholar Roland in terms of awakening him to embrace the creative faculty, it, at the same time, bothers him greatly, as he knows it in his heart that the letters were not written for readers, but “for *a* reader” (Byatt 145; emphasis in the original). In *Author, Author*, Lodge portrays Henry James burning his collection of letters in a bonfire since he does not want to be “possessed” by the curious eyes after his death. In *VWM*, through problematizing the boundary between private and public texts, and “possession” of these texts by other parties than the author, Gee, too, addresses these issues, regarding how much the readers should know about the authors, and where the boundary between private and public selves of an author, if such a boundary exists, should be drawn. In the case of Gee, who has an extremely self-conscious, yet, at the same time, very playful authorial posture, the boundary is a very slippery one.

#### **5.4 Authorship in “a Different World”: Virginia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*VWM* is an exploration of authorship, where multiple author figures representative of various standpoints, are placed in dialogue with one another. Angela Lamb, Gee’s fictional counterpart, is juxtaposed with the fictional Virginia Woolf whom she encounters during her visit to the Berg Collection in New York Public Library. These two authors finally unite with the third figure, Angela’s daughter Gerda, who is an author-to-be. In addition to these fictional authors, there are also real authors: Virginia Woolf, who inspired this novel, and, eventually, there is Maggie Gee herself as the author of *VWM*. Through these author figures, as well as the addition of narrative agents such as the narrator, the implied author, the reader and the implied reader, Gee portrays a holistic vision where the discordant voices are harmonized as they work together towards reconstruction.

These conflicts are presented through the juxtaposition between Virginia and Angela, who is her midwife, saviour and also antithesis. All the private knowledge she possesses about Virginia Woolf makes it difficult for Angela to position herself in relation to Virginia. Leaving aside the question of how she could come back to life, Angela asks herself what makes her feel obliged to help Virginia, why she is connected to her, and wonders “Was it a kind a celebrity worship?” (*VWM* 50).

Angela's connection is more akin to the return of the repressed or anxiety of influence. The ephebe, which she had tried to suppress, strikes back, as indicated by her portrayal as an intruder. She arrives at the 21<sup>st</sup> century, carrying the "weight of the tradition" with her. She takes Angela's favourite coat, eats greedily on Angela's account, has expensive tastes, and above all makes Angela feel insecure and inferior. Angela complains in a whining tone about the difficult time Virginia gives her: "The Virginia Woolf I was writing about was so much less trouble than the one I was with. The first earned me money, the latter cost me" (VWM 139). Virginia costs Angela not only money, but also, her self-esteem as an author. In her soliloquies, she often compares herself to Virginia. Angela wonders:

Would her opinions unsettle my life?

Would she always, somehow, make me feel a failure?

I dismissed the thought. I was a best-selling author, with two degrees – she didn't have one, though they called her 'the cleverest woman in England' – and I went to the gym and looked after myself. Whereas she looked as though the only exercise she did was dragging herself through a hedge backwards. I had good hair. Ok, this was shallow, but – I had a daughter. She did not. Leonard had forbidden her to have children in case it drove her mad again – though I knew my daughter had kept me sane. (VWM 95)

In spite of her literary and non-literary accomplishments as listed above, in Virginia's presence, Angela is distressed; she feels insecure and inferior as the defence mechanism she puts to work manifests. For example, Angela thinks that even though she tells Virginia she is a writer, this never attracts her attention; and, in some other instances, Virginia is portrayed as belittling Angela's self-identification as an author. Virginia mocks Angela, stating she cannot grasp how Angela calls herself an author when she cannot read Latin or Greek:

'Then I don't understand why you don't know Latin. And you write books-you're an author- *Auctor auctoris*. You must know *some* Latin'.

'It's a different world,' I said, despairing. (VWM 159)

As Virginia is going to discover via her journey, it, really, is a different world. Virginia Woolf and her highbrow art and the Bloomsbury circle are buried in the past now. Virginia's teasing attitude towards Angela, and Angela's finding it hard to compromise with Virginia, even if she is familiar with the Virginia Woolf she read, display how the ways authorship is practised have changed across time and space.

In Virginia's view, author signifies authority; however, as understood from Virginia's surprise over Angela's practice of authorship, the modern author has to share this authority with editors, publishers, and critics – a practice Virginia finds unbelievable and likens to “a chained monkey, night and day, dancing to the tune of her accordion” (*VWM* 300). She thinks to herself, “[w]hile I was breathing in the evening air, Angela was tethered to her London friends, or worrying about her editors – she had so many editors, her agent, first, then her publisher, then her American editor – did these modern writers not edit themselves?” (*ibid*). She was a Virginia's presence in the novel allows Gee to comment on authorship from various angles such as writing, criticism and publishing, which are brought together in the outstanding persona of Virginia Woolf. In addition to being a writer and a critic, Woolf was also in many ways, the pioneer of self-publishing. Through the allusions to Hogarth Press in *VWM*, self-publishing is juxtaposed to corporate publishing. The process of publication and its aftermath is presented as confining for the contemporary author, “a chained monkey” as Virginia suggests. In contrast, Virginia's own press had freed her. Virginia remembers how she felt naked, “exposed” to strangers as she submitted a manuscript, before they started the press:

That terrible feeling of nakedness, akin to what I once felt with Gerald, when I was a child, helpless, small. Or that terrifying sense of being undressed when I sent my first novels to publishers. It was why we started the Hogarth Press, so that never again – never again – would I feel I had been passed around among strangers, naked as a baby from the waist down, to be judged and prodded, discussed, handled. (*VWM* 190)

In Woolf's own life, the Hogarth Press put an end to the feeling of being violated by the gazes of the strangers, which she had to go through during the process of reviews and critiques. Laura Marcus affirms that the press “gave Woolf a way of negotiating the terms of literary publicity, and a space somewhere between the private, the coterie, and the public sphere” (*VWM* 145), in which “Woolf quickly developed the confidence to attack Edwardian critics like Arnold Bennett, among others, and to formulate and publicize her own modernist aesthetic (Dubino 7). Overall, it gave Woolf a room of her own to practise her art as she wished. In this regard, the publication of Woolf's *Jacob's Room* by their own press is regarded by Sally Dennison as the event which “made possible [Woolf's] change from a commercial

to an experimental writer” (qtd. in Southworth 3). In the Hogarth Press, Woolf was involved in all the stages of running the press, including the financial matters as well as being her own editor, reviewer and critic. For instance, she notes down having opted artistic freedom over financial help in her diary entry for 3 December 1922 as follows:

The Hogarth Press is in travail. Heinemanns made us a most flattering offer – to the effect that we should give us [sic] our brains & blood, & they would see to sales & ledgers. But we sniff patronage. If they gain, we lose. Our name has to be coupled with theirs. In the opinions of Desmond [MacCarthy], Clive [Bell], Roger [Fry] & I think Vanessa [Bell], the exchange would be capitulation. We are both very willing to come to this conclusion, & have decided for freedom & a fight with great private glee” (D2 215). (qtd. in Southworth 7)

Contemporary scene of publishing and book trade runs completely counter to the vision Virginia Woolf presents as the co-owner of the Hogarth Press. Leonard Woolf described their interest “primarily in the immaterial inside of a book, what the author had to say and how he said it” (qtd. in Southworth 4). In the new world, by contrast, it is all about “looks” attested by “big” images, prizes, and selling rates. In the novel, this is addressed through the difficulty Angela and Virginia have as they try to find a bookshop where books are still being sold in printed form. The only bookshops they come across are branches of some chain stores, where books are consumed rather than appreciated for their literary merit. Angela thinks, “‘Maybe we should never have had them either. Maybe they’re dinosaurs who grew too big’. They had swallowed up food, coffee, cards, events, readings, signings, music...Till the customers noticed they were being sold rubbish” (VWM 174).

Virginia suggests finding smaller bookshops, which are not “monstrosities” (VWM 174). As the quest continues, they come across Rizzoli’s bookstore, which offers them the peace they have been looking for, with its rich collection of books in different languages. Since it is an Italian bookshop, at first, they can only find translations of Virginia’s books, and ask for assistance from a sales assistant, who is portrayed as a caricature of “all knowing,” superficial readers. He claims to adore Virginia Woolf’s “poetry,” delivers a long speech about it only to reveal he mistakes what he thinks to be Virginia Woolf’s poems with Sylvia Plath’s (VWM 176) since both authors committed suicide. Through examples of such shallow attitudes to

works and the authors who wrote them, Gee satirizes the contemporary pretentiousness, as well as the overall tendency to group writers into over-arching categories such as “suiciders,” “feminists,” “post-colonials,” etc., overlooking the individual identity each author has.

While the contemporary scene does not please Virginia, as she realizes that she is stuck in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, she faces the reality and starts to feel worried about financial matters and how to make a living. As Virginia thinks she could write a novel, which was after all her profession, Angela is unsettled by the realization of all the possibilities out there: once she recovers from the shock she receives, as Virginia talks to her about her plans to write a new novel, Angela immediately starts to consider the feasibility of Virginia’s schemes. Could the reborn Virginia Woolf write *in the present* or write *the present*? In the below extract, Gee offers some of the possibilities. Being questions rather than answers, they leave the reader feeling uncertain. Gee’s answer to the question is dispersed all over the novel.

But I hadn’t considered what would happen next. Because Virginia Woolf had done her writing- Virginia Woolf the historical figure. There it was in the university libraries, the rows of volumes, the critical editions. It must be over; she had entered the canon. How could it all begin again? (VWM 156)

If it was to begin again, Angela asks, how would Virginia be positioned? “Would she be Virginia Woolf Mark 2? Of course, she couldn’t change her name, because her name was everything. This would be, what, her Late Period? ‘Posthumous Period’ was too weird. Would she write a novel about New York? Publishers would fight over it” (VWM 156). The possibilities disturb Angela and she feels “sharply territorial” since writing about their time is Angela’s job. She is left with a bunch of questions: If Virginia was to write in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what could she possibly write about? How would her position as an outsider contribute to her distinct voice? Had Virginia done her writing, as Angela claimed? Or could her vision still be useful? In that case, how could she position her own writing in relation to Woolf’s? By posing these questions through Angela, Gee invites the reader to think about how and when exactly a writer stops writing. Could an author be considered dead after her physical death or is the author reborn with each reading? The sympathetic treatment of Virginia in the novel suggests that Gee believes that authors live in others. Through imagining Virginia coming back to life and writing again,

noticeably in New York, she is simultaneously pointing to the position of her own novel, *VWM*, as well as countless other rewritings of Virginia Woolf. Even if Angela finds it too weird that these rewritings could be termed “Virginia Woolf Mark 2” or the “Post-Humous” Period, such wording is employed to refer to Woolf’s presence in contemporary narratives. For instance, in her article essay “‘Serv[ing] under two masters’: Virginia Woolf’s Afterlives in Contemporary Biofictions” (2012) Monica Latham<sup>36</sup> uses “afterlives” to refer to rewritings of Virginia Woolf.

Angela bemouths autobiographical elements, such as her own working-class background, from Gee’s life. Thus, Gee compares and contrasts the circumstances that affect literary production via using Woolf’s writings such as *A Room of One’s Own*, *Three Guineas* and Virginia Woolf’s life as *hypotexts* to initiate a discussion of authorship. In addition to allusions and references to Woolf’s non-fictional work, the themes such as transience of life and fame encountered in *To the Lighthouse* are invoked in *VWM*, too. While at the beginning of the novel Angela was pleased with her position and boasted about being a “success” (*VWM* 15), in Virginia’s presence she cannot maintain this self-esteem for so long. Furthermore, she is driven to question her own work and self as a writer. Just like Mr. Ramsay worrying over the fate of his works, Angela wonders even if she is a best-seller now, would her books be read hundreds of years later (*VWM* 140), and where she, as an author stands, compared to Virginia and her high art as opposed to Angela’s being a best-seller, whose works are meant to be devoured, rather than appreciated and digested. She compares herself to Virginia: “Would my books be valuable, a hundred years later? It didn’t matter, I was a best-seller. She seemed surprised when I told her that. Only one of her books was a true best-seller, and that was probably her worst, *The Years*” (*VWM* 140). Even if Virginia was not a best-seller author, she made it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with her art, and now in *VWM*, she strikes back. Gee’s Virginia comes back to life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and markedly in Manhattan, a symbol of capitalism, where everything has a retail price. Gee’s Virginia, transferred to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, inevitably confronts the brave new world of “digimodernity” as she finds herself grappling with its advance.

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<sup>36</sup> Latham has also recently published a book with a similar title, *Virginia Woolf’s Afterlives: The Author as Character in Contemporary Fiction and Drama* in May, 2021 by Routledge.

Alan Kirby sees digimodernism both as the condition of the time and an effort to name the period that extends beyond postmodernism: “Since its first appearance in the second half of the 1990s under the impetus of new technologies, digimodernism has decisively displaced postmodernism to establish itself as the twenty-first century’s new cultural paradigm” (Kirby 1). In his view, digimodernism was brought about by “the computerization of text which yields a new form of textuality characterized in its purest instances by onwardness, haphazardness, evanescence, and anonymous, social and multiple authorship” (*ibid*). Kirby’s theorization of digimodernism posits it as “the successor to postmodernism” (2), which in the second half of the 1990s, “co-existed with a weakened, retreating postmodernism; [and hence] it’s the era of the hybrid or borderline text,” which has finally become the cultural dominant in Jameson’s sense, and replaced postmodernism. As much as it is an expected outcome of postmodernism, it is also both a reaction and also a continuation since it is “historically adjacent and expressed in part through the same cultural forms [...] suggesting a modulated continuity more than a rupture” (*ibid*).

In digimodernism, “one phones, clicks, presses, surfs, chooses, moves, downloads” (Kirby) rather than simply writing. Initially, Virginia has a hard time with it, she tries to start Angela’s laptop with a fruit knife, struggles with telephones and remote controls, but eventually she learns “Internetting” even if the digital world, search engines, blogs, discussion forums are definitely puzzling. When she googles Leonard Woolf, she realizes now, as a reader, she has to navigate her way among the hyperlinks. In the new world, as attested by the difficulty of finding pen and ink (*VWM* 107), the means of textual production have changed completely. The pace of change dazzles not only Virginia, but also Angela, who considers herself a part of it. She expresses her disappointment about their failure to find pen and ink to sign Virginia’s books to sell them as such: “And could we find pen and ink? We could not. It was as if our world no longer needed to be written. It was simply *there*, solid, confident, lush” (*VWM* 107; emphasis in the original). Now, the world, with the digital revolution, as Carla Hesse argues, a place in which “we are all, through electronic writing, continuously present to one another,” and “in which public exchange through the written word can occur without deferral, in a continuously

immediate present” (32). It is self-explicatory, as Angela realizes; and consequently, with everyone being an author and having access to writing, the author’s role as a guide has lost its significance.

The new world, with its salient disregard of the writer, who writes to cultivate empathy and meaning in a world, where none exists, aggrieve both authors. Angela, now, beholds that just like Virginia, whose time passed, Angela’s own time is passing and her influence, her power as a storyteller is waning. Astonished to be called “out of date” in some of the shops they visited, Angela wonders, has she, too, like Virginia become Vintage. “-and for heaven’s sake, I was not exactly old. *I was only forty-nine, and on Facebook and Twitter!*” (VWM 107-8; original emphasis). The world itself as well as the scene of writing and publishing are changing at a pace, which makes it difficult to keep up, even for Angela.

Manhattan is an iconic symbol of this speed, and time flies rapidly for Angela and Virginia, too. Before their journey to İstanbul, Angela and Virginia try to see more of the city. Hoping to impress Virginia, Angela takes her to a huge bookstore, only to find it is closing:

‘Oh, Virginia, I’m sorry. It’s closed down. I don’t know why.’

‘But you said it was the best bookshop?’

‘Yes. Did I? No – there are others.’

I wanted to protect her from the blow I felt. We were both authors. Authors need bookshops. Tunnels of ore waiting to be mined. (VWM 171)

Angela is heartbroken as a result of the disillusionment she confronted. Even if she lives in a world of fast change, Angela still finds it hard to accept the fact that bookshops are closing one after another. Ironically, Virginia comforts her: “‘It’s just a shop,’ she said. ‘Don’t worry. Bookshops closed down in our day too. They are only businesses, my dear. The books themselves will live elsewhere. Maybe they are going to live in your ... laptops?’” (VWM 172). Virginia, who finds it hard to acquiesce digimodernism at first, seems at peace with it, now. The books will live in other formats surely, but it should also be granted that “computerization has changed and will change the text violently and forever, altering its production, consumption, form, content, economics, and value” (Kirby 246). On the one hand, computerized text forms such as blogs or online organizations like Wattpad make literature more accessible to anyone who desires to write; on the other hand, this ease of access

results in the accumulation of all sorts of written “texts,” which occupy an ambivalent status regarding their qualification as works of literature. In *VWM*, the closing of bookshops is also discussed within this context. In the old world of *belles lettres*, the bookshop was a symbol of the authorized text, but now especially in the digital hypertext format, characterized by multiple authorship and anonymity, it is hinted that authority is becoming more and more obscure and perhaps irrelevant. Yet, through Virginia, in whose persona, the author, critic and authority are united, Gee claims otherwise and reconstructs the author as the authority.

Virginia’s inquiry about whether the past can write the present, brings Gee’s exploration of the nature and value of art to the fore. Evoking the figure of the artist having a vision and retreating after achieving it, Gee’s *VWM* explores the spatiotemporal boundaries of this vision. Does literature expire or is it timeless? This question is approached from diverse angles throughout the narrative. In the above-mentioned examples, Virginia is depicted as burdened with this question on a personal level, comparing her avant-garde art with contemporary art, which she regards as lacking meaning.

The opposition embodied by Virginia and Angela is created by Gee to offer answers to the question. In her treatment of Virginia Woolf with disobedient love, Gee also maintains her ambivalence towards Virginia Woolf. Gee’s statement where she refers to her novel as “a twenty-first-century love letter as well as an act of cheek, an attempt not to be afraid of Virginia Woolf” (*VWM* 474), divulges Gee’s tense relationship to Virginia Woolf as the precursor, as oscillating between love and fear. The same anxieties of influence, authorship and reception discussed earlier in David Lodge’s revisitation of Henry James, threaten Maggie Gee, too. Therefore, while Gee creates a transcendental author image, she also delineates the same author as confined to her own chronotope. Accordingly, *VWM* pictures Virginia as having a vision, yet, in her own century. The new millennium, as presented in the novel via the skyscrapers of Manhattan, is a product of the “cultural logic of late capitalism”; it witnessed the “disappearance of a sense of history,” which means it lost “the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social

formations have had in one way or other to preserve” (Jameson 20). Virginia cannot connect with this modern setting and cannot write this perpetual present. As indicated by Virginia’s sighs for her friends and her literary circle, the world she knew has disappeared. Virginia, who would not even care to read Angela’s work, eventually has to accept that reality now is different and it requires a different vision of both art and the artist.

İstanbul seems to offer the chance to reconnect to the creative impulse for Virginia, since İstanbul promises familiarity as opposed to alienation she feels in Manhattan. However, even at the end of the İstanbul conference, where she delivers an inspiring speech encouraging all the audience, consisting of academics, students of literature and common readers, to write, Gee’s Virginia herself cannot write. Actually, this point was addressed in many reviews the novel received, often in negative terms. Lucy Ellman, who calls *VWM* a sex and shopping novel aimed at getting Woolf laid, points to the lack of attention to Virginia’s own writing, and asks why “resurrect one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, and never ask her about her books?”. Similarly, Simon Thomas, who has a more positive review overall, refers to Gee’s irreverent attitude towards Virginia’s writing as unconvincing. He states: “The only thing that didn’t ring true to me (besides a rather risqué scene towards the end) is that Woolf doesn’t read anything” (Thomas).

As a matter of fact, the entire novel is about Virginia Woolf’s writing; but it is Gee, who does the writing. Woolf’s novels, especially *TL*, and *Orlando* are hypertextually incorporated in the novel as has been discussed throughout this chapter and *VWM* is full of references to Woolf’s other novels, as well as diaries and letters. Besides, Virginia comments on her own work and inquiries Angela about how her *Between the Acts* was received after her death. Through this intricate weaving of Woolf’s writing into the narrative, Gee, firstly, exhibits her thorough knowledge of Woolf’s writing and also draws attention to the fact that our knowledge of Woolf is acquired through her writing. Gee might have avoided depicting Virginia as she writes or reads precisely in order to dwell on this aspect, to suggest an author’s writing stops with the author’s death. This death, unlike Barthes’s metaphysical death, is indeed a physical death. In Gee’s view, the author stops “writing” physically, but legacy and influence will continue, and thus the

authors will continue to return and haunt us, in works written after their death, as exemplified in author fictions.

Besides, as Gee is a novelist- critic, like her fellow writers Byatt and Lodge, she pre-empts most of the criticism the novel may face by offering counter examples; and Virginia's indifference to reading and writing can be approached in that regard. Pondering over whether Virginia would at some point care to ask Angela about her work, she confesses to herself: "No, she would never bother to read me. To be fair, I had never seen her reading. Or writing, when it came to that" (VWM 443). Through Angela's focalization, Gee addresses the implications of Virginia's indifference to the world of letters, in a gesture nullifying the prospective critic of the novel.

There is in fact an episode where Virginia attempts to write. One evening, while they are chatting about their day, Virginia tells Angela that she has been trying to write. In their previous exchanges when Angela discovered that Virginia might be planning to write, she was concerned about practical issues, such as under what name she could write, what she would write about. With these previous exchanges in mind, when they finally have the chance to speak about writing, or rather when Angela assumes they have, Angela shyly tries to initiate a conversation on the agonies of being a writer. She tries to tell Virginia that she understands and shares her predicament: "'I'm not surprised you find writing hard. This world's so new and strange to you. I myself have been blocked of late. I mean, I published only last year, the reviews were fine, the sales were great, but it's not like turning on a tap, is it' (Virginia twitched slightly, I hoped we'd connected.)" (VWM 189). Virginia remains still as Angela proceeds with her long-awaited speech, which she expected to be a *tete-a-tete* with her favourite author, but turns out to be a monologue. She desperately tries to explain to Virginia the reasons behind the writer's block she is going through:

'There've been the problems with, you know, Edward...And you and I have been quite busy.' (I meant: 'I've been busy looking after *you*.') 'I'm not totally sure what to write about, though something, somewhere, may be coming together... You get to a certain stage in your career- you haven't read me, Virginia, that's fine, but I am quite famous, and it *is* a pressure-didn't you find? (VWM 189; emphasis in the original)

Trying to gain Virginia's attention and respect, Angela goes on to talk about how she can be considered a successful writer in today's standards, only to receive the bitter reaction recounted below from Virginia:

I wanted to spit. Did she think we were the same? Did this woman presume to share my feelings? She thought she saw into my soul. She thought she would share 'confidences'. She thought I was 'blocked', like any novice! Soon she would be giving me 'advice'. I held my lids shut for a long, long time, and hid inside my world of darkness. (*ibid*)

Virginia makes it clear to Angela that the two of them are entirely different. Virginia is not a novice, nor a best-seller, for which she looks down on Angela. We see she is confident that she is a great writer and thinks if she cannot write, there has to be a very valid reason for it. As it turns out, the difficulty she has about writing was caused by her failure to use a pen. She cannot write because she finds the pens they have bought are impossible to write with. The fact that the pen does not yield itself to Virginia, which should not be that complicated for someone who learns "Internetting" as she calls it, indicates that in spite of her familiarity with the art of fiction, perhaps, she is not equipped with the tools needed to cross the narrow bridge of art into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The tools she knew, the vision she had, are now defunct.

On their last day in Manhattan, Angela and Virginia take a trip to The Statue of Liberty, which is narrated through images alluding to the trip to the lighthouse in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Just as Cam and James watch the lighthouse as they sail towards it, watching The Statue of Liberty from the ferry, Virginia feels fatigued, and questions who she would write for in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This scene, as is discussed below, engages in a dialogue with the portrayal of Lily Briscoe, the artist, with whose image *To the Lighthouse* ends:

There it was - her picture. Yes. With all its green and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something ... With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done: it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (*TL* 334)

Gee's ongoing interest in the author was addressed in the introductory section of this chapter. Gee uses the terms "author" and "artist" interchangeably in her dissertation in line with her belief of author as someone distinguished by his/her creativity. She used the above-mentioned passage from *TL* in her dissertation as an

epigraph to the chapter on Virginia Woolf's self-conscious novels to propose that this extract shows "the artist reflecting on his image in the mirror, the image of a man who has made a world and is now at the end of his task. [...] a mood of pride touched with ecstasy" (Gee *Self-Conscious* 1). In that study, she also compares and contrasts the self-conscious artist with John Barth's "Life-Story," printed in *Lost in the Funhouse*, where Barth sees a different kind of author, portrayed as paralyzed by the terror of his age. His author cannot reach the end of his work, and thus cannot experience the ecstatic pride that the artist at the end of *To the Lighthouse* experiences. Virginia alludes to Lily Briscoe through referring to the vision; yet, she is now like Barth's artist paralyzed and cannot write:

Tired to death of what I have seen, and what has been lost, in this dazzling new century, with the masses forever pressing forward till those like me will be trampled underfoot- we have been trampled, for they are all gone, Desmond and Lytton, G. E Moore, Leonard and all the others, those wry, clever faces, those cultured brains with their subtle cargo of Latin and Greek, their skilful phrases, their philosophy, their discriminations, their subtleties in art and life- all of it discarded and out of date, their names forgotten, the velocities lost that they argued over till the morning hours; the bookshops are gone, the books are gone, the crowd round the Statue hardly used language- and who will I write for, if I write about *this*? (VWM 210; emphasis added)

*This*, this world, this loss of meaning, all of *this* unsettle Gee's Virginia. She thinks "[b]ack in the 1920s, 1930s, people were rooted in reality. Loyal to reality one might say" (VWM 229), while, now, they are much more individualized and prefer simulation over the real. For example, while they are flying to İstanbul and Angela prepares to watch a movie, Virginia begins to compare and contrast the past and the present. She cannot grasp how modern people are so addicted to their technology: "They were addicted to cinema, these modern people! At home, at table, or on tiny machines on the streets of New York – now even on a plane they couldn't do without it. We were flying headlong through the air, ten thousand metres up, according to the pilot, surely that was excitement enough?" (VWM 229). Given the fact that it is Woolf's first time on a plane, her excitement would not be a fair comparison with a frequent flyer; yet, the point she makes offers good food for thought. Virginia diagnoses our generation as suffering from alienation. In Virginia's eyes, we are members of a generation that lost sense of community along with art's loss of its social function. Now, art, as suggested by individual movie

experiences, does not bring people together; it divides and separates: “They were so much lonelier than we had been, each lost in the story of his own choosing” (VWM 229).

As the two authors finally embark on an adventure in İstanbul, Virginia finds herself discovering new critical perspectives such as deconstruction and discursive production. As she is observing the flight attendants on the plane, Virginia notes: “She fed us, we ate, we pushed it away, she had barely finished distributing the trays before she had to take it all back where it came from” (VWM 248). And then, she compares it with a writer’s work. While the former is doomed to destruction, “a writer’s work was aimed at survival (And I had survived. A small surge of joy.)” (*ibid*). Two forms of production are aimed for different things: while the cabin girl’s work is intended for the present, to be devoured, the writer’s work will endure. This question continues to bother Virginia, which results in the following exchange between Angela and herself. Asking Virginia whether she has any rubbish to discard, Angela finds herself trying to teach how to be polite to Virginia, but Virginia has a completely different take on this issue. She simply does not understand why one cannot call the servants by that name, while obviously it is what they are still doing (VWM 269). Through alluding to her own sense of modernity, Virginia invites the reader to consider our own, and our own alienation in the language. By pointing to the circumstances as having remained more or less the same, Virginia purports, it is just our attitude, our ways of positioning ourselves in relation to them, and hence our language, which has changed in terms of tackling the problems we encounter daily. And thus, it is a language which is blank, and fails to connect to the lived experience. The realities, on the other hand, are too straightforward to go unnoticed: “...Who wanted them [servants], sullen in some basement room not far enough from one’s own? Yet we had no running water till the 1930s, and at Asheham, endless chamber-pots, earth-closets, buckets. Our arms couldn’t carry them. Without servants, Vanessa’s and my work would never have got done” (VWM 249). Virginia continues this interior monologue to lay bare there is perhaps no difference between the servants in her own time and the present, and, therefore, according to Virginia, it is time modern audiences dropped the pretence and accepted the reality for what it is. For her, the sophisticated language of theory

and politically correct language is no more than a sugar coating, whereas what one needs is facts. In a bold assertion, she questions:

What should we have done? There was no answer; and the modern world seemed hardly any better. Our hotel had servants – the Wordsmiths Hotel, with its literature-themed rooms and bookish clients. Yet back up in the bedrooms were the same maids, somehow enduring the same duties, groaning faintly, on creaking knees because how else, pray, could you clean under the beds? Was there any difference but the colour of their skin and the strange electric music mine sang to? (*ibid*)

Remembering the housekeeping at the hotel, she ruminates the potential she might have had in a passage that echoes Shakespeare’s imaginary sister Judith:

And who was to say if this African woman might have been a great poet, had she but the chance? Might have given form to that hard, harsh life. Might have made each one of her peers a hero, and at last enlightened us about their story – a story as epic as ours? Who knew if one of them burned to do it, without the words, without the schooling?  
That’s where it came from, our shame, our awkwardness. Because, I think, one has always known it. We had the luck, and they did not. (*ibid*)

As indicated earlier, Gee has been famously known to bring up her working-class background and the fact that she was the first person in her family to have a university degree and become a writer. Gee recounts all this information about herself in terms of how she feels blessed to have the luck Virginia is referring to, which is also a point she explores in depth in her Ugandan novels through Mary Tendo. In *VWM* Angela describes how she enjoys this luck as such: “I loved my life: I was in the thick of it. Things I had earned by writing my books. Yes, I’ve earned them, and I enjoy them” (*VWM* 23). Like Gee, Angela in the novel is highly conscious of her position and the comfortable life afforded by her profession as a writer. She could climb the social ladder thanks to writing.

Maggie Gee herself has a double take on this issue. Firstly, she acknowledges having the author’s luck in terms of money and means, but she also emphasizes the feeling of responsibility that comes along with it.<sup>37</sup> For example, in a

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<sup>37</sup> Gee refers to this function at every opportunity. In addition to above mentioned example, one quite recent example is worth remembering here. She referred to the same point in her plenary talk for “Living in the End Times” Conference, (Cappadocia University, February, 2021), which was held online due to Covid restrictions. Emphasizing that during the pandemic that is sweeping the world, new heroes emerged, such as healthcare workers, Gee draws an analogy between them and writers,

podcast interview with Georgia de Chamberet, she refers to how she sees the human culture and its cultural production as part of a continuous tradition and feels blessed to be contributing to it as a writer. She rejoices: “When you look at human culture, at some of that extraordinary ice age art from hundreds of thousands of years ago, then you realise you are just part of this endless tradition, when to live fully, people have to create things, and those things have meaning for others” (Chamberet). As revealed in her strong belief in fiction, in Gee’s view, fiction is “equipment for living” (Kenneth Burke, qtd. in Dix 33). It nurtures, protects and heals, but how can Virginia position herself in relation to all “this”? In the above-mentioned soliloquy about who and what she would write for, if she cannot connect to all *this*, and hence she concludes:

*‘Maybe the past can never write the present’.*

... Yes, I had had my vision. But that was decades, a life, ago. I had my vision in my own century. (VWM 210; emphasis in the original)

Virginia now knows that she cannot simply rewrite that vision; it had its time. Besides, the returned Virginia seems to regard her previous life as a writer as burdensome. When they visit Florence Nightingale Museum in İstanbul, she contemplates about the sense of duty. She draws a similarity between a nurse’s work, and her own writing: “In a way, my writing was also a duty. I had to do it. It harrowed me” (VWM 370), and then she thinks “(Yes, I had to write every day, thousands of words: duty, duty. Maybe, now, I was free at last. *Yet I had loved it more than life itself*” (VWM original format 370). Virginia’s thoughts reveal how she was burdened with the duty as a writer. The pressure she felt to write, to produce and always exceed previous works, as she reminds, cost her life. Gee declares: “I’ve always felt that, although of course it is terrible that she drowned, she would not have wanted us to focus on that. She was overwhelmingly positive about life” (O’Keeffe). Simon Thomas, who has once indicated his dislike of the fact that Virginia does not read or write anything in the novel, inquired Gee herself about it in an interview. Gee replied to Thomas’s inquiry by suggesting that her fictional Virginia is not interested in being written in the present: “That is all part of the idea

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who, through their own healing methods, such as the storytelling, serve the society and help and guide the people overcome the “end times,” as they have always done.

that slowly emerges as the novel goes on – the real Woolf’s work ended when she drowned herself, and that was one of the terrible costs of suicide, being unable any longer to take part in the life of letters [...] It’s better to stay alive” (Thomas). Gee’s fictional Virginia does not write or read in the novel, but Gee further argues, she delivers a message to the contemporary writers. Carrying this message across is the mission she has in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Gee justifies her decision about not to include any scenes where Virginia reads or writes, with such instances showing Virginia as expresses the desire she has to free herself from this duty. In other words, Gee suggested that in her lifetime, Virginia died to write; yet, this time, in her second life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, she is ready to embrace life, by living it to the fullest in İstanbul.

### **5.5 The İstanbul Conference: Uniting the Author, the Reader and the Critic**

Özyurt-Kılıç holds that Gee often makes use of big public scenes, as spaces for confrontation, negotiation and dialogue to end her novels (Int.180). The conference in İstanbul fulfils this function, as it brings together three authors, Angela, Virginia and Gerda, and prepares them to meet students of literature, professors, and petulant critics, whom Gee had likened to “a piranha shoal” (*Self-Conscious* 9) earlier. These big gathering scenes also support construction of circular plots, which are another salient feature of Gee’s novels. In *VWM*, too, the plot reaches a full circle as Angela and Virginia arrive at the İstanbul Conference, an event behind Angela’s visit to the Berg Collection. The narrative beginning with Virginia’s rebirth ends with her (re)death.

As the Manhattan chapter of their lives ends, Angela and Virginia head to İstanbul. Yet before the İstanbul part, a section named “Time Passes” after the chapter in *To the Lighthouse* takes place. Through an omniscient narrator, this section portrays Angela and Virginia flying to İstanbul while Gerda is flying in the opposite direction from London to Manhattan in search of her mother. Gee uses this “bridging section” as she calls it to talk about themes such as transience of life and fame, language and freedom, which were discussed above, in relation to Virginia’s authorship and Angela’s and Gee’s view of it. Through the course of writing the novel, Gee was blocked regarding how to situate and place Virginia apart from New

York. In her essay “In the Footsteps of Virginia Woolf” for *The Guardian* she states: “I didn’t want to rewrite Woolf’s past, nor write about New York on its own. And then I thought: Constantinople. Woolf visited Constantinople as a young woman. Her Orlando changes sex there. Why shouldn’t she revisit the shimmering city? I was due to do a reading at Istanbul University that summer” (Footsteps). İstanbul sprang, as this statement reveals, as the alternative leg of the binary Gee had already formed in her mind in opposition to New York.

Genette defines the paratext as “those liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (*peritext*) and outside it (*epitext*), that mediate the book to the reader: titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, inter titles, notes, epilogues, and afterwords” (*Paratexts* XI). He further distinguishes between paratexts which are *autographic*, by the author, and *allographic*, by someone other than the author, such as an editor or publisher. In *VWM*, the paratexts are mostly *autographic*, and therefore they should be read in the light of Genette’s emphasis on its function:

Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies. (*ibid* 2)

The title, “Virginia Woolf in Manhattan” clarifies the generic status of *VWM*. Virginia Woolf, the English author and Manhattan, the American contexts, have almost oxymoronic connotations as they do not usually appear together. Through this unusual combination, Gee makes it clear, right from the start, her novel will be different from a classical biography. The title is also the place where Gee addresses other “pragmatics,” Genette referred to, as she endeavours to tie herself to American audiences and international authorship. When she considers the possibilities about the future career of Virginia, Angela particularly likes the idea that if Virginia were to write a novel about New York, that would certainly make publishers fight over it (*VWM* 156), and in *VWM*, Gee implements this idea; yet, this novel has failed to receive the critical acclaim Gee hoped for in comparison to other Woolf novels such as Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours*, for instance.

On the dust jacket for the hardcover copy of the Telegram edition of the novel, three author figures are presented against the skyscrapers of Manhattan at the background. At the back cover, there is a sketch of a mosque, placed beneath two blurbs from reviews by Patrick Ness and *Sunday Times*. These two images alone, and their placement, may prompt the reader to question Gee's treatment of Manhattan and İstanbul in this novel. Even if Gee refers to İstanbul as the city "the whole world is in" (VWM 428), she represents it as if all there is to İstanbul is religion, or even religious fundamentalism.

In VWM, Gee addresses the lack of freedom in contemporary Turkey. Lest her distinct voice may get lost amidst Angela's and Virginia's narrative, Gee allocates a separate chapter, section 54, to discuss backward-looking religiosity in the country, as she terms it, through the portrayal of the Turkish cabin crew during the flight to İstanbul. This part is narrated by an authorial narrator, who attempts to portray the entire political history of Turkey by bringing together three staff members, discussing the lack of freedom in Turkey in the limited time they have before landing. The cabin crew, Süleyman, Amara and Maha, are led to discuss freedom and democracy as they watch different nationalities flying on the plane. Among other things, in Gee's portrayal, the choice of names strikes anyone familiar with Turkish culture as haphazard. Only Süleyman could be a frequently encountered Turkish name, yet the other two names, with Kurdish and Arabic origins, might be encountered but they are quite rare, and their representativeness of Turkey, Gee aspires to create, is highly questionable. It is also possible that Gee might be aiming to sketch a multicultural portrait with this selection, but unfortunately, she misses the target. If the character names were picked to be representatives of certain ideologies, the standpoints they were supposed to represent, do not parallel the claims they make. If they were randomly chosen, the randomization appears to be quite haphazard. Perhaps Gee could also be aiming at irony by creating the reverse effect through creating a discontinuity between the character names and their standpoints; however, since her claims are not fully developed in the novel; her remarks cannot go beyond stereotypical representation.

In the section inserted in between, Süleyman starts lecturing two young women stewardesses about the Turkish War of Independence and blames them for

being ignorant about the political atmosphere in the country, which, he thinks, has been reduced to a conflict between Kemalism<sup>38</sup> and Erdoğan fanaticism. For example, when Amara inquires what he has to say regarding the claims Atatürk caused Turkish nation to lose their language<sup>39</sup>, he gets really angry and chides her, saying if it was not for Atatürk, she would get married at the age of eleven. Amara is presented as agreeing with Atatürk's reforms, but finding it hard to connect with a man who has lived almost a century ago, while she is surrounded by the current government's policies and practices in her daily life. Süleyman, on the other hand, as shown through this event, is depicted as an oppressive patriarch. Ironically, while he is supposed to represent liberal ideas of Atatürk, he is portrayed as using them in an oppressive manner to "educate" these young women. Overall Gee's clumsy portrait might have points to agree or dissent with, but a more important question that needs to be emphasised here is why Gee needs to insert this episode into her story of authorship through the figure of Virginia Woolf. She expresses the reason behind it as follows: "Any novel about Virginia Woolf had to be about freedom. Freedom was threatened in Turkey by the backward-looking religiosity of Erdoğan's government, just as it was by the political correctness of self-righteous, right-angled New York. Both cities could do with a playful visit from Virginia" (Footsteps).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Kemalism, named after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, also known as Atatürkism, is the founding ideology of Turkish Republic, and it is used to refer to politics and acts conducted in the manner and ideology of Atatürk.

<sup>39</sup> Here she refers to the Turkish Alphabet Revolution, which Atatürk initiated in 1928. This reform enforced the use of the Latin alphabet in the place of Arabic letters used by Ottomans. It was a part of the pedagogical plan to increase literacy rates and preparing the ground for the following cultural reforms. The historian Bernard Lewis has referred to the introduction of the new alphabet as "not so much practical as pedagogical, as social and cultural – and Mustafa Kemal, in forcing his people to accept it, was slamming a door on the past as well as opening a door to the future". The effects of this reform on Turkish history and culture are still a matter of debate. With this reform it was indicated that Atatürk's vision for Turkey was to compete with the modern West, by adopting its language, yet on the other hand by cutting ties with the languages of the Ottomans, with Arabic and Persian verbs, a language was lost. Today, an ordinary Turkish citizen cannot read or understand Ottoman, it requires special training in the language.

<sup>40</sup> Gee mentions the same motives in another interview, with Simon Thomas, too. She states: I wanted to compare the two cities, as well as everything else – New York so white and straight, Istanbul so sinuous, watery and forgiving, where a man on his own can still make a living selling mussels on a tray. But after I finished the Manhattan section, I got totally stuck, only partly because we moved house (and the removal men lost the bolts that held my desk together!) Two parts is essentially a static form – whereas three is dynamic. In the end I decided to introduce a bridging

Yet, her treatment of political problems and tensions in contemporary Turkey is very simplistic and the fact that they are mentioned merely in passing adds onto it.

Gee's reference to İstanbul as a "shimmering city" makes it a flamboyant setting as opposed to Manhattan. İstanbul, Angela suggests, is "a city without fixity." "Unlike New York, where Woolf never went, it is not a city of right angles and rectitude, a city with a rigid matrix" (VWM 450). For Virginia, "New York is a man, [...] cool, straight, confident. And İstanbul's a middle-aged woman. Watery. Supple. All tides and inlets" (Gee VWM 353). Interestingly, this flexibility Gee refers to cannot really be observed in Gee's portrayal of İstanbul. Gee aims to achieve a holistic view of fiction and the world; and, her characters might have referred to New York and İstanbul respectively as man and woman, in the vein of Woolf's androgyny, as two complementary aspects of existence; yet, while Gee claims to juxtapose New York and İstanbul, New York does not receive the same stereotypical treatment Gee's İstanbul is subjected to. Besides, while in New York capitalism is the subject of critique and it is being supported by relevant episodes about the closing down of bookshops, waning of creativity, Virginia's "getting laid" (Ellman) in İstanbul does not overlap with the lack of freedom Gee identifies Turkey with. As Ellman points out in her review for *The Guardian*, it may indeed unfortunately be a "waste" of the city and its potential.

Yet, there is a significant contribution of the İstanbul setting to Gee's engagement with Woolf's fiction because it enables Gee to enter into a dialogue with *Orlando*. Firstly, through making Virginia revisit the old city, Gee makes it clear that she performs a generic and thematic rewriting of Woolf's *Orlando*. İstanbul is one of the settings in Woolf's novel. David Roessel believes that Woolf's choice of İstanbul as the city where Orlando changes sex is not random since, he believes, the city symbolises three main life drives: Sapphic love, war and death in Woolf's life (389). Gee transfers these connotations to her own work by rewriting

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section, in which Virginia and Angela fly from New York to İstanbul, and I modelled it on 'Time Passes', the bridging section in *To the Lighthouse*. Also I went back to Turkey, a country I love, where I have friends, and know a little about Turkish students; and their own love of Woolf, and the way they value the intellectual freedom they are losing under Erdogan, inspired me to go on. Plus, it would have been such a defeat. I am so happy the book is out and in the world.

<https://shinynewbooks.co.uk/maggie-gee-on-bringing-virginia-woolf-to-21st-century-manhattan>

the hypotext, *Orlando*. Besides, Virginia is in many ways a modern Orlando as Gee makes “her Virginia” declare it. She remembers her first time in İstanbul, Orlando’s city, as follows:

1910. Over a century ago. The message came, and I had to go. Vanessa was miscarrying in Bursa, a boat trip away from Constantinople. It was me she asked for. Roger wrote to me. And then I showed them what I was made of. I travelled alone, I travelled hard, I refused to fear heat, or snakes, or strangers, I went by boat and bus and horseback and crossed Europe in less than four days. I found her lying in a darkened room. I became a man, off to save a woman. (VWM 273)

At another instance Virginia testifies: “Later I used that trip in *Orlando*. I was *Orlando*. A man-woman” (VWM 305). Orlando can travel across centuries, so can Gee’s Virginia. Virginia awakens her from her 70 years of sleep in Manhattan. While Orlando experiences sex change, Virginia experiences sex itself in İstanbul, “a place of transformation; a place where anything could happen” (VWM 454).

Orlando’s adventurous spirit is adopted by Gee; furthermore, as a part of the autofictional aspect of the novel, the İstanbul episode is based on Gee’s own experience in the city. As mentioned earlier, she had the idea to take Virginia to İstanbul, after her own visit to the city. Therefore, Gee builds on her own experiences of the city and probably information she has gathered from some of the people she met interim. Gee delivered a keynote speech at the 1<sup>st</sup> International Akşit Göktürk Conference, titled “Visions of the Future Now and Then” held at İstanbul University in 2010. The İstanbul conference in the novel is in many ways a re-enactment of that experience, as further suggested by Gee’s dedicating the novel to her friends in İstanbul and Mine Özyurt-Kılıç, in particular. Moreover, the names of the professors in the conference room are highly allusive, too. Her own conference experience might have been different from the one in the novel, yet Gee’s naming the professor who is the head of the department at İstanbul University, Melike, cannot be explained by chance alone given that the actual head at the time was Prof. Dr. Melikoğlu.

In Gee’s playful visit to the city, Virginia is first taken by the timelessness of the city. In words highly allusive to the timelessness of art in *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia conveys her view of the glimmering city:

‘It’s very strange the way time passes,’ says Virginia as they climb out of their taxi. ‘And everything but us remains. We came by sea, before, in the very early morning, we came up on deck to see the dawn, and it burned on the golden domes and windows. My sister has gone. All of us have gone. But those airy domes are still standing, as if the past had waited for me!’ (VWM 289)

In opposition to Manhattan, a symbol of fast change, İstanbul emerges as a symbol of endurance, similar to an artwork. It is also presented as a space that allows boundary breaking in a manner similar to Bakhtinian carnival. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin describes the carnivalesque as such:

[i]n fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators ... Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. (7)

Carnival is also an alternative space where through the performative act, people are reborn in a sense, as a result of the temporary dissolution of hierarchies. Through masking, self is transgressed. The dominant mood of the carnival is festivity. Virginia is depicted as being fearless in Manhattan, too; she could adapt to circumstances easily, but in İstanbul, she is portrayed as more vivacious and genial as she is in “Orlando’s city [which] is all being and becoming, not one where categories fix us in the past” (VWM 454). While in Manhattan one clicks, thinks, navigates through the maze, in İstanbul, Gee implies, one just lives and experiences.

With the grotesque body, Bakhtin breaches the boundaries between the sacred and the profane, the physical and the spiritual, body and art. The grotesque body of the carnival is the one that can transgress its own limits, and in İstanbul, Virginia’s body contravenes all the boundaries she was trapped in while in Manhattan. Back there, however unwillingly it may be, she mostly submits to Angela’s patronization of her body and mind, yet, in İstanbul Virginia can set herself free. Bakhtin sees the body “in immediate proximity to birth or death, to infancy or old age, to the womb or the grave, to the bosom that gives life or swallows it up” (*Rabelais* 26). Therefore, when Virginia’s body is portrayed as a grotesque image in terms of its boundary breaking, it “outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits” (*Rabelais* 26) through the sexual act, and thus emerges as “a

phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming” that Bakhtin aligns with the grotesque body of the carnival (*Rabelais* 24). She becomes the androgynous Orlando who was a man and a woman, who “knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each” (*Orlando* 77) as she explores and transgresses the boundaries of her body and mind. Yet, this festive mood only serves to underline Virginia’s sexual intercourse with the first man she encounters. Therefore, festivity and Gee’s allusions to Bakhtinian carnival and boundary crossing cannot achieve the effect they were designed for. If Virginia has to have sexual intercourse, the question of why İstanbul, rather than Manhattan, “a city of freedom,” discloses a stereotypical attitude to İstanbul, which is portrayed through the sensual and the sexual, in a manner, unfortunately, not much different from orientalist fantasises of the *harem*.

Although it takes place at the end of the novel, the İstanbul Conference is at the heart of the novel. In their Manhattan exchanges, the conference always resonates at the background with Angela, mostly trying to avoid the subject since she is naturally too preoccupied with the question: How can she possibly take Virginia to her own conference? In her e-mail correspondence with her daughter Gerda, Angela writes about Virginia’s sudden appearance as if it is an everyday event. What really bothers her is the more important and urgent question of how to take Virginia to her own conference. After presenting a summary and relating to Gerda what has happened, Angela confides in her daughter:

I don’t know what I will do with her when I have to go and speak at the conference ...

and in fact I am one of the plenary speakers. By irony, the conference is all about her - ‘Virginia Woolf in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Cross-cultural and Transformational Approaches.’ I can hardly take her to her own conference!

(why not? Wouldn’t it be helpful to have the actual writer telling all the academics and people like my mother where they are going wrong? Surely it would be good for them). (*VWM* 145; original format)

Through exposing Angela’s fears about confronting the real author, which she confesses to her daughter, Gee portrays her critique of the theories that disregard the author. The words in parentheses belong to Gerda, and they can be easily distinguished from Angela’s statements, both by their theoretical naivete and

suggestively, by their similarity to Virginia's view. With her lack of academic training, Gerda speaks from a vantage point similar to where Virginia stands.

Before their flight to İstanbul, Virginia literally nags Angela with her question "What will happen at my conference?" (*VWM* 220), which Angela tries hard to avoid since she has no idea about how to answer. She unsuccessfully attempts to abort the discussion but Virginia is insistent. "'You'll see,' I said, turning my gaze away from the eagerness in her great orbs. (I had forebodings. What would she make of Bakhtin? Derrida?) 'Perhaps you shouldn't call it 'my conference', Virginia" (*VWM* 221). Through Virginia's failure to understand why she couldn't possibly go to her own conference, Gee satirizes the theories that deny the agency of the author. Virginia, who has learned that "the past cannot write the present," now has to learn new concepts such as "the intentional fallacy" and "the death of the author". While Angela is stressed about her paper for her plenary speech for the Virginia Woolf conference, Virginia, wittily suggests she can help with it, since she is a specialist on it. Contrary to her expectations, this does not ease Angela; in fact, it makes her feel even more stressed out. "Don't say you're a specialist" (*VWM* 317), to which Virginia responds she needs to learn about modern academics. Then, seeing she has no other chance, Angela tries to explain to her why she feels distressed about Virginia's suggestion of help:

'I know this will sound strange to you, but they won't believe what you say about your work.'

'Because – because I am dead?' It was obvious. 'Because they won't believe it's me?'

'No, nothing as simple as that, Virginia.' (*VWM* 317).

Angela wholeheartedly wishes it was as simple as that. Yet, she has to "educate" Virginia about modern critical theories which dismiss the author, while Virginia stands there as an author, not just back from the grave, but also as an author figure, who had the authority, which is now denied to the contemporary author.

'It's because – some modern scholars think authors don't know anything about their work,' she panted, over her shoulder.

'That doesn't make sense. We are the ones who wrote it.'

'It's not about sense. Or sensible. Sense is considered to be old hat. Rather a dull, Anglo-Saxon idea. This is a concept. A critical concept,' she said. 'You can't expect to understand it, Virginia, so don't dismiss it before you do.'

'It's obviously ridiculous.' (*VWM* 317-8)

This dialogue continues with more exchanges between them where Angela tries to explain “The Death of the Author” to Virginia:

‘You see? I knew you would sneer at it. It’s “The Death of the Author”. It’s – well, it’s French.’

‘But I’m the living embodiment of that. I am a dead author,’ I said, and started laughing again, because, really, it was quite funny.

‘You don’t know everything about your work. It’s the intentional fallacy,’ she said. ‘That is a critical concept, too.’

‘You mean we don’t know what we’re doing?’

She nodded. ‘It’s not what I believe,’ she added. ‘I just ought to warn you.’

‘Our conscious intentions do not count? I see the influence of Dr Freud.’

‘Then how can critics know their own intentions? Maybe, unconsciously, they want to kill us. Yes, of course. Then they have the power.’ (VWM 318).

Virginia starts to grasp the gist of it, as she correctly links the theories on authorship with the theories of subjectivity as in the example of Freud. She also alludes to ongoing discussions regarding the claims to authority between the author and the critic. The rhetorical inquiry she makes into the question of if the text cannot bear the intentions of the author, whose intentions might it convey is presented as self-evident in the novel. Here, Virginia’s words resonate with E.D Hirsh’s. He saw the banishment of the author as “the rule of the critic,” and argued that “what had not been noticed in the earliest enthusiasm for going back to ‘what the text says’ was that the text had to represent somebody’s meaning- if not the author’s, then the critic’s” (*Validity in Interpretation* 110).

As Virginia prepares to grant the victory to the critic, by suggesting the critics try to kill the author, Angela replies in a cautionary tone: ““No, Virginia. That’s just – glib. I hope you won’t say that at the conference.”” (VWM 318). However, Angela realizes she has to see things for what they are and stand for what she believes in, rather than trying to fit in. For the readers of Gee’s previous novels, like *The Flood*, Angela’s dislike of critics, especially Moira, is well-known. In *VWM*, it is foreshadowed when Angela announces that she herself does not believe in the death of the author. This is obviously not a surprise given that she is an author herself, but her position as an author who has a Ph.D. and happens to be a critic complicates her authorial identity and how she performs it.

On the morning of the conference, as they arrive at the university, Angela feels extremely nervous. She ponders: “I was not an academic, but I took enough pride in having had an academic training (first generation in my family, so it mattered) to want to make a good impression. Academics didn’t always like novelists. Especially conference-going hybrids like me” (VWM 443). Here, Angela is mouthing Gee, who has the exact training Angela mentions, and who always referred to the fact that she was the first person in her family to receive this academic training. Moreover, Gee is also known to attend conferences on her own work; therefore, Angela’s and Virginia’s presence at the conference mirrors Gee’s own position as “a conference going hybrid”.<sup>41</sup> At first, the conference flows peacefully as Angela delivers her plenary. She cites from usual sources, makes the useful references to usual big names, until she realizes that she is losing grip on her audience, especially the younger generation of students. At that instance, she decides to “strip out the theory, talk from the heart” (VWM 446), and tears apart the speech she has prepared. Her improvised talk proceeds smoothly. As Angela continues to talk about the idea of a room of one’s own, she manages to captivate the students. A woman from the crowd, who says she has not read that work due to the expensive prices of English books, raises her hand to ask Angela if she could possibly read an exemplifying passage from *A Room of One’s Own*.<sup>42</sup> Angela cannot do it since she tore her theoretically adorned speech, where she had all the quotations. For this reason, she asks the staff of Istanbul University whether they have a copy, but they fail to produce one. Just as Angela thinks her plenary is about to end

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<sup>41</sup> About the conferences, Gee said to Simon Thomas: “Oh, and literary conferences: I enjoy them, except for the more linguistically impenetrable theory. I cannot help finding a lot of modern literary theory comic.” This view is evidenced in the comic treatment Moira is subjected to.

<sup>42</sup> Gee’s stereotypical representations of Turkey continue here, too. While the devaluation of Turkish Lira definitely obstructs access to English books, this hardly applies to Virginia Woolf’s books, especially, when Gee wrote the novel. In the first place, all of her works have been translated to Turkish, so it is possible to read them in Turkish, too. Besides, they are widely available in university libraries and all over the Internet. Secondly, *A Room of One’s Own* is a text to be found in almost every English Department syllabus; so, it is impossible to imagine anyone in the field not being familiar with it. However, in the novel, the only person who has the book with her and to have thoroughly read it, is Gerda. While there are surely certain plot-related reasons for this symbolic gesture, which are recounted above, the overall treatment of the students and the audience at the conference is far from the uniting vision Gee seems to promote.

catastrophically, a figure with red hair, emerges from the crowd. As it happens, the figure who has access to Woolf's legacy, who can possess and rewrite it, Gerda, has the book with her. Reading Woolf's oft-quoted passages about Shakespeare's sister, she manages to capture the audience in a manner Angela previously has failed to do. Gerda's taking over the stage signals Angela's time is ending, too. Perhaps she has had her vision, as well. Angela is happily puzzled to discover how, through her Gerda, Woolf is redeemed, and seeing them sitting together, whispering to each other, helps her position herself in relation to them.

Virginia is physically present in the room, but of course only Angela and Gerda know it. Nonetheless, the harmonious atmosphere this community experiences, owes it to Woolf's writings. As the room starts to feel lively again with contributions from students, Angela wonders "Did it matter that we had strayed from the text?" (VWM 461) that she tore to pieces. Apparently, it does not matter; the author and the reader can maintain a peaceful co-existence; the room is filled with joy; yet, this only lasts until the intervention of the critic.

Moira Penny, who held the position of Reader at a university in *The Flood*, has now attained Professorship, and she is fully armed to rage a war on Angela. After her talk, she is the first one to confront Angela as depicted below. Angela's thoughts are differentiated from Moira's speech, which Angela comments on, through the use of italics:

'Professor Moira Penny,' she rasped. (*She had attained professorship. At what cost? For God's sake, at what institution?*) 'Thank you for your ... series of remarks,' she began. She made it sound like 'silly remarks'. 'You spoke about Virginia Woolf almost as if you knew her.' (*Well I do know, her, I thought, as it happens.*) 'This is a very *subjective* approach. (VWM 461-2; emphasis in the original)

She continues to blame Angela for lack of attention to the theory, arguing that she did not cite a single source, and Moira is particularly distressed by her lack of attention to her theoretical work on Woolf. She asks Angela how she could think it is possible to deliver a speech without referring to her *Liminalities and a Reading of One's Own: Confusions and Elucidations on the Threshold of Woolf's Room* (VWM 462), which makes Virginia wonder "[w]hy would one write about "*Confusions*"?" (VWM 464; emphasis in the original). Along with Virginia, the authorial narrator,

too, satirizes this work and the theoretical background it stands for. The mocking tone is most assertively felt in the representation of Moira's carrying the book with her and taking it out of a plastic shopping bag, which suggests that her book is artificial, just like the bag it is placed in. The narrator's satirical attitude aims at the critique of the deconstructive methods that highlight "liminality," "threshold" and "confusion". In contrast, in Angela's view, Woolf's fiction is about uniting and embracing. This is in keeping with Gee's aim to maintain a reconstructive approach to literature which "no longer seeks to expose and deconstruct fiction's underlying premises. Instead, it reconstructs fiction as precarious communication and focuses on the ways in which we draw on fictions to make sense of ourselves, our past, our present and our future" (Huber 221).

Angela refers to *A Room of One's Own* as one of these works in terms of its bringing out new parts of ourselves, helping us understand who we are, and the uniting vision it promotes: "it links us, the lucky ones – me, your teachers, each one of you students, everyone in this room today – to all those less lucky human beings of the past; our mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers; those women whose chances, and hopes, are over". Angela believes that by imagining them in her fiction Woolf makes them eternal, "lets them live again" (VWM 455) as her works continue to be read across the centuries. Through redeeming Woolf in her fiction, Gee makes sure they will live again.

The critic, however, embodied by Moira, is presented as someone who fails to comprehend it due to being brainwashed in the language of theory. The critic, Gee suggests, is so distanced from the creative impulse that she can only produce second-hand discourse. Gee acknowledges that Angela and Moira are caricature parts of her, but Moira is definitely a far more exaggerated caricature simply because she is not the author, whereas Angela is. Moira is portrayed as being hysterical in *The Flood* and the same prejudice towards the critic continues in VWM. For example, Moira has a frenzy over Angela's excluding her critical position by directly confronting her. Even before reading the whole extract, Moira's attacks on the author may strike the reader since they appear in these sentences inscribed in capital letters:

'I - I don't know how to answer you,' I said. 'Perhaps I spoke as a writer, not as a critic.'

‘WHAT DOES THAT MEAN??’ she screamed at me. She was hanging on to the mike for dear life. Professor Melike was standing beside her, trying to wrestle it away. Moira mimicked me in a monkey squeal. “I speak as a writer, not a critic.” WHY DO YOU THINK WRITERS ARE BETTER THAN CRITICS? Why do you think you’re better than me?’ (VWM 463; original format)

Moira is unsettled by Angela’s simple answer “I speak as a writer”. Angela’s answer to Moira may not necessarily be taken as a negative one perhaps, but given the fact that Moira is depicted from Angela’s point of view, the words the narrator uses to portray her such as “monkey squeal,” indicate otherwise. The author finds the critic nothing but a parasite, and in Moira’s case, an unbearable intruder. She speaks from a post-structural perspective, which “by positing language or discourse as both preceding and exceeding the subject, deposed the author from his or her central place as the source of meaning” (Anderson 6). This position is not welcomed in VWM.

The dispute between Angela and Moira is interrupted by Virginia’s intervention as “the Author”. Even if the audience does not recognize her as the Author Virginia Woolf, her words resonate with them, and certainly with the real reader of Gee’s novel, who possesses the information the audience at the conference room is unaware of:

‘Mrs Woolf,’ she said, in her extraordinary voice, low, murmurous, amused. The room, already turbulent, rippled again, a kaleidoscope quake like the start of a migraine. ‘Make what you like of *that*. I am happy to be a distant relation. Two things. First, I like the lecture. And, of course – I liked the quotation.’ A short laugh at her own wit, which was rather lost on the audience. ‘Secondly, though, there should be no difference between a writer and a critic. I am a writer and a critic. Virginia Woolf was a writer and a critic. Criticism in my day, her day, was no different to good writing. It wasn’t hard to understand. (VWM 463-4; emphasis in the original)

Through alluding to fiction writing on her own day, Virginia hopes to regain the pre-theoretical bliss by restoring the communicative function back to the language. This could only be possible by welcoming back the author.

Virginia in the novel speaks from a view of authorship as practised in her day. Yet, it should be noted that the modernist author, Virginia Woolf, was not fully compliant with how Gee presents her in the novel. The attempt to humanize Virginia, presenting her as an unhailed socialist writing for anyone and everyone in

her fiction, as opposed to the Bloomsbury elitism Woolf's name is associated with, is part of Gee's agenda. Through Virginia, Gee advocates her own view of authorship, a vision which is more akin to the Romantic view of the author as the genius, as a "specially gifted person able to produce from the depths of personal experience an organically unified work of art" (Rose 132). Gerda's intrusion as a fresh voice, wrapping up the discussion and the story although she is neither a critic nor an author, is fully congruous with the model of the authorship foregrounded by Gee. When Gerda appears all of a sudden in the conference hall, Angela is relieved not only due to maternal bliss she feels after uniting with her daughter; she unites with the future author, as well.

Gerda joins the discussion, and it is her remarks, not Virginia's or Angela's, that conclude the discussion. Admitting that since she is only a teenager and obviously not a professor of literature, Gerda boldly asserts: "But surely writers came first. If there weren't writers, there wouldn't be critics, 'cos they wouldn't have anything to write about" (VWM 464). With her naiveté, she now replaces Angela as the mouthpiece for Gee. Gerda's remarks echo the younger Gee, who had earlier said "critics *write about*, a superficially sensible procedure, creative writers merely *write*" (Gee *Self-Conscious* 52; emphasis in the original). The novel attests that this belief still resonates with Gee as shown through the satirical treatment both of Moira and the faculty at the university, who are referred to as "sunken faces" that look terribly old (VWM 44) whereas the author figures, Virginia, Angela and Gerda, are depicted as buoyant and livelier.

Angela finally feels a bit relieved when a student asks how others could possibly write like Virginia, hinting at the frequently raised claim that Virginia was privileged. Angela finds a challenge here, which inspires her to channel the discussion to another direction as she posits the crucial question to the students: "Do you write?" (VWM 465). She inquires how many of the students write or wish to write. As hands go up one by one, not only students but ordinary people from the crowd, or research assistants and professors also join the flow:

There was a ripple, a slow stirring breeze that came from somewhere closer to the stage. Was it the windows that had been opened? No, the front rows were pushing up shoots, the lecturers, the research assistants, who toiled in libraries, who sweated over footnotes, who laboured with passives, 'It is

sometimes asserted ...', 'It is believed ...', their hands were moving, their fingers uncurling, loosing their tension, opening up like flowers, they were smiling at me, a little shyly, maybe, but they were alive, their eyes were shining- (*ibid*)

The hands going up one after another suggests that each of the faculty and students filling the hall desire to write, suggesting, as in the case of the academics Roland and Maud in Byatt's *Possession*, the inhabitants of the room long to break away with the language of theory and connect with the creative faculty. As they yield to the power of imagination and break away from the embellished discourse of theory, the scene changes from a suffocating one to a fresher, peaceful one. Angela portrays the scene of writerly ecstasy as follows:

I was staring out at a room that was a forest. Sun poured in through the windows on the right, the filmy white curtains blew like a water, the living things were unfolding in their seats, they were stretching and moving, free at last, there were small cries and laughter and delight as they looked around them and saw what was happening, the hall around them swam and shifted, they turned in their seats and found each other, some were embracing, two were kissing, then another two, the students were rising to their feet, girls at the front of their section were dancing, oh girls with garlands in their hair, those circlets, sun-lets of red and white buds I'd seen on sale in the Hippodrome- (*VWM* 466)

This is all made possible by embracing the author. It is a vision in which even Moira is changed. Angela depicts her as such: "Now Moira Penny was on the move, like a fluttering bat in her blue-black garments, but she was making, aslant, for the window, she knelt in the wall of the white sunlight, she raised both her arms to the wash of heat, she laid down her pain, she was young again" (*VWM* 466-7). The young Moira, as readers of Gee's *Dying* will remember, was an author, whose death was the subject of that novel. Moira's return in *The Flood* as a critic, thus, might also be interpreted in this respect. The critical discourse kills the creative one since it denies agency, as suggested by Moira's "dying, in other words". Therefore, in *VWM*, when she becomes young again, she returns to her author-self.

Gee also states that while the belief in the power of art and the distinguished position of the artist as the creator subsisted all through history, the contemporary self-conscious artist can be differentiated from his/her ancestors by what she calls "over-education". Now, Gee advocates, artists are "forced to respond to an immense

barrage of stimulus and information” (*Self-Conscious* 123), flooding from all kinds of sources. Especially, novelist-critics, as in the case of Byatt, Lodge and Gee, employ in their novels “colourful ‘humanizations’ of theory [...] in defiance of the efforts of structuralism and poststructuralism to erase every trace of human subjectivity from discourse” (Greaney 158). In *Possession*, Roland could enter the realm of the creative only after he succeeds in transcending his theoretical formation and learning to read the text as self-sufficient. His welcoming of the humanist model foregrounds the author over the critic. Gee, too, often remarks how blessed she feels to have chosen the path of authorship rather than opting to be a critic. Looking back on her first job as a receptionist and trying to make ends meet, Gee recounts how she made a life-changing decision:

So I sat there and wrote and I worked as a hotel receptionist and this was a so much better way of writing novels than academic life, because I wasn’t trying to use the same part of my brain twice. I did stop writing when I did my Ph.D. because I just couldn’t do both at once. It was too hard. It’s the hardest work anyone does in their life. I still think theses are too long. They could be done in twenty thousand words; they’re very rarely going to be published. It’s just a way of making people suffer. So the reason why I left academic life was the desire not to suffer or be inauthentic. I just had this sense that I had to get onto my own path and onto what I really wanted. (McKay 218)

Her mouthpiece, Angela realizes that once this bond with the creative self is established, once every reader becomes a writer, albeit in a different sense from Barthes’s sense of the *writerly*, she is not needed in the room. While Barthes uses the term *writerly* to refer to the text which invites the reader to produce their own meanings and thus rewritten with each reading, Angela’s writer is the person who takes pen and ink, or a laptop in this case, and actually writes. Angela’s duty comes to an end as the “room” merges reading and writing, author and reader, and unites everyone in the act of writing. “They no longer needed me- did they? Were they still waiting for an answer, or had they found it in each other? What had I got to say to them? I had asked the question – who wanted to write? – and the seed was stirring in everyone – but what came next? What could I tell them?” (*VWM* 467). It is not Angela’s place and duty to deliver the final notes, anyway. She realizes that Virginia is going back, she feels her time is over and she begs her to speak her mind before she disappears. As students, professors, critics and authors join one another “in a

joyous place where everything was known” (VWM 467), unlike the poststructuralist critics’ room, where nothing could be known, she cries, “It’s her! Yes! Virginia Woolf! Virginia Woolf in the house!” filtrate the room (VWM 467-8). At that instance, Virginia is going pale, she can hardly speak, but delivers her last words nevertheless:

‘You are my readers. Thank you, friends. Some of you, readers who would be writers. You are the minds I spoke about, the writers of a hundred years later. What do I have to say to you?’

‘The young woman questioner thought I was lucky. And I admit I had great good fortune. Who is to say what I would have written without my father, without Leonard, without servants? What would I have written without money? Five hundred pounds and a room of my own?’ (VWM 468)

In *A Room of One’s Own*, real Virginia Woolf addresses these issues by pointing to the pressure of the material conditions a writer lives with. When the spider’s web we call fiction is pulled, Woolf suggests, “one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in” (43). Woolf “draft[s] a model of literature as grounded in the ‘real world’, that is, in the realms of historical, political and social experience” (Goldman 99), and Gee transfers and reproduces these connotations of Woolf’s background to VWM. Throughout the novel, the impact of the material conditions on creativity is foregrounded by setting Virginia’s middle-class upbringing and Angela’s working-class background against each other. At the end of the novel, Virginia is compromising, as she admits that she had good fortune, she had money, and goes on to express that is exactly why she thinks it is necessary for a woman to have a room of her own and enough money if she is to write fiction. By acknowledging how her financial stability granted her the freedom to write, she underlines the significance of attaining it and the freedom to write that comes with it. Virginia concludes:

‘But I tell you this: I would have written. Somehow I would have found my voice. I would have found a way to be heard, published.’

...

‘And so must you. And so will you.’ (VWM 469)

This advice on writing and finding one’s own voice is followed by the description of the room in which the author needs to write. Virginia’s vision lays bare that the

room might not only be a physical space, it also signifies the community and the freedom to write. As long as the desire to write persists, the room will continue to be sunlit. Virginia then states “There is only one kind of luck for writers. There is the room. The sunlit room” (VWM 469). The “real luck,” a writer has, is being gifted with this potential. Virginia ends her message by indicating that her time as a “visitor” is about to end: “I ached to write ... But for me, that’s over” (*ibid*).

Virginia had similar thoughts once before when she visited the Statue of Liberty. However, while in Manhattan, she finds the contemporary world exhausted, in İstanbul, she is fulfilled. She can leave this world feeling proud and joyous since she has created this community by bringing them together and instilled the wish to write in them. As Virginia utters her last words “Write [...] ‘Your turn now ... I shall write no more’” she dies into the abyss. This end where the author is transformed into another dimension as another being is symbolically different from death. Virginia disappears, but she continues to shine in the room filled with writers. In the final chapter, Gee imagines the possible lives people might have in other worlds. As she imagines herself on another plane with Gerda and Virginia, she fantasizes that Virginia finally meets with Leonard, and all her friends are there, too. She reminisces “There were many worlds, many universes. Maybe we never die entirely... We live in others. We live in words” (VWM 472). Virginia Woolf, the author, returns through Gee. Besides, as suggested by the novel’s positioning Gerda as the future author, the line of writing will continue.

In “Freedom and the City: Contemporary British Fiction and the Cultural Politics of Disenfranchisement” (2011), Alexander Iain Beaumont holds that throughout Gee’s writing, “preoccupation with the potential embodied by children and young people, the world they may (or may not) inherit, and the politically onerous position of their parents, who have a responsibility to both, can be observed” (198). While in some novels, Gee approaches this matter from an eco-critical perspective, in *VWM*, she focuses on the world of letters, a future author like Gerda, whom Gee admits to be partly based on her own daughter Rosa Rankin Gee, who is also a novelist, is to inherit.

Maggie Gee expressed complicated feelings regarding her daughter’s choice to be a writer. In the interview with Alice O’Keeffe, she calls novel writing “a

ghastly profession” and adds that “only a foolish parent would totally encourage it”. She had voiced her reservations about her daughter’s choice to be a writer. In the interview she conducts with Anita and Kiran Desai, a novelist mother and daughter, like Maggie Gee and her daughter Rosa, Gee shares how she found it difficult, but compulsive to balance between being encouraging and honest about writing as a profession (*Conversation* 32). Rankin-Gee herself admits she grew up with “a realistic view of what it is to be a writer” (Baker). Gee also suggests that her judgement of Rosa’s work as completely different from her own had a great impact in her granting her support to Rosa. She states that if their writing were similar in any way, she would find it hard to be supportive. As of 2021, Gee is fully supportive of her career as an author as exhibited on Maggie Gee’s social media accounts. Gee often tweeted advertising posts herself and retweeted other posts about the publication of Rosa’s novel *Dreamland*, and hence definitely tried to create publicity for Rosa. On 15<sup>th</sup> April 2021, she proudly tweeted about the publication of Rosa’s second novel *Dreamland*, and reposted some of the good reviews it received. She ends her tweet with the note “Nothing more scary for a novelist than having beloved daughter choosing same risky job” and she pinned this tweet on her feed. Maggie Gee’s Twitter bio as of 16 April 2021 reads: “Writer of books. For now the proudest mother of Rosa Rankin-Gee, @rosarankinee, publishing *Dreamland* this week, ‘liquid grace & glinting sparkle’, Observer. (Original wording and format).

Finally, regarding her daughter, Gee states “[t]here is also, maybe, a sense in which, though different, we are part of one another. Perhaps if she does become a writer I will feel freer to die one day, because the genetic line of writing will go on” (Özyurt-Kılıç, Int. 172). This statement throws light on why Virginia can die into amiss at the end of the novel. Like Gee finding solace in her daughter’s presence as a writer, in *VWM*, Virginia may find peace as an author, who had her vision, once she is reassured that the line of writing will continue through Angela, who in turn will pass it to Gerda.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

*Ars Longa, Vita Brevis*

This study has explored the return of the author in post-postmodernist author fictions of A.S Byatt, David Lodge and Maggie Gee. Written from a reconstructive perspective, Byatt's *Possession*, Lodge's *Author, Author* and Gee's *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* address both the old questions of "the death of the author," "intentional fallacy," "anxiety of influence" and more contemporary issues such as the death of theory and the return of the author. Byatt, Lodge and Gee were brought together in this study due to their common interest in the return of the author, and also because of the background they share in terms of their academic training. All three authors either have Ph.D. degrees in English Literature or engaged in scholarly pursuits, and they are all highly conscious of literary theories. In their author fictions they self-reflexively address these issues by juxtaposing author figures with critics. While Lodge can be said to have a more compromising approach, especially Byatt and Gee, more overtly and pertinaciously establish the creative author as the sole authority over her text while challenging the critic. In all three authors, their stance against the critic also entails a self-reflexive commentary about their own positions as novelist-critics.

Through antithetical representations of pre- and post-theory temporal planes in their author fictions, where past and present forms and practices of authorship are juxtaposed, Byatt, Lodge and Gee also aim to bridge the poststructuralist rupture they perceive between theory and the novel, the critic and the author. In spite of their individual differences and approaches to author fiction as analysed in this study,

these authors aim to resurrect a form of authorship that was practised by earlier authors, in whose persona the creative writer and the critic coexisted. As the analysis of their novels has shown, all three authors end their novels by foregrounding this vision. With a reconstructive agenda, through which the author regains his/her authority, fiction's potential for cultivating empathy and understanding, in spite of the modern despair caused by the death of the subject, is celebrated.

In her *Literature After Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies*, Huber regards the development of reconstructive fiction from the 1990s onwards, marked by the efforts of a new generation of authors to give meaning, to learn and to connect, as a *Bildungsroman* in itself (215). By tracing the development of reconstructive fiction, through the *bildung* motif, she emphasizes how the reconstructive writers educated themselves in new idioms such as post-postmodern sincerity as opposed to postmodern irony, and author fictions might be read as one of the most suitable examples of this change of attitude, through which the *bildung* of the contemporary author, which Huber refers to, might be observed and analysed. Byatt, Lodge and Gee both contribute to the development of the author and the authorial identity, and in their author fictions, these novelists also self-reflexively use the *bildung* narratives to depict the transformation of their heroes and heroines. Especially Maud and Roland in *Possession* and Angela Lamb in *VWM* are portrayed in the process of "becoming". As academics and/or products of the postmodernist capitalist society, they can connect with the creative force and embrace the author fully, only after they are educated through unlearning the language of theory. Within this context, this study puts a particular emphasis on both aspects of the *bildung*. By bringing together exemplary works, starting with *Possession*, which was published in 1990, written decades apart, as significant cornerstones across the journey of author fiction in the aftermath of the postmodern, it aims to trace the "life" of author fiction. In contrast to some readings of *Possession* as a postmodernist novel, in this study, a post-postmodernist reading is offered, and *Possession* is regarded as a pioneering example of author fiction that engages with the dissolution of the postmodern and carries out an overt critique of theory.

Byatt's construction of her authorial identity in *Possession*, by writing a story of the discovery of the passionate love relation between the two Victorian poets,

Christabel LaMotte and Randolph Henry Ash, by two twentieth-century scholars, Roland Mitchell and Maud Bailey, was analysed in Chapter 3. In her novel, Byatt depicts her view of poststructuralism's ignorance of the author's agency through juxtaposing the nineteenth-century world of poetry with the twentieth-century world of theory. The Victorian world is resurrected through Roland, who defines himself as an old-fashioned textual scholar, and his chivalric quest, as his name suggests, takes Roland to his trophy to be, Maud Bailey, a feminist scholar specializing on the work of LaMotte. Their quest teaches them, and, in turn, to the audience, significant lessons about the rupture created by poststructuralism. Confrontation with the Victorian world awakens the modern critics to their own condition as "possessed" by the theoretical lens, which prevents them from connecting to the essence of things. Maud regrets, for instance, how her generation "has learned to see sex everywhere" (266), as a result of being "children of a time and culture which mistrusted love, 'in love,' romantic love, romance in toto, and which nevertheless in revenge proliferated sexual language, linguistic sexuality, analysis, dissection, deconstruction, exposure" (458). By embracing the creative faculty, Maud and Roland can resolve their anxieties, just like Byatt, who quit the academia to write novels, had done. As this chapter has shown, through the story of Roland and Maud, Byatt resolves her own ambivalence as a novelist-critic in a text that marks the end of postmodernism, with its departure from deconstruction for reconstructive forms of authorship and storytelling.

In Chapter 4, David Lodge's *Author, Author* was analysed. Lodge's *Author, Author* dwells on Henry James's middle years. Using an authorial narrator who implements the point of view in a Jamesian manner, Lodge rewrites not only Henry James's life, but also appropriates his narrative tools, too. This approach allows Lodge to negotiate initially his own anxiety of influence over Henry James, as well as other "anxieties" of authorship regarding the author's status and reception. In *Author, Author*, Lodge reconfigures authorial power through juxtaposing Henry James's public and private lives in his representation of James as struggling to establish a secure place within the literary world. Like Byatt, Lodge, too, writes his own story of authorship through author fiction. By portraying difficulties Henry James went through, his experiences of rejection and failure, Lodge presents

authorship not only as limited to the text, but also as being formed and defined within the material conditions that surround the production and circulation of literary texts.

Lodge's revisitation of Henry James was a peculiar case since Lodge had the misfortune of writing a biographical novel about Henry James at a time when there emerged three other novels on Henry James within the same year, which came to be known as "the year of Henry James". The startling increase in the number of biographical novels in general, and author fictions in particular, produced around that time indicates that more and more authors were revisiting historical authors. By resurrecting authors from the past in their author fictions, contemporary authors sought answers to their own questions and anxieties. Hence, while the author was postmodernism's stock character, as Fokkema claimed (49), in post-postmodernism, the author becomes a dynamic character and the protagonist of his/her own story, actively writing his/her own story of authorship.

In Chapter 5, Maggie Gee's construction of authorial identity was explored through the analysis of *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*. Through the intertwined stories of two writers, with Angela Lamb guiding her famous heroine, the literary "foremother," (VWM 354) Virginia Woolf, in her second life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Gee explores questions of authorship and authority. From the period between their first encounter in Manhattan to the time of travelling to İstanbul for a conference on Virginia Woolf, the two women get to know each other as writers, and thus past and present forms of authorship are negotiated in a dialogic discourse between two fictional authors in the novel.

Gee is very attentive to the materiality of literary production and she uses Virginia Woolf to present a contrast to her own autofictional portrait, Angela Lamb, who, like Gee herself, has a working-class background. However, in spite of the differences that set them apart, the two writers, Angela and the fictional Virginia, and, thus the discourses they represent, are eventually reconciled as Angela leaves her theoretical lens coloured by postmodernism and poststructuralism behind while Virginia adapts to the 21<sup>st</sup> century ways.

Maggie's Gee's playful handling of her historical author, Virginia Woolf, by placing her in the 21<sup>st</sup> century draws attention to more recent issues in the author's

*bildung*. By juxtaposing Virginia Woolf's practice of authorship with that of Angela Lamb's, Gee presents a rich commentary on issues of authorship, ranging from class backgrounds, the pressure of the market to the contemporary author's trial with editors and publishers. Through Virginia's adventures with computers, e-mail and online platforms, Gee also portrays the effects of digimodernism on literature. While attending to such material conditions, which according to Gee have a direct bearing on the text, Gee also grants the supremacy of creative writing by presenting writing as a uniting act. It unites writers, students, centuries and cultures.

According to Huber, the story of reconstructive fiction is very much a story of "postmodernist fathers and reconstructive sons" (Huber 216). Reflecting on this point, she invites readers to contemplate on women's absence from this space. Considered in relation to Huber's call for critical reflection, *Author, Author* can be said to comply with the diagnosis Huber makes. Being a revisitation of Oedipal anxieties via the modernist author figure Henry James, it is unmistakably a story of "postmodernist fathers and reconstructive sons".

Byatt and Gee's novels, on the other hand, assert women's presence in this space. Their dissatisfaction with postmodernism is conspicuous and they reflect it in their reconstructive fictions. While Byatt's critique of poststructuralist feminist scholars such as Leonora Stern was referred to as evidence of Byatt's misogyny, Byatt in fact offers a much richer and multi-layered discussion of female authorship in *Possession*. Similarly, in *VWM*, Gee centralizes women as reconstructive agents. It is a novel populated by female authors across three generations. Gee brings Virginia Woolf alive and juxtaposes her with author characters like Angela Lamb and her daughter Gerda, and there are many other writer figures always lurking at the background.

In these novels, it is possible to witness how, while reconstructive sons are imagining the aftermath of postmodernism, which they inherited from their postmodernist fathers, women writers have to attend to two various missions: first, to deconstruct the fatherly symbols of oppressive authority, and, then, affirm and celebrate, "the ability of the fictive to connect and communicate, to create meaning both on an individual and on an intersubjective level" through writing (Huber 222). By foregrounding these aspects and exploring the way these tensions are represented

and negotiated by Byatt and Gee in *Possession* and *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*, this study aims to contribute to the studies of reconstructive fictions by women authors.

It seems the question of authority in relation to authorship is becoming progressively more valid in today's world, in which the material conditions of writing, publishing and reading books are transforming rapidly. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, apart from physical spaces such as university halls, the discussion of literature is now reaching the public, more easily and directly as literary works are being discussed on TV shows or as people come together in online platforms to talk about books. Readers are sharing their reviews of books and commentaries, on forums or blogs, in the manner and style of the literary critic. Moreover, with self-publishing and a recent phenomenon like Wattpad, authorship appears to become more accessible and democratic.

In her article "The Return of the Social Author: Negotiating Authority and Influence on Wattpad" (2016), Melanie Ramdarshan Bold explicates how the way authors on Wattpad interact with their readers, give and receive feedback resembles the serial novels published in instalments in the past. As in that old practise of authorship, the contemporary authors who interact with their audiences may also observe how their work is being received and make adjustments on it accordingly. Some readers may in turn have a direct influence, or, "authority" to lead a work to a certain direction. Thus, concludes Bold, "in this digital realm, authorship, and cultural production, is becoming a lot more transparent, collaborative, malleable and targeted" (*ibid*).

Such transformations enabled by the increasing digitalization of writing and reading have been taking place simultaneously with the author's assertive return as discussed in the preceding chapters specifically in relation to author fictions, which invites us to reassess their impact on the text. For example, the digital text is more about the *process* as opposed to the *stability* of the printed text (Fitzpatrick 8) and by offering a more collaborative and interactive form of authorship, the digital text might be read as an example of Barthes's notion of the *writerly* text, that is, a text being transformed and reproduced with each reading.

In that sense, it might also be a liberatory form of authorship compared to the strict sense of authority that we encounter in Byatt, Lodge and Gee. The digital text forms brought about by digimodernism also transformed the distinction between the readerly and writerly text, in Barthes's sense. A reader, writing fanfictions on Wattpad, or, the author writing a hypertextual novel as seen in the above-mentioned author fictions participate in the writerly, but at the same time, she/he engages in a different kind of writing than suggested by Barthes's writerly text. While the reader of Barthes's writerly text shares the pleasure of the text derived from the birth of the reader, it is nonetheless a passive experience since it is an act pseudo writing. But what happens when these readers take the pen in their hand and begin to *really* write and even publish with a name inscribed on a book? How is this author to be positioned in terms of authorship and authority?

The questions of authorship and authority are being further complicated by the emergence of new authors: the machines. As the prevalent use of AI for purposes ranging from translating to generating texts proves, AI, which was once thought of as a thing of the future, is already here, with pressing issues demanding our attention.



Figure 2: Robots and Us

In *The Artist in the Machine: The World of AI-Powered Creativity* (2019), Arthur I. Miller argues that AI, which was mostly associated with positive sciences and calculations until recently, is now being used to create art. AI has been

increasingly employed in painting and music, and new media artists use AI to process immense amount of data to create, for instance, virtual installations. “Plot robots” which generate Hollywood scripts have long been in use. It is now even possible to write essays and “poems” in seconds, using AI in websites such as *Verse by Verse*.<sup>43</sup> Marcus du Sautoy, the author of *The Creativity Code: How AI is Learning to Write, Paint, and Think* (2019), believes writing is the most challenging art for AI, yet there are certainly several noteworthy examples in addition to projects like *Verse by Verse* or *Talk to the Transformer*, where it is enough to insert a line for the AI to generate a possible continuation in the form of an essay.

The first completely AI novel, *I the Road*, was published in 2018. It was written as a part of the project by Ross Goodwin to emulate Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*. AI was trained with massive data of samples of fiction and poetry and was taken on a road trip from New York to New Orleans in 2017. In that trip, it combined its training with real images and sounds it would capture on the road. These data were then simultaneously printed on rolls of receipt paper, which emerged as the novel *I the Road*. It was a source of tense discussions regarding the questions of originality, quality and authority. While the debates over the status of “art” produced by AI will surely continue for some time, let us now turn to its pragmatic consequences. Kevin Kelly, in his article “Scan This Book,” resurrects the old dream of having a library which has all the books in the world. He also imagines digitalizing all books into “a single liquid fabric of interconnected words and ideas,” which may be unravelled and rewritten at will by anyone who desires to do so. In the literary field, the digital text, may actualize both Kelly’s dream and Barthes’s dream. AI might be the ultimate scriptor, creating “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (*IMT*, 146). AI has the power to “mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them” (*ibid*), and hence, it can nullify the search for origin.

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<sup>43</sup> I tried writing a poem myself, and it took less than a minute to compose a poem written in the voice and manner of some of the American poets, whom we can choose from the list available on the website. Once we insert the first line, the AI tool offers various lines from which we can choose. One can simply copy and paste these lines, or use them as inspiration to form new lines.

Machine learning and authorship practices on Wattpad are developments that invite us to reconsider questions of authority, too. When AI is accepted as a scriptor, with whom does Foucault's author function rest, then? Whose name is to be printed on the artwork produced by an AI? Getting rid of the name would be an ideal case; however, so far, the desire for "an author" triumphed over. For instance, in the case of *I the Road*, it was Goodwin himself who took the credit. He told Nora Young that he felt entitled as an author in the following words:

I do very much feel ownership of the work, even though it was created from a diverse variety of sources. The project was my idea, and I don't want people to misattribute it to some supernatural force or science fiction concept. This was a computer program that I created, that I put in a car and drove across the country with. (Young)

Here Goodwin refers to AI as a mere instrument in writing, but obviously even if Goodwin programmed it, he did not know the exact outcome. So, the novel shared with the reading public, was actually generated by an AI, which makes the AI also (if not entirely) eligible for authorship.

With the developments in publishing, such as self-publishing, or multiple and/or anonymous authorship, and, eventually, AI, the question Barbara K. Olson<sup>44</sup> asked back in 2006, "Who Thinks This Book?" might be said to have expired, if we are to hold onto the notion of the polymorphous text, a text without an origin. But, has her answer "Or Why the Author/God Analogy Merits Our Continued Attention" expired, too? This study has explored precisely this question of why it is still relevant through author fictions of Byatt, Lodge and Gee. It seems as long as the act of writing is perceived as creation, the Author/God analogy will be a valid one; yet, our notions of the constituents of this analogy will continue to change, bend and adjust in accordance with our new realities. Just as in the case of David Lodge, who admitted that he had never thought it possible to write a biographical novel up until the 2000s, yet eventually wrote one on Henry James, the developments in technology, changes in culture and lifestyles will continue to impact our perception of authorship, whether this author is a single person, multiple people, or, perhaps, a machine, as the increased use of AI to create art, suggests.

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<sup>44</sup> Full name of her article is "Who Thinks This Book?" Or Why the Author/God Analogy Merits our Continued Attention.

Goodwin's experiment with AI surely offered exciting results. In order to keep the authentic material, Goodwin deliberately avoided editing the text, and he published it exactly as it was generated by the AI. In this format, it looks like a first draft, with randomly dispersed sentences, but its attention to detail and word combinations are noteworthy. However, as Thomas Hornigold concludes his review of *I the Road* project, "AI Is Still No Kerouac." "[A] coherent tone and semantic 'style' might be enough to produce some vaguely-convincing teenage poetry, as Google did," he adds, "and experimental fiction that uses neural networks can have intriguing results," but overall, the result, he concludes, cannot approach literature's potential, written by a human being.

As the analysis of authorship in *Possession*, *Author, Author* and *VWM* show us, if the author is to die into the abyss and exist in the text merely as a scriptor by leaving their persona behind, the possible consequence is that the literary output will not be much different from the dull and emotionless text produced by AI. Therefore, by reconstructing the author's authority and agency, authorship practices as seen in these author fictions might be interpreted to claim that the scriptor could be a position fit only for a lifeless body, like the AI. The presence of utterance without the utterer to possess it, is not convenient or desirable, indeed even dystopian, for authors who foreground fiction's potential for building communication through responsibility, sincerity and bonding. Even after postmodernism, even after the subject has been defiled and broken into pieces, these authors, who believe in the power of fiction to tell us who we are, continue to tell stories with the knowledge granted by their predecessors, "fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners" (*A Room* 45). As Woolf goes on to remind us, the attachment may not always be easily detectable, but it should be acknowledged that the literary works do not come into being in a vacuum. It is not possible to extract language from life and compose a novel in an isolated bell jar. As Byatt, Lodge and Gee manifest, each through their own distinct way of approaching the biography of the authors they revisit, when looked beyond the surface, the impact of the material things or the emotional experiences of the human beings who write the works of fiction we read, manifests themselves outstandingly. In these novels, there emerges an author, whose job is not just to mix writings as Barthes

suggested. The author in these novels is a person endowed with the gift to “create”.

To conclude, Barthes’s attack on the author had emerged from the particular conditions of French academy at the time. His criticism towards the author was based on the association of the Author with the God. Similarly, Bakhtin’s theories were developed in response to totalitarian Stalin regime of his own time. In this respect, just like fiction, criticism, too is attached to life; therefore, the return of the author, too, is an outcome of certain changes taking place in our era, which has witnessed postmodernism’s turning into an institutionalized pop culture product adopted for dubious ends such as “alternative facts” of the post-truth era, for instance. On the other hand, with the intensifying of authoritarianism in the post-truth era, the return of the author might also be seen as a consequence of this change. If authoritarian discourse penetrates into the text, the authority the authors claim might also be read as symptoms of authoritarianism. Within this context, the return of the author cannot be said to be completely unproblematic.

The unquestioned celebration of the return of the author might easily turn into a form of authorial fascism, which critical theory had been fighting against. Especially with the critic’s banishment from the realm of fiction as seen in *Possession* and *VWM*, the return of the author in such an authoritarian manner might also pose a serious threat to freedom of speech and thought. In this case, conserving the fiction’s potential for communication and understanding – and this is precisely what these authors claim to be doing – might easily turn into a form of dangerous political conservatism, which we, as readers, need to be acutely wary of. Therefore, when these issues are taken into consideration, it can be concluded that the position and the authority of the author will continue to pose itself as a double-edged question, oscillating between absence and presence, freedom and oppression, authorial and authoritarian.

This study sprang from two main sources: life and writing. Exploring how they intersect in author fiction, through the example of three novelist- critics, Byatt, Lodge and Gee, this study will primarily contribute to a variety of fields such as biofiction and author fiction studies. Biofiction and author fiction studies are thriving research fields. In future studies, the theoretical basis formed here could be applied to various other novels. In this study, I did not fully engage with the political

views of the authors and its possible effects on their fiction, yet, given the fact that authority is never free of power struggle, exploring these areas would surely prove to be very fruitful and engaging. Hence, hopefully, it will inspire similar studies about the reconstructive turn in the fiction of the post-postmodern era.

The hybridity, fluidity and self-reflexivity of author fictions also lend themselves to generic analysis, from which various studies could emerge. The author's return challenges and alters previously accepted notions, not only of authorship, but the text and the book, as well. Therefore, in addition to such novels, which usually blur the boundaries between romance, biography, detective fiction and *bildung*, such texts as author interviews, letters and commentaries also need to be reconsidered and classified in terms of their relation to the resurrected author. Other related areas of autobiography, autofiction, or life-writing in general, might also benefit from this study and the above-mentioned questions it raises.

With its focus on the author, and the author's persona, his/her birth, life and the death, and how it relates to the authority, this thesis shows how the author, who has been marginalized by anti-authorial discourses, is now back, and it presents a trajectory of the reconstruction of the authorial identity. By focusing on novelist-critics Byatt, Lodge and Gee, it also addresses how textual and extratextual authority is claimed both by the authors and the critics. With these features, this study aims to contribute to the discussions of author's position in contemporary author fictions of the post-postmodern. The post-postmodern is still in the process of being defined, as the lack of consensus over how to name the period after the postmodern proves. This study brings together three novels that were usually read as postmodern and analyses them from a post-postmodern perspective. With the detailed analysis of these exemplary novels, where their post-postmodern agendas and ontologies were highlighted and differentiated from that of the postmodern, this study offers a detailed account of how while postmodernism continues stylistically, ontologically, the postmodern moment has passed. The distinction made here between the two, by using the reconstructive mission of the post-postmodern, will enrich the ongoing conversation about post-postmodernism and particularly, the place and role of the author in it. Finally, by inviting the reader to contemplate how recent technologies such as AI might possibly impact authorship and authority, this study draws

attention to current issues in authorship studies that require immediate attention from all of us as readers, authors and critics.

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## APPENDICES

### A. CURRICULUM VITAE

#### PERSONAL INFORMATION

Surname, Name: Koç, Nesrin  
Nationality: Turkish (TC), Bulgarian  
Date and Place of Birth: 31 October 1989, Bulgaria  
Marital Status: Married  
email: [nesrinmutlukoc@gmail.com](mailto:nesrinmutlukoc@gmail.com)

#### EDUCATION

Degree	Institution	Year of Graduation
MA	METU, English Literature	2014
BA	İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, English Language and Literature	2011
High School	Sakarya Hacı Zehra Akkoç High School, (Foreign Languages Department)	2007

#### WORK EXPERIENCE

Year	Place	Enrollment
2016-	Sınav College	English Teacher

#### LANGUAGES

Advanced English, Intermediate Spanish

## **SCHOLARSHIPS & AWARDS**

TÜBİTAK- National Scholarship Programme for Ph.D. Students

İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University- Full Scholarship during B.A

METU, Course Performance Award, 2015-2016 Academic Year, with a CGPA of 3.93/4.00

## **RESEARCH INTERESTS**

Postcolonial Fiction, Women and Writing, Biofiction,

Author, Authorship and Authority, Author Fiction, Autofiction

Postmodernism, Post-postmodernism

## **CONFERENCE PAPERS**

Koç, N. “Willesden Green as Zadie Smith’s Multiculturalist Site” 3rd International Conference on English Studies: Multiculturalism Heritage and English Studies. Karabük University, Karabuk, Turkey. May 2016.

Koç, N. “Negotiating Hyphenated Identities in Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers*”. Making, Re-presenting and Dissembling Differences and Identities in Contemporary Societies. Middle East Technical University. Nicosia, Cyprus. July 2013

Koç, N. “Language of Confinement: Strategic Use of Silence in *The God of Small Things*”. Postgraduate Conference on Translation Studies and Literatures in English. Çankaya University. Ankara, Turkey. May 2013

## B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKE ÖZET

### A.S Byatt'ın *Sahipler*, David Lodge'un *Yazar, Yazar* ve Maggie Gee'nin *Virginia Woolf Manhattan'da* Adlı Yazar Romanlarında Yazar Kimliğinin Yeniden Kurgulanması

Bu çalışma A.S Byatt'ın *Sahipler* (1990), David Lodge'un *Yazar, Yazar* (2004) ve Maggie Gee'nin *Virginia Woolf Manhattan'da* (2014) romanlarını yazar romanı türünün örnekleri olarak incelemektedir. Bahsi geçen yazarlar, biyografik roman türünü kullanarak geçmişte yaşamış bir yazarın hayatını kurgusallaştırken aynı zamanda Roland Barthes'ın "Yazarın Ölümü" adlı eserinde ele aldığı yazarlık anlayışına ve yazarı öldürüşüne net bir biçimde meydan okumaktadırlar.

Roland Barthes "Yazarın Ölümü" adlı eserinde bir metne yazar atamanın o metne kilit vurarak yazıyı kapatmak anlamına geldiğini savunduğunda modern metinleri kökten değişime uğratma gayesine ulaşmıştı; ancak yazarın dönüşü ile geçmişten günümüze yazarın konumunu tartışma ihtiyacı da doğmuştur. Bu ihtiyaca yönelik bir cevap olarak değerlendirilebilecek olan bu çalışmanın çıkış noktası Roland Barthes ve yazarın ölümü fikrini destekleyen teoriler ile "öldürülen" gerçek yazarın, kurgu dünyasına geri dönmesidir.

Yazarın dönüşü, elbette bütünüyle yeni bir olgu değildir. Yazarın varlık ve yokluğu yüzyıllar boyu akademik araştırmalara ve edebi eleştirilere konu olmuştur. Bu tartışmalardaki esas yenilik, son dönemlerde yazarın dönüşünü konu alan eserlerin sayısındaki gözle görülür artıştır. Biyografik roman türünün özelliklerinden faydalanan Byatt, Gee ve Lodge gibi usta yazarlar, kendilerinden önce yaşamış yazarların hayatlarını ve eserlerini yeni bir bakış açısıyla ziyaret ederek kurgusallaştırırlar ve biyografik kurgu sayesinde geçmişteki ve günümüzdeki yazarlık uygulamalarını birbirleri ile kıyaslarlar. A.S Byatt, yazarın ölümüne kullandığı Neo-Viktoryen unsurlar ile meydan okurken, David Lodge, yazarı

dirilterek yazın dünyasına geri getirmek için öncelikle Henry James'e karşı hissettiği "etkilenme endişesini" yazıya dökmek zorundadır. Maggie Gee ise bir yazar olarak otoritesini ve böylece yazarın dönüşünü sağlamak için kurgusunun kahramanı olan Virginia Woolf'u kendi tarihsel döneminde değil, 21. yüzyıl Amerika'sında diriltmeyi tercih eder.

Roman yazarı kimliklerinin yanı sıra edebiyat alanında doktora düzeyinde çalışmalar yapmış olan bu üç yazar aynı zamanda akademisyen ve eleştirmendir de. Bu üç yazar-eleştirmenin, "yazarın ölümü" fikri ve bu fikrin sembolik anlamlarını ne şekilde ele aldıkları sorusu ile başlayan bu çalışma, ilk olarak yeniden yapılandırmacı romanların ortaya çıkmasına olanak sağlayan uzamsal ve kültürel arka plan olan post-postmodernizmin ortaya çıkışı üzerinde durmaktadır. *Sahipler, Yazar, Yazar* ve *Virginia Woolf Manhattan'da* romanlarını post-postmodern bir çerçeveye konumlandıran bu çalışma, çağdaş yazar romanlarında yazarların, postmodern ironiye karşıt olarak içtenlik ve "güven estetiği"<sup>45</sup> kavramlarını öne çıkararak, postmodernizmin "ötesine" uzanmaya çalıştıklarını öne sürmektedir.

Peki, bu eserlerin merkezinde olan "yazar" kimdir ve nasıl tanımlanabilir? Bu çalışmanın ikinci bölümünün odağında bu soru vardır. Bu çerçevede yazarın "doğumu", "ölümü" ve "geri dönüşü" üzerinden yazar kavramının ve bununla ilintili olarak yazarlık anlayışı ile yazarın otoritesinin tarihsel süreç boyunca geçirdiği değişimler üzerinde durulmuştur. Yazar sözcüğünün etimolojik kökeni belli hakların sahibi anlamına gelen Latince "auctor" kelimesine uzanır. *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern* adlı eserinde, Plato'dan günümüze yazarlık anlayışını inceleyen Seán Burke, Yazar (Author) kelimesinin kökenine ilişkin üç muhtemel sözcük önermiştir: "agere" (to perform), "augere", (to grow), "auieo" (to tie). İngilizce karşılıkları parantez içerisinde verilmiş olan bu sözcükler yazarlık kavramının sergilemek, gelişmek, bağ kurmak gibi farklı yönlerine vurgu yapmaktadırlar. Burke, bu üç önermesine ilave olarak modern Yazar (Author ya Latince karşılığı ile "auctor") sözcüğünün Yunan kökenli "authentim" sözcüğünden de türemiş olabileceğini iddia eder. Burke'nin dört muhtemel köken arasında yazar ve otorite

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<sup>45</sup> Hassan, Ihab. "Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust". Hassan'ın makalesinin adından da anlaşılacağı üzere, Hassan postmodernizmi karakterize eden şüphecilğin tersine, postmodernizm sonrasında güven ve içtenlik ile yoğrulmuş bir estetik anlayışının mevcut olduğunu öne sürmektedir.

ilişkini yansıması bakımından en uygun bulduğu sözcük bu sonuncusudur. Bu ilişkilendirmeye rağmen Burke, bu dönemde orijinal kökeninde yazar kelimesinin barındırdığı otorite fikrinin otonomiden tamamen ayrı olduğunu belirtir, çünkü eski yazarlar otoritelerini öncelikle gelenek ile olan ilişkilerinden, sonra ise Tanrı'dan almışlardır. Yazar kavramının ortaya çıktığı şeklindeki otorite, bireyin kendisine ait değil, Tanrı'dan aldığı otoritedir ve yazarlığın özerklik ile bağdaştırılması çok daha sonra gerçekleşecektir.

Yazarın otoritesinin Tanrı'dan geldiğine inanılan Orta çağ edebiyatında yazar özerk bir birey olarak karşımıza çıkmaz. Bu dönemde edebiyat kilise çevresinde geliştiği ya da çoğu zaman kolektif çalışmaların ürünü olduğu için, üretilen eserler de genellikle anonimdir. Rönesans ile birlikte, gerek matbaanın icadı ile kitabın ulaşılabilirliğinin artması, gerek bireye inancın artması ile, yazar ve tanrı analogisi etkisini yitirmeye başlamıştır. Edebiyat, sözlü gelenekten yazının esas olduğu kamusal bir ürüne dönüşmeye başlamıştır.

Romanın yükselişine şahitlik eden on sekizinci yüzyıl aynı zamanda yazarın otoriter bir figür olarak yükselişine de şahitlik etmiştir. Yazarın yeni ya da farklı bir ses benimseyerek belli bir yazarlık performansı ortaya koyması ile bu sesin sahibini keşfetme çabası on yedinci ve on sekizinci yüzyıllarda oldukça geçerli bir okuma stratejisi olarak varlığın sürdürmüştür. Yine bu dönemde anlatacak “yeni” ve “orijinal” bir hikayesi olan yazar, eserinin üzerine adını bastırarak yasal bir varlığa dönüşmüş, eseri üzerinde hak iddia edebilmiş ve yazdıklarından sorumlu tutulabilmiştir. Romantik dönemde, yazarın bir “insan” olarak nitelenmesi, yazar ve “dahi” kavramları arasındaki ilişkilendirmenin yolunu açan en önemli gelişme olmuştur.

Şairin eşsiz bir hayal gücüne sahip olarak eşi benzeri görülmemiş bir şekilde kutlanması, temsilin kavramsallaştırılma biçimleri üzerinde önemli etkilere sahipti. Hayal gücü, Shelley'nin tasvirinden anlaşıldığı üzere Romantiklerin yeni tanrısıydı. Shelley'e göre hayal gücü, “tekrarla köreltilen izlenimlerin yinelenmesiyle zihnimize yok edildikten sonra, evreni yeniden yaratır” (533). Burke, hayal gücü üzerindeki bu yeni vurgunun yansıma kuramı (mimesis) ile ilişkisini sorgular ve Romantik şairlerde mimetik temsil tamamen ortadan kalkmasa da imgelemin işlevinin, eserde temsil edilen Doğa üzerinde giderek daha fazla vurgulandığı

sonucuna varır (xix). Diğer bir deyişle Romantizm akımından önce yazar Doğa'yı Tanrı'nın yarattığı bir eser olarak tasvir ederken ana amaç taklitti. Romantik şiirde ise Doğa, insanda yaratıcılığı tetikleyen bir kaynak olarak karşımıza çıkar. Burke'nin de işaret ettiği üzere, Romantik şairlerde Doğa şiirsel olarak yeniden üretilebilmesi için şairin hayal gücünün tezahürüne bağımlıdır (xxi). Bu sebeple de Romantiklerde yazar, artık ne Orta çağ edebiyatındaki gibi ilahi yazıtların ayrıcalıklı bir okuyucusu, ne de Tanrıdan gelen ilhamla ilahi söylemleri tekrarlayan seçilmiş kişidir. Yazar artık yaratma eyleminin kendisini taklit etmektedir (Burke *Authorship* xxi- xxii).

Romantik şairlerde “Şair kimdir?” olarak karşımıza çıkan arayış ve de Wordsworth, Coleridge gibi o dönemin şairlerinin bu soruya cevap vermekte zorlanmaları, aslında, kendileri için bir yazarlık pozisyonu tayin etmekte yaşadıkları güçlüğü göstermektedir. Bennett'in anımsattığı üzere, Romantiklerdeki yazar ve kimlik karmaşası, üzerinde durdukları varoluşsal sorgulamalar bakımından kendilerinden önce gelen yazarlarınkinden çok daha farklıdır. Örneğin, Rönesans dönemi şairlerinden Sir Philip Sidney, “Şair ne yapar?” sorusuyla ilgilenmişken, Wordsworth “Şair kimdir?” sorusuna yoğunlaşmıştır (Bennett 3). Wordsworth şairin bir “insan” olduğunu ilan etmişti, ancak bu insan diğerlerinden sahip olduğu bütünsel ruh ve insan doğasının inceliklerine hâkim olmasıyla ayrılıyordu. Şairin kültürel temsillerinde hükmeden bu ilahi yön, Barthes'ın eleştirisinin hedefidir (Bennett 36).

Romantizm ile birlikte edebi analiz ve eleştiri, eserin kendisinden, eseri yaratan yazar ve şairin kim olduğuna ve bu kişinin hayal gücünün nasıl çalıştığının keşfedilmesine yönelmiştir. Bu bağlamda, Donovan'ın iddia ettiği gibi Barthes ve sonrasında Foucault gibi eleştirmenlerde rastladığımız Yazar'a yönelik eleştirilerin hedefindeki Yazar'ın, orijinal anlamın tek kaynağı olarak Yazar'ı gören Romantizm yazarlık anlayışında karşımıza çıkan yazar olduğunu bilmemiz gerekir (9).

Romantizmin yaygınlaştırdığı “yazar” ve “dahi” analojisi sonraki dönemlerde de etkisini sürdürmüştür. Burke'ye göre Romantizm'deki “yüce” ideali Modernist şiirde de devam etmiştir. Örneğin Keats'in “negatif yetenek” (negative capability) kavramı ile T.S Eliot'un “kişidişi” (impersonal poet) kavramları ardıl kuramlar olarak düşünülebilir. Keats'ın ifade ettiği gibi yazar sadece yaşadığını

yazan kişi değildir. Yazar tecrübe etmediği olayları da zihninde duyumsayarak yazabilen kişidir. Eliot da yazar kişi ile metnin yazarı arasındaki bu ayrım üzerinde durmuştur.

İlginçtir ki Barthes'ın eleştirdiği gibi Yazar'a Tanrı'nın güçlerinin atfedildiği yazarlık anlayışı, modernist dönem eserlerinde de görülmektedir. Modernist yazarların paradoksunu Brian McHale şöyle açıklar: Modernist şairler metinden kendilerini ne kadar silmeye çalışılırsa, varlıklarını o kadar dikkat çekici hale getirmişlerdir. Kendi kendini silme stratejileri, görünürde, yazarın yüzeydeki izlerini silerken aslında stratejist olarak yazarın kendisine dikkat çekmektedir (McHale 199).

Barthes, yaşayan kişi ile yazar şair arasında ayrım yapabilen yazarlar olarak Proust, Mallarme ve Valery gibi modernist şahsiyetleri övmesiyle, kişisel olmayan sanata değer verdiğini göstermektedir. Bu yazarlar Yazarı öldürebilir, ancak metnin arkasında “yaratıcı” olarak duran Yazar-Tanrı'yı öldürüp öldürmedikleri kolayca cevaplanamaz. Bu nedenle, modernist edebiyat yansıtmanın ötesine geçer ve yazarlar eserlerini kişiselleştirirken, özgün bir eserin yaratıcısı olarak yazarın otoritesi, sahip olduğu tanrısal güç açısından pek değişmemiştir. Yazarın biyografisinin izleri eserlerden silinse de tanrısal anlatıcı büyük oranda aynı kalmıştır. “Yazarın dönüşü” nün coşku ile kutlanmasının ana sebeplerinden biri de tanrısal anlatıcı ile yazar arasında bağ kuran bu yaklaşımdır.

Roland Barthes'ın eleştirdiği Yazar kavramının temelinde belli bir yazarlık anlayışı yatmaktadır. Barthes'ın dilimize *Görüntünün Retoriği, Sanat ve Müzik* adıyla çevrilmiş olan *Image, Music and Text* adlı eserindeki yer alan “Yazarın Ölümü” adlı makalesinde tasvir ettiği Yazar; Orta çağda İngiliz deneyselciği, Fransız rasyonalizmi ve Reform hareketinin kişisel inancı ile ortaya çıkmış, modern bir figür ve toplumumuzun bir ürünüdür. Yazar, bireyin, veyahut daha soylu bir ifadeyle “kişinin” prestijinin keşfidir (*IMT* 142-3). Bu tanımla Yazar'ın tarihsel gelişiminin takibinde izlenecek yola da ışık tutan Barthes'ın eleştirisi, Yazar'ın kendisini Tanrı gibi görerek kendini metnin merkezine yerleştirmesi ve kendini metin üzerinde yegâne otorite ilan etmesidir. Barthes'ın Yazar'a yönelik eleştirisi yukarıda kısaca sunulan yazar tarihinden de anlaşılacağı üzere, yazar ve otorite ilişkisini konu almaktadır. Barthes metnin ardındaki şahısa meydan okuduğunda eleştirdiği, yazarın şahsına en büyük önemi veren kapitalist ideolojinin özü ve doruk

noktası olan, pozitivistizmdir (*IMT* 143). Greaney'in de açıkladığı üzere, Barthes'ın argümanı tarihsel olarak yazarı değil, yapıtı yaşama, başarıyı niyete, yazıyı psikolojiye tabi kılan edebi eleştiri türünde hüküm süren belli bir yazarlık türünü yıkma arzusu taşır (60). Yazar kavramına özel ilgi duyan Barthes pek çok eserinde bu konuyu irdelemiştir.

Tarihsel olarak dilin sahibi yazarlardı; Fransız Devrimi ile birlikte dil, yazarın boyunduruğundan kurtarılmış olsa da 1968'de Barthes yazarın ölümünü ilan edene dek, bir kurum olarak yaşamaya devam etmiştir. "Yazarın Ölümü" adlı eserinde Barthes Yazar'ın tıpkı günlükler ve hatıralar aracılığıyla kişiliğini ve eserlerini birleştirmeye çalışan edebiyatçıların bilincinde olduğu gibi, halen edebiyat tarihlerinde, yazarların biyografilerinde, röportajlarında ve dergilerde hüküm sürdüğünden yakınıdır. Dilin konuşan kişiye üstünlüğünü temel alan Barthes, kitaptan önce var olan ve onu bir Baba gibi "besleyen" ve doğuran Yazarın aksine, metinle aynı anda doğan, hiçbir şekilde yazıdan önce veya yazıyı aşan bir varlıkla donatılmamış "modern bir yazman" ister. Metin, yazarın kişiliğine, yaşamına, zevklerine, tutkularına gaddarca odaklanan statüsünden kurtarılmalıdır (*IMT* 143). Seán Burke'ye göre bu arzu Barthes'ın yazar için kurguladığı yeni pozisyonu metafizik bir soyutlama, bir Platonik tip, bir mutlağın kurgusu olarak formüle etmiş olduğunu doğrular (*Return* 26). Burke'nin nezdinde yazarı öldürme çabasının ardındaki tüm sebepler geçersizdir, çünkü Barthes yazarı öldürmeye girişirken sunduğu sebepler ile yazarın var olduğunu kabul etmiş ve böylece dönüşüne zemin hazırlamıştır. Yazarı metinden dışlayarak Barthes Yazarı öldürebilir; ancak ölümünü ilan ettiği anda yazarın varlığını da kabullenmiş olur. Belki de Barthes yazarı öldürebilmek için yazardan "öldürülmeye değer bir kral" yaratmıştır (Burke 25).

Yirminci yüzyılın ikinci yarısının en önemli paradigmalardan biri olan postmodernizm, 1960'larda popülerleşmesinden bu yana kültürel çalışmalar ve beşerî bilimlerde baskın konumunu sürdürmüştür. Büyük anlatılara meydan okuyan postmodernizm, genellikle özcü ve totaliter yaklaşımların eleştirisi olarak anlaşılır ve çokluk, ironi, oyunbazlık ve metinlerarasılık gibi kavramları savunur. Bununla birlikte, son dönemlerde McLaughlin'in öne sürdüğü gibi edebiyatta, özellikle kurgudaki estetik yön değişimi, postmodernizmin hegemonyasının sona erdiğinin emaresidir (55). Green'in belirttiği gibi bir zamanlar sorunlara bakmanın yeni ve

heyecan verici bir yolu gibi görünen postmodernizm, artık, büyük ölçüde özümsemiştir (24). Irmtraud Huber'in *Literature After Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies* (2014) adlı eserinde belirttiği üzere postmodernizmin üzerinde durduğu, merkezsizleşme, yayılma, bozulma, yer değiştirme, farklılık, süreksizlik, gizemden arındırma gibi kavram ve metotlardan da anlaşılacağı gibi yapısöküm üzerine odaklanan bir metodolojinin tekdüzeliğinden bıkan yeni nesil yazarlar, postmodernizmin tıpkı bir rock şarkısı gibi yaygınlaştığını belirtirler (Hassan "Beyond Postmodernism?" 128). Postmodernizmin ölümü artık kabul görmüştür. Katrin Amian, *Rethinking Postmodernism(s)* (2008) adlı eserinde, postmodernizmin ardından yazdığı taziyesinde, "ölü" yü şu sözlerle anmaktadır:

Göründüğü üzere, postmodernizm tarihe karışmıştır. 1960'larda ve 1970'lerde yeni çağdaşın kısaltması olarak doğmuş, 1980'lerde canlı ve tartışmalı bir eleştirel kavram olarak olgunluğa erişmiş ve 1990'larda Aptalların rehberlerinin ve Pepsi kola reklamlarının popüler cazibesıyla ana akım haline getirilmiş bu terim, yeni milenyumdaki edebi ve kültürel üretimin değişen ittifaklarını tanımlamanın ve anlamamanın bir aracı olarak potansiyelini tüketmiş durumdadır. (1)

Amian'a benzer şekilde pek çok yazar ve eleştirmen postmodernizmin öldüğü fikrine katılmış ve eserlerinde bu düşüncüyü dile getirmişlerdir; ancak bu fikre katılmayanlar da vardır ve bu görüş ayrılığının temel sebebi, ilk etapta postmodernizmin net bir tanımı olmamasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Postmodernizmden bahsederken Amian'ın başlığında çoğul ekini kullanmasının vurguladığı üzere, edebiyatta, sanatın diğer alanlarında veyahut dünya üzerinde tek bir postmodernizm ve postmoderniteden bahsetmek mümkün değildir. William Plumley ile gerçekleştirdiği bir röportajda John Barth, bu durumu esprili bir tonla şu şekilde özetler: "İki yaz önce Almanya'da 'postmodernizmin sonu, yeni başlangıçlar' temalı bir seminere katıldım, tam da artık postmodernizmin ne ifade ettiğini yeni yeni anlamaya düşündüğüm zamanda" (15). Postmodernizmin sonunun ilan edilmesinde görüş birliği sağlanmış gibi görünse de postmodernizmin tarifi zor yapısından dolayı, tam olarak tanımlanamamış, birden çok tanımı ve uygulaması bulunan bir kavramın sonunun geldiğini iddia etmek, tam da bu nedenlerden dolayı retorik bir hamlenin ötesine geçemeyecektir. Böylesi bir çabanın basitleştirme tehlikesini de beraberinde getirdiğini kabul eden Huber, yine de bu atılımın gerekli olduğunu savunur ve okuyucuyu postmodernizmin ötesinde düşünmeye davet eder.

Huber'e göre postmodernizmin ölümünü ilan ederken, postmodernizme ilişkin kavramsal ve kuramsal tartışmaları basite indirgemekten kaçınmanın bir yolu, tıpkı modernizmin postmodernizm ile devam ettiği gibi, post-postmodernizm döneminde de postmodernizmin bir hayalet gibi varlığını sürdüreceğini düşünmektedir. Postmodernizmin ötesinde düşünmenin gerekli olduğunu savunan Ihab Hassan da bu gerekliliğinin elzemliğine karşın, dünyayı postmodernizmin renkleriyle bezenmiş gözlüklerden gördüğümüz için, postmodernizmin beşerî bilimlerdeki etkisinin bir kalemde silinemeyeceğini belirtir (305).

Postmodernizmin sona erişiminin genel kabul görmesinde en önemli etkiye sahip olan kişi belki de postmodernizmi teorize eden ilk eleştirmenlerden biri olan Linda Hutcheon'dur. Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism (Postmodernizmin Politikası)* (2002), adlı eserinin ikinci baskısında postmodernizmin modasının geçtiğini kabul eder. Huber gibi, Hutcheon da postmodernizmin ötesindeki bu yeni dönemin keşfedilip araştırılmasının aciliyetine vurgu yaparken aynı zamanda, aşağıdaki sözlerle, eleştirmenlere bir çağrıda bulunur:

Söyleyelim gitsin: Bitti. Söylemsel stratejileri ve ideolojik eleştirisi - modernizminki gibi - çağdaş yirmi birinci yüzyıl dünyamızda yaşamaya devam etse bile postmodern an artık geçti. [...]Ne de olsa modernizm ve postmodernizm gibi tarihsel kategoriler, kültürel değişimleri ve süreklilikleri haritalama girişimlerimizde yarattığımız buluşsal etiketlerdir. Post-postmodernizmin kendine ait yeni bir isme ihtiyacı var ve bu nedenle, yazımı, okuyuculara onu bulma ve yirmi birinci yüzyıl için adlandırma konusundaki bu meydan okumayla sonlandırıyorum. (165-6)

Hutcheon'ın bu çağrısı yanıtızsız kalmadı. Postmodernizmin etkisini yitirdiğine inanan pek çok teorisyen bu yeni dönemi tanımlayacak yeni bir isim bulmaya çalışmıştır. Örneğin, çağımızın kültürel pratiklerinin anlamını yitirdiğine inanan Gilles Lipovetsky, aşırılık ile anılan milenyumunu tanımlamak için *hipermodern* terimini üretmiştir. Robert Samuels'in *otomodernizm*, Alan Kirby'in *digimodernizm* terimleri de bu yeni dönemde makinelerin etkisini arttırdığına ve dijitalleşmenin insan ve sanat üzerindeki etkisine vurguda bulunan adlandırmalardır. Billy Childish ve Charles Thomson'un birlikte hazırladıkları *Remodernist Manifesto* adlı eserlerinde postmodernizmi "insan olmaya ilişkin herhangi bir soruya cevap vermekte yetersiz kaldığı için (10) gereksiz görürler. Enrique Dusel'in *transmodernizm*'i ile Nicholas Bourriaud'un *altermodernizm* terimleri, modernizm

ile koloni sonrası dönem arasındaki ilişkiye dikkat çekerek, ana akım modernizm tarafından geri plana itilen, üçüncü dünya ülkelerinde farklı zamanlarda ve biçimlerde ortaya çıkmış ve tecrübe edilmiş diğer modernizmlere de değinir.

Bu teoriler arasında adından en çok söz ettiren ve geniş kitlelerce yirmi birinci yüzyılı tanımlayan akım olarak kabul gören Timotheus Vermeulen ve Robin van der Akken'in *metamodernizm* tanımı olmuştur. Vermeulen ve van der Akken metamodernizmi “epistemolojik olarak (post)modernizmde, ontolojik olarak (post)modernizmin arasında ve tarihsel olarak (post)modernizmin ötesinde” konumlandırırlar. Metamodern, modern ile postmodern arasında salınan bir sarkaca benzetilmektedir: “Metamodernizm modern bir heves ile postmodern ironi, umut ve melankoli, toyluk ve bilgelik, eşduyum, duygusuzluk, teklik ve çokluk, bütünlük ve parçalanmışlık, saflık ve belirsizlik arasında salınır. Aslında, ileri geri salınarak metamodern, modern ile postmodern arasında bir uzlaşma sağlar” (5-6).

David Mitchell'in *Cloud Atlas* ve Zadie Smith'in *NW* adlı eserlerinde postmodernizmin izini takip eden Nick Bentley, “iz sürme” imgesini oluşturarak, postmodernizmin sonrasında yazılan romanların tıpkı bir dedektif gibi iz sürerek postmodernizmi dikkatlice incelediklerini, parçalarına ayırdıklarını ancak aynı zamanda da postmodernizmin genel şüpheci yaklaşımını koruduklarını iddia eder. Bu iki romanın analizi üzerinden ilerleyen Bentley, bu bağlamda, göreceli bir dünya anlayışını kabul eden, ancak bireyin kolektif kimlikler için somut anlam ve konum arayışının değerini koruyan bir post-postmodernizme işaret ettiklerini belirtir (724).

David Rudrum ve Nicholas Stavrakis, postmodernizmin yerini almaya çalışan tüm bu terimleri derledikleri çalışmalarının girişinde, post-postmodernizmin Alan Kirby'nin de dediği gibi Wikipedia sayesinde meşhur olmuş, çirkin bir terim olduğunu savunurlar. Rudrum ve Stavrakis'e göre post-postmodernizm kafa karışıklığı ve kavramsal karmaşadan başka bir şey değildir (20). Bu ismin kullanışsızdan daha kötü bir adlandırma olduğunu öne süren Rudrum ve Stavrakis alaycı bir tonda, eğer böylesi yaratıcılıktan uzak isimler bulmaya devam edersek, bundan sonraki döneminden de pekâlâ post-post-postmodernizm olabileceğini söylerler.

*Post-Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (2012) adlı kitabında Jameson'un eserine atıfta bulunarak post-postmodernizme kapitalizm açısından bakan Jeffrey T. Nealon da bu terimin çirkin olduğunu kabul

eder; ancak postmodernizm içerisinde bir yoğunlaşma ve farklılaşma olarak (kaldı ki postmodernizm de modernizmdeki belli eğilimlerin yoğunlaşması ve farklılaşmasıydı) tanımlanabilmesi için kullanışlı bir terim olduğunu savunur. Postmodernizm üzerine çalışmaları ile tanınan Bran Nicol da 2017 yılında IDEA Konferansı'nda "Post-Postmodern Yorumlayama Doğru" başlıklı bir seminer vermiş, postmodernizmin ana akım olarak etkisini yitirmeye başladığını belirtirken post-postmodern terimini tercih etmiştir.

Tüm bu terimlerin özelliklerini olumlu ve olumsuz yönlerini değerlendiren bu çalışma post-postmodernizmi tam olarak, Rudrum ve Stavris'in post-postmodernizmi suçladıkları "kavramsal kargaşanın" getirdiği özgürlük ve sınırsızlığa vurgu yapmak amacıyla kullanmaktadır. Linda Hutcheon'ın çağrısına yanıt olarak düşünebileceğimiz *altermodernizm*, *digimodernizm*, *metamodernizm* vb terimlerin her birinin kendine özgü özellikleri ve kullanım alanları vardır; ancak postmodernizmin sonrasındaki dönemin farklı yönlerine vurgu yapan bu terimler bu özelliklerinden dolayı, son dönemde karşımıza çıkan yeniden yapılandırmacı eserlerin üzerinde durduğu bütüncül yaklaşımı sunmakta yetersiz kalmaktadırlar. Bu sebeple bu çalışmada, modernizm ile postmodernizm ilişkisini farklı açılardan ele alan bu terimlerin her birinin kendi açısından değerli ve kullanışlı olduğu kabul edilirken, genel bir çerçeve oluşturmak adına, post-postmodernizm terimi tercih edilmiştir. Ayrıca, post-postmodernizm, "post" ön eki sayesinde, postmodernizmin ötesine geçme hissini hem tematik hem de zamansal açıdan daha çarpıcı biçimde hissettirmektedir. Ayrıca modernizmin sonrasında alaycı ve oyunbaz kimliği ile tanınmış olan postmodernizmin de sona erebileceği, kendisinden sonra da yeni akımlar üretilabileceği gerçeği, post-postmodernizm terimi ile yine ironik bir biçimde doğrulanmış olur.

Postmodernlerden uzaklaşmanın, postmodernizmin modernizmden kopuşuna benzediğini hatırlatan Josh Toth, "her epistemik kopuş her zaman veya yalnızca bir yeniden yapılandırmadır" der (5). Toth'a göre yeni bir teorinin oluşabilmesi bir öncekinin hayaletinin yeni teoride var olmaya devam etmesine bağlıdır. Tam da bu sebeple postmodern ile post-postmodern arasındaki ayrım her zaman çok net biçimde yapılamayabilir. Örneğin Byatt'ın *Sahipler* romanında olduğu gibi aynı eserlerin postmodern ve postmodern sonrası kuramlar çerçevesinde farklı farklı

okunduğunu görmek mümkündür; zira oyunbazlık, çoğulculuk, şüphecilik gibi postmodernizm ile özdeşleşmiş pek çok ögenin post-postmodernizmde de varlığını sürdürdüğü görülmektedir. Bu nedenle, post-postmodernizmin Irmtraud Huber'in tasvir ettiği biçimde yorumlanması yerinde olacaktır. Huber'e göre, yeni nesil yazarların bir kısmı farklı bir şey yapma amacıyla yola çıkmışlardır; yeniliğe yönelik postmodernizme karşı bir tavır değil, bilakis postmodern yoluyla postmodernin ötesine ulaşma yönelimidir. Bu yeni nesil yazarlar, örneğin David Forster Wallace için post-postmodernizmin bir parçası olmak, her ne kadar içtenlik üzerinde durulsa da gerçekten postmodernizmin ötesine geçebildiğinizden, benmerkezcilikten, bencillikten, ironiden ve yapmacılıktan kurtulmayı başarıp başaramadığınızdan asla emin olamamak anlamına gelmektedir (Kelly "New Sincerity" 145). Tüm bunlara rağmen, ironiye karşı içtenliği savunan yazarların sayısı göz ardı edilemeyecek bir hızla artmakta, çoğu aynı zamanda edebiyatın akademik boyutuyla ilgili eğitim almış olan bu yazarların eserlerinde postmodernizmin getirdiği belirsizliklerden uzaklaşarak insana ve sanata geri dönen yeniden yapılandırmacı bir anlayış ortaya çıkmaktadır. Huber'in ifade ettiği gibi "postmodernizm, modern 'ya/ya da' karşıtlıklarının yerini muğlak ve sonsuza dek ertelenen 'hem/ve ile' değiştirmişse, bunun yeniden yapılandırmacı paraleli pragmatik 'rağmen' tutumunda bulunabilir" (223). Yeniden yapılandırmacı bir amaçla yazan yazarların eserlerinde postmodernizm ile bağdaştırılan öğelerin yeniden ele alınarak, "...-a rağmen" yazmaya devam edildiği görülür. Postmodernizmde dilin yapısökümü, ana anlatılar ve parçalanma, övgüye değer özellikler olarak ele alınırken, yeni nesil yazarlar onlara "giderek daha kırılğan ve tecrit edici bir toplumun yaygın ve zararlı unsurları" olarak yaklaşmaktadırlar (McLaughlin 213). Postmodernizmin getirdiği bu bakış açısına karşı çıkan yazarlar, yeniden yapılandırmacı kurgularında, bağlanma ve empati kurmak için yeni yollar aramaktadırlar. Josh Toth'un tasvir ettiği gibi, yeniden yapılandırma çalışmaları, "paradoksal olarak imkânsız olarak göstermeye devam ettikleri şeyin olasılığı üzerinde belirli bir kararlılık sergilemeleriyle ayırt edilebilir: anlam, hakikat, benzetim, telos, toplumsal anlayış ve iletişim" (103). Benton yeniden yapılandırmacı edebiyatın amacını aşağıda alıntılanan sözleri ile ifade eder:

Ben, insan olmak için yazıyorum. Lacan ve Derrida'dan öğrendiğim kadarıyla, kelimelerin asla mükemmel olmadığını biliyorum, ama yine de başka biriyle bağlantı kurmamı sağlayan faydalı bir çekirdek var. Kökenden kopuşun seküler günahına mahkûm olsam da olmasam da ısrarlı bir arzudan söz etmek mümkün; farklılığın uzlaşısı için algılanan benzerlikleri içeren topluluk arzusu devam ediyor. (Huber'in Benton'dan yaptığı alıntı 49)

Benton'un sözünü ettiği bireye, topluluğa ve aidiyete duyulan arzu karşısında yazar ve yazar romanları nasıl konumlanmıştır? Yazarın ölümü, öznenin ve tanrının ölümünü takip etmiştir; bu açıdan bakıldığında yazarın dönüşünün öznenin yeniden keşfedilmesiyle aynı zamana denk gelmesi tesadüf değildir. Biyografi ve otobiyografi türündeki eserlere duyulan büyük iştah, 1960'lar sonrasında bu eserlerin satışlarında ciddi artış olmasını sağlamıştır. "Yaşam" odaklı eserlere yeniden ilgi duyulması Michael Lackey'in "ana karakterini gerçekte yaşamış biri üzerinden isimlendiren bir edebi biçim" olarak tanımladığı biyografik kurgu türünün popüleritesinin artmasından da anlaşılabilir ("Locating" 3). Biyografik kurguda belirleyici unsur, esere konu olan kişinin tarihsel veya biyografik gerçekliğinden çok, kurguyu yazan yazarın yaratıcı vizyonudur (Lackey "Virginia Woolf and Biofiction" 9). Bu türdeki romanlarda aynı karakterin, farklı yazarlarca çok farklı biçimlerde ele alındığına sıkça rastlanmaktadır. Bu çalışmaya konu olan Byatt, Lodge ve Gee gibi aynı zamanda akademisyen ve eleştirmen de olan romancıların kendilerinden önce yaşamış ve kendileri üzerinde önemli izler bırakmış yazarların hayatlarını kurguya döktükleri ya da eserlerini, vizyonlarını kendi bakış açılarıyla yeniden yazdıkları yazar romanlarında Lackey'in bahsettiği unsur net bir biçimde görülmektedir. Her üç yazarda da yazar romanının belli bir misyonu ve vizyonu vardır.

Bir tür olarak yazar romanı yeni ortaya çıkmamıştır. Bilakis, kökeninin ilk yazara kadar uzandığı bile söylenebilir. Tarihsel olarak, genellikle *Odyseia* destanının sekizinci kitabında Phaeacians'ın kör ozanı Demodocus'a kadar uzandığı kabul edilir (Franssen ve Hoenselaars 12). Homer de anlatılarda sık sık geri döner; Virgil, Dante'nin *İlahi Komedya*'sında görünür ve özellikle on sekizinci yüzyılda, yazarların, Thomas More gibi yazarları "dirilttikleri," "ölüler ile diyalog" olarak ünlenmiş form, yazar romanlarının erken örnekleri olarak değerlendirilebilir. On dokuzuncu yüzyıla gelindiğinde ise Viktorya dönemi romanının yükselişi ile birlikte, kurgu ve biyografi birbirinden beslenen iki tür olarak hem ayrı ayrı hem de

dönemin ünlü kurgusal biyografilerinde varlıklarını sürdürmüşlerdir. Modernizm ve postmodernizm ile birlikte, biyografiye duyulan ilgi tamamen yok olmasa da öznenin bütünlüğünü yitirmesi ile parçalanmış bir öznenin geleneksel metotlarla temsil edilemeyeceği inancı yerleşmiş ve biyografik kurgular kesinlikle biçim değiştirmiştir.

Andrew Bennett, “yazarlığın duygusal hümanizmine, rahatlatıcı özcülüğüne karşı, sözde hoşgörüsüzlüğüyle postmodernizm, yine de -ya da belki de bu nedenle-yazar-etkileri ve yazar-figürleriyle büyülenmiş, bu noktaya takılıp kalmıştır” der (109). Laura Savu’nun “postmodern yazar romanları” olarak tanımladığı Peter Ackroyd’un *Oscar Wilde’in Son Vasiyeti* ve *Chatterton*, Penelope Fitzgerald’ın *Mavi Çiçek*, Michael Cunningham’ın *Saatler* gibi eserlerinde, yazara duyulan ilginin yeniden canlanmasını şu üç kategorinin yeniden yorumlanmasıyla açıklamak mümkündür: özne, yazar ve temsil (13). Postmodern yazar romanlarında postmodern öznenin çift bilinçliliği yapışöküm için kullanılırken, post-postmodern örneklerde, bu bilincin yeniden yapılandırıcı amaçlar doğrultusunda yazarı bütüncül bir biçimde sunmak için kullanıldığını görmekteyiz.

Savu, son olarak Barthes’a atıfta bulunarak, yazar romanlarında, Barthes’ın ortadan kaldırdığı “yazan kişinin kimliği” nin metne geri getirildiği sonucuna varır (41). Yazarı geri getirmek, Greaney’in iddia ettiği gibi teori karşıtı gibi görünme tehlikesini de beraberinde getirir. Yazarı geri getirmek, özellikle de postmodernizmdeki gibi tipik bir karakter olarak geri getirmek, “basitçe, yazarlar hep, sadece edebi hayal gücünün uydurmaları olmuşlar; yazar metinselliğin sessiz, kişisel olmayan operasyonlarının makul bir öncüsünden başka bir şey olmamıştır” önermesini doğrulama riskini de beraberinde getirmektedir (Greaney 59). Bu sebeple, Fokkema’nın da vurguladığı üzere, yazarın etrafındaki tartışma, yazarın ölümüne değil, söylemsel yazarın, Barthes’ın *scpritor*’unun, gerçek yazar ile net bir biçimde nasıl uzlaştırılacağına yönelmelidir. Yazar romanları ve burada ele alınan üç eser de bu soruya cevap aramaktadır.

Viktorya dönemi ile yirminci yüzyıl arasında gidip gelen, Byatt’ın *Sahipler* romanı yirmi sekiz bölüm ve bir son nottan oluşmaktadır. 1986 sonbaharında, Londra kütüphanesinde rastladığımız romanın baş karakteri Roland Mitchell, büyük hayranlık duyduğu Viktorya dönemi şairi, Randolph Henry Ash üzerine araştırmalar

yürüten bir doktora öğrencisidir. Kütüphanede Ash'a ait kitapları incelerken Vico'nun *Principi di una Scienza Nuova* kitabının sayfaları arasında isimsiz bir kadına yazılmış iki mektuba rastlar. Roland, o ana kadar biyografiye dayalı eleştiriyi ciddi bir eleştiri metodolojisi olarak görmemiş olsa da bu mektupları keşfeden ilk kişi olma heyecanı ile hayranlık duyduğu yazarın o güne kadar göz ardı ettiği hayatına da ilgi duymaya başlar. Mektuplara "sahip olma" arzusuna yenik düşen Roland, iki mektubu da gizlice alır. Mektuplar üzerinde kısa bir çalışmanın ardından Christabel LaMotte adında, adı pek duyulmamış, *canon* dışında kalan bir kadın şaire yazıldığına dair ip uçlarının peşine düşen Roland soluğu Lincon'da alır. Burada LaMotte araştırmaları ile tanınan bir akademisyen olan Maud Bailey ile tanışan Roland, mektupları ona gösterir. İkili, kısa sürede mektupların etkisine girer. Maud aynı zamanda Christabel ile aynı aileden gelmektedir. Bu aile bağı sayesinde ziyaret ettikleri bir evde, Maud ve Roland, ahşap bir bebek içine gizlenmiş başka mektuplar da bulurlar; ancak bu keşif de romanda yer alan pek çok diğer keşif gibi edebi eserler aracılığıyla yapılabilmıştır. Christabel'in "Dolly Keeps a Secret" (Bir Sır Saklar Oyuncak Bebek) şiirini anımsayan Maud'un aklına Christabel'in eski eşyaları arasında rastladığı oyuncak bebeğin içini açıp bakma fikri gelmiş ve bu sayede Roland'ın keşfettiği mektupların devamına ulaşmışlardır. Roland ve Maud, evli bir erkek olan Ash ile o zamana değin lezbiyen bir şair olarak bilinen Christabel arasındaki aşk ilişkisini ortaya koyan bu mektuplar ile ne yapacaklarını bilemezler. Bu mektupların akademide yaratacağı etkiyi düşünerek bir süre bu keşfi gizli tutmaya karar veren ikili, Ash ve Christabel'in izinde, Kuzey Yorkshire bölgesine seyahat eder. Ash ve Christabel'in gittiği yerlere gitmek, mektuplarında anlattıkları yerleri ziyaret etmek, Maud ve Roland'a akademik eğitimlerinin kazandıramadığı yepyeni bakış açıları kazandırır. O güne kadar LaMotte'nin şiirlerinde lezbiyen imgeler olarak yorumlanmış olan Yorkshire bölgesini, mektupların ortaya koyduğu üzere Christabel, Ash ile birlikte ziyaret etmiştir. Bu iki Viktorya dönemi şairinin izindeki yolculukları, esasında, Maud ve Roland'ın kendi özlerine yaptıkları bir yolculuğa dönüşür. Ash'ın mektuplarını okuyan Roland, bu gizli mektuplara sahip olmanın hazzını sürerken bir yandan da başkasına yazılmış bu mektupları sahibinin izni dışında okuyor olmaktan büyük rahatsızlık duyar. Roland'ın hikayesi ile Byatt okuyucuya modern akademisyenin çelişkiler barındıran hikayesini sunar ve hem

sıradan okuyucunun hem de eleştirilenler gibi profesyonel okuyucuların kendi bakış açılarını irdelemesini ister.

Roland, akademik çalışmalarını Fergus Wolff gibi en son teoriler üzerine çalışan, yapısökümde uzmanlaşmış meslektaşlarından farklı olarak metin odaklı, daha klasik olarak adlandırabileceğimiz yöntemlerle sürdürmektedir. Roland için esas olan metin ve sözcüklerin büyüdür. Bu durum da akademide geri planda kalmasına, bütün asistanlık işleri yapısökümcüler arasında birer birer dağıtılırken kendisinin işsiz kalmasına sebep olmuştur. Roland hayatını sürdürebilecek parayı güçlükle kazanmakta, kız arkadaşıyla birlikte yaşadığı bodrum katında mutsuz bir hayat sürmektedir.

*Sahipler* romanı 1990 yılında basılmıştır. Basıldığı dönem sebebiyle, Byatt'ın romanı genellikle postmodernist bir roman olarak okunmuştur. Postmodernizme açıkça karşı çıkan yazarların eserlerinin postmodern olarak okunması sıklıkla karşılaşılan bir durumdur ve *Sahipler* romanı üzerine yazılan analizlerin çoğunda bu eğilime rastlamak mümkündür. Ancak, Sarah Becker'in belirttiği gibi, Viktorya dönemi edebiyat dünyasını kurgusal Viktorya dönemi şairlerinin vantrilog sesleriyle yeniden inşa eden *Sahipler* romanı, anlamın sürekli ertelendiği oyunbaz anlatıların sunduğu entelektüel zevklerinin ötesinde bir şeye (maddi bir şeye, duygusal bir şeye) sahip olma arzusunu yeniden gündeme getirir (29). Bu bağlamda, Seán Burke'ın "son oyuncu kadrosu ne kadar doğaüstü olursa olsun, edebi eserler neticede insandan doğar" (*Return* 193) önermesinde vurgulandığı gibi, "insan" ile daha fazla temas halinde olan bir şeye duyulan özlem *Sahipler* romanındaki nostaljik anlatının ardındaki temel sebeptir.

*Sahipler*'de nostalji, yeni bir şey arayışının itici gücüdür, Byatt geçmişe duyulan özlemi geçmiş ile günümüz edebi gelenekleri arasında bir bağ kurmak amacıyla metinde işler. Byatt'ın *Sahipler*'de nostaljiyi ele alışı, tanıdık bir geçmişe yönelik basit bir özlemin çok ötesindedir. Daha ziyade, çağdaş karakterlerin "cehaletin mutluluk olduğu" bir duruma geri dönme arzusuna vurgu yapar. Maud'un postyapısalcı bakış açılarına ilişkin küçümseyici sözlerine kulak vererek bu alanda eğitim almış olan Maud'un hayal kırıklığını ve bunun ardından gelen çaresizliğini anlayabiliriz. Maud'a göre, modern akademisyenler gereğinden fazla şey bilmektedirler. Mesela nasıl üniter bir ego olmadığı - nasıl çatışan, etkileşimli

sistemlerden oluştuğumuz hakkında çok şey bilen akademisyenler buna inanmaktadırlar da. Roland'a "arzu tarafından yönlendirildiğimizi biliyoruz, ama bunu onların gördüğü gibi göremeyiz, değil mi?" (290) sorusunu yönelten Maud, kendi neslinin her anlatıda sadece cinsellik gören bu dilin tutsağı olduğundan yakınıdır.

Maud ve Roland, roman anlatıcısının tasvir ettiği gibi "aşka, 'aşık olmaya' romantik aşka, romantizme tamamen güvenmeyen ve bunun intikamını almak için, cinsel dili, dilsel cinselliği, analizi, incelemeyi, yapısökümü, teşhiri çoğaltan bir zamanın ve kültürün çocuklarıdır" (458). Bu özden kopuş Roland ve Maud'un çeşitli kimlik sorunları yaşamasına sebep olmuştur. Yaşadıkları hoşnutsuzluk ile Roland ve Maud teori sonrası jenerasyona aittirler. Teorinin diline hâkim olan bu nesil, teorinin sınırları ve baskıcı kurallarından bezmiştir (Greaney 114).

Viktorya dönemi şairleri, aşk ve arzudan bahsederken şiirin dilini kullanırken, Maud ve Roland'ın kullanabileceği tek dil teorinin dilidir. Bu yüzden, modern akademisyenlerin "söz[ü], onların bildiği haliyle söz, her şeyi mahvedecek[tir]" (459). Duygularını ideolojik çağrışımlarından tamamen sıyrılmış biçimde tecrübe etme naifliğini yitirmiş olan Roland ve Maud, aşka, gerçekten önemli olan şeylere inanmanın nasıl bir his olduğunu yeniden tecrübe edebilmek için hayal güçlerini oldukça zorlarlar. Keşfettikleri mektuplar ise onlara özlem duydukları bu hisleri yeniden tadabilecekleri yepyeni bir dünyanın kapılarını aralar. Ash ve Christabel arasındaki aşkın mektuplara dökülmüş hali, Roland ve Maud'a kendi modern dünyalarından çok farklı olan, daha lirik, imge ile imlenenin anlam olarak birbirinden kopmadığı bir zamana dönme imkânı sunar. Bu dünyada buldukları özü koruyabilmenin yolu da yaratıcı gücü ve yazarın otoritesini kucaklamaktan geçer.

Byatt'ın on dokuzuncu yüzyıl Viktorya dönemini ve yirminci yüzyılın akademik dünyasını karşıtlık içinde sunması, yazarın kimliği hakkındaki endişeleri açığa çıkarır. Bu endişe kendi yazarlığından ziyade, edebiyat eleştirisindeki pratiklere yöneliktir. Bir yazar olarak kendi sesinden ve gücünden son derece emin olan Byatt, yine de yazarın herhangi bir metinsel otoritesi olduğunu reddeden teorik söylemleri rahatsız edici bulur. Tüm bu noktaları vurgulamak için Viktorya dönemi edebi geleneklerini kullanarak, Neo-Viktoryen bir bakış açısıyla yazdığı *Sahipler*'de

Ash ve Christabel aracılığıyla yazarı tekrar merkezi bir konuma alarak yazarın ölümüne meydan okurken, Maud ve Roland örneğindeki gibi metne önceden edinilmiş teorik dil ve metodolojilerle yaklaşarak metnin gerçekten ne söylediğine kulak vermeyen eleştirmenlere karşı tavır alır. Romanda bu eleştiri oklarının özellikle hedefinde olan karakter feminist bir eleştirmen olan Leonora Stern'dir. Kendisi de lezbiyen olan Leonora, Christabel'in şiirlerindeki tüm imgeleri lezbiyen imgeler olarak okumuş ve akademiye kabul ettirmiştir. Stern'i fiziksel özellikleriyle, günlük konuşma ve vücut diliyle bir karikatür olarak sunan Byatt, bir röportajında Leonora'nın tarzına tahammül edemediğini belirtmiştir. Byatt'a göre Leonora gibi eleştirmenler, Luce Irigaray gibi teorisyenlerden koparıp aldıkları kadın cinselliği ile ilgili cümleleri, metinlerine serpiştirerek, edebiyatı, dünyada başka hiçbir şey yokmuşçasına, salt cinsellik ve cinsiyet tartışmalarına indirgerler (Franken 92). Böylesi yaklaşımların edebiyatı esas amacından uzaklaştırdığını iddia eden Byatt, edebiyatın üniversitelerde çalışılacak bir disipline dönüşmesiyle yazar ile okuyucu arasındaki bağı koparıldığını söyler.

Aynı zamanda eleştirmen olan romancıların yazar romanları hakkında yazmak oldukça zor bir iştir. John Chevalier'ın *Sahipler* romanı eleştirisinde belirttiği gibi "kendi eleştirisini titizlikle yapan bir roman hakkında söylenebilecek pek az söz vardır" (112). Bu tür romanlarda okuyucu-eleştirmen ya yazarın dediklerini tekrar edip durur ya da tamamen susar (Davies 152). Bu çıkmazın eleştirmenleri nasıl etkilediğinin en belirgin örneği, Byatt'ın itirazlarına ve metindeki yeniden yapılandırmacı unsurlara rağmen, romanın sıklıkla postmodern bir roman olarak okunmasıdır. Yeniden yapılandırmacı açıdan bakmak, yazarın otoritesine saygı duymak ve Byatt gibi yazarların durumunda eleştirmene karşı olumsuz tutumlarını da kabul etmeyi gerektirir; postmodernizm ve postyapısalcılık, böylesi bir boyun eğmeyi kabul etmeyen eleştirmenlere bir çözüm sunuyor olabilir. Byatt'a göre, "modernist edebiyat, kaba olduğunu düşündüğü hikâye anlatıcılığını ortadan kaldırmaya, onun yerine geçmişe dönüşler, aydınlanmalar, bilinç akışları koymaya çalıştı (*On Histories and Stories* 170). Ancak Şehrazat'ın hikayesinde olduğu gibi ölüme meydan okumanın tek yolu hikâye anlatmaya devam etmektir. Postyapısalcı bir açıdan bakıldığında her anlatıldığında hikâye değişse ve her okuyucu tarafından farklı yorumlansa da nihayetinde hikâyenin bir yazarı olduğu

gerçeği deęişmez. Post-postmodern ve yeniden yapılandırmacı yaklaşımın çıkış noktası bu gerçektir.

Bu çalışmanın dördüncü bölümüne konu olan David Lodge'un *Yazar, Yazar* romanı 2004 yılında basılmıştır. Kampüs romanlarıyla tanınan toplumsal gerçekçi Lodge genellikle hiciv türünde eserler vermiştir. *Yazar, Yazar* ise Lodge'un hem hiciv türündeki hem de yazarları konu alan önceki romanlarından farklı bir çizgidedir. Lodge bu romanın farkını şu sözlerle dile getirir: “*Yazar, Yazar*’ı yazmaya hazırlanmak ve yazmak benim için bütünüyle yeni bir yazma tecrübesiydi: Ben hayal edene kadar var olmayan bir kurgu dünyası yaratmak yerine, Henry James’in hayatındaki çeşitli olaylarda roman biçimde bir hikâye bulmaya çalışıyordum (TYHJ 31-2).

Lodge'un yazarlık anlayışı üzerinde önemli etkiye sahip olaylardan biri edebiyat dünyasının Mikhail Bakhtin’i yeniden keşfetmesidir. Lodge’a göre Bakhtin’in teorileri postyapısalcılık sonrası bir edebi hayatın mümkünlüğünden endişe duyan edebiyat eleştirmenlerine umut olmuştur (*After Bakhtin* 4). Lodge Bakhtin’in çağdaş eleştiriye en büyük katkısının “uzun süredir bilinmezliğinin ve ölümünden sonra gelen şöhretinin tarihsel ironisi aracılığıyla, yazarın yaratıcı ve iletişimsel gücünü tam zamanında, yeniden, doğrulamış olması” olduğunu belirtir (*After Bakhtin* 7). Bu güçten ilham alan Lodge, Henry James’in orta yaşlarını kurgusallaştırdığı romanında, yazarlık sorununu ölüm ve ölümsüzlük mecazları üzerinden ele almayı amaçlar ve bu doğrultuda, romanın “yazarın ölümü” ile başlayan son derece sembolik bir açılış sahnesi vardır. Bu sahnede Lodge savaşta ölen askerler ile James gibi yazılarıyla ölümsüzlüğü yakalamayı başarmış insanlar arasında bir karşılaştırma yapar. Askerler birer kahraman olarak ölseler de James gibi bir yazarın aksine arkalarında bıraktıkları sayfaları dolduramayacaklardır. Yazarı ölüm döşeginde tasvir eden bu kısa giriş bölümünün ardından İkinci Bölüm, James’in orta yaş dönemine odaklanarak 1880’lere geri döner ve romanın büyük çoğunluğunu James’in yazarlık uğraşısı, buhranları ve başarısızlıkları oluşturur. Bu bölümde ayrıca, Henry James’in George Du Maurier ile kurduğu dostluk üzerinde de durulur. Du Maurier ile Henry James iki farklı yazar portresi olarak karşımıza çıkar. Punch dergisi için karikatür çizen Du Maurier, görme yetisini kaybetmesinin ardından geçimini sağlamak için yeni bir uğraş olarak gördüğü romancılığa yönelir.

Du Maurier popüler kitleler için yazdığı *Trilby* romanıyla başarıdan başarıya koşarken, James son romanlarının beklenen ilgiyi görmemesi sebebiyle tiyatrodaki şansını denemeye karar vermiş, ancak romanın da dönüm noktası olan *Guy Domville* oyununun açılış gecesinde seyirci tarafından yuhalanması olayının ardından uzun bir süre eski başarısını yakalaması mümkün olmamıştır.

Her bir yazarın biyografik kurgu ve yazar romanı türlerine yaklaşımı farklıdır. Byatt Viktorya dönemi şairlerini kurgularken belli başlı kişilerden esinlenmiş olsa da romanda bu isimleri kullanmaz, özgün görünümlü karakterler yaratır, hatta bu karakterlere ait hayali şiirleri de yazar. Lodge ise tam aksine, Henry James ismini özellikle kullanır ve kullandığı bu isme sadık kalarak romanını araştırmalarından elde ettiği bilgiler üzerine kurar. Bu özelliği ile *Yazar, Yazar* romanı çoğu kez, bir kurgu eserinden ziyade adeta tarihi bir doküman olduğu yönünde eleştiriler almıştır.

Lodge'un yazar romanı için Henry James'i seçmiş olması ve kurgusunu belli bir etik sadakat içerisinde devam ettirmesi için elbette kendine göre sebepleri vardır. James yazarların yazarıdır ve kendisinden sonra gelen pek çok yazar "etkilenme endişesi"nin doğal bir sonucu olarak, bilinçli ya da bilinçsiz bir şekilde kendi yazınlarını James'inki ile ilintili olarak konumlandırmıştır. James aynı zamanda Viktorya dönemi gerçekçiliğinden modernist kişi dışılıktan uzaklaşmaya geçiş figürü olarak da bilinir. Bu özelliğiyle Kaplan'ın ifade ettiği gibi "Son Viktoryen, ilk modern, her ikisi de" olan James, her daim yazarlığın geleceği hakkındaki endişelerin merkezinde olmuştur (*Victoriana* 71). Bu bağlamda, Ozick'in ifadesiyle gizemli bir şekilde, yıllar geçtikçe James biraz daha çağdaşımız olmaktadır. Belki de zamanımızın duyarlılıkları onunkine ancak yetişebilmiştir (135).

Bloom, etkilenme endişesi teorisinde her şairin, kariyerine, bilinçsizce, ölüm korkusuna diğer tüm erkek ve kadınlardan daha güçlü bir şekilde isyan ederek başladığını belirtir. Henry'nin edebi yaşamını başarı ve başarısızlık mecazları etrafında, ölümsüzlüğün kazanılabileceği veya kaybedilebileceği bir mekanizma olarak tasvir eden Lodge, bu nedenle, yazarın çok çeşitli yazar konumlarına ve eleştirilerine değinir. Lodge *Yazar*'ı yaratıcı olarak sunar ve Barthes'ın iddiasının aksine, otoritesi yazma işin tamamlanmasıyla sona ermez; yazar metnin her aşamasında, öncesinde ve sonrasında da aktiftir. Yazdığı romanlar için bir tür

ebeveyn sorumluluğu hissettiğini, bunların kompozisyonunun önemli bir anlamda kendi geçmişi olduğunu söyleyen Lodge, bir kitabı yazarken düşündüğünü, acı çektiğini ve o kitap için yaşadığını anlatır (*After Bakhtin* 15). Eserleri ile böylesi bir bağ kuran Lodge için, *Yazar, Yazar* romanının aldığı olumsuz eleştirilerin ardından kaleme aldığı *The Year of Henry James: The Story of a Novel* (2006)<sup>46</sup> adlı kitabında dile getirdiği üzere, yazar, bir romanın doğuşunun ve yazılışının hikayesini anlatmaya en yetkili kişidir ve romanın nasıl yorumlandığından en çok etkilenen kişi de yine yazardır (xi). Bu yüzdendir ki, Lodge Graham Greene'den alıntıladığı gibi yazarın- o zavallı şeytanın- da var olma hakkı olduğuna yürekten inanır (*TYHJ* 220) ve *Yazar, Yazar* romanı, eleştirel devam romanı olan *The Year of Henry James* ile birlikte, Lodge'un kendi yazarlık serüveninde bu mottoyu nasıl uyguladığını göstermektedir.

Bu çalışmanın beşinci bölümünde, Maggie Gee'nin yazarlık kimliğini kurgulaması *Virginia Woolf Manhattan*'da adlı romanın analizi üzerinden ele alınmıştır. *VWM*, kariyeri boyunca, bir yazar olarak eserlerinde yazarlık uygulamalarına ve performanslarına yoğun bir ilgi göstermiş olan ünlü yazar Maggie Gee'nin güçlü ve gösterişli bir yazar beyanıdır. Roman, romandaki ilk yazar figürü Angela Lamb'ın uçakta "çantasında Virginia Woolf ile New York'a uçarken" tasvir edildiği sahne ile başlar. Angela Lamb, Gee'nin önceki romanlarının okuyucularının hatırlayacağı gibi, Gee'nin biricik kurgusal karşılığı ve sözcüsüdür. Otokurmaca bir portre olarak, Gee'nin *The Burning Book* (1983) ve *The Flood* (2004) gibi romanlarında gördüğümüz Angela Lamb, bu romanda başarılı bir romancı olarak okuyucu karşısına çıkmaktadır.

Gee'nin hikayesindeki Virginia Woolf, Byatt ve Lodge'da biyografik kurgu örneklerinde gördüğümüzün aksine tarihsel gerçekliğinden çok farklı bir biçimde

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<sup>46</sup> *Henry James Yılı: Bir Romanın Hikayesi* olarak çevrilebilecek olan bu eserde Lodge, Henry James üzerine bir roman yazmaya karar vermesi ile başına gelen trajikomik olayları uzun bir hikaye biçiminde anlatır. Öncelikle Lodge'un romanının piyasaya çıktığı 2004 yılı civarında Emma Tennant'ın *Felony* (2002), Colm Toibin'in *The Master* (2004) gibi pek çok diğer Henry James romanı basılmıştır. Özellikle Toibin ile Lodge'un romanlarının aynı yıl basılması Lodge adına büyük bir talihsizlik olmuş, iki roman arasında sayısız kıyaslama yapılmış ve Lodge'un tarihsel doğrulara sadık kalarak kaleme aldığı romanı başarısız bir roman olarak yorumlanmıştır. Durumun ironisini ve trajikomikliğini Henry James üzerine roman yazmaya niyetlenen yazarlarının adeta birer James karakterine dönüşmesi üzerinden ele alan Lodge, bu eserde aynı zamanda biyografik kurgu türünün özellikleri, türe duyulan ilginin artması gibi konuları da işlemektedir.

kurgulanmıştır. İstanbul’da gerçekleşecek olan Virginia Woolf konferansına açılış konuşmasını yapmak üzere davetli olan Angela, konuşmasını hazırlarken “yazara dönmek” üzere Woolf’un el yazmalarına ev sahipliği yapan New York Halk Kütüphanesi içerisinde yer alan Berg Koleksiyonunu ziyaret ederken Virginia Woolf bir anda kitaplar arasında canlanıverir. Yirmi birinci yüzyıla yabancı olan Woolf’a rehberlik etmek ile görevlendirilen Angela, bu konuda oldukça zorlanmaktadır. Virginia’nın meyve bıçağı ile laptopu açmaya çalışması, tüm tanıdıklarının ölmüş olduğuna inanamaması gibi trajikomik sahneler ile yirminci ve yirmi birinci yüzyıl yaşam ve yazarlık biçimleri arasındaki zıtlıkları ortaya koyan Gee, Angela Lamb ve Virginia Woolf’un iç içe geçmiş yazarlık hikayeleri aracılığıyla yazarlık ve otorite sorunlarına eğilmektedir. Manhattan’daki ilk karşılaşmalarından, Virginia Woolf üzerine bir konferans için İstanbul’a gitmelerine<sup>47</sup> kadar geçen sürede, iki kadın yazar olarak birbirlerini tanımakta ve böylece geçmiş ve şimdiki yazarlık biçimleri, iki yazar arasındaki diyalog üzerinden müzakere edilmektedir.

Gee, edebi üretimin maddi boyutu konusunda çok hassas bir yazardır. Romanında “ayrıcalıklı” bir sınıfa mensup olduğu için sıklıkla eleştirilen Virginia Woolf’u, Gee’nin kendisi gibi işçi sınıfı geçmişine sahip olan kendi otokurgu portresi Angela Lamb ile bir tezat oluşturmak için kullanır. Angela’ya göre Virginia rahat rahat para harcayan, insanların kendisine hizmet etmesini bekleyen biridir; ne de olsa hayatı boyunca para hakkında endişelenmek zorunda kalmamıştır. Angela ve Virginia birbirini tanıdıkça birbirleri hakkındaki olumsuz düşünceleri değişir. Angela Virginia’yı ayrıcalıklı olarak görmekten vazgeçer, teori eğitimin kazandırmış olduğu bakış açısını bir kenara bırakırken, Virginia da yirmi birinci yüzyıl dünyasına ve değişen yazarlık anlayışına adapte olur. Gee, Angela ve Virginia’nın New York’ta kitapçı ararken pek çok kitapevinin bir bir kapandığına şahit olmaları, Virginia’nın yeniden doğarken beraberinde getirdiği *Orlando* ve *Deniz Feneri* romanlarını ilk basım nadir eserler olarak satabilmek için üzerine kişisel notlar yazmaya uygun dolma kalem bulmakta güçlük çekmeleri gibi durumlar ve Virginia’nın bilgisayar, e-posta ve çevrimiçi platformlarla olan maceraları

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<sup>47</sup> Virginia Woolf’u “kendisi” konferansına götürerek Gee “yazarın ölümüne” alaycı bir tavırla karşı çıkmakta ve yazarın ve yaşamının metin üzerindeki otoritesine vurgu yapmaktadır.

aracılığıyla digimodernizmin edebiyat üzerindeki etkilerini de resmeder. Yazı dünyası büyük bir hızla değişmektedir. Virginia bir yana, genç olmakla ve teknolojiyi yakından takip etmekle övünen Angela dahi bu değişimin hızına yetişemediğini fark etmektedir.

Romanın son bölümünde İstanbul'daki konferans gerçekleşir. Bu konferans aracılığıyla, yeni nesilde Virginia Woolf'un mirasını devralacak kişi olarak romandaki üçüncü yazar karakteri, Angela Lamb'ın kızı Gerda'yı yücelten Gee, aynı zamanda konferansı kullanarak Moira Penny gibi yazarı tamamen göz ardı ederek sadece teoriye yoğunlaşan eleştirmenleri yerer. Romanın sonunda Virginia'nın yeniden ölmesi ile ima edildiği üzere, yazar, tıpkı eserleri gibi değişik evrenlerde, değişik biçimlerde var olmaya devam edecek, her okuyuşta yeniden dirilecektir.

Çalışmanın son bölümünde çalışmanın bulgularının özetlenmesinin ardından, Byatt, Lodge ve Gee'de görülen otorite temelli yazarlık anlayışından yola çıkılarak teknolojideki son gelişmelerin yazarın yazma pratiklerini ve otoritesini ne şekilde etkileyebileceği üzerinde durulmuştur. Bu gelişmeler arasında en dikkate değer olanı, yazarlık ve tanrı arasındaki benzetme ile de ilişkilendirilebilecek olan yapay zekanın yazar/yaratıcı olarak kullanılmasıdır. Günümüzde yapay zekâ yazma işini kolaylaştırmak, çeviri, vb pek çok amaçla kullanılmakta, Hollywood filmlerine senaryolar üreten robotların varlığı uzun süredir bilinmektedir.

Tamamen yapay zekâ tarafından yazılmış ilk roman olan *I the Road* 2018'de yayınlanmıştır. Ross Goodwin tarafından Jack Kerouac'ın *On the Road* adlı romanına öykünme projesinin bir parçası olarak tasarlanan bu projede, yapay zekâ, kurgu ve şiir örneklerinden oluşan devasa verilerle eğitilmiş ve araba üzerine kurulu bir kamera düzeneği ile New York'tan New Orleans'a bir yolculuğa çıkarılmıştır. Seyahat esnasında gördüklerini veriler ile birleştiren yapay zekâ "romanını" fatura kâğıtlarına yazmıştır. Böylesi bir proje bazı çevrelerde heyecan ile karşılanırken, her kesimde beklenen etkiyi yaratamamıştır. Pek çok eleştirmene göre, yapay zekanın ürettiği roman, öykündüğü *On the Road*'ın yanına bile yaklaşamamıştır. Buna rağmen, bu projenin heyecan verici ve düşündürücü çıktıları olmuştur ve hem yazarlık pratikleri hem de yazarın otoritesi açısından yapay zekânın üzerinde düşünmek gerekir.

Yapay zekâ dünyadaki bütün kitapların, yazılmış her şeyin, taranıp aktarıldığı ve istenildiği zaman kullanıldığı bir kaynak olarak düşünülürse, herhangi bir şey yazmak istediğinde de bunu rahatlıkla yapabilir. Bu özelliği ile belli bir kökeni olmayan yapay zekâ, Barthes'ın kişisellikten arındırdığı *scriptor* olabilir mi? Yapay zekâ, pekâlâ, Barthes'ın yazmana attığı “hiçbiri orijinal olmayan çeşitli yazıların harmanlandığı ve çatıştığı çok boyutlu bir alan” (IMT 146), yaratan nihai bir yazman olabilir. Ayrıca yapay zekâ, “hiçbirine dayanmayacak şekilde, yazıları birbirine karıştırma, diğerleriyle karşı karşıya getirme” (a.g.e.) gücüne sahiptir ve dolayısıyla köken arayışını geçersiz ve gereksiz kılabilir.

Peki, yapay zekâ, bir yazman olarak kabul edildiğinde, Foucault' nun “yazar işlevi” kime işaret eder? Bir yapay zekâ tarafından üretilen sanat eseri programa mı yoksa onu tasarlayan kişiye mi ait olacaktır? Tüm bu sorular ile yapay zekâ, yazar ve otorite ilişkisini yeniden düşünmeye ve kurgulamamıza sebep olacaktır. Mevcut haliyle, edebiyatın çıkış noktası ve nihai gayesi olan “insan” unsurunun kapasitesinde bir eser üretebilmekten uzak olan yapay zekâ ile bu çalışmaya konu olan yazar romanlarını bir arada düşündüğümüzde görüyoruz ki yazarın varlığı, kökeni ve hayatı metinden silinerek yazar öldürülüp robot gibi bir yazmana dönüştürüldüğünde ortaya çıkacak metin *On the Road* romanına öykünerek yazılan *I the Road* gibi, yapay zekâ mekanikliğin ötesine geçemeyecektir. Bu nedenle, yazarın otoritesini yeniden inşa ederek, kurgunun antropolojik işlevine vurgu yapan bu romanlardan yola çıkarak iddia edebileceğimiz gibi, yazman, yalnızca yapay zekâ gibi cansız bir bedene uygun bir konum olabilir. Byatt, Lodge ve Gee'in yazar romanları ile gösterdiği üzere, derine inildiğinde okuduğumuz kurguların ardında maddi koşulların, yazarın tecrübelerinin ve duygularının etkisi olduğunu görürüz. Bu üç yazara göre, yazar, Barthes'ın ileri sürdüğü gibi işi sadece yazıları karıştırıp harmanlamak olan kişi değildir. Yazar, kendisine sözcükler ile yeni bir dünya “yaratma” hediyesi bahşedilmiş kişidir ve dolayısıyla hayatıyla metnin hem içinde hem dışında yer alabilir.

Bu çalışma iki ana kaynaktan doğmuştur: hayat ve yazın. İkisinin yazar romanlarında nasıl kesiştiklerini üç romancı-eleştirmen, Byatt, Lodge ve Gee örneği üzerinden inceleyen bu çalışma, öncelikle biyografik kurgu ve yazar romanı çalışmaları gibi çeşitli alanlara katkı sağlayacaktır. Biyografik kurgu ve yazar

romanı çalışmaları gelişen araştırma alanlarıdır. Gelecekteki çalışmalarda, burada oluşturulan teorik temel çeşitli romanlara uygulanabilir. Bu çalışmada, yazarların siyasi görüşleri ve onların kurguları üzerindeki olası etkileri incelenmemiştir; ancak otoritenin asla güç mücadelesinden bağımsız olmadığı gerçeği göz önüne alındığında, bu alanlarda yapılacak çalışmaların çok faydalı olacağını söyleyebiliriz. Bu çalışma, post-postmodern dönem yazınının yeniden yapılandırmacı dönüşüne ilişkin, benzer çalışmalara ilham verecektir.

Yazara ve yazarın kişiliğine, doğumuna, yaşamına ve ölümüne ve de bunun otorite ile ilişkisine odaklanan bu tez, yazar karşıtı söylemler tarafından marjinalleştirilen yazarın nasıl geri döndüğünü göstererek yazar kimliğinin yeniden inşa edilme sürecini anlatır. Bu özelliği ile bu çalışma, post-postmodern dönemdeki çağdaş yazar romanlarında yazar kimliğinin tartışılmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu dönemi tam olarak nasıl adlandırabileceğimize ilişkin görüş birliğinin noksanlığının gösterdiği üzere, post-postmodernizm halen tanımlanma aşamasındadır. Bu çalışma daha önce genellikle postmodern olarak çalışılmış olan bu üç romanı bir araya getirerek, bu romanlara post-postmodern bir perspektiften bakmaktadır. Bu örnekleyici romanların detaylı analizi yapılmış, post-postmodern gündemleri ve ontolojileri vurgulanmış, postmodernizmden farkları aktarılmıştır. Bu yönü ile bu çalışma, bu eserlerde postmodernizmin biçim olarak devam etmesine rağmen ontolojik olarak etkisini yitirdiğini göstermiştir. Postmodernizm ve post-postmodernizm arasında yapılan bu ayrımın örneklendirilmesi halihazırda devam etmekte olan post-postmodernizm tartışmalarını, özellikle de yazarın bu tartışmalar karşısındaki konumu ve rolü gibi konuları, zenginleştirecektir. Son olarak, yeni teknolojilerin yazarlığı ve otoriteyi nasıl etkileyebileceğini düşünmeye davet eden bu çalışma yazarlık araştırmaları alanındaki okuyucular, yazarlar ve eleştirmenler olarak hepimizin derhal ilgilenmesi gereken güncel konulara dikkat çekmektedir.

## C. THESIS PERMISSION FORM / TEZ İZİN FORMU

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### YAZARIN / AUTHOR

Soyadı / Surname : KOÇ  
Adı / Name : Nesrin  
Bölümü / Department : İngiliz Edebiyatı / English Literature

### TEZİN ADI / TITLE OF THE THESIS (İngilizce / English):

**A.S Byatt'ın *Sahipler*, David Lodge'un *Yazar, Yazar Ve Maggie Gee'nin Virginia Woolf Manhattan'da Adlı Yazar Romanlarında Yazar Kimliğinin Yeniden Kurgulanması***  
The Reconstruction of Authorial Identity in Contemporary Author Fictions: A.S Byatt's *Possession*, David Lodge's *Author, Author* and Maggie Gee's *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*

TEZİN TÜRÜ / DEGREE: Yüksek Lisans / Master  Doktora / PhD

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