"The Dead Man Touch'd Me From the Past": Reading as Mourning, Mourning as Reading in A. S. Byatt's 'The Conjugial Angel'

Andrew Williamson
(The University of Queensland, Australia)

Abstract:
At the centre of nearly every A. S. Byatt novel is another text, often Victorian in origin, the presence of which stresses her demand for an engagement with, and a reconsideration of, past works within contemporary literature. In conversing with the dead in this way, Byatt, in her own, consciously experimental, work, illustrates what she has elsewhere called "the curiously symbiotic relationship between old realism and new experiment." This symbiotic relationship demands further exploration within *Possession* (1990) and *Angels and Insects* (1992), as these works resurrect the Victorian period. This paper examines the recurring motif of the séance in each novel, a motif that, I argue, metaphorically correlates spiritualism and the acts of reading and writing. Byatt's literary resurrection creates a space in which received ideas about Victorian literature can be reconsidered and rethought to give them a new critical life. In a wider sense, Byatt is examining precisely what it means for a writer and their work to exist in the shadow of the 'afterlife' of prior texts.

Keywords: A. S. Byatt, 'The Conjugial Angel', mourning, neo-Victorian novel, *Possession*, reading, séance, spiritualism, symbiosis.

*****

> Nature herself occasionally quarters an inconvenient parasite on an animal towards whom she has otherwise no ill-will. What then? We admire her care for the parasite.
> (George Eliot 1979: 77)

Towards the end of A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), a group of academics is gathered around an unread letter recently exhumed from the grave of a pre-eminent Victorian poet, the fictional Randolph Henry Ash. The letter, sent to Ash during his final illness by his former mistress, the poet Christabel LaMotte, was written to confess that their affair had produced a child. While the importance of this scene rests in its revelation of narrative truths and thus the provision of closure for characters and readers alike, it is the conditions under which this letter is read that holds a crucial meaning for understanding this novel, and other of Byatt's, works:

> So, in that hotel room, to that strange gathering of disparate seekers and hunters, Christabel LaMotte's letter to Randolph Ash was read aloud, by candlelight, with the wind howling past, and the panes of the windows rattling with the little blows of flying debris as it raced on and on, over the downs. (Byatt 1991: 499)

Byatt's description of this scene, as Louisa A. Hadley has noted, "bears an uncanny resemblance to a séance" (Hadley 2003: 87). Elements such as the candlelight, the wind ethereally rapping on the windowpanes, and the circle of participants listening to an otherworldly voice answer their most pressing questions combine to lend the scene unearthly qualities. The letter, moreover, reveals LaMotte and Ash to be the great-great-great-grandparents of one of the listeners, and thus, as Hadley argues, forges a connection between past and present, and a spiritual communication between Maud Bailey and her dead ancestors (Hadley 2003: 87).

What I would like to draw out of this scene, though, is that the séance's participants are professional readers who represent a diverse range of methodological approaches in the field of literary study. More importantly, the letter reveals to each scholar new meaning in the textual productions of the past and encourages readings that revise received interpretations of both poets' works, while still allowing the contemporary readers to remain faithful to those texts as historical documents. In this sense, the scene indeed resembles a séance; however, the trans-generational haunting that takes place transforms it into a repetition with a difference of a Victorian séance. For Elisabeth Bronfen, repetition is part of the work of mourning, an attempt to reclaim what has been lost. This attempt, however, can never unambiguously succeed as such repetition is

> a double movement, both a return to something primary and the production of something new.... Repetition is, then, a duplicitous rhetorical strategy, for what it enacts lies in the past. It is also different from – in fact quite possibly the first representation of – the *original* lost term. Thus repetition is always informed with novelty. (Bronfen 1993: 105, original emphasis)

Byatt's repetition, then, which metaphorically links the séance and the act of reading itself, reflects an ideal situation of literary study as a continual re-thinking of received ideas through a persistent contemporary re-engagement with past works. What the metaphor of the séance works to produce is a critical novelty through an engagement with what has been lost.[1]

As both novelist and critic, Byatt is preoccupied with the inevitable embedding of contemporary British writing within a vast body of realist literature. In particular, Byatt's work continually returns to the question of precisely how writers can innovate while weighted down by the history of the English novel. In her 1979 article 'People in Paper Houses: Attitudes to "Realism" and "Experiment" in English Postwar Fiction', Byatt directly addresses the intersection of categories she defines as "realist" and "experimental" in her response to Nathalie Sarraute's earlier proposition that the works of the past "demand of the writer a difficult type of conduct, a painful, dual effort" (Sarraute 1960: 41). For Sarraute, the peculiar situation of the modern writer requires a simultaneous acknowledgement and disavowal of their literary inheritance. The writer, she continues,

> must at the same time impregnate himself with [these works], feed upon them and discard them; be familiar with them and forget them; see with their eyes a universe enriched with all the complexity with which they furnished it, and yet see it intact and new. While studying the admirable implements forged by his predecessors, he must never forget that these implements could only be used by them. (Sarraute 1960: 41)

Both Sarraute and Byatt demand an engagement, at some level, with literary history; where Byatt departs from Sarraute, however, is in Sarraute's suggestion that unless we forget the writers of the past, contemporary writing can never be innovative or wholly new. Once one's own literary history, the mourned object, is properly dead, there can be no repetition of it.

For her own part, Byatt claims, in *On Histories and Stories*, that "my sense of my own identity is bound up with the past, with what I read and with the way my ancestors, genetic and literary, read, in the worlds in which they lived" (Byatt 2001: 93); for Byatt, then, contemporary literary identity is inevitably constituted from a consideration of the historical. Such

awareness of her literary descendancy inherently problematises any easy separation of categories of realist and experimental, old and new. Rather, Byatt argues that any discussion of contemporary literature is necessarily haunted by literary history:

> Respect for the tradition of the realist novel is apparently a very rooted fact…. The fictional texts of the Great Tradition are indeed the texts of the Religion of Humanity; and many novelists now seem to feel that they *exist in some uneasy relation to the afterlife of these texts*…. Thus it seems that much formal innovation in recent English fiction has concerned itself, morally and aesthetically, with its forebears…. (Byatt 1979: 21, emphasis added)

For Sarraute, contemporary literature must not repeat its history. For Byatt, literary innovation is born from a repetition in which the original object both has and has not been forgotten: contemporary literature is the repetition of a mourned object and is thus an attempt to keep it alive; however, its difference ensures that it can never ultimately replace the original object, turning contemporary literature instead into something new. Similarly, the intertextual nature of Byatt's writing ensures this foregrounding of literary history. In remembering the dead, her novels resurrect literary history in the present not with the intent of mere repetition, but to produce new readings, new understandings of it.

'People in Paper Houses' continues with a reading of contemporary fiction in which the dialogue with its predecessors is emphasised to illustrate what Byatt calls "the curiously symbiotic relationship between old realism and new experiment" (Byatt 1979: 24). What I will suggest is that such symbiosis can be read throughout her own fictional works. Byatt, ever-conscious of her status as literary heir, enters into a Derridian "reaffirmation" of literary history, in which, according to Derrida,

> the heir must always respond to a double injunction, a contradictory assignation: It is necessary first of all to know and to know how to *reaffirm* what comes 'before us'.... What does it mean to reaffirm? It means not simply accepting this

> heritage but relaunching it otherwise and keeping it alive. (Derrida 2004: 3, original emphasis)

Byatt's dialogue with the dead ensures her texts embody this responsibility of the literary heir towards the writing that has been inherited. Her work exists within what J. Hillis Miller terms a chain of host and parasite, in which

> [t]he host and the somewhat sinister or subversive parasite are fellow guests beside the food, sharing it. On the other hand, the host is himself the food…. If the host is both eater and eaten, he also contains within himself the double antithetical relation of host and guest, guest in the bifold sense of friendly presence and alien invader. (Miller 1977: 442)

In her refusal to place boundaries on categories of old and new, Byatt stresses the importance of, and simultaneously accommodates, literary history within the contemporary novel, an accommodation that demands a perpetual re-reading, relaunching, and reaffirmation.

If the implicit gesture of intertextuality is one of unfolding the text, of opening dialogue between texts, this literary parasitism is fundamentally, and paradoxically, a hospitable move. Much like the symbiotic relation between old and new that Byatt finds in contemporary writing, Miller further states that the relationship of host and parasite

> subverts or nullifies the apparently unequivocal relation of polarity which seems the conceptual scheme appropriate for thinking through the system. Each word in itself becomes separated by the strange logic of the "para," [a] membrane which divides inside from outside and yet joins them in a hymeneal bond, or [which] allows an osmotic mixing, making the strangers friends, the distant near, the dissimilar similar ... without, for all its closeness and similarity, ceasing to be strange, distant, [and] dissimilar. (Miller 1977: 443)[2]

Byatt's work knits together such threads of intertextuality; at once similar and strange, her fictions and their intertexts, as well as her critical writings, converse with or, perhaps, feed off, each other. In a wider sense, Byatt is examining precisely what it means for a writer and their work to exist "in some uneasy relation to the afterlife" of prior texts. Her demand for a consideration of literary history within the contemporary novel self-consciously establishes her work as a link within Miller's parasitical chain. However, she recognises that to host these works, writers must necessarily move beyond the role of mere parasite: only by engaging the dissimilar can they produce new readings and, consequently, new meanings, crucial to heightening our understanding of texts both past and present.

Byatt's first post-*Possession* work, *Angels and Insects* (1992), comprises two novellas, the second of which, 'The Conjugial Angel', largely focuses on the nineteenth-century spiritualist practice that was a peripheral interest in *Possession*.[3] Through a group of spiritualists, Emily Jesse, née Tennyson, sister of Alfred and fiancée of Arthur Hallam at the time of his death, attempts to communicate with Hallam's spirit. 'The Conjugial Angel' continues *Possession*'s metaphoric correlation of spiritualism and reading; however, Byatt expands this association to include the act of writing. Moreover, in implicating reading and writing in the mourning process, and by resurrecting the voices of past writers through the metaphor of the séance, Byatt asks her reader to consider the "afterlife" of literary history itself. Both texts propose the séance as a figure for patient and considered (and, perhaps, professional) reading, and if we read 'The Conjugial Angel' through this metaphor, we recognise its reversibility: reading can itself be seen to be a kind of séance or spiritual parlour game. The reader, as Michael Levenson notes in his review of *Angels and Insects*, is always involved in a Lazarus-like project of resurrecting the dead or, rather, of raising the ghosts of those who do not exist. Levenson argues that Byatt's novella faces her readers with the realisation that

> we novel readers are always seeing ghosts. Every character is an apparition. Whenever we lend solidity to the stories we follow, we are living proof of a visionary capacity almost always undervalued. Byatt's purpose is to push this fact about fiction into the foreground of consciousness, so that

> reading novels becomes the training of vision. (Levenson 1993: 44)

This notion, I would argue, can be extended to the writer herself, whose "visionary capacity" reflects a manifest responsibility towards mourning in which a resurrection and reaffirmation of her literary antecedents is enacted. Levenson's "training of vision" becomes a training in creativity for the reader, who has a similar responsibility to literary history. The aim of the séance is, to borrow Byatt's pun, to *possess* and, in the case of the medium, *to be possessed by*, the past, to seek answers from the past, and to resurrect the spirits beyond death, while simultaneously summoning their voices into the present. Indeed, reading neo-Victorian literature such as Byatt's enacts this very process.

Moreover, if the desire for participation in the séance is not a simple inquisitiveness about the afterlife, Byatt is careful to acknowledge it as an expression of mourning.[4] Approaching the séance as readers, the characters of 'The Conjugial Angel' mime the process of reading as mourning literary history, and of reading as resurrecting literary history, precisely Byatt's own movement as writer and reader. 'The Conjugial Angel', like much of Byatt's fiction, is populated by good readers, through whom she connects spiritualism and literature.[5] Each of the two séances featured in 'The Conjugial Angel' begins with a poetical or theoretical reading, after which the characters wait for the spirits to communicate through automatic writing.[6] The acts of both reading and writing, then, become means of channelling the departed: in Byatt's Victorian world, "[s]éances ... frequently opened with poetic evocations of those gone before" (Byatt 1995: 246). The novella's only truly gifted spiritualist, Sophy Sheekhy, "could produce the vague, floating state of mind [required to channel spirits] by reciting poetry to herself. She had not known much poetry before her work at Mrs Jesse's house, but had taken to it there like a duck to water" (Byatt 1995: 246). Alone in her chamber, amidst otherworldly echoes of *Possession*'s séance, Sophy recites Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel':

> Her voice was low and pure and clear. As she spoke, she saw the thin flames, the moon curled like a feather, and felt herself spinning away from herself, as sometimes

> happened.... Reciting that made her cold all over. She held tighter to herself for comfort, cold breast on cold ledge of arms, little fingers clasping at her ribs. She was sure, almost sure, sure, that something else breathed amongst the floating feathers behind her. Poems rustled together like voices.... She heard the rattle of hail, or rain, suddenly in great gusts on the windowpane, like scattered seed. She felt a sudden weight in the room, a heavy space, as one feels tapping at the door of a house, knowing in advance that it is inhabited.... (Byatt 1995: 248)

Sophy takes to poetry so easily because the activity of both medium and reader is the same: the literature of the past is filled with spectral presences and, Byatt implies, successful reading summons them into being.

Hadley also notes the explicitness of the connection between literature and spiritualism in this passage (Hadley 2003: 96); however, Byatt, I would argue, is doing more than simply forging such a connection. More generally, Hilary M. Schor writes that "Byatt's own fiction ... has always connected writing and death" and, particularly in *Angels and Insects*, Byatt invokes ghostwriting, which "she reads in a double sense: first, that of the 'borrowings' ('writing like...') that seem to approach the postmodern forms of pastiche, and second, a ghostwriting that is speaking with the dead, not so much as writers but as moldering bodies, decaying forms" (Schor 2000: 237). The presence Sophy intuits above is indeed Hallam's decaying form; as a "sort-of-substance ... not exactly human" (Byatt 1995: 249), Byatt's Hallam literally incarnates Schor's mouldering body. For Schor, however, the decaying forms with which Byatt engages are not only literal but also extend to the history of the novel itself:

> There is already something elegiac, nostalgic, and downright creepy about the novel; the act of writing is an act of mourning, but it is also a refusal to let nature take its course. The act of preservation at the heart of the novel is simply unnatural, its way of cataloging, transforming and resurrecting matter an intervention in the world it pretends merely to "show".... (Schor 2000: 240)

If, as Freud argues, "the work of mourning is completed [only once] the ego becomes free and uninhibited" (Freud 1957: 245), Byatt's obsession with and her compulsion to revisit and repeat her literary history would seemingly indicate that, as Schor would imply, she remains pathologically trapped within the mourning process.

According to Freud, mourning becomes unhealthy when "the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged [and e]ach single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected" (Freud 1957: 245). This suspension, Schor argues, is precisely what the realist novel enacts:

> To the extent that the realist novel is a collection of material things, it ... partakes of the macabre itself: it must bring things to life, keep them in life, arrest their decay. But it also studies decay: the novel is primarily an animist fantasy, of making the dead live, of making "mere" forms "matter". (Schor 2000: 244)

Schor's account of the realist novel highlights the similarities it shares with the elegiac form as a system of recollection, ordering, and resurrection. W. David Shaw argues that elegy "is always 'in memoriam' – an art of re-viewing and recollecting the past, as opposed to merely remembering it" (Shaw 1994: 214). Elegists, then, in the very act of recollecting their relationships with the deceased for the purposes of ordering their poems, are doomed to repeat their own pasts, which will often find expression in the elegies themselves. *In Memoriam*, in its fragmented and discursive structure, mimics these mournful repetitions and the compulsive "arranging impulse in human consciousness, [and the] conditions under which we find ourselves pressed into making new sense of experience" (Peltason 1985: 12). Due principally to Tennyson's elegy, the death of Arthur Henry Hallam is almost certainly the most commemorated of nineteenth-century Britain; Hallam's life and death, then, remain perpetually arrested in time, a repetition which will last for as long as *In Memoriam* is read. For Schor, the effect of this repetition would be that Hallam is refused life's ultimate closure, his own death.

Byatt's response, though, complicates Freud's description of mourning; repetition with a difference allows the mourner to emerge from

their grief without wholly freeing their ego from the original object and, simultaneously, without investing their libidinal desires in a replacement. Rather, Byatt traces what Bronfen would term a "healthy trajectory from mourning to remembrance", one which is

> marked by a freeing of libidinal energies from the first lost object that must be reinvested in a second surrogate object, in whom may be perceived the image of the deceased, notwithstanding the introduction of difference. Successful mourning, one could say, is repetition as forgetting a lost object sufficiently to reinvest one's love in another, accepting the other as Other, even if the new beloved in part suggests the refinding of the former. (Bronfen 1993: 107)

While the mourning process may hold the deceased in the world of the living for the length of the mourner's grief, if that mourning is expressed as a total libidinal investment in the memory of the dead, Byatt suggests, the deceased's desire may not necessarily be this spiritual detainment. Indeed, Byatt intimates, such suspension may be detrimental to the departed. Byatt's Hallam, a trembling, grotesque figure, half-human and half-angel, literally embodies the suspended form which, for Schor, is the "matter" of realist fiction; neither dead nor alive, he is, as Schor says, uneasily situated between this world and the next (Schor 2000: 244). He winces at Sophy's sympathies, causing her to feel "in her blood and bones that the mourning was painful to him. It dragged him down, or back, or under" (Byatt 1995: 250). Tellingly, what follows this image of the "[b]affled and impotent" Hallam (Byatt 1995: 250) is perhaps the novella's most unsettling chapter, in which the reader is given an image of Tennyson, now enfeebled and, according to Byatt, still obsessively longing for his dead friend. Or rather, this unsettling image of Tennyson is conjured for Sophy by Hallam's pain (Byatt 1995: 252-253). As Christien Franken notes, in this chapter Byatt is quite critical of Tennyson's failure to release Hallam and allow him his death. The poet's extended grief "is more an expression of melancholy than mourning. Whereas mourning is a process of healing, a necessary step in coming to terms with loss, melancholy cannot let go of the beloved object" (Franken 1999: 247).[7] Byatt implies, then, that Tennyson and, moreover, the

life of Tennyson's poem, are responsible for Hallam's pain, as they endlessly perpetuate and repeat the mourning of Hallam's vanished life.

While mourning may pain the deceased in Byatt's novella, this is not to say that Tennyson's desire to preserve the dead is unnatural, as Schor implies. Provided that the repetition of the deceased's image is infused with difference, as Bronfen suggests is necessary, and the ego is invested in a similar yet different object, then the mourned can be both simultaneously resurrected and allowed to die. For despite Schor's protestations, to "write like", or to "approach the postmodern forms of pastiche", is precisely to enter into a dialogue with the dead as writers and not necessarily as the mouldering bodies or decaying forms that she envisages. Schor admits, for example, that Byatt

> outdoes the poet laureate by writing answering portions of *In Memoriam* in dialogue with Arthur Hallam, and rewriting the poem in séance form. These parts of the novel read almost like a deconstruction, posing and counterposing key terms, returning to them in uncanny fashion and making them speak to each other.... (Schor 2000: 243)

Byatt, moreover, has spoken of her mistrust of the terms "pastiche" and "parody", famously outlined by Fredric Jameson;[8] instead, Byatt refers to the imagined writings of her historical characters and narrators as "ventriloquism", a concept she prefers, as it specifically "avoid[s] the loaded moral implications of 'parody', or 'pastiche'" (Byatt 2001: 43). Sally Shuttleworth similarly finds Jameson's model lacking for Byatt's purposes; unsatisfied with his suggestion that pastiche empties the writing of historical meaning, Shuttleworth claims that the "historical deafness" Jameson sees in contemporary cultural production appears distinctly at odds with Byatt's own project (Shuttleworth 2001: 148; Jameson 1991: xi). Rather, for Shuttleworth, Byatt's texts overturn Jameson's definitions: when reading Byatt, "[t]he language and experiences of our own era become mere pastiche, and the evident artefact, the postmodern recreation of Victorianism, becomes our measure of authenticity" (Shuttleworth 2001: 156). While I would not wish to claim the same inauthenticity of Byatt's contemporary narrative and narration as Shuttleworth does here, 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. As Levenson argues, "the very act of writing historical fiction is a raising of the dead; it brings to life a buried past and so counts as a contemporary spiritual gesture" (Levenson 2001: 172).

In Sophy's recital of Rossetti, for example, Byatt literally assumes reading's power not only to raise, but to speak with, the dead. Once conjured, Hallam specifically asks Sophy to read him poetry, a request she indulges. Beginning with a recital from Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale', she follows literary associations to finish with Tennyson's 'Recollections of the Arabian Nights' (Byatt 1995: 251-253), a poem itself concerned with the ability of literature – shared by the spiritualist – to transport the reader to an alien world, suspending them between the realms of the living and the non-living. Further, *The Arabian Nights* is about narration as necessity, a suspension of death through storytelling. Scheherazade is, after all, narrating for her very survival, and to achieve this she creates tales which intertextually and dialogically intertwine. Similarly, it is this dialogism that, for Byatt, breathes life into the literature of the past. Intertextually evoking Hallam's own short life, 'The Blessed Damozel' concerns itself with the story of a woman who dies young and spends her time in Heaven longing for her earthly lover, awaiting his death, which will reunite them eternally. "He will come", both the damozel and Sophy confidently claim (Rossetti 2003: 68; Byatt 1995: 247), and, indeed, Sophy's recitation conjures the eponymous angel, the dead man's presence she feels as she recites. The angel thus becomes a metaphor for Byatt's own project: in conjuring the angel, she is conjuring her own literary predecessors, not only as one of Schor's literal bodies but as a body of work that lives in the present. Byatt's own "conjugial angel", it could be said, is literary history itself, a presence which waits patiently in the afterlife for a reunion with its spiritually betrothed, the contemporary writer: the metaphor of a conjugal angel implies a marital separation by death and time in which widowhood does not factor. Byatt evokes, then, like Sophy, "those gone before" and enters into a dialogue with them: "You are much mourned, much missed", Sophy tells the angel, "[a]nd not forgotten" (Byatt 1995: 250), as if transmitting Byatt's own message to her literary forebears.

The narrator's ventriloquism in both *Possession* and *Angels and Insects* allows Byatt to avoid the distancing from her subject that she sees as the effect of both parody and pastiche. Within these novels, the nineteenth-

century may be past but, Byatt assures her reader, it is far from dead. Ventriloquism embodies, Byatt states, "the relations between readers and writers, between the living world of dead men and the modern conjurers of their spirits" (Byatt 2001: 43), and so invokes a literary continuum that connects Byatt with her forebears. When ventriloquising Tennyson, for instance, she has him consider the spectral echoes of his own elegy: "If the air was full of the ghostly voices of his ancestors, his poem let them sing out again, Dante and Theocritus, Milton and the lost Keats, whose language was their afterlife.... He saw it as a kind of world ... held together with threads of living language" (Byatt 1995: 269). Ventriloquism, then, raises Byatt's dead antecedents and, in drawing them into the present, it "emphasise[s] at once the presence of the past and its distance, its difference, its death and difficult resurrection" (Byatt 2001: 45). As Byatt ventriloquises Tennyson, she in turn steps into his world of living language; the chain, stretching as far back as Theocritus, is ever-lengthening as new links are added.

Ventriloquism, while a means of keeping the past alive in the present, is also another kind of repetition; however, Byatt is aware of the difference necessary to alter the present's conception of the past. Notably, the effect that Sophy's recitation has on her is similar in style, narration and, to a lesser extent, imagery, to Roland's rereading of Ash in *Possession*. Both are subject to Derrida's relaunching-otherwise, whereby the text is kept alive through a new reading that leads to a hitherto unanticipated understanding. Describing Roland's rereading, *Possession*'s narrator claims:

> Now and then there are readings ... [in which] the knowledge that we *shall know* the writing differently or better or satisfactorily, runs ahead of any capacity to say what we know, or how. In these readings, a sense that the text has appeared to be wholly new, never before seen, is followed, almost immediately, by the sense that it was *always there*, that we the readers, knew it was always there, and have *always known* it was as it was, though we have now for the first time recognised, become fully cognisant of, our knowledge. (Byatt 1991: 471-472, original emphasis)

In this passage, which itself revives the intrusive narrator common in nineteenth-century writing, Roland's, as well as the reader's, invited

intellectual realisation of an enhanced critical understanding mirrors Sophy's physical experience of reading as resurrection: while the text remains unchanged, a new critical engagement leads to innovative knowledge and ways of understanding that ensure the text's novelty and vivacity within the present. For Byatt, the task of the historical novelist, through ventriloquism, is to keep the text from decaying. Though dead, the past is nevertheless speaking to Byatt who, in turn, responds by "writing Victorian words in Victorian contexts, in a Victorian order, and in Victorian relations of one word to the next [which] was the only way I could think of to show one could hear the Victorian dead" (Byatt 2001: 46-47).

The reading that Byatt describes in *Possession* is much like the reading of *In Memoriam* offered in 'The Conjugial Angel', which relaunches the poem and ensures our reading of it is forever changed. It is through *In Memoriam*, the novella's primary poetic intertext, that Byatt establishes further the relation between mourning literary history and the potential this mourning has to keep it alive and relaunch it. Whereas the poem is concerned with the living's remembrance of the departed in their "second state sublime" (Tennyson 2004: LXI 1), Byatt, in using a poem whose concern is with mourning and which questions the certainty of an afterlife, suggests that her reader remember and reappraise the afterlife of *In Memoriam* itself. This gesture will inevitably lead to a reappraisal of the position that past texts assume for the contemporary writer and reader. To host the revenants of one's literary history is, as Poznar has indicated, to demonstrate the fertile nature of encounters between categories of old and new and the critically rich terrain of this interdependency (Poznar 2004: 185).

As the novella itself notes, for Victorian spiritualists Tennyson's *In Memoriam* had become an appropriate vehicle through which the dead could communicate (Byatt 1995: 204).[9] Its thematic concerns, which further associate literature with spiritualism, make the poem an obvious choice for Byatt to use to illustrate reading as mourning. If, as Hadley suggests, Emily Jesse's interest in spiritualism is a direct response to her brother's poem, a means of communicating with Hallam as Tennyson appears to have done through the poem itself (Hadley 2003: 97), then her attempt has hitherto been less successful than the same attempts made through writing and reading. In 'The Conjugial Angel', Hallam's spirit has eluded Emily for forty-two years, "almost twice the length of his stay on earth", as Mrs

Papagay, the novella's other, less successful spiritualist, reflects, and "[t]hey had never succeeded unambiguously in communicating with him" (Byatt 1995: 177).[10] Trafficking with the dead is similarly the ultimate goal of the elegist. Alfred Tennyson claims to have had more success through the writing of his poem. In, for example, cantos XCI-XCV, the speaker attempts a spiritual reunion with the departed, and concludes that, indeed,

> The dead man touch'd me from the past,
> And all at once it seem'd at last
> The living soul was flash'd on mine
>
> And mine in this was wound... (Tennyson 2004: XCV 34-37)[11]

Within this communication between living and dead, text and intertext, host and parasite, however, Byatt's interest in intertextual resurrection lies in the silences it exposes or, rather, in how giving voice to what has previously been silenced can reanimate our readings. Thus, in 'The Conjugial Angel', Byatt expresses her interest not in the now-common reading of Tennyson's creation of a homoerotic Eden for himself and Hallam within the poem, but rather in how the poem excludes Emily from that Eden. Just as *In Memoriam* is a way of resurrecting Hallam, an accommodation of literary history within 'The Conjugial Angel' is a way of resurrecting Emily and of examining the effects of her silencing. Byatt gives Emily a voice and a responsive agency that, she implies, were denied Emily in life and which will continue to be denied her for as long as interpretations of Tennyson's poem repeat these previous readings. For although, as Franken observes, the Tennyson family consoled Emily as she mourned Hallam, *In Memoriam* curiously excludes almost any mention of her or her engagement to its subject (Franken 1999: 248): "her small ghost appeared from time to time" is the way Byatt has Emily put it to herself (Byatt 1995: 233). Instead, what Byatt depicts is Alfred Tennyson co-opting his sister's position as the mourning and faithful lover, turning Hallam's loss into something personally singular.[12]

The effect of Tennyson's appropriation of his sister's grief is a key focus of Byatt's novella. Considering the part Emily plays in her brother's poem, Byatt writes:

> They had been bred to be generous in spirit. Resentment was ignoble, and Emily hoped she didn't feel it. But she could never be wholly easy about the way in which Alfred's mourning had overtaken her own. Had not only overtaken it, she told herself in moments of bleak truthfulness, had undone and denied it. It had been she, Emily, who fainted, she, Emily, who had lived incarcerated, entombed in grief, for a year, she, Emily, who had reduced the assembled company to tears with her appearance in black, with the one white rose in her hair, as he liked to see her. (Byatt 1995: 229)

Elsewhere, Byatt has commented on *In Memoriam*'s conclusion, which details the celebration of a marriage; however, the marriage is that of another of Alfred Tennyson's sisters, Cecilia, to another of his friends, Edmund Lushington: "I thought about this, and tried to imagine what Emily Tennyson may have thought and felt" (Byatt 2001: 105). What Byatt does not mention is that Emily, too, marries in this same year: the poem concludes in 1842 and yet Tennyson, the reluctant participant in the marital festivities outlined in the poem's epilogue, is silent on the subject of Emily's marriage. Tennyson's mourning, as expressed through the poem, has no room for the pain of others; it threatens to exclude Emily, who, Byatt implies, is justified in feeling that her position as Hallam's fiancée entitles her to a more central place within the poem.

Yet, Emily feels that her brother's mourning does more than merely exclude her: Byatt suggests that the poem reads Emily's later decision to marry as an act of infidelity to the dead and that it reproaches her for it. As early as canto VI, for example, the speaker addresses the "Poor child, that waitest for thy love" and asks: "O what to her shall be the end? / And what to me remains of good?" (Tennyson 2004: VI 28; 41-42). The answer, immediately revealed, condemns Emily's decision to marry a man other than Hallam by reminding her of her supposed duty to the deceased's memory: "To her, perpetual maidenhood, / And unto me, no second friend" (Tennyson 2004: VI 43-44). The events of 'The Conjugial Angel' unfold in 1875, forty-two years after Hallam's death and thirty-three years after Emily married Captain Richard Jesse, which, she thinks, "closed her mourning" (Byatt 1995: 232). *In Memoriam* was published in 1850, some seventeen years after Hallam's death and eight years after Emily's marriage. As if to

punish her, Tennyson takes Emily's right to grieve from her, a fact of which, Byatt suggests, Emily must have been all too aware. One of the central questions raised by 'The Conjugial Angel' is that of Tennyson's ethical responsibility towards the mourning of those others who share a separate relationship with the departed. For it is the singularity of Tennyson's own mourning that overshadows and appropriates that of his sister.[13] Emily thinks: "*In Memoriam* had reawakened much that had lain quiet. Alfred's mourning had been long and steadfast. It put hers, however fierce, however dark, however passionate, ultimately to shame" (Byatt 1995: 221-222). In a later passage, moreover, Byatt has Emily consider what she suspects is the accusatory tone of her brother's poem:

> Alfred had been faithful, as she had not.... She believed that in that poem she stood accused.... It was, she knew and said often, the greatest poem of their time. And yet, she thought in her bursts of private savagery, it aimed a burning dart at her very heart, it strove to annihilate her.... (Byatt 1995: 233)

And, Byatt suggests, annihilate her it does, for even though Emily's small ghost makes its brief appearances, as Tennyson considers the lost union of his and Hallam's households through the engagement, Tennyson nevertheless appropriates the status of widowhood for himself.

When Emily thinks, then, that "[t]he poem had made *Alfred* into Arthur's widow" (Byatt 1995: 234, original emphasis), Byatt asks her reader for a patient reconsideration of the place Tennyson himself assumes in the poem. And upon reconsideration, a certain innocence is lost as the reader realises the speaker's abundance of claims – some of which Byatt includes in the novella itself – to be Hallam's eternal partner, the combined effect of which is to usurp Emily's position. The poem repeatedly claims that the speaker's loss is analogous to the separation of two lovers. Canto IX, for instance, reads:

> Sleep, gentle winds, as he sleeps now,
> My friend, the brother of my love;
>
> My Arthur, whom I shall not see
> Till all my widow'd race be run; (Tennyson 2004: IX 14-17)[14]

The theme of marriage and eventual widowhood is a recurring one in *In Memoriam*: the speaker refers to himself as either widow or widower no less than five times. Tennyson's allusion here to the faithfulness of a spouse runs throughout the course of the poem. As late as canto XCVII, the speaker claims:

> Two partners of a married life–
> I look'd on these and thought of thee
> In vastness and in mystery,
> And of my spirit as of a wife. (Tennyson 2004: XCVII 4-8)

In passages such as these the speaker assumes a position that, in life, could only be held by Emily Tennyson; in considering Emily's hitherto peripheral role in the poem, Byatt's novella attunes her reader to the ethical responsibility to the other that Tennyson's mourning appears to neglect.

The possibility of Byatt's alternative reading of *In Memoriam* returns her reader to the persistent concern in both her fiction and criticism with which I began this paper. For it is here that Byatt shows the dangers of privileging one particular reading over any other. Byatt shows that a reading of *In Memoriam* in which Tennyson creates a homosocial paradise for himself and Hallam is not only an almost too easy reading, it also has the effect of silencing a further and different reading. This is not to say that Byatt denies the validity of any prior reading and seeks to replace it with her own. Franken has previously noted an encompassing tendency in Byatt's own criticism: her essay 'Robert Browning: Incarnation and Art', for example, recognises the ambivalence of Tennyson's feeling in *In Memoriam* as the possibility of either "the excessive sensuality of a homosexual memory" or merely a "part of the climate of the time" (Byatt 1993a: 62; Franken 1999: 251-252). This critical encompassment extends to 'The Conjugial Angel', whose dialogic involvement in the wider conversation surrounding Tennyson criticism includes other possible interpretations. Jane Campbell, for example, notes that *Angels and Insects* as a whole provides many readings of *In Memoriam*: to the sympathetic feminist reading of Emily's marginalised position can be added the fragmented reading produced in the séance scenes, Tennyson's own focus on the language of the poem, and, in 'Morpho Eugenia', Sir Harald Alabaster's post-Darwinian grasping at the poem's consoling affirmation of eternal life (Campbell 2004:

167). Chapter Ten of 'The Conjugial Angel', moreover, includes a reading that addresses Byatt's very ambivalence towards the poem's homoeroticism, in which the aged Tennyson is depicted thinking through the precise nature of his relationship with Hallam and his description of it in his poem.

Byatt's Tennyson hints at the poem's allowance of the possibility of a perceived homoeroticism between speaker and subject: "he knew too of the terrible misconstruction to which his exact exposition of the full extent of his pain and longing in Arthur's poems had laid him open" (Byatt 1995: 257). Importantly, though, he is more knowing and less innocent than those around him assume him to be, and he refuses to apologise for the readings his poem may permit, preferring instead to remain silent:

> He knew very well what Arthur's father feared and suspected, though he had never once allowed Arthur's father to see in his face, or hear in his voice, any acknowledgement of his suspicions, any disquietude.... People thought he was an innocent old creature, he was well aware. They humoured him, they protected him. But he knew more than he said, that was a politic way of going on in this straitlaced time, and he was a child of an altogether less innocent time. (Byatt 1995: 258-259)

Byatt's Tennyson appears to revel in the possibilities of the poem's interpretation. Although he may privately deny any implied homoeroticism in his poem, he never denies a homosocial reading; rather, he considers the possibility of the homoerotic reading to be a consequence of his expression of the complex and poetic nature of his friendship with Hallam. In a passage that recalls Roland's experience of rereading Ash, Tennyson thinks:

> If he was truthful, there was more excitement in the space between his finger and Arthur's, with all that implied of the flashing-out of one soul to another, of the symmetry and sympathy of minds, of the recognition they had both felt, that they had in some sense *always known* each other, they did not have to learn each other, as strangers did. (Byatt 1995: 260, original emphasis)

Yet Byatt's Tennyson, as he considers Hallam, never thinks of his sister's own relationship with his friend; rather, the novella's consideration of the homosocial relationship carries with it implications of the exclusivist climate of nineteenth-century patriarchy. Thus, while Byatt allows for a possible reading of the poem that reflects an ambiguous bond between two men, she continues with her own reading of the poem as one of exclusion. The novella foregrounds the intimacy contained within Victorian patriarchy when, for example, Emily reflects that Hallam's stays turn the Tennysons' home "into a real Summerland of its own, a land of Romance" (Byatt 1995: 222). It was, Emily thinks, "timeless Somersby, made by men, made for men. There was Alfred, desiring to live alone with his friend" (Byatt 1995: 225). However, what immediately follows this interpretation is Byatt's own consideration of Emily's possible reaction to this masculine world: "If she were wholly truthful with herself, she remembered the sight of those two male backs, those two pairs of eagerly climbing legs, going up to the attic with the white beds, with the sensations of one excluded from Paradise" (Byatt 1995: 226-227). A singular reading, Byatt implies, is no different from a singular mourning. One reading of a text must be open to other readings; indeed, only through this hospitality can literary history be refreshed with new readings, new understandings.

The gathering of professional readers in *Possession* with which I began further clarifies Byatt's position. Each reader represents a different approach to literary study: the readers assembled include a psychoanalytic critic, a biographical critic, a textual New Critic, a biographer, a feminist revisionist, a literary theorist, a lawyer, and an editor, and each, as Hadley observes, has his or her reading of literary history altered in some way by the letter read within the pseudo-séance (Hadley 2003: 98). However, the letter reveals Maud to be the direct descendant of LaMotte and Ash and thus, as biological heir, she embodies the succession of more than one tradition. Importantly, in her capacity as a feminist psychoanalytical scholar, Maud has resisted Ash's masculine tradition which she perceives as a threat to LaMotte's rightful place in literary history. The novel depicts, then, Maud's altering critical perspective of Ash's poetry. Initially, she is openly dismissive of any possible influence Ash may have had on LaMotte. She tells Roland that she "wouldn't have thought his poems would appeal to [LaMotte]. All that cosmic masculinity. That nasty anti-feminist poem about the medium, what was it, *Mummy Possest*? All that ponderous obfuscation.

Everything she wasn't" (Byatt 1991: 42). Though dismayed "that Christabel LaMotte should have given in to whatever urgings or promptings Ash may have used" (Byatt 1991: 246), Maud nevertheless concedes that a new reading, one that acknowledges the possibility of an exchange, intellectual or otherwise, between Ash and LaMotte, would "change all sorts of things. LaMotte scholarship, even ideas about *Melusina*. That Fairy Topic. It's *intriguing*" (Byatt 1991: 49, original emphasis). Maud's reconsideration of a possible intertextual exchange between the works of Ash and LaMotte offers an astute new insight into the possible addressee of Ash's poetry, hitherto an enigma: "I've been reading his poems. *Ask to Embla*. They're good. He wasn't talking to himself. He was talking to *her* – Embla – Christabel" (Byatt 1991: 266).

Ultimately, when Maud is revealed to be the descendant of Ash and LaMotte, Byatt implies that the literature of the past is intended to be inherited by a reader more receptive to this kind of encompassment: Blackadder suggests that the letter preserved in Ash's grave was "[f]or Maud.... As it turns out. She [Ellen Ash] preserved it, for Maud" (Byatt 1991: 504). Blackadder's suggestion perfectly illustrates the alogical reversibility of the host and parasite model: the text inexplicably answers to a future context it can never have imagined. The readers who populate Byatt's novels are often rewarded for their cleverness. Maud's realisation, for instance, that LaMotte's 'Dolly Keeps a Secret' is encoded with a literal rather than a figurative message for the reader constitutes a rereading that diverges from any received interpretation and leads immediately to the discovery of the LaMotte-Ash correspondence (Byatt 1991: 82-83). Just as Maud's rereading of the poem reveals an encoded message from its author, Byatt suggests that to be the literary inheritor the contemporary reader must be open to plural interpretations. While Byatt's own late-twentieth-century reading of *In Memoriam* cannot help but be informed by a sympathy towards the social aims of feminism, Tennyson could never have foreseen this critical approach and it becomes unclear which text acts as parasite and which as host. Contemporary literature is, of course, feeding on the remains of literary history here; however, Victorian literature is as much a parasite on the contemporary as it relies upon a rereading and relaunching that sustains critical interpretations of nineteenth-century literature in the present.

Byatt's mourning of her own literary predecessors encourages a literary study that takes a more inclusive approach to the ghosts of its own history. Reading, Byatt suggests, like intertextuality, like the relation of host and guest, must be open and hospitable. For Byatt is nevertheless hosting the homosocial reading of *In Memoriam* in her own reading of Emily's exclusion from both the poem and from her brother's world. After all, Byatt's reading is only made possible by the tradition of reading the poem as an embodiment of homosociality; that is to say, only when Tennyson and Hallam turn Somersby into a homosocial Eden can Emily justifiably feel excluded from it. The best kind of reading, Byatt seems to suggest, is one that encompasses such gaps and ambivalences, for it is only through the not-yet-known that literary history can be kept alive. In offering this alternative reading, Byatt accepts that there can be no complete reading of a text. Any one, singular reading has the potential to cancel others out by hierarchising and privileging. Like Miller's host, the text is offered as a "gift":

> The gift is the thing always left over which obliges someone to give yet another gift, and its recipient yet another, and so on and on, the balance never coming right, as a poem invites an endless sequence of commentaries which never succeed in 'getting the poem right'. (Miller 1977: 446)

The poem, or, indeed, any text, relies on a series of misreadings lest the "endless chain of gifting" cease (Miller 1977: 446). To abandon past works in favour of writing anew, then, is ultimately an inhospitable move, one which sees reading as finished and complete.

As Byatt invokes the act of criticism with the séance, so too are we, as critics, implicated in this chain. As Miller concedes, the relation of host and parasite inevitably extends "as much to critical essays as to the texts they treat" (Miller 1977: 447). This very paper resuscitates Tennyson's poem and places it alongside Byatt's work, and is therefore a part of this series of revivification: I, too, as parasite and host, am entering into Byatt's circle of readers. Readers must, therefore, be careful that their own reading as mourning does not create an exclusionary tradition, that what one claims as heritage remains hospitable to other interpretive possibilities. For as Derrida cautions: "An heir is not only someone who receives, he or she is someone who chooses, and who takes the risk of deciding.... Every text is

heterogeneous.... The heir's affirmation consists, of course, in his interpretation; it consists in choosing" (Derrida 2004: 8). Byatt is aware that any revisionist approach to literary history must inevitably exclude other histories. While, for example, she understands from her experience as a teacher that, pragmatically, any literature curriculum "must include something at the expense of excluding something else" (Byatt 1993b: 3), she voices her dismay when the reason for this exclusion is ideological:

> I myself, being an older and more individualistic feminist, find myself very ambivalent about being taught on courses about 'women's discourse', and worry about being read by a generation that has read all the minor female writers of the eighteenth century, but not Proust and Mann, not Virgil and Racine.... The fear of being appropriated by an individual critic modulates into the fear of being appropriated by – or supported by – a group. (Byatt 1993b: 5-6)

In *On Histories and Stories*, Byatt reveals that her desire to ventriloquise the writings of her Victorian characters was driven by what she saw as an expanding gap between Victorian poetry and the criticism generated by it: "Modern criticism is powerful and imposes its own narratives and priorities on the writings it uses as raw material, source, or jumping-off point" (Byatt 2001: 45). Byatt implies, then, that modern criticism has the potential to kill its subject, particularly if it uses Victorian poetry as a means to an end, usually as some kind of disingenuous conceit made by the critic (Byatt 2001: 45-46). In *Possession*, the figures of Leonora Stern, Fergus Wolff, and James Blackadder, the principal targets of Byatt's satire, serve as particularly acute warnings of this danger. Moments before the knowledge of Ash and LaMotte's affair is revealed to the public, for example, Stern is forced to concede to Blackadder that "a lot of us are going to have to eat our words when this all gets out in the open, a whole lot of us" (Byatt 1991: 402).

However, Byatt remains hopeful for the possibility of a scholarship that is both innovative and respectful to the language of the text; provided that our mourning "open[s] the ring of the domestic enclosure to the alien" (Miller 1977: 445-446), the intertextual chain of literary history will remain hospitable. For the responsibility of the heir, Derrida's double injunction, is

simultaneously this responsibility to what has come before and, also, before what is to come: before oneself (Derrida 2004: 5). To be responsible to and for literary history is to ensure responsibility to yourself: Byatt will, in her turn, become literary history, become food for some other alogical parasite and host; her texts will inevitably become subject to readings that she has not foreseen as new contexts emerge that create new interpretive demands. Her concern, both fictional and critical, is to show that we are not finished with literary history, and neither, if this is the case, is literary history finished with us. To dichotomise old and new is to neglect the text's pensive supplementarity, its essential, unexpected meanings, and it is for the hopeful-yet-impossible revelation of such meanings that Byatt refuses to forget her literary predecessors. For as long as we mourn it, the text, and the afterlife of its spirit, remains hospitable to our continual revisitations.

Notes

1. For Susan Poznar, the séance is a metaphor for metaphor itself: "A séance itself might figure the functioning of metaphor: séances self-consciously produce images (visual, acoustic, or both) of the dead for the living; yet séances also function to interpret those images; they produce a kind of knowledge that is ordinarily and otherwise inaccessible; they unite seeming opposites to advance understanding; and they preserve an unspeakable core of paradox and mystery. They require that the participants passively receive and actively understand. What better way to trope the interdependent valences of identity and difference working within metaphor itself than by engaging human characters in contacting the beloved dead, who at once offer themselves for confident recognition and yet signal their terrible alteration in messages that demonstrate this sameness and difference?" (Poznar 2004: 177)
2. My editing here reflects the difference between the original text from which this quotation is taken and the edited version contained in *The J. Hillis Miller Reader* (Miller 2005: 20).
3. In opting for "conjugial" over the more commonly understood "conjugal", Byatt is preserving Emanuel Swedenborg's neologism from *Conjugial Love* (1768); for Swedenborg, "conjugial love" was primarily the spiritual union of two departed souls (See Byatt 1995: 175; Swedenborg 1954: 43ff).
4. Byatt's characters, for example, attend the séance only after a loved one has passed on: LaMotte's interest in spiritualism is ignited after the suicide of her

companion (and perhaps lover) Blanche Glover (Byatt 1991: 500); Ash attends the séance under the pretence of poetic research (Byatt 1991: 299), although his real intent is to contact his and LaMotte's child, whom he assumes to be dead (Byatt 1991: 397). In 'The Conjugial Angel', Emily Jesse "desired to see and hear" Arthur Hallam (Byatt 1995: 177), Mrs Hearnshaw "was in deep mourning" for her five departed infants (Byatt 1995: 167), and Lilias Papagay "had attended her first séance really in order to find out whether she was or was not a widow" (Byatt 1995: 168). However, Mrs Papagay's interest, Byatt stresses, lies in the "*now*, it was for more life *now*... [and] was not for the Hereafter (Byatt 1995: 171, original emphasis). With the exception of Captain Jesse, whose role is one of supportive husband to Emily, the only character who attends the séance out of genuine spiritual curiosity is Mr Hawke, the "theological connoisseur" (Byatt 1995: 166), who turns out to be as predatory as his name suggests (Byatt 1995: 214-215).

5. Byatt's novels abound with characters who are careful and attentive readers, most notably Frederica Potter, the fiercely astute protagonist of Byatt's quartet and *roman à fleuve*, *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), *Still Life* (1985), *Babel Tower* (1996), and *A Whistling Woman* (2002). Indeed, the protagonist of every Byatt novel is a reader of some kind, which would indicate the importance the author places on the integrity and responsibility of the reader of fiction.
6. Hadley similarly makes this connection between spiritualism and reading; however, for Hadley, its importance lies in the potential for disrupting Victorian patriarchal conventions: "The process of automatic writing provides Mrs Papagay with an access to language that her position as a middle-class lady would otherwise have denied her" (Hadley 2003: 91-92). It is worth noting that Alex Owen's *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late-Victorian England*, which concerns itself with the challenges female spiritualists presented to rigid gender conventions of the late-nineteenth-century, is much admired by Byatt, who wrote a favourable review of the book for the *Times Literary Supplement* and who notes Owen's influence in the acknowledgements of *Angels and Insects*.
7. This position, largely indebted to Freud, is one with which Shaw would agree. Discussing concision within the elegiac form, Shaw states that, comparatively, *In Memoriam* "seems endlessly to end, and so never ends at all.... The mourner seems afraid to reach the end. Perhaps ... the prospect of ending *In Memoriam* threatens to end the seventeen-year afterlife that Hallam

has enjoyed during Tennyson's composition of the poem" (Shaw 1994: 224-225).

8. See Jameson's *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*: "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs" (Jameson 1991: 17).
9. Hadley makes a similar point: "Tennyson's poem had become a great mouthpiece for the spiritual anxiety of the Victorian era and as such seems an appropriate medium through which spirits should speak" (Hadley 2003: 96).
10. 'Papagei' is, it has been noted, the German word for "parrot" and much has been made of this association. Richard Todd, for example, views it as indicative of the social and racial mores Mrs Papagay must adopt in order to serve her upper middle-class clientele (Todd 1997: 33; see also Poznar 2004: 182); "parrot", however, also connotes repetition without difference, which would indicate a further reason for her failure to recall the dead with the same effectiveness as Sophy.
11. Crucially, Tennyson altered these lines in later editions of the poem. In the Norton Critical Edition (Second Edition) of *In Memoriam*, Erik Gray notes that earlier versions of these lines read: "'*His* living soul was flash'd on mine, / And mine in *his* was wound.' Tennyson changed to the more impersonal reading only in 1872 and later commented, enigmatically, 'The first reading ... troubled me, as perhaps giving a wrong impression'" (Tennyson 2004: 69-70, emphasis added). Byatt herself has Tennyson consider his changing of these lines for precisely these reasons (Byatt 1995: 266).
12. See also Franken (1999: 248), who is concerned with the gendered implications of Tennyson's appropriation of Emily's role.
13. W. David Shaw offers a different explanation. Citing the examples of Hardy and Housman, Shaw notes the elegiac trope of concluding with the marriage of the dead man's betrothed to the survivor as "a disguised act of homage or love" (Shaw 1994: 216). Tennyson, however, pained by survivor guilt, and "in mourning the death of someone who has taken up residence in himself ... keeps running the risk of incest" and so must assume the position of widow himself (Shaw 1994: 216).

14. Tennyson repeats this phrase in Canto XVII, line 20, which Byatt also has Emily quote (Byatt 1995: 234).

Bibliography

Bronfen, Elisabeth. 'Risky Resemblances: On Repetition, Mourning, and Representation', in *Death and Representation*, Elisabeth Bronfen and Sarah Webster Godwin (eds.). Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, 103-129.

Byatt, A. S. 'People in Paper Houses: Attitudes to "Realism" and "Experiment" in English Postwar Fiction', in *The Contemporary English Novel*, Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (eds.). London: Edward Arnold, 1979, 19-41. (Rpt. in *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings*, 165-188.)

——. 'Chosen Vessels of a Fraud', Review of *The Darkened Room*, by Alex Owen, *Times Literary Supplement*, 4496, 2-8 June 1989, 605.

——. *Possession*. London: Vintage, 1991 (first publ. 1990).

——. *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings*. London: Vintage, 1993a.

——. 'Reading, Writing, Studying: Some Questions About Changing Conditions for Writers and Readers', *Critical Quarterly*, 35:4 (Winter 1993b), 3-7.

——. *Angels and Insects*. London: Vintage, 1995 (first publ. 1992).

——. *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays*. London: Vintage, 2001.

Campbell, Jane. *A. S. Byatt and the Heliotropic Imagination*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2004.

Derrida, Jacques, and Elisabeth Roudinesco. *For What Tomorrow…: A Dialogue*, Jeff Fort (trans.). Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004.

Eliot, George. *The Mill on the Floss*, A. S. Byatt (ed.). London: Penguin, 1979 (first publ. 1860).

Franken, Christien. 'The Gender of Mourning: A. S. Byatt's "The Conjugial Angel" and Alfred Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam*', in *The Author as Character: Representing Historical Writers in Western Literature*, Paul Franssen and Ton Hoenselaars (eds.). Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999, 243-252.

Freud, Sigmund. 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 14 (1914-1916)*, James Strachey and Anna Freud (eds.); James Strachey (trans.). London: Hogarth, 1957, 237-260.

Hadley, Louisa A. 'Spectres of the Past: A. S. Byatt's Victorian Ghost Stories', *Victorians Institute Journal*, 31 (2003), 85-99.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991.

Levenson, Michael. Miller, J. Hillis. 'The Critic as Host', *Critical Inquiry*, 3:3 (Spring 1977), 439-447. (Rpt. in Julian Wolfreys (ed.), *The J. Hillis Miller Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005, 17-37.)

——. '*Angels and Insects*: Theory, Analogy, Metamorphosis', in *Essays on the Fiction of A. S. Byatt: Imagining the Real*, Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble (eds.). Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood, 2001, 171-174.

Owen, Alex. *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late-Victorian England*. London: Virago, 1989.

Peltason, Timothy. *Reading In Memoriam*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Poznar, Susan. 'Tradition and "Experiment" in Byatt's "The Conjugial Angel"', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 45:2 (Winter 2004), 173-189.

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. 'The Blessed Damozel', in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Poetry and Prose*, Jerome McGann (ed.). New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003, 3-6.

Sarraute, Nathalie. 'Rebels in a World of Platitudes', *Times Literary Supplement*, 3041, 6 Oct. 1960, 371. (Rpt. in *The Writer's Dilemma: Essays First Published in The Times Literary Supplement Under the Heading 'Limits of Control'*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961, 35-41.)

Schor, Hilary M. 'Sorting, Morphing, Mourning: A. S. Byatt Ghostwrites Victorian Fiction', in *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century*, John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff (eds.). Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 234-251.

Shaw, W. David. *Elegy and Paradox: Testing the Conventions*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Shuttleworth, Sally. 'Writing Natural History: "Morpho Eugenia"', in *Imagining the Real: Essays on the Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble (eds.). Westport, Connecticut, & London: Greenwood, 2001, 147-160.

Swedenborg, Emanuel. *The Delights of Wisdom Pertaining to Conjugial Love After Which Follow the Pleasures of Insanity Pertaining to Scortatory Love*, Samuel M. Warren and Louis H. Tafel (trans.). New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1954 (first publ. 1768).

Tennyson, Alfred Lord. *In Memoriam*, Erik Gray (ed.). New York: Norton, 2004.

Todd, Richard. *A. S. Byatt*. Plymouth, United Kingdom: Northcote House, 1997.