



An Ecofeminist Interpretation of A.S.Byatt's *Possession*

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements**

**For the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS**

**School of Foreign Languages
LIAONING NORMAL UNIVERSITY**

2010

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摘 要

A. S. 拜厄特是英国当代著名女作家及文学评论家，其代表作《占有》自 1990 年发表后，在英国引起了剧烈的反响，当年就获得了英国最高图书奖“布克”奖。《占有》的成功创作为拜厄特赢得了许多荣誉，使她文学生涯达到了顶峰，并且在世界范围内掀起了对拜厄特研究热潮。在中国，最早有关拜厄特和她小说《占有》的介绍是蒋显文教授在 1998 年《外国文学》上发表题为“评 A. S. 拜厄特的〈占有〉”的文章。自此之后这位女作家引起了我国的读者广泛关注，大家从各种角度来理解和诠释这部“魔力之作”。一些学者从历史、爱情、道德等主题角度对其进行研究；一些学者从写作技巧、写作风格和语言方面对其进行研究；更多的学者从女性主义、象征主义、神话原形批评和叙事理论等角度对其进行研究。但是无论怎么样的评论和研究，都无法全面的解读其潜在的哲理思想、作者扎实的语言功底及独到的个人洞察力。本文认为 A. S. 拜厄特作为二十世纪末的女性作家，在《占有》中深刻地表达了她对自然和女性命运的关心。女性和自然恰巧也是生态女性主义的所关注的主题。然而从生态女性主义角度对《占有》进行的解读却是一项空白。本文尝试从生态女性主义角度出发去揭示小说所体现的生态女性主义思想内涵和作者向往和谐美好社会的愿望。

全文共分五章。第一章简要介绍拜厄特的生平和作品，以及国内外研究成果。第二章是本论文研究的理论基础。本章概述了女性主义运动发展的三次浪潮，认为拜厄特是在第二次和第三次女性主义浪潮转折点的一位女性作家，她继承了弗吉尼亚·伍尔夫的一些女性主义观点，同时体现出了在当代社会对人类特别是女性命运高度关注的生态女性主义思想。分析部分主要在第三章和第四章。第三章从生态女性主义的视角出发揭示了《占有》中人与自然，男性与女性之间扭曲的社会关系。同时，女性生存空间的封闭化更加引起人们对女性生存状态的深入思考。生态危机已经波及到学术领域，拜厄特通过自己独特的文学视角揭露了当代社会中人类价值观的扭曲，同时表达了对传记工业的讽刺。在第四章中本文进一步指出拜厄特从生态主义原则出发为妇女解放运动找到了出路，她吸收了伍尔夫的双性同体理论，主张积极构建两性之间平等和谐的社会关系。第五章得出结论，拜厄特不仅是女性主义者，而且是生态女性主义者，因为她对人类命运的高度关注。在《占有》中拜厄特清楚地表明了她的生态女性主义主张：双性同体是个人的理想状态，无论男性与女性都不能统治这个世界。只有男性和女性相互合作，充分发挥各自的长处，人们才能回归自然，并且和谐地生活在这个现代社会。

关键词：女性主义；生态女性主义；人与自然；男性与女性；和谐社会

An Ecofeminist Interpretation of A.S.Byatt's *Possession*

Abstract

A.S.Byatt is a renowned contemporary English female literary critic and novelist. Her masterpiece *Possession* has evoked strong repercussions at home since its publication in 1990, and won the Booker Prize, the highest honor of books in England, in the same year. The successful creation of *Possession* brings Byatt with many honors and takes her to the submit of her literary creation. Since then the Byattian study has been in vogue all over the world. In China, the introduction to Byatt and her *Possession* firstly appeared in the essay "On A.S.Byatt's *Possession*" in *Foreign Language*, written by Professor Jiang Xianwen, and since then many Chinese scholars were attempted to interpret this "magic book" in various perspectives. Some of them analyze the themes of the novel from the angles of history, love, moral sense; others focus on its writing skills, writing styles, and language; more scholars interpret it from the perspectives of feminism, symbolism, myth archetypal criticism, narratology, and so on. However, no matter which criticism methodology is applied, it is hardly for us to fully understand the author's profound philological ideas, language skills, and unique insights. This thesis suggests that Byatt, as a female writer in the late 20th century, expresses her deep concern on the destiny of women and nature, which is the very focus of the ecofeminists. However, up till now there is no interpretation of *Possession* from the ecofeminist point of view. This thesis, on the basis of ecofeminism, attempts to delve into the ecofeminist ideas in the novel, and the author's great expectation of a harmonious society.

The thesis is composed of five chapters. The first chapter serves as an introduction, including the life and works of the author, and the literature review at home and abroad. The second chapter is the theoretical part, which draws a brief sketch on three waves of feminist movement. Then through the analyses, it indicates that Byatt is such a novelist who stands at the turning point of the second and the third wave feminist movements, and she absorbs some feminist ideas from Virginia Woolf, and forebodes the coming of ecofeminism, which keeps keen eyes on human destiny, especially female destiny in modern society. The analytical parts of the thesis can be seen in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. From the perspective of ecofeminism, Chapter Three reveals the distorted relationship between man and nature, men and women. Meanwhile, women living in the enclosed space arouse the thoughtful thinking about female living situation. The ecological crisis has been extended to the academic field. Byatt, through her unique literary point of view, expresses her criticism of contemporary social values and satirizes the biography industry. In the fourth chapter, it shows that Byatt finds a vent for women's liberation movement from the perspective of ecofeminism. She

absorbs Woolf's "Androgyny" theory, and then calls for a harmonious bisexual relationship. Chapter Five gets the conclusion that Byatt is not only a feminist, but also an ecofeminist, for she keeps deep concerns on human destiny. In *Possession*, Byatt states her ecofeminist ideas clearly: Androgyny is the ideal state for an individual, and neither male nor female could dominate the world. Only male and female cooperate together, taking advantage of each other's strength, could people return to nature and live harmoniously in the modern society.

Key Words: Feminism; Ecofeminism; Men and Nature; Male and Female; Harmonious Society

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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Brief Introduction to the Author and the Novel

Antonia Susan Byatt, known as A.S.Byatt, is one of the greatest female British writers of the late twentieth century. She is also a perceptive literary critic, who holds unique viewpoint on certain social phenomenon, writing for *The Sunday Times*, *The Independent*, as well as radio or TV programs. She was born in a well-educated family in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, on August 24, 1936. Both of her parents had higher education in Cambridge University, which seemed to be a good family atmosphere for learning, but turned out to be not so happy, because of her mother's frustrated ambition resulted from marriage and children. Her mother was one of the influential persons in her creation career. Like Roland's mother in the novel *Possession*, her mother was also "unable to control her bitterness, and conveyed to her children not only her own dissatisfaction, but her high expectations"¹. The wrath of her mother's frustration made her pay more attention on women's living condition in modern society greatly, and this became the eternal theme of Byatt's creation. When she was a child, through reading, she made friends with Coleridge, Jane Austen, Dickens, Walter Scott, who all had profound and original insights on social phenomenon, and she confessed that she just "kept alive by fictions", and could "lived with other people in other worlds, from fairy-tales through epics to the seventeenth century"². As she grew older, her attention turned to George Eliot, Iris Murdoch, Willa Cather and so on. These female writers, with their mental perception and passionate concerns on human beings, especially women, have influenced Byatt and her creation dramatically. And her critical works mainly lie on the study of Iris Murdoch. She once stated that all her novels "think about the problem of female vision, female art and thought"³. Just as Kathleen Coyne Kelly pointed out that "there are many threads to Byatt's intellectual life, threads she gathers up and weaves into her fiction and non-fiction alike"⁴. Meanwhile, extensive reading of biology, history, philosophy and other areas provides her with plentiful source for her later literary creation. Therefore, her novels are always with the whole world in them—from characters to the theme, all reflect her rich life experiences. Another factor that influenced Byatt's creation value was her teacher, F.R.Leavis⁵, who was concentrated on close reading and "moral sense" of British literary works, in Newnham College, Cambridge. And the instructions she received in the universities provided her with the basic concerns on human destiny. Mary Kaiser points out that *Possession* is such a novel which is faithful to the serious realistic tradition, and committed to reveal the reality of human experience.⁶ Byatt got her bachelor degree of Art in 1953. And

¹ Catherine Burgass. (2002). *A.S.Byatt's Possession: A Reader's Guide*. New York, London: Continuum, p8.

² A.S.Byatt. (1991). *Passions of the mind: Selected Writings*. London: Vintage, p22.

³ Catherine Burgass. (2002). *A.S.Byatt's Possession: A Reader's Guide*. p9.

⁴ Kathleen Coyne Kelly. (1996). *A.S.Byatt*. New York: Twayne Publishers, p4.

⁵ F.R.Leavis (1895-1978), one of the most influential literary critics of the twentieth century, taught and studied for nearly his entire life, and published "The Great Tradition", one of his important works.

⁶ Mary Kaiser, (1991), *World Literature Today* 5.4 Autumn, p707.

then she continued her studies on seventeenth century literature for a doctoral degree. In 1983 she resigned as a lecturer in university to concentrate on writing. As her works mainly concerns on the social reality, most critics regard her as a realistic writer; however, her importance as one of the most outstanding postmodernism authors has been the most discussed topic recently. And she endeavors to redefine the meaning of realism in the frame of postmodern theory⁷. Her erudition is equaled by her deep understanding of human passion, and she herself inevitably shows her concerns on the living condition of nature and women in the modern society, which has been proved in her representative novel *Possession*—the analytical focus of this thesis. This also can be seen in her other novels. Her bildungsroman tetralogy—*The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), *Still Life*(1985), *Babel Tower* (1996) and *Whistling Women* (2002), displays the material lives and emotional experiences of women, particularly, the predicament when facing the traditional role and the new way of life, emphasizing the historically allegorical meaning and revealing the author's concern for human destiny. Hence it is agreed that her works are rarely easy for reading, instead they are thought provoking.

Byatt's first novel, *The Shadow of the Sun*, published in 1964, tells a story of a young girl who is growing up in the shadow of a dominant father. She always feels constrained, and this feeling is from her father's omnipresent influence, and she tries hard to get rid of the pressure from her father. Then *The Game* (1967) is the study of the relationship between two sisters, and Byatt attempts to uncover the tragic figure Cassandra Corbett—a failed female visionary artist. All in all, Byatt keeps concerning on the living situation of women in the patriarchal society through her works. However, what brings her great fame is *Possession* (1990), which has drawn increasing critical attention since its publication. It was rewarded Booker Prize, the highest prize of British literature in the same year of its publication. And it was made into a film in 2002 in USA. The whole novel consists of twenty-nine parts, including a "postscript 1868", with poems, diaries, journals, rewritten stories and academic articles mixed in it. The novel is presented with the three-layered historical period—the myth period, the Victorian Period and the twentieth century of modern time⁸. Each period performs the same theme with the female protagonists connected, that is, women just like nature are marginalized in the patriarchal society, and they have fought for the liberation in a long history. Generally speaking, there are two main sets of characters—Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte, poets in the Victorian period; Roland Michell and Maud Bailey, scholars in the late twentieth century. The story begins in London Library, where Roland Michell, the Ash scholar, is busy collecting data for the edition of Ash's works. He comes across two passionate letters written by Ash to an unidentified woman, which shocks him greatly. The sensitiveness as a

⁷ Andrea Louise Rohland-Le, (2000), *The Spaces between: A.S.Byatt and Postmodern Realism*, diss., Universite De Montreal, (Dissertations Online, UMI – Proquest, 2000): AAT NQ55474, V.

⁸ 参看程倩, (2007), 《历史的叙述和叙述的历史—拜厄特<占有>之历史性的多维研究》, 北京: 人民文学出版社, 第29页。

scholar propels him to do something which might change “the face of scholarship”⁹. With the progress of his research, Roland deduces that the addressee of the letter is Christabel LaMotte, the author of the epic poem *The Fairy Melusina*. In order to continue his investigation, Roland is introduced to know Maud Bailey, the well-known researcher of Christabel LaMotte. The curiosity of the two scholars leads them to Seal Court¹⁰, where they discover the letters between Ash and Christabel, which were unrevealed since the death of Christabel. Reinterpreting the defamiliarized correspondence, they uncover a Victorian love story, which not only changes the direction of the whole academic study of the nineteenth century poets, Ash and Christabel, but also the relationship between Roland and Maud. Ash is such a poet who is interested in science and probing into the origin of life. He is assumed by the scholars of modern times “lived a quiet and exemplary married life” (10), and is always “guarded, courteous” (10). However, in the correspondence with Christabel, he changes into another person—his passion is so intense that a romance comes into being. And such change makes his researcher Roland, who thinks he knows Ash fairly well, thrill. Christabel, a not well-known fairy poetess, lives obscure life in a lesbian relationship with Blanche Glover, a painter. She believes in feminism, and keeps her own creation tenet. During the process of the quest, Roland and Maud finds more important thing for them, instead of the academic findings. The two scholars hold no illusions about love in the contemporary society, where they are taught that love is nothing but sex, and they are afraid of being loved. The further the investigation goes, the closer of their relationship becomes. Touched by the love romance of Victorian poets, they reconsider the meaning of love, the relationship between men and women, and begin their relationship in a harmonious way.

In the twentieth century, the value standard is distorted, and everybody is a profit-maximum seeker. During the process of research on Ash and Christabel, more and more scholars are involved. Among them, Mortimer Cropper is a sinister American collector of Ash's possession. Where there are Ash's legacies, there is Cropper. British professor James Blackadder, who is F.R. Leavis's student, a patriot, claims that what belongs to the British should be stored in British Museum. As Ash is an Englishman, Blackadder insists that what belongs to him should be kept by the English in Ash Factory. Leonora Stern, who tries to keep lesbian relationship with Maud, concentrates on the lesbian relationship study of Christabel and Glover. Whatever motives they have, they are all concerned about what happened between Ash and Christabel. In the journals of Christabel's French niece—Sabine de Kercoz, the author presents the reader a big puzzle: since Christabel is pregnant, where is the child? Does Ash know this? Then there comes the climax of the novel. Christabel keeps clam that her love with Ash can not get any good results because of the pressure coming from the patriarchal society, and then she leaves Ash decisively. After that she gives the birth to a

⁹ Byatt, A. S. *Possession*. (2000). Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, p94. The following quotations of this novel are just cited with pages.

¹⁰ Seal Court is located in Lincolnshire, London, where Christabel lived and ended.

daughter, Maia Thomasine Bailey, who is adopted by Christabel's sister Sophia, and regards Christabel "as a sorciere, a spinster in a fairy tale" (544). Getting the news that Ash is dying, Christabel letters to Ash to inform him something about their child. It is regrettable that Ash's wife Ellen, not letting Ash being disturbed, buries the letter unopened with Ash after his death. Therefore, all the scholars gather around the grave of Ash and his wife Ellen to restore the historical truth. And Christabel is proved to be Maud's great-great-great-grandmother.

The story ends happily; "Something for Val. Something for a self effacing guardian of Ash's wife's journal, Something for Blackadder. Maud finds out who she is, and Roland, noble knight, finds the real object of his quest"¹¹. Val finds her love, and finds a boyfriend, Euan, who is a lawyer, helps Maud to get the correspondence of Christabel, and keep them in England. Roland turns from an unemployed student to a welcomed teacher abroad, and what he quests gets the reward. The greedy scholar Cropper's conspiracy comes to naught. The academic research on Ash and Christabel comes into a new stage. The postscript provides the readers some consolation: Ash indeed meets with her daughter, and Maia seems to like this poet, despite her dislike to poets. Everything is new in the other day, and a harmonious world is coming.

1.2 Literature Review At Home and Abroad

Byatt, with unique novel creation and literary critic talent gains widespread acclaim at home and abroad. Especially after the publication of *Possession*, there have been a variety of critical works on it and its author Byatt. The study is well developed in the critical works of Kathleen Coyne Kelly, Richard Todd, Celia Wallhead, and Cathrine Burgass etc. Centering round Byatt's deep concern for humanity and women's living situation, the discussions touch on the characters, themes, narrative strategies, feminist suggestions, postmodernism techniques, historicity of the novel, which attract more and more researchers to join in. Comparatively, the study of Byatt in China lags behind more than that in English-speaking countries. However, these years witness the prosperity of Byattian study, including her novels and critics in China.

1.2.1 Literature Review Abroad

In Britain the Byattian criticism has formed since 1980s whence her published fictions (*The Shadow of the Sun* 1964, *The Game* 1967, *The Virgin in the Garden* 1978, *Still Life* 1985) attracted the academic attention and interest.¹² However, it is her Booker-Prize winner—*Possession: A Romance* (1990) that propels Byattian study into a new stage. Up to the year 2008, "there are 58 monographs on Byattian criticism"¹³. Among them, there are two general surveys: one is Kathleen Coyne Kelly's *A.S.Byatt* (1996); the other is Richard Todd's briefer book, with the same title as Kelly's, in the series of *Writers and Their Work* (1997).

¹¹ See Carolyn. (1990). "Art a Magic Threshold", *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, October 28, p12.

¹² 梁晓东, (2008). "身份的识别与重构——论拜厄特早期小说女性任务的神话性塑造". 上海外国语大学博士学位论文, p2.

¹³ Ibid, p5.

The former depicts the whole picture of Byatt's early literary creation chronologically, including short stories, feminist novels, and she specifies *Possession* for further study, which she praises as the exemplary of metafiction. The later pays more attention on the themes of Byatt's works. Both of them are extremely helpful and illuminating for the readers and later researchers. When talking about Byatt's unique thinking and deep probing into female issues, Richard Todd holds that there is few contemporary writers, as A.S.Byatt, investigates the marginalized female living condition in the patriarchal society¹⁴. Then there comes the more specific ones. Celia Wallhead's *The Old, the New and the Metaphor* (1999) centers on metaphorical patterns in the novels from her earliest ones up to her later novel *Babel Tower*. And in *Possession* it reveals that the world is fulfilled with metaphors, and even people are associated with certain metaphors. In this metaphorical world, people's social value is distorted greatly. Christien Franken's *A.S.Byatt: Art, Authorship, Creativity* (2001), from feminist perspectives, provides the contradiction between traditional literary spirit and women's creativity through analyzing *The Shadow of the Sun*, *the Game*, and *Possession*, and reflects the writer's ambiguous standpoint towards feminism through her female characters. It is widely accepted that only male writers could create the great literary works, which can reflect the traditional literary spirit. Therefore, women's creativity is shadowed by the power of men and the social prejudice towards them. Female writers are always trapped in the dilemma between literary creation and domestic things, such as marriage and procreation. The first collection of essays on Byatt—*Essays on the Fiction of A.S.Byatt: Imagining the Real*, edited by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Nobel, appeared in 2001. This book collects twelve essays which coincide with Byatt's novel creation from *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964) to *Babel Tower* (1996). In the first two essays and preface of this book, the editors sort out the connections between the novel and postmodernism, and the possible meaning of the open end in the novel respectively. Byatt herself in the book writes about *Angels and Insects*, which is very helpful for Byattian studies.

A.S.Byatt's Possession: A Reader's Guide(2002), written by Cathrine Burgass, is the first research treatise on *Possession*, which covers Byatt's life, plot, characters, narrative mode, the suggested interpretation approach to readers, and delves into the main themes of the novel.

In 2004, Jane Campell, from the perspective of feminism, published her critical work *A.S.Byatt and the Heliotropic Imagination*. It is chronologically arranged, up to *A Whistling Woman* (2002), and all about women's mental and emotional lives and creativity, also the most comprehensive one.

In *Melusina the Serpent Goddess in A.S.Byatt's Possession and in Mythology*, Gillian M. E. Alban retraces the tale about the serpent Melusina back into French medieval legend, and tries to restore her female deity in order to reconstruct the female position. She explains that the origin of Melusina is a aquatic goddess coming from deep water of the earth, and I have

¹⁴ Richard Todd, (1997), *A.S.Byatt, Writers and Their Work*, Plymouth: Northcote House, p55.

got initial ideas from her work, to delve into the ecofeminist ideas of Byatt.

Jeniffer M. Jeffers directs the readers to take notice of the symbolic meaning of the white color in the novel, and indicates the relationship between white color and desire. Nancy Chin explores the female's marginalized position in the long history, where they live in solitude and seclusion. The novel's protagonist Christabel LaMotte like Emily Dickinson writes poems to express her solitude. All these help me a lot in constructing this thesis.

1.2.2 Literature Review At Home

It is indicated above that Byattian study began in 1980s abroad, however, Chinese critics have launched into the study of Byatt's *Possession* since 1998. From then on, more and more new members join in the pilgrimage to interpret the novel from different angles, characters, themes, thoughts, writing styles, and so on.

Jiang Xianwen is one of the pioneers of Byattian study in China. And he is the first who gives a brief introduction to *Possession* in academic media. The essay "On A.S.Byatt's *Possession*" in *Foreign Language* displays the general picture of the novel to the readers from plot, characters, writing style to themes. It centers on the theme of love and possession, leaving some space for the reader to ponder on. His explanation of the word "possession" renders the reader to think about the ownership in modern society. However, it inevitably lacks analytical depth after all. In his second essay, published in *Journal of Hengyang Normal University*, in 2000, he analyzes Byatt's feminist ideas in *Possession*, that is, her ideas on male, and female, love and marriage, procreation and progeny. He points out there is a conflict between the male and female, which the author built in the novel, and the focus of the conflict is control and anti-control, in the author's words, that is possession and anti-possession.¹⁵ He high-lightens Byatt's feminist suggestions further as follows. The first is that the female-centered city of "Is" will take charge of the world; on the contrary, the male-dominated city of "Paris" is doomed to be drowned for its sins. The second is that women can be self-fulfilled and live meaningfully without any help from men. The third is that women today should stand up against the oppression from men, and marriage and children should not be the obstacles of their fulfillment. And then Byatt calls for the liberation of women. In 2000, the novel was introduced to China by Beijing foreign Language Teaching and Researching Press. Jiang Xianwen writes a preface for the novel, which is descriptive and introductory, attracting more readers.

Another important researcher in this area is Cheng Qian, who has made great contribution to Byattian study in China, and has published five influential papers in CSSCI¹⁶,

¹⁵ 参看蒋显文, (2000), "A.S.拜厄特的女权思想", 《衡阳师范学院学报(社会科学版)》, 第21卷第2期, 第73页, 本文作者翻译。

¹⁶ 程倩, (2007), "女性人生的历史困境—拜厄特小说《占有》之女性主义解读", 《湖南师范大学社会科学学报》, 第03期。

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——, (2003), "回归历史之途—析拜厄特小说《占有》的历史叙述策略", 《外国文学》(季刊), (总第89期)。

——, (2003), "女性生命本真的历史叙述—拜厄特小说《占有》之女性主义解读", 《北京大学学报》(哲学社会

and a doctoral dissertation. Her papers cover the narrative strategies, female living condition, archetypal interpretation, multiple dialogic relationships, and so on. In “Historical Narration of the True Female Life: A Feminist Reading of Byatt’s *Possession*”, Cheng Qian reveals the historical truth of female existence in the western patriarchal society, and analyses the numerous images of female existence to uncover the feminist consciousness and Byatt’s perspective on female history. Then in her doctoral thesis entitled *The Narrative of History and the History of Narrative—A Multi-dimensional Study of Byatt’s Possession* (2007), Cheng Qian tries her best to integrate all the interpretation of the novel together, “such as narratology, Bakhtin’s dialogism, archetypal criticism and feminist criticism”¹⁷, and her investigation is carried out “both on the story level and discourse level”¹⁸. The inter-textualized context of the three periods brings the readers a thoughtful understanding of what has happened in the past and what is at present, rendering them to reconsider the social value in modern society, which is fulfilled with crisis of faith, ecological problems, and so on. This book provides the researchers in China with many sharp insights, and better understandings of the novel, and signifies the prosperity of Byattian study in China. From then on, it marches into the stage of “A hundred schools of thought contend”.

After then, the academic study of Byatt and her novels emerge one after another. Professor Cao Li published “Possession: Historical Truth and the Pleasure of the Text” in *Foreign Literature Studies* in 2005, from which I have got much inspiration for this thesis. The essay points out that the rich imagination and creative practice of *Possession* draw the readers’ attention into the historical depth, where Byatt earnestly concerns about literature, art and human living situations.

In her “The Paradox of Possession: Highly Traditional and Strikingly Postmodern” (2005), Qian Bing points out that *Possession* is highly traditional and strikingly postmodern. There are many typical postmodern techniques applied in it, using collage, parody and self-references to subvert the modern value standard in the patriarchal society, and showing its concern over the problem of history, and literary criticism.

According to CNKI, during the years of 2003 and 2009, many MA theses and PhD dissertations emerge. Some of them are mentioned here. Liang Xiaodong’s PhD dissertation: “Identity Recognition and Reconstruction: The Mythic Depiction of the Female Characters in A.S.Byatt’s Early Novels”, mainly concerns about female creative identity, through the analyses of her three representative novels—*The Shadow of the Sun*, *The Game*, and *Possession*. It makes a comparative study of the mythic figures and the central female protagonists in Byatt’s three novels, exploring how these traditional tales work effectively upon the depiction of female characters for their identity recognition and reconstruction. Liu

科学版), 2003年第2期。

——, “历史的回声—拜厄特《占有》之多重对话关系”, 《当代外国文学》, 2006年第1期。

¹⁷程倩, (2007), 《历史的叙述与叙述的历史—拜厄特〈占有〉之历史性的多维研究》, 人民文学出版社, 第4页。

¹⁸ Ibid.

Aiqin¹⁹, from Shandong University, is one of the earliest MA theses writers on this subject. She analyzes the artistic characteristics of *Possession* on the whole: the perspective of narrative strategies, mirror images, metaphor, symbolism, and stream of consciousness. She also mentions other minor techniques which contribute to the construction and the theme of the novel, for example, the meaning and function of the title "Possession", the Paradise-lost-and-regained story pattern which is the frame constructing the novel, and the skillful satire upon biography writing. All these analyses provide the later readers many meaningful ideas, and forebode the prosperity of Byattian study on MA theses.

All of the above mentioned critical articles or works make great efforts to interpret the novel, provide the later study with a good, solid foundation, and are all extremely illuminating and significant for Byattian study. However, few critics appreciate *Possession* from ecofeminist point of view, integrating the development of three waves of feminist movement. In order to have deep understanding of the novel, this paper suggests that Byatt is quite different from other female writers, whose feminist consciousness is the succession of the precursors, and her writing fully inherits the tradition of feminist suggestions, and demonstrates the harmonious ideas which ecofeminists suggested. Therefore, this paper aims to delve into the ecofeminist suggestions in this novel, to give deeper interpretation of her masterpiece.

¹⁹ 刘爱琴, (2003), "谜—论《占有》的艺术特色", 山东大学硕士学位论文。

Chapter Two Theoretical Perspective

2.1 Literary Criticism in Three Waves of Feminist Movement

Although, the term “feminism” has gained widespread use, and feminist literary criticism has been one of the most important twentieth century western critical theories, it is not easy to give it an exact definition. In *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, it indicates that feminism is often defined as a matter of what is absent rather than what is present, and its social orientation moves beyond traditional literary criticism. “In its diversity feminism is concerned with the marginalization of all women: that is, with their being relegated to a secondary position. Most feminists believe that our culture is a patriarchal culture: that is, one organized in favor of the interests of men.”²⁰ Feminist literary critics attempt to reveal how power imbalances due to gender in a given culture are reflected in or challenged by literary text. Zhu Gang, a western critical theorist, specifies his study on feminism as follows:

The historical implication of “feminism” usually means “movements for recognition of the claims of women for rights (legal, political, familial, etc.) equal to those possessed by men”..... The “feminism” in this unit refers chiefly to the theoretical speculations on women and women related subjects as the result of the contemporary women’s movement, which is markedly different from the previous feminisms.²¹

Despite their diversity, feminist critics all agree that women, along with nature, in the patriarchal society have suffered a lot, the ultimate goal of feminist movement is the liberation of women, and the construction of a harmonious society.

Nowadays, academically, it is known that the feminist movement has experienced three waves²², and each of them influences the others. The first feminist wave refers to the period of the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, connected with the women’s suffrage (concerning the women’s right to vote). The English feminist Mary Wollstone’s “Vindication of the Rights of Woman” (1792) is the first declaration of the earliest feminist movement. However, the forerunner of literary criticism is Virginia Woolf. In her *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), Woolf demonstrates her feminist suggestions fully, and she states that “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction”²³. While, an outstanding writer should be bisexually harmonious, equipped with both masculine and feminine characteristics, that is achieving the state of androgyny. Androgyny, which means the quality of possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics within a given person, is one of the most important literary critical ideas of Virginia Woolf.

At the beginning of the essay *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf describes such a scene: the two people, a man and a woman, come together, and get into a taxi. She thinks that the union

²⁰ Wilfred L. Guerin. (eds). (2004). *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, p196.

²¹ 朱刚, (2001), 《二十世纪西方文艺批评理论》, 上海外语教育出版社, 第 228 页。

²² 都岚岚, (2009), “后回潮时代的美国女性主义第三次浪潮”, 清华大学博士学位论文。

²³ Virginia, Woolf. (1929), *A Room of One’s Own*, London:, Vintage, p4.

of man and woman is the natural thing. Then she adventures a proposal—Androgyny, and she points out this is the ideal state for literary creation. She thinks about this hypothesis as follows: “One has a profound, if irrational, instinct in favor of the theory that the union of man and woman makes for the great satisfaction, the most complete happiness. But in the sight of the two people getting into the taxi and the satisfaction it gave me made me also ask whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness”? The answer is definitely Yes. Then she further explains the “Androgyny” proposal: “In each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man’s brain, the man predominates over the woman and in the woman’s brain, the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. If one is a man, still the woman part of his brain must effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine, I thought”.²⁴ And Woolf’s androgyny theory has been very influential, especially in modern society to construct a harmonious world.

Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, based on the “materialism” of the first wave, propels the development of the second wave feminist movement. She, who is one of the representatives at the turning point between the first two waves, is well-known for her literary ideas: one is not born a woman, but becomes one. She argues that women have been historically marginalized, and considered as “the Other”. Furthermore, she identifies this social construction of Women as the Other as the fundamental to women’s oppression. However, many feminists, “even Mary Wollstone considered men to be the ideal toward which women should aspire”²⁵. Only must this assumption be set aside, the feminist movement could move forward. The second wave feminism begins in the 1960s, with the slogan “The Personal is Political”.

The second wave feminist theories have been greatly enriched by Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, cultural feminism, and so on. Compared with the first wave focused on women’s suffrage, the second wave is largely concerned with social issues, with its goal to criticize and subvert the inequality in patriarchal society, and ending discrimination. In this period, the theoretical feminism is usually divided into two major parts: the Anglo-American and the French²⁶. According to Toril Moi²⁷, Anglo-American criticism is either theoretically naive or refuses to theorize itself; the French,

²⁴ Virginia, Woolf. *A Room of One’s Own*, pp59-60.

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simone_de_Beauvoir

²⁶ 朱刚,《二十世纪西方文艺批评理论》,第229页。

²⁷ Toril Moi, psychoanalyst and professor of literature at Duke University, is interested in feminist theory in general (*Sexual/ Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 1985) and French feminism in particular (*The Kristeva Reader*, 1986).

on the other hand, is theoretically self-conscious and sophisticated²⁸. Anglo-American feminist literary criticism is an empirical approach, including many feminist theorists, such as Michele Barrett, Juliet Mitchell, Kate Millet, Nancy Chodorow, Elaine Showalter, and so on. And in this period American feminism plays a prominent role. It experiences three phases (though by no means necessarily chronological): criticism of male sexism in the “androtexs”, discovery of the women writer in history or spade work for “gynotexs”, and feminist discourse for female identity²⁹. Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1977) enables her to be “the most famous mother of American feminist criticism”. She criticizes sexism and heterosexism of some classic male writers, such as D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Sigmund Freud, and uncovering the inequality of power in the male-centered society, then offers the critique to the patriarchy in Western countries. One of the representative “gynotexs” is *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women, the Tradition in English* (1985)³⁰ edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, explores the systematic development of feminist literary tradition in English-speaking women’s works, the deficiency of which is that it is comparatively depend on the patriarchal literary canon. It is Elaine Showalter who undertakes the course of feminist discourse for feminist identity. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977) outlines the literary history of female writers, who are believed “hidden from history”, and develops her “gynocriticism”, which focuses on the “history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women”³¹. Showalter indicates that female tradition development can be represented with three words respectively: “feminine”, “feminist” and “female”. The first, “feminine” phase refers to the forty years of 1840-1880, with the characteristics of that “women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about female nature”³². In the second “feminist” phase (1880-1920), feminist writers become more radical and protest against male standards and advocate women’s autonomy to construct the utopia. The “female” phase from 1920 onwards, in Showalter’s own words, is the phase “women reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature”³³. And this thesis will prove that Byatt obviously belongs to the last phase.

The third wave, begins in the 1990s, and is the continuation of second wave feminism and response to its failure. It was coined by Rebecca Walker, a bisexual African-American woman in 1992. Walker strongly claims that second-wave feminism has historically failed to contain the voices of many women, that is, non-heterosexual women, and women of color.

²⁸ <http://www.english-e-corner.com/comparativeCulture/core/gender/frameset/nonamemainpage.html>

²⁹ 朱刚,《二十世纪西方文艺批评理论》,第230页。

³⁰ The first version of this book was published in 1985, the second in 1996, and the third was available in 2007. The second and third edition gives more emphasis to how the women’s experiences are shaped by different cultural, racial, religious, economical and sexual backgrounds.

³¹ <http://www.enotes.com/contemporary-literary-criticism/showalter-elaine>

³² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elaine_Showalter

³³ Ibid.

Therefore the third wave feminism pays more attention on the differences among women, instead of the unity in the first two feminisms. Feminism in this period has been greatly developed, integrating with other literary criticism, emerging racial feminist studies, gender studies, cultural feminist studies, intersectionality, post-colonial feminist studies, ecofeminism, queer theory, cyber feminism and so on. And eco-feminism is one of the most important branches of the third wave feminism, which will be discussed in the following part.

2.2 Introduction to Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is commonly regarded as a social and political movement, which combines environmentalism with feminism. It is agreed that the term "ecofeminism" firstly appeared in 1970s; however there is no consensus on its source. Some scholars attribute it to Franchise D'Eaubonne's *Le Feminisme ou La Mort* (Feminism or Death) (1974), in which the author challenges the patriarchy from the perspective of ecology and feminism. Franchise D'Eaubonne holds that the oppression to women and nature directly connect, and only both of them are liberated could the society come into a harmonious stage. And the common destination of ecofeminism is the liberation of women and nature, to set up a non-exploitable, harmonious relationship in the modern society.

Other scholars regard American ecofeminist, Ynestra King, as one of the first persons who uses the term "ecofeminism". She argues that "all feminists—and indeed everyone—should question the ideal of human freedom and liberation over and against the natural and biological".³⁴ She notices that biology, sometimes as destiny, is not just a threat to women, but also an excuse for all forms of oppression, and she advertises to "recover some awareness of the earthiness, the fleshiness of human life"³⁵. Her clear statement on ecofeminism is as follows:

Ecofeminism is a joining of environmental, feminist, and women's spirituality concern. As the environmental movement along with environmental crisis raised the consciousness of women to the decay of the earth, they began to see a parallel between the devaluation of earth and the devaluation of women. Women began to see the link as not a false construction of weakness, but as a strong unifying force that clarified the violation of women and the earth as part of the same drama of male control.³⁶

King in her article "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the Nature/Culture Dualism" states that the starting point of ecofeminist theory is the analysis of the interrelated dominations of nature-psyche and sexuality, human oppression, and nonhuman nature and the historic position of women in relation to those forms of domination.³⁷

When she taught the course of Ecofeminism, she pointed out three possibilities of ecofeminism development. The first direction is the integration of women and nature, and

³⁴ <http://www.holysmoke.org/fem/fem0095.htm>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ King, Ynestra.(1990) "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the nature/culture dualism". *Reweavin the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Diamond & Gloria Feman Orenstein (eds). San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, pp. 106-121.

³⁷ Ibid, p117.

then the second is reaffirming the linkage between them, to inform that the essence of women is different from that of men, and the culture of women is superior to that of men. The third one, the substantial ecofeminist direction, is the deconstruction of dualistic structure—culture/nature, male/female. It is required to create a different culture and politics, in which the intuitive, spiritual and rational cognition is integrated, and a free and harmonious society is formed, instead of joining the male culture to meet the link between women and nature. Females in the reconstructed society should make use of their superior insight to reveal how humans can live in harmony with each other and with nature. And Byatt's *Possession* is just the exemplary of this ecofeminist suggestion.

Ecofeminism, intertwined with different social ideology, takes various forms, such as cultural ecofeminism, social ecofeminism, philosophical ecofeminism, and so on. And most forms of ecofeminism depend on the deconstruction of western ideology, named patriarchy, which is based on dualism. The dualist ideology divides the world into two opposed pairs of concepts: male/female, mind/body, spirit/matter, and culture/nature. The former in each pair is deemed superior to the other, and “the other” is always demonized and always discriminated against. And the patriarchal society is constructed on the following hierarchy:

1. God
2. Man
3. Woman
4. Children
5. Animals
6. Nature³⁸

No matter what forms they take, they all call for an end of all kinds of oppression and prejudices, advocating that the efforts to liberate women will not successful, unless when nature is liberated. This can be seen in Ruether's ecofeminist book, *New Women/New Earth*:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this (modern industrial) society.³⁹

The 1990s witnesses the rise of a new branch of literary criticism—ecofeminist literary criticism. Based on the ecofeminist philosophy, it becomes one of the unique forms of literary criticism in third wave feminism. Ecofeminists suggest that females are oneness with nature, and they can understand nature intuitively, and the domination of women and nature are fundamentally connected. From this core tenet a philosophy has flowered based on the interconnected web of life. The common goal of ecofeminists is the liberation of women and nature, that is, to set up a more harmonious relationship between the genders, further to build

³⁸ <http://www.thegreenfuse.org/ecofem.htm>

³⁹ Rosemary Radford, Ruether. (1975). *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*. New York: Seabury, p204.

up the world of harmony. More recently, ecofeminist theorists have extended their analyses to consider the interconnections between sexism, the domination of nature (including animals), and social inequalities. Consequently, it is now better understood as a movement working against the interconnected oppressions of gender, and nature.

Ecofeminist literary criticism takes place in the special context of the deteriorating environment and the long historical trend of the feminist movement. Through studying the relationships between nature and females from the perspective of ecology, ecofeminism exposes the connection of the two forms of oppression in literature and reassesses the literary works from the criteria of ecofeminism. Though it has experienced many years, and many branches of it come into being, such as socialist ecofeminism, cultural ecofeminism, philosophical ecofeminism, anthropocentrism, ecofeminist literary criticism is not a mature one. It needs to be enriched and developed. In "*Feminist Literary Criticism in the West and China*"(2004), the Chinese ecofeminist scholar, Luo Ting, considers that construction of ecofeminist theories could be carried out by the following steps. The first is to uncover the relationship between nature and women in literature. According to ecofeminists, the connection between women and nature is closely integrated, through symbols and status. The next is reading the rich ecofeminist texts, by which the dualism in the patriarchal society is revealed, and the oppressions of women as well as nature are exposed. Finally, the goal of ecofeminist criticism is to delve out the harmonious suggestions in the text.

Ecofeminists keep their eyes on the society, and highly advocate the moral sense of ordinary people, and encourage more and more people to participate in the construction of a harmonious world. Ecofeminist suggestions conform to Byatt's original intention of literary criticism. In her youth, her teacher, F.R.Leavis had great influence on her, although she expresses her ambivalence towards him in *Passions of the Mind*:

I am a non-believer and a non-belonger to schools of thought. I grew up in Dr Leavis's Cambridge, in an atmosphere of moral seriousness which placed English Literature at the centre of university studies and also of social morality. I felt then that these claims were extravagant and absurdly exclusive—all sorts of other things are good and beautiful, paint, philosophy, mathematics, biology—there are many ways of coming at inevitably partial visions of truth.⁴⁰

In any case, Byatt, as her teacher, keeps in mind that a great literary writer should have moral sense, which weighs much in her heart. The difference of them is that Byatt, not like her teacher who devoted himself wholeheartedly to the revival of "The Great Tradition" of British literature, stands highly and keeps sharp insight on human destiny. That is why, Byatt, lived in the second wave feminist movement, is connected with ecofeminism in third wave feminism.

Byatt, who never claims herself as an ecofeminist, is really a feminist, especially an ecofeminist, for she always keeps sharp insight into the women's living conditions, and has a deep concern on human destiny in the modern society. Therefore, this thesis suggests that

⁴⁰ Byatt,A.S. (1991). *Passions of the mind. Selected Writings*, p.2.

Byatt's masterpiece, *Possession*, with its thoughtful themes, reflects the feminist ideas in the second wave feminism, and forebodes the insightful proposition of third wave feminism.

Chapter Three The Distorted Relationship between Man and Nature, Men and Women

As commented by Cheng Qian, historicity, female historical narrative in particular, is the uniqueness of *Possession*. This chapter undertakes an ecofeminist historical investigation, to reveal the rich implications of ecofeminist consciousness and historical consciousness. This part also aims to deconstruct the patriarchal society through the analyses of the marginalized situation of women and nature. It serves as the base for the next chapter, the reconstruction of a harmonious world.

3.1 Marginalized Living Condition in Patriarchal Society

In literary works, many female writers express their paradoxical situation in the marginalized space in the patriarchal society, and Byatt is one of them. In *Possession*, she makes use of the symbolic associations between women and nature, which are all oppressed in the male-centered world. Women are always connected with some demon animals with negative meanings. Colors, which are a part of the world, have innately associated with men and women, to reveal the theme of the novel. Women's living space, in the patriarchal society, is isolated, enclosed, and filled with frozen atmosphere. And the following parts will illustrate these in detail.

3.1.1 The symbolic Links between Nature and Women

In patriarchal society, women are regarded as inferior to men, and nature is regarded as inferior to culture. The destiny of women and nature are closely connected. Byatt through the rewriting of the classical fairy stories in *Possession*, reveal the obvious symbolic oppositions, red and white, ice and fire, snow and blood, life and death. Ecofeminists take notice of the symbolic links between nature and females, and in literature many writers through the enforcement of these kinds of links aim to arouse people's sensitive feelings towards women and nature. When women are "naturalized", nature is "feminized". Ecofeminists, on one hand, see the earth as the mother of human beings; on the other hand, women are nurturers of nature. Here, the status of women and nature is raised. In the society, men rely on nature to survive, whereas they not regard females as beautiful nature, but ugly and wild nature. What's worse, men want to confine women by a set of rules. The fact is that women are defined with such natural phenomenon as giving birth. In literary works, it can be seen that animals always bear implied meaning, and colors serve as a foil to illuminate the theme. And the iciness indicates the miserable living condition of women. Ecofeminists focus on these connections, and endeavor to delve into how men devalue and oppress both women and nature. These are also fully illustrated in Byatt's *Possession*, and will be discussed in succession.

a. Women and Animals

Traditionally, philosophy in the west shows little respect for women and animals. And for a long history, the image of women is closely related with certain kind of animals. In

ancient times, before men knew their role in paternity, women were regarded as Goddess, also seen as creatures of new life, potent in the life cycle of human beings as well as in animal and vegetable life. In the patriarchal society people's value concept is distorted, and it is hard for them to hold neutral attitude towards certain phenomenon. Everything is definitely stereotyped. In the novel, the image of mythical character Melusina⁴¹ is depicted through the poem by Byatt. Melusina was originally worshipped as the mother goddess, and represented women's fertility. Because of her revenge on her father, she was put on a curse by her mother turning into a monstrous half-serpent creature, and then she turned to be a dragon due to her husband's broken promise. It is known that snake renews its life by shedding its old skin, and in the poem, the snake Melusina symbolizes a self-sufficient image that can live meaningfully without any help from others, especially the male. She resembles the snake in her regenerative qualities. Melusina is a good mother and has ten sons. She even builds the houses for her family. Unfortunately, in patriarchal times, this goddess is changed into demonic serpent and her life-giving shape as snake epitomizes evil. In Christianity, it can be seen that the previously powerful snake deity is relegated to a tempter in the garden who must be crushed underfoot and blamed for original sin. This brings readers to the contradictory versions of Melusina.

In Christabel's epic "The Fairy Melusina", Melusina is portrayed in the eyes of men as follows:

And what was she, the Fairy Melusina?
Men say, at night, around the castle-keep
The black air ruffles neath the outstretched vans
Of a long flying worm, whose sinewy tail
And leather pinions beat the parted sky
Scudding with puddered clouds and black as soot,
And ever and again a shuddering cry
Mounts on the wind, a cry of pain and loss,
And whirls in the wind's screaming and is gone.(314)

Influenced by the men centered value standard, Melusina is "half sable serpent, half a mourning Queen" (314) with "cry of pain and loss" (314), and "a horrible snake" (38). "A good mother" is changed into a bad snake in men's dominated world. Women, who were the deities in the pre-patriarchal society, were demonized by the male. Christabel confesses her creation purpose of this epic to Ash like that "I would like, if I undertook it—a little from Melusina's—own—vision...seeing her as an unfortunate Creature—of Power and Frailty—always in Fear of returning to the Ranging of the Air—the not-eternal—but finally—annihilated—Air—" (192) Just as what Christabel has told her niece, Sabine, "men saw women as double beings, enchantresses and demons or innocent angels", "Who knows what Melusina was in her freedom with no eyes on her?"(404)

⁴¹ Melusina: the character of the poet Christabel LaMotte's *Melusina*.

In the correspondence of Christabel and Ash, both of them are enjoying the passionate love, a kind of natural force. Here, Byatt also utilizes the intensive words to display the love to readers. Their love is so intense that "Surtur's"⁴² flame lapped the shores" and Christabel regards this "glowing salamander" a "Firedrake"⁴³, which will be "Conflagration" (213). And Ash strongly feels this as Christabel, "all creation rushed round us out there—earth, air, fire, water...warm and human and safe, in the circle of the trees, in each other's arms, under the arch of the sky" (214). And Ash regards Christabel as his "Phoenix", although it is burned in flames, it "shall fly up renewed and unchanged—the gold more burnished, the eye brighter..." (214). However, the name "Ash" has another meaning—"lifeless dust" buried with flame which licked, enfolded, looped veins, and this indicates that after the burning of love, ashes will be left.

Ash, interested in evolutionism, holds that human beings are "part of the animal world". When he and Christabel walks along the sea, talking about selkie⁴⁴, Ash describes the selkies as what he had seen, they are "like huge lithe fish", while "they have human eyes, very liquid and intelligent, and sleek round bodies"; "on the land they have to creep and haul themselves, as though maimed" (305). Ash even has the feeling that Christabel is just like a "selkie", a woman "who come for a time and then must leave" (305).

In her times Christabel is underappreciated, and even in the eyes of Sir George Baily⁴⁵, she is just a "funny old bird" (88), "old bat", not "a real poet" like Ash. What she had written in the eyes of Sir George is "terrible sentimental stuff about God and Death and the dew and the fairies" (88), and makes him nauseate. When Maud tells him that she writes about the biography about Christabel, he comments that: "She didn't *do* anything. Just lived up there in the east wing and poured out all this stuff about fairies. It wasn't a *life* (89). In from the viewpoint of Sir George, women like Christabel can never write poems like Ash did.

Christabel always regards herself as a bird. This image reveals her deep desire to fly away and fly highly. However, when she is confined in the cage, she turns to think herself as an egg. For one thing she is looking forward to joining in the society, writing as male poets do, for another she cherishes her own private space, not disturbed by the outside world.

The unmarried modern scholar Beatrice Nest lives in a tiny house in Mortlake (dead lake), and is described as the one whose external presence, not inner life that stirred up people's imagination. Cropper, Blackadder, and Roland all have their own metaphoric identity towards Beatrice. Cropper thinks of her "in terms of Carroll's obstructive white sheep" (126). Blackadder in his bad moods thinks of her as "one of those puffed white spiders, bleached by the dark, feeling along the threads of her trap from her central lair" (126). Meanwhile, she is regarded, by some feminists who had from time to time sought access to Ellen Ash's journals,

⁴² It is the character in Ash's poem "Ragnarok."

⁴³ It refers to a kind of dragon.

⁴⁴ Selkies, associated with romantic tragedies, can become human by shedding their seal skins, and then return to be a seal when putting in the sea.

⁴⁵ Sir George is the owner of Seal Court in London, where Christabel lived.

as “some kind of guardian octopus,—curled torpidly round her board, putting up opaque screens of ink or watery smoke to obscure her whereabouts” (126). These are all negative images connected with women.

b. Women and colors

Colors, as a part of nature, are always been used by artists to present the wonderful world vividly, and assumed to be conspicuously important by writers. And for writers, colors can speak. In Grimm's Fairy Tales, Snow White lies in a transparent glass coffin, although she has lain there for a long period of time, she is still “as white as snow, as red as blood, and black-haired as ebony-wood”⁴⁶. These three colors enable Snow White look as fresh as a living person and is restored to life by the prince. Byatt confesses that when she was a child, she was entranced “by the patterning of this, the weaving of the three colors, the framing in glass of faces and stages of lives”⁴⁷. In *Possession*, colors communicate and establish the integral facet of identity. As commented by many critics, colors play an eminent role in revealing the theme and essence of the novel. Jennifer M. Jeffers, a literary critic, comments that Byatt frequently writes about art and color theory in her fictions⁴⁸. And Byatt's unique technique of using colors earns her much praise at home and abroad. Julian Gitzen confesses that “she observes and describes her novel's characters from a comparably painterly perspective”⁴⁹.

Byatt takes advantage of colors to parallel narratives of the Ash-Christabel story and the Roland-Maud story. Jiang Xianwen in the preface to *Possession* (2000), reminds the readers of Byatt's application of Italian Pre-Raphaelite painting, to awaken the readers' sensitive feeling. And he further divides the colors in the novel into two schemes, which are communicating and struggling to speak something. One is earth colors, represented by the colors of brown, gray, yellow and black, signifying masculine power and identity; the other is vegetable colors, including green and yellow (or gold), and white (or silver), which are the embodiment of feminine power and identity⁵⁰. The two clarified colors interact together to form a unified picture of human experience. Byatt makes full use of the vegetable colors—green, white, silver, and golden, to bond the female characters of different period—Melusina, Christabel and Maud together. And through the exertion of earth colors, the conflicts between female and male are demonstrated.

Green is the color of nature, and the essential color of female identity in *Possession*. In the ecofeminist movement, green is a powerful symbol, with the meaning of initiation, frugality and health. Nevertheless, “the extremes of green are considered to be bad as in ‘green with envy’ or its association with money which is sometimes deemed as ‘the root of all

⁴⁶ A.S.Byatt. (2000). *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays*. London: Chatto&Windus, p152.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p152.

⁴⁸ Jennifer M. Jeffers. (2002). “The White Bed of Desire in A.S.Byatt's *Possession*”. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. Vol.43, No. 2, p.135.

⁴⁹ Julian Gitzen. (1995). “A.S.Byatt's Self-Mirroring Art”. *Critique*, Vol.36, No.2.

⁵⁰ A.S.Byatt.(2000). *Possession*, pviii.

evil”⁵¹. In the novel Byatt intentionally utilizes this color to reveal the paradoxical living condition of women. White, as we know, symbolizes innocence, purity, cleanliness, and sterility. Yellow, with its dark color gold, is the typical symbolization of harvest, wealth, optimism, happiness and so on. In contrast to vegetable colors, the earth ones, black and brown, which Byatt mainly places on her male characters, have multiple meanings. Black is known as the symbol of death, and with the negative implication of emptiness, darkness, seriousness and sophistication, whereas it also means intelligence, formality, modernity, power. Brown, the color of earth, with the environmental quality of green, contrasts dramatically with green in *Possession*. It signals the message of calm, boldness, roughness, as well as dullness, and it can provide people with a comforting feeling.

The colors green and gold associate women with nature, the green of growth, the golden of harvest. And they reflect the essential element of their feminine nature of fertility. At the beginning of the novel, Ash's "The Garden of Proserpina" attracts the readers:

These things are there. The garden and the tree
The serpent at its root, the fruit of the gold
The woman in the shadow of the boughs
The running water and the grassy space.
They are and were there. At the old world's rim,
In the Hesperidean grove, the fruit
Glowed golden on eternal boughs, and there
The dragon Ladon crisped his jeweled creast
Scraped a gold claw and sharpened a sliver tooth
And dozed and waited through eternity
Until the tricky hero, Herakles,
Came to his dispossession and the theft. (1)

Proserpina, the Goddess in the poem, "gold-skinned in the gloom", was also "grain-golden". "Ears of grain were called apples of gold, which must have been the first gold in the world while metallic gold was unknown...So the golden apple which Hercules first brought back or gathered from Hesperia must have been grain..."(2) And in the Christabel's fairy tale "The Threshold", the gold lady sings the power of gold highly:

"Mine the bright earth
Mine the corn
Mine the gold throne
To which you're born
Lie in my lap
Tumbled with flowers" (170)

The color gold connects the Goddess, Proserpina, with Christabel, and then Maud. During the days in North Yorkshire in 1859, Ash deeply immersed himself into the love with Christabel. Her "leek silver-gold hair seemed to him to have in it a tinge, a hint of

⁵¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color_symbolism_and_psychology#Green

greenness...a pale sap-green of vegetable life”(301). When Maud unbound her hair in front of Roland, the same picture recurred. Roland watched intentionally, “the light rush towards it and glitter on it, the whirling mass, and Maud inside it saw a moving sea of gold lines, waving” (296).

In the forth part of the novel, after discovering the mysterious letter, Roland went to Lincoln to ask Maud for help. When they first met each other, Roland was surprised by Maud’s appearance, and thought she was dressed in an unusual way for an academic scholar. Here Byatt just creates such contrast to subvert the authority of men. Maud Bailey is described in “green and white length, a long pine-green tunic over a pine-green skirt, a white silk shirt inside the tunic and long softly white stockings inside long shining green shoes” (44). She would like to coil her long beautiful blond hair into “a green scarf” (283), then pinned with a jet-black mermaid brooch. When she drives, she is in an “immaculately glossy green Beetle” (44).

On the contrary, Christabel is firstly depicted as “very fair, pale-skinned, with eyes, not unduly large, of a strange green color which elementally transmuted itself as the light varied” (298). Her feet are “encased in a gleaming pair of laced boots in emerald green leather” (299). Her hair of shining of gold, “like the silvery bark of young trees, or green shadows in green tresses of young hay” (301-302). Her eyes are also green, “glass-green, malachite green, the cloudy green of seawater perturbed and carrying a weight of sand”, and she always touches her cheeks “with green too” (302).

Christabel and Maud are not only “serpent-like green women” like Melusina, but also are isolated as “white ladies”. In “The White Bed of Desire in A.S.Byatt’s *Possession*” Jennifer M. Jeffers states that the white color stands for innocence, joy, and the triumph over darkness in western culture, and silence in literature. “In the tale, Maud and Roland desire ‘clean and white beds’; Ash desires ‘the white lady’, LaMotte, who is ‘white in the dark’; and LaMotte’s poems refer to white hands, linen, milk, bones, crosses, and ‘marbling nakedness’”.⁵² Byatt in the novel makes the readers know that although the “white ladies” are white, there is a hidden power of desire that can subvert darkness.

One of the main male characters, Ash is portrayed with the earth colors to indicate his intelligence and strength:

He was a handsome man, with a flowing head of very dark brown hair, almost black but with russet lights in its waves, and a glossy beard, a little browner, the color of horse-chestnuts...He had black brows, a little rough and craggy, under which very dark eyes looked out, the nose was clearcut and the mouth firm and settled—a face, one might think, that knew itself and had a decided way of taking in the world (298).

His figure is full of muscular characteristics of hardness and rockiness with his blacks and browns. In the patriarchal society, this power inevitably casts on the female, especially for those women who lived under great social pressure. After having affairs with Ash,

⁵² Jennifer M. Jeffers. (2002). “The White Bed of Desire in A.S.Byatt’s *Possession*”, P.137.

Christabel's colors are darkened. She goes to her relatives in Brittany, France, with "all black", "a dark-checked woolen dress, black and grey, with a voluminous fringed shawl...in dark green with a black trim"(327). Her boots are also green, and "her hair is a strange color, silvery-fair...the gold bleached out" (327).

All in all, in the conflict between women and men, women are always the victims in the patriarchal society. Byatt's self-conscious use of certain color schemes not only unifies the characters separated by time and space in the novel, but also manifests the elemental struggle between the sexes, and women's searching for freedom and independence in the patriarchal society.

c. Women and Iciness

There is one chapter on "Ice, Snow, Glass" in *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essay* by Byatt. Ice is a form of water, which shifts from solid to liquid with seasons. As one of extreme forms of the universe, ice makes the things silently shine. Glass is resembled to ice, and has its unique characteristics. Snow is the symbol of the iciness in winter, and the portent of warm spring. In *Possession*, the images of iciness are represented by water, snow, ice. Byatt considers ice and snow as a part of the season circulation, in which the frozen and hibernating life forms are preserved⁵³. Iciness state is a kind of self-defence strategy for women to survive, and this kind of state renders them the life-long living chances. Byatt puts these images into use, to reveal the tough condition of female living in the patriarchal society. And the princess, in the glass coffin, who has put a curse to stay in it for nearly a hundred years, waits for the day of the revival of life. It is well known that women are made of water, and Leonora Stern, an American Christabel research scholar, analyses the water-complex in her book *Motif and Matrix in the Poems of LaMotte*. For instance, the "pleasure in the shapeless of yet patterned succession of waters, in the formless yet formed sequence of waves on the shore, is essentially present in the art of Virginia Woolf and the form of her sentences, her utterance, themselves"(266). And Charlotte Bronte, when she first came face to face with the sea, turned aside, trembled, "with her face flushed, her eyes wet" (266). The heroines of Christabel's poems are typically watery beings, and the exact examples are Dahud, who rules the mythical City of Is⁵⁴, the Fairy Melusina, and Melusina's mother.

City of Is, ruled by Queen Dahud, symbolizes the world of women, and is drowned in the sea because of her perversion and isolated from the outside world forever. It lies "beneath a skin of moving water", "as though the world of roofs and rocks were stored inside a glassy box. And damned and drowned transparent things hold silent commerce"(491). The unyielding women thus construct a shield of water to preserve a secret maternal society under the sea.

Melusina is first encountered by her husband-to-be at the Thirsty Fountain, the fountain which satisfies thirst. She is "in her primary and beneficent state a watery being". "The

⁵³ A.S.Byatt. (2000). *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays*. London: Chatto&Windus, p159.

⁵⁴ It is the place where Christabel LaMotte's poem "The Drowned City" sets.

fountain ‘springs from a wild hillside, with great rocks above, and a beautiful meadow along a valley, after the high forest’” (266). “Melusina, singing to herself on the brink of this mystic fountain, is a potent being of great authority who knows the beginnings and ends of things—and is, as has been pointed out, in her aspect of water-serpent, a complete being, capable of generating life, or meanings, on her own, without need for external help”(267). Women, when living harmoniously with nature, are the most beautiful ones in the world. Melusina’s mother, Pressine, is also seen by the Fountain singing beautifully and harmoniously. Unfortunately, they are regarded by men as temptresses, “allied with the seductive powers of Nature” (266).

When women are connected with water in nature, men are always represented by earth or rocks, which in conflict with each other. The waterfall at Thomason Foss is where Christabel LaMotte’s Melusina lives. “The water fell amongst a naturally cavernous circle of rocks and lowering brows, in which various saplings struggled for a precarious living; it was dark and smelled cold, and mossy and weedy”. (288) Roland is deeply attracted by this “curious natural phenomenon” (289), and loses his sense of time and space. Under the sun, the pool shows the mirror-glitter on the surface, and various lives and dead leaves, plants move under it. Thomason Foss waterfall symbolizes the oppression on women by men. Water stands for the vitality of women, which is restricted by rocks, and never yields to the male element, rocks. And water tries her best to show her own glory. Inside the cavern, water appears to be striving and moving upwards. “Wherever the refracted light off the water struck the uneven stone, wherever a fissure ran, upright or transverse, this same brightness poured and quivered along it...”(289) And this is just the vivid living picture of women in Victorian period and the modern society.

In the poetic world of Christabel LaMotte, white and snow are the dominant images:

“All day snow fell
Snow fell all night
My silent lintel/Silted white
Inside a Creature—
Feathered—Bright—
With snowy Feature
Eyes of Light
Propounds—Delight.” (142)

The Seal Court, Christabel once inhabited, is dark, damp, and bitterly cold. When Roland and Maud go there, reading the correspondence between Ash and Christabel, he feels “as though he should never be warm again” (142). In contrast, Maud seems to enjoy the iciness: “There was a faint flash of color in her ivory cheeks. As though the cold brought out her proper life, as though she were at home in it” (143). She is called by Joan Bailey, the hostess of Seal Court, “a chilly mortal” (159), because she is beautiful, shy, most importantly stand-offish. She walks around the winter garden, and stops at the frozen pool, darkly glowing under the traces of snow. This makes her think of Christabel’s poem:

And in the depth of wintry night
They slumber open-eyed and bright
Silver and red, a shadowed light
Ice-veiled and steadily upright
A paradox of chilly fire
Of life in death, of quenched desire
That has no force, e'en to respire
Suspended until frost retire—(156-157)

This is a paradoxical description of women's marginalized living condition, just as Byatt indicates: "The distancing of glass and ice is an ambivalent matter, both chilling and life-giving, saving as well as threatening".⁵⁵ Even Coleridge who conventionally associated ice with "the icy dart of death",⁵⁶ came to be interested in the possibilities of preserving living things by freezing them. Although it is cold, it could provide a relatively safe place for women, just like fish in the pool. Iciness state is not only a threat of death, but also a hope of life. Women in iciness are waiting for the coming of spring.

3.1.2 Women and Nature in the Enclosed Space

Many critics, especially feminist literary critics, have analyzed the enclosed space, where women have lived for quite a long time. Byatt provides many enclosed spaces, where women are confined, in myth, the Victorian period and modern times, for example, the princess in the Glass Coffin, the women in the drowned City of Is, Christabel and Blanche in their Bethany, Maud in her pristine apartment and tower like office, and so on. Greatly different from Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's version that the symbolic enclosed space images express women's feelings of "imprisonment", and the desire to escape from it. The enclosed space image in Byatt's eyes usually has two contradictory meanings—women in it could enjoy freedom, and be undisturbed by male power; it is confined after all, and women in it have no further development. That is to say, in order to seek for identity, autonomy and freedom, women choose to confine themselves in the enclosed space, whereas, this enclosed space is undoubtedly in conflict with their natural desire for freedom. Since female characters are at the center of this novel, Byatt has utilized certain images of the enclosed space to reveal this tough and paradoxical situation of women's life in the patriarchal society.

According to Elaine Showalter, the enclosed and secret room had become a potent image in women's novels since Jane Eyre in *Jane Eyre*, and it symbolizes the asylum for women to avoid the oppression from the harsh male-centered world. Then to the period of Virginia Woolf, "a room of one's own" is a favorite image with its insistence on artistic autonomy and its implied disengagement from social and sexual involvement⁵⁷. And Virginia Woolf's "a room of one's own" is not only the residence where women can safely settle down, but also

⁵⁵ A.S.Byatt. (2000). *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays*, p156.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p159.

⁵⁷ Elaine, Showalter. (1999). *A Literature of Their Own: British Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p33.

the free space where women can be independent from men and continue their pursuits.⁵⁸ Byatt, as a novelist, as well as a literary critic, desires such a space, and also cherishes it. She, as her character Christabel, is deeply afraid that any ordinary human happiness may be purchased at the expense of her art. In 1983, she quitted her job as a university lecturer, and concentrated on writing full time, and then she has got widespread praises. She cherished her solitude at the house in the South of France: "I found myself alone in this house, and there was total silence, and the sun was absolutely blazing, and I walked up and down the stairs absolutely boiling with the sense that I belonged to myself, and could finish any thought".⁵⁹ And her creative power experienced during this period was just like fire burning, and nourished her intensively. In *On Histories and Stories*, Byatt expresses that "preserving solitude and distance, staying cold and frozen, may, for women as well as artists, be a way of preserving life".⁶⁰ In *Possession*, Byatt effectively takes advantage of this traditional image of the enclosed space in women's writings and develops it to the full meaning: uncovering women's living situation in the patriarchal society and their close relationships with nature to pursue their autonomy, and endowing this image with fresher meanings and more significant power.

By contrast with women's enclosure space, men, with the power in the patriarchal society, roam freely where they would like to go. The destiny of women and nature is held in the hands of men. And men are always interpreted by ecofeminists as the intruders into the domain of women and nature. And men's intrusion directly results in the constantly deteriorating environmental condition and the distorted relationship between men and women/nature.

In *Possession*, men, who intrude into the space occupied by women, become intruders, just like those people who transgress into nature to get natural resources. For example, Ash is described by Blanche as a "Prowler", "Peeping Tom" and a "Wolf" (52-54), when he wanders around Bethany to get contact with Christabel. And Blanche notices that this "prowler" always snuffed round their small retreat, and threatened their "quiet harmony" (52). Christabel writes to Ash about the condition of her Bethany: "This house—so happy once—is full of weeping and wailing" (207). What's worse, after the breaking of alliance between Christabel and Blanche, the destructive results are the death of Blanche, and Christabel's miserable spiritual life in the rest of her life.

Ash himself senses this hostility, and writes to Christabel that "your house did not love me and I should not have come" (216). Roland, staying in Maud's apartment, thinks himself like Ash is "an intruder into their female fastness" (65). Beatrice Nest⁶¹ worked in Blackadder's Ash factory, regards "all male members of her quondam department as persecutors" (131), including Roland, whose own living situation is actually precarious.

⁵⁸ Mary, Eagleton. (1997). *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p.75.

⁵⁹ <http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/06/13/specials/byatt-possessed.html>

⁶⁰ A.S.Byatt. (2000). *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays*, p158.

⁶¹ Beatrice Nest, the research scholar of Ash's wife, Ellen Ash, and she published her research result the book *Helpmeets*.

a. The Image of Enclosed Places in Myth

Byatt, in the fourth chapter of *Possession*, relates a fairy tale—the Glass Coffin. This story fully reflects Byatt's ecofeminist suggestions. The main conflict in the story is between the princess and the black artist, and this symbolizes the conflict between nature/women and men in the patriarchal society.

The peaceful and harmonious life of the princess and her brother in their castle is disturbed by the coming of the black artist. The brother and sister are so kind to this black artist to provide him shelter from foul weather. Unexpectedly, the black artist is such a greedy and ungrateful man that he wants to own the castle and threat the princess to marry him. The princess, under the pen of Christabel, is endowed with beauty, wisdom, courage and wealth, unlike the other traditional passive image of women. She fights bravely against the black artist—the patriarchal power. However, in the patriarchal society, women as weaker ones have to endure all kinds of oppression from the male power. The black artist is infuriated by the princess' refusal, and puts her into the glass coffin as long as a hundred years. Women, just as the princess endure agony of the life in the glass coffin. Then the princess is rescued by the tailor, which is different from Grimm's version. And Byatt rewrites it on purpose and makes the tailor feel inferior to the princess, when he is married to the princess. Under the shining from the princess, the tailor regrets his own art, and tries his best to serve for the palace. This can be seen as the challenge to the patriarchal society.

The suffering princess imprisoned in the glass coffin echoes with the life experience of Melusina. In Christabel's poetry, the primordial goddess Melusina and her sisters live by the side of the cold "Thirsty Fountain" surrounded by rocky hills on the wild moor. After the marriage with Raymond, she builds the castle of Lusina for her family, and gives birth to ten sons. Melusina confines herself in Lusina, and tries her best to be a best wife and mother. Unfortunately, her fate is miserable. Her husband breaks his oath, and she is turned to be a serpent forever.

"The City of Is" is also a poem created by Christabel. In the novel through Leonora Stern's comments and two excerpts of this poem, Byatt presents this feminist figure—Dahud vividly. City of Is, ruled by Queen Dahud, is an enclosed place, in which women in the ancient time could survive. The poem reflects "a cultural conflict between two types of civilization, the Indo-European patriarchy of Gradlond and the more primitive, instinctive, earthy paganism of his sorceress daughter, Dahud, who remains immersed when he has taken his liberating leap to dry land at Quimper" (148). In *Possession*, Byatt, through Sabine⁶²'s journals, shows her intention of subverting the patriarchal society. Sabine explains like this: "What I had meant was to make of the wild Dahud an embodiment as it were of our desire for freedom, for autonomy, for our own proper passion, which women have, and which, it seems, men fear"(378).

⁶² Sabine is Christabel's niece in the novel.

Dahud is viewed as a rebel against the patriarchal society, and is drowned in the sea with her followers. The women's world underwater city is the reverse of the male-dominated technological industrial world of Paris or Par-is:

There are none blush on earth, y-wis
As do dames of the Town of Is.
The red blood runs beneath their skin
And feels its way and flows within,
And men can see, as through a glass
Each twisty turn, each crossing pass
Of threaded vein and artery
From heart to throat, from mouth to eye.(149)

Underwater, they suffer the pain of coldness and being spied on; however, women in the City of Is are still proud of "their haughty browns circled with gold"(149), and they believe that "Is will come to the surface when Paris is drowned for its sins" (148).

b. The Image of Enclosed Places in Victorian Period

Christabel LaMotte, like her protagonist Melusina, tries her best to live an independent and self-sufficient life with her friend Blanche Glover in Bethany cottage. The two are quite different from the ordinary women in the Victorian Times. They get together to construct a "utopian world", and "live the Life of the Mind—to make good things" (205). They form a project of making their "Bethany, where the work of all kinds was carried on in the spirit of Love and His Laws" (191). They would like to support themselves by giving drawing lessons or selling wonder tales or poems, and then "they might make themselves a life in which drudgery was artful" (205). So they renounce "the outside World—and the usual Female Hopes (and with them the usual Female Fears) in exchange for art" (205). And Christabel confesses to Ash that she has been wondrously happy.

No matter how hard Christabel writes, and considers language as her whole life, she still is not accepted by the male-centered society. Once she sent some of her smaller poems to a great Poet, whose ideas stand for the value standard of the main culture in that period. Christabel asked: "Are these poems? Have I—a Voice?" The poet replied with courteous promptness: "they were pretty things—not quite regular—and not always well-regulated by a proper sense of decorum—..." He encouraged her to have "sweeter and weightier responsibilities" (197-198). Here it demonstrates that women are confined into the domestic thing, and those who attempt to pursuit arts are no more than an alien in men's eyes. Christabel indicates this to her niece, Sabine, women are "largely thought to be unable to write well, unlikely to try, and something like changelings or monsters when indeed they do succeed, and achieve something" (390).

However, Christabel would not yield to the authority, and after the spiritual communication with one of the Great Poets, Ash, the desire from the heart of Christabel are expressed by the following words: "No—I am out—I am out of my Tower and my wits" (215).

At the same time, she also kept in minds that love “might mockingly forsake all Women, who dally with it” (216).

Maud wonders “why could she do nothing with ease and grace expect work alone, inside these walls and curtains, her bright safe box” (151). And Christabel just accounts for this clearly with the “riddle”. This is an old and easy Riddle, or a fragile one, “in white and Gold with life in the middle of it” (151). The answer to the riddle is an Egg. Therefore, she makes an analogy of her life to an egg “An Egg, a perfect O, a living stone, doorless and windowless, whose life may slumber on till she be Waked—or find she has Wings to spread—” (152). There may come a day when the lid is lifted “with impunity”, or it may open by itself, then the life may come. Ash and Christabel gets to know each other through the extraordinary conversation. Ash is attracted by Christabel, and they begin their correspondence on life and poem creation. In this process, Ash lifts the lid “with impunity”, and the life comes—they fall in love with each other, and enjoy their “honey month” in Yorkshire. However, Christabel asserts that this egg is different from the usual one. She pleads Ash not to steal away her solitude, not only for the sake of herself. Once the egg is cracked, “something slippery and cold and unthinkable disagreeable” (152) is what they had. Christabel keeps clearly that their love has to face the great pressure from the society, and she leaves forever from Ash for the sake of them. And both of them live unhappily in the rest of their lives. Christabel holds that her solitude is her Treasure, the best thing she has. Further she explains that “the Donjon may frown and threaten—but it keeps us safe—within its confines we are free in a way you, who have freedom to range the world, do not need to imagine” (152). Once she goes out her solitude, all the “good old days” will never come back.

All these are just the reflection of the paradoxical living conditions of Christabel. On one hand, she cherishes her solitude, and enjoys the world undisturbed by male power; on the other hand, she clearly knows that the enclosed space dramatically blocks her way to literary creation, and the strength from the inside of her heart propels her to enjoy the trip with Ash in Yorkshire. It is happened in the patriarchal society, women who deviate from the social constraints, must pay the penalty. So she has been Melusina for thirty years, and endures the emotional torment that her daughter sees her as “a sorciere, a spinster in a fairy tale” (544).

c. The Image of Enclosed Places in Modern Times

The reason why Maud becomes a Christabel research scholar is not because of the family connection, which is proved at the end of the novel, but results from a little poem, like a touchstone for her at her early age. The poem is about the Cumaean Sibyl⁶³, included in Christabel's book *Ghost and Other Weird Creature*, revealing the complexities of “freedom” for women. Although Maud didn't know who a sibyl was at that time, she sympathized with her greatly. For the sibyl, the enclosure in the jar offers her the safety that women in whatever

⁶³ The word “sibyl” means pagan prophetess. Christians are especially impressed with the Cumean Sibyl, because in Virgil's Fourth Eclogue Sibyl foretells the coming of a savior, possibly a flattering reference to the poet's patron, whom Christians identified as Jesus.

period seek.

Though Maud lives in the twentieth century which is a period with the rising of feminist movements, she still has to face similar problems as Christabel. "I know how she feels about her unbroken egg. Her self-possession, her autonomy"(549). She won't want to go the same way as Christabel does. She values freedom and autonomy highly, but it is still difficult for women to attain. And she explains that she keeps her defence up, because she must go on doing her work. Although she has a career and prestige in her research field, she has to confine herself on the edge of the society.

Maud presides at Women's Studies in Lincoln University at the top of Tennyson Tower, which is located at the top corner of the library. This symbolizes that women's status in the modern society is still marginalized. Her room is "glass-walled on one side, and lined floor to ceiling with books on the others" (45), and it is orderly and dust-free, in which Maud could hide from the chaotic disorder of the reality and devote herself to her scholarly pursuit. She talks about her study on thresholds with Roland:

"I wrote a paper on Victorian women's imagination of space. *Marginal Beings and Liminal Poetry*. About agoraphobia and claustrophobia and the paradoxical desire to be let out into unconfined space, the wild moorland, the open ground, and at the same time to be closed into tighter and tighter impenetrable small spaces—like Emily Dickinson's voluntary confinement, like the Sibyl's jar."(61)

Women in modern times still live in the paradoxical enclosed space. In Women's Studies, Maud always speaks with "frigid voice" (54). However, when women come out of the enclosed places, they can sing to themselves freely. When Maud talks about horses and a little about the Norfolk Baileys with Sir George, Roland notices that "she would never make in the Women's Studies building" (87).

Maud not only confines herself in the enclosed space, but also self-consciously hides her long, blonde hair inside a scarf lest the uncomfortable offensive language would be lashed out. She agrees with Roland that the "best state is to be without desire", and dwells longingly on the vision of "a clean empty bed in a clean empty room, where nothing is asked or to be asked" (290). This confined solitary bed is just an emblem of the autonomy both Maud and Roland fight for.

Beatrice Nest's research interest in Ash is repressed by the prejudice of her instructor that Ash is too complicated to study for a woman, and then her teacher finds a "suitable" job for her—to edit Ellen Ash's journals which is also related to Ash. As a result, she confines herself in a tiny house in Mortlake for many years. The living conditions have great influences on her characteristics. With the narrowing of her social circle, she changed from a "motherly" teacher to "a repressed and unregenerate lesbian" from the eyes of her students. She has spent twenty-five years studying the journals of Allen. When she talks about her study on Allen with Maud, Beatrice inevitably expresses her miserable academic dilemma, and that is just the vivid reflection of women's condition in history. "I've very little to show for all these years of

work on these papers. Twenty-five years to be precise, and the sliding past at increasing speed..... ” (240). “we are gratefully for employment. We thought it was bad being young and attractive, but it was worse when we grow older. There is an age at which, I profoundly believe, one becomes a witch, in such situations.....there are witch-hunts” (241).

Therefore, we can see the space for women is always at the edge of the society away from the mainstream culture, which invariably means a tough condition of existence. Through the analysis we could see that although women are confined in the enclosed space from the primeval to modern times, they on one hand see it as the safe pace to survive; on the other hand, they strive for the freedom to return to nature to have the equal opportunities as men.

3.2 The Critique of Contemporary Social Values and the Satire on the Biography Industry

3.2.1 The Distorted Social Values

Possession was created in late twentieth century, the period of postmodern after two world wars, in which people's social values have greatly changed and distorted. In the novel, this can be revealed from two aspects mainly: one is people's strong possessive desire; the other is people's attitude towards love. Maud is a beautiful and successful scholar in the twentieth century, but she knows clearly about her own position. She confesses that “People treat you as a kind of possession if you have a certain sort of good looks.”(549). In order to avoid being possessed, she keeps herself “icily regular, splendidly null” (550).

People in modern society live in a contradictory situation: on one hand, they hold the negative attitude towards everything except money in modern society; on the other hand, they miss the old past days such as Victorian Times, and their desire of possession just like the burning fire. Byatt talked about why she named this novel “*Possession*” like this:

I thought of it in the British Library, watching that great Coleridge scholar, Kathleen Coburn...I thought: she has given all her life to his thoughts, and then I thought: she has mediated his thoughts to me. And then I thought ‘Does he possess her, or does she possess him? There could be a novel called *Possession* about the relations between living and dead minds’⁶⁴.

Therefore the biography industry seems very prosperous—almost all scholars show great interest in historical and literary materials, such as the famous writer's personal letters, diaries, etc., as if they were detectives. And it can be seen that literary critics make natural detectives. Just as the title “*Possession*” indicates, people, especially those in the modern society have strong possessive desire. They are crazy for the historical things and writing autobiography for the great writers and themselves, as well as comments, so as to get satisfied with their own vanity. Therefore, when Roland attempts to have a position in this biography industrial society, he has to indulge in the books which are “thick and black and covered with dust”(1). When Roland accidentally discovered the unveiled manuscript of Ash, his possessiveness takes control of him, and he regards them as his “booty” (11), takes them as his own. He never

⁶⁴ A.S.Byatt. “Choices: On the Writing of *Possession*”, <http://www.asbyatt.com/essay.htm>

thinks the notice on mutilation of volumes about theft in the library has anything to do with him. Then he gets contact with Maud, who is a research scholar on Christabel, and starts their adventure. He confesses to Maud that he doesn't know why he kept the two unfinished letters of Ash to himself, then he further explains: "Because they are alive. They seemed urgent—I felt I had to do something. It was an impulse. Quick as a flash. I meant to put them back. I will. Next week. I just haven't, yet. I don't think they're mine, or anything. But they aren't Cropper's or Blackadder's or Lord Ash's, either. They seemed private. I'm not explaining very well"(56). This is the world full of strong desires and possessiveness, Maud points out: "Literary critics make natural detectives" (258). Roland keeps clearly in mind that he should not do that out of sight, but the two manuscripts represent a considerable academic scoop to him. He wants to be the one who does this work, and he emphasizes that he is just an old-fashioned textual critic, not a biographer, and he doesn't want to go in for that sort of profit. And the two scholars all agree that the discovery of the letters will change "all sorts of things"(56), including both Ash and Christabel scholarship, ideas about the poem *Melusina*, and something related. When the two young scholars are together to investigate the fact, all the literary scholars get involved in this historical battle, with different motives, including Cropper and Blackadder. Cropper even illegally excavated the tomb to get the last letter, which was written by Christabel to Ash, in order to unveil the truth about the relationship between them. Actually, the letters are proved to belong to Maud finally. Here, Byatt skillfully satirizes the contemporary scholars' attempt to possess the relics of the past by fair or foul means.

Roland wants to possess Ash and all things about this great poet, and he always keeps the copy of the Oxford Selected Ash with him, just as his confidant. When he is studying in the British Museum, he finds out the seat "at the end of AA (for Ash) near the door" (31). Then he is called by Val "Ashram"(13). When Roland reads Ash's own copy of Vico, he feels great pleasure "from reading the sentences Ash had read, touched with his fingers, scanned with his eyes"(4). And he recognizes Ash's handwriting "with a shock of excitement" (5). Why people have big interest in biography is that they can control people in that way. Roland gets very confused when he first sees the letters written by Ash to some lady, because "he thought he knew Ash fairly well, as well as anyone might know a man whose life seemed to be all in his mind"(10). This is a kind of distorted fascination to someone. Val, knowing that Roland may love with Maud, holds that this relationship is healthier than that with Ash. When Roland finds the letters written by Ash to an unnamed woman in London Library, he takes for granted that the letters should belong to him. And he makes the decision to undertake the research by himself, not letting Blackadder, his employee, know. Then he gets to know Maud to investigate together. With the process of research, Maud feels taken over by something that Roland also has. She then attributes it to something more primitive, instead of professional greed. This primitive thing is a kind of intuitive curiosity and possessive desire. She lies

shamelessly to Leonora, and nicks Ariane Le Minier's⁶⁵ address from Leonora, and then goes to France with Roland to get more information about Christabel. She admits that "all scholars are a bit mad. All obsessions are dangerous"(360). Curiosity and narrative greed are sharper than anything else for them.

When Blackadder asks him how he came across the correspondence in the first place, Byatt in the novel comments: "This was the moment of truth. Also the moment of dispossession, or perhaps the word was exorcism"(522). From this, it can be seen that Byatt criticizes those who are blinded by the lust for gain. The end of the story indicates that only after his pursuit of Ash's emotional experiences, does he understand Ash spiritually. The world full of possession is not what Byatt wants to present in the novel, at the very end of the novel Byatt skillfully makes use of epilogue to convey her idea—people who wants to possess everything, can never succeed. The historical facts between Ash and Christabel are not completely discovered by those crazy literary detectives. The readers know that Ash get the information that they have a daughter, and he has seen her.

The desire of possession also represent in the bisexual relationship. It is known that the true love of the two is mental and physical mutual possession. Ash keeps relationship with two women in his life, one is Christabel; the other is his wife. And he and Christabel are true lovers. He confesses to his wife about his love with Christabel "I could say it was a sort of madness. A possession, as by daemons"(492). However, his wife in his death knows that "The other woman was in one sense his true wife" (499), and she lives in a lie.

Roland has similar experience as Ash does. He and his girlfriend, Val, live together, and afford the living expenses, but there is no true love. In modern society, both Roland and Maud regard themselves as the product of the era and culture, in which people have no illusion about love. It is widely accepted that romantic love is just the imagination of children. And people should keep clam towards love, and restrain their desire. However, as the investigation moves on smoothly, Roland and Maud are touched by the purity of feelings of the poets (Ash and Christabel), and begin to reconsider people's love value in modern society. People nowadays, know about the sex clearly, and they are made up of conflicting, interacting systems of things, and driven by desire. They never say "love", for they hold that love is a suspect ideological construct, especially romantic love. Therefore, with the modern social value, Roland and Maud make great efforts to understand what love feels like to be for Ash and Christabel. Then the two scholars come to know that the best state for people is to be without desire. They attribute this to an empty clean white bed in a clean empty room, where nothing is asked or to be asked. It also indicates that they are symptomatic of the whole flocks of exhausted scholars and theorists, for it is an exhausted academic world. At the end of story, the two come over the "threshold", and possess each other both body and soul. This shows Byatt's suggestion on humanistic care and ecofeminist ideas.

⁶⁵ Ariane Le Minier is a French scholar, who studies the poetess of Sabine de Kercoz, Christabel's niece.

3.2.2 The Satire on the Biography Industry

Thomas D'evelyn points out that *Possession* is a book about books, and the satire on academic authority is one of its characteristics.⁶⁶ The damage to ecology has extended to the academic field. These years witness the decay of academic environment. This thesis uncovers ecological concerns in academic field, calling for the purer academic research environment. In the third chapter of *Possession*, Byatt, under the pen of Ash, writes a satirical poem on scholars who writes biography, or the ones who work in biography industry.

In this dim place
The creeping Nidhogg⁶⁷, with his sooty scales
Gnaws at the great Tree's root, and makes his nest,
Curled in the knotted maze on which he feeds (26)

In the biography industry of modern society, the representatives in the academic circles are an American scholar Cropper, who is known as an "authority", and his British rival Blackadder. They just like Nidhogg bite the relics of Ash. Cropper shows a strong narcissistic tendency in his biography, and he considered that academic research means possession of historical facts and historical relics of celebrity. He often spends a huge sum of money to purchase Ash's belongings, then shows off his collection all around the world. He works in Robert Dale Owen University, where he takes charge of the Stant Collection, the largest single gathering of Ash. The university is located in Harmony City, where life is not harmonious at all. Cropper is such a fantastic Ash fan that where there is something connected with Ash, there must be his first destination, and he never feels enough, and "Nothing was wasted on that sharp noticing mind"(137). He boasts that: "In Harmony City, in the Stant Collection in the University there, I have the largest and finest collection of Randolph Henry Ash's correspondence anywhere in the world"(108). The biggest aim in his life is to know as much as possible about everything Ash did and everyone who is connected with Ash and even everything Ash is concerned. And he even guarantees that all of the collections about Ash will be preserved forever "in the finest conditions and purified air, controlled temperature and limited access, only to accredited scholars in the field"(108).

Blackadder is a pedant, whose ideological ideas are so rigid. He studies with F.R. Leavis, who is Byatt's teacher as well, and is addicted greatly to the "great tradition of English literature". The young Blackadder also tried to write poems, but as long as he thought of Dr Leavis's comments on them, he burned then at once, with the burning also his dreams and creativities. He is so indulged in this great tradition every day to prepare the boring footnotes of text analyses that his imagination is completely lost. His office is located at the bottom of the British Museum, called "Ash Factory" (or 'Ash squeezing machine'). He thinks often, in his dim place, of how a man becomes his job, and what would he be now if he has become,

⁶⁶ Thomas D'evelyn. (1990). "A Book about Books", *Christian Science Monitor*, 16, Dec, p13.

⁶⁷ In Norse mythology, Nidhogg, is a dragon who eats the roots of the World Trees, Yggdrasil. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N%C3%AD%C3%B0h%C3%B6gr>)

say, a policeman? And "there 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. And then his thought it did not perhaps matter so greatly"(33). He does after all find Ash fascinating, even after all these years. If he is a subordinate of Ash, he is "a pleasant subordinate" (33). However, he believes Cropper regards him as "the lord and owner of Ash" (33). Here, Byatt shows her doubt towards the parochial Leavisism in her period.

In "Ash factory" Fergus is on behalf of young generation, and keen to show off the literary terms and to write the sexual deconstruction on literary criticism, then to become very popular in academic field. Clearly, Byatt indicates that in contemporary society there is no pure land on campus and academics any longer. Professors and experts, to some degree, are nothing but "cultural animals", which are eager for instant success and fame. And sex has become their favorite topics on literary criticism. Byatt, making use of the irony of contemporary scholars, challenges the western "biography industry", and condemns the pan-sexual, pan-theoretical literary criticism.

In this biography industrial battle, Roland always regards himself as a "latecomer", "he arrived too late for things....." (13). He gets caught in the fights among such characters in the "Ash Factory", and becomes very confused. He tries very hard on the studies of Ash in order to get rid of all the unpleasant things of daily life, which is a relief for him. However, the fact is that he lives under the shadow of "Ash Factory" for a long time, and keeps the love relationship with a girl, called Val, who supports his life, but he is not in love with her. He even sees "himself as a failure" (14). The figure in the novel here subverts the male authority. People always attempt to possess everything, just as they want to conquer nature. They make every effort to get resources from nature, but in the end what do they get? Nothing, but floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, droughts, snow disasters, by which men are threatened. They try their best to know everything, but what they have got? Maud thinks that "our metaphors eat up our world" (275), and Roland finds that although people try hard to be knowing, "and all we've found out is primitive sympathetic magic. Infantile polymorphous perversity" (276). They are imprisoned in themselves—they cannot see things, and they paint everything with metaphor. People's self-value has been distorted in the postmodern society, they are crazy to possess the old past things of the great, enchanted by that, takes pleasure from that, and regards that as their sole life goal. The more avaricious men are; the more reserved women are. With the increased successes of Roland, Val says less and less, and when she argues, she offers him "increasingly his own ideas, sometimes the reverse side of the knitting, but essentially his" (16). Even though she did very good job on her Required Essay, it was discounted by the examiners, who unjustly doubted it was probably largely written by Roland. And she herself gets used to all of these unequal things in this society; the typical example is that when she describes her job, she always uses "menial".

When Ash is dying, he asks his wife, Ellen, to burn what the others should not see, for he

hates “the new vulgarity of contemporary biography, the ransacking of Dicken’s desk for his most trivial memoranda, Forster’s unspeakable intrusions into the private pains and concealments of the Carlyles”(480), and he would like to burn what is alive for him with the life of his memory, and “let no one else make idle curios or lies of it”(481).

Byatt also clearly condemns the biography industry through Ash Ellen’s journal as following:

“I remember being much struck with Harriet Martineau, in her autobiography, saying that to print private letters was a form of treachery—as though one should tell the intimate talk of two friends with their feet on the fender, on winter nights. I have made a fire here, and burned some things. I shall burn more. He shall not be picked by vultures.”(481)

In conclusion, it makes no way for the scholars to believe that history can be fully possessed, and biographical industry can bring huge profits. Then Byatt again criticizes the access to possess all knowledge of the historical facts, and subverts the people’s values in contemporary society and condemns biography industry in modern period.

Chapter Four Return to Nature—the Harmonious State

4.1 Androgyny

In Chapter Two we have analyzed the development of feminist literary criticism, and pay more attention on Virginia Woolf's literary theory of androgyny. The hypothesis of "Androgyny" challenges the dualism in patriarchal society, and reflects Woolf's literary creative goal of achieving the harmony of bisexual relationship and her deep concern for human society. And ecofeminists who suggest a harmonious relationship in human society, inherits the concept of "Androgyny". This part will continue to dig out the implied meaning of androgyny in Byatt's *Possession*, and its practical significance in the constructing of harmonious society.

In the patriarchal society, men are entitled supreme authority, and they take for granted that they are superior to women in nature. Women and nature have been oppressed for a long time. And with the awakening of female consciousness and the rising of feminist movements, more and more women, have been fighting for their rights, but they still can not be satisfied, what should they do in the modern society? We find the answer in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, and she also asserts on the androgynous mind in her book.⁶⁸ Women, nowadays, as well as men, realize the importance of feminine qualities. Furthermore, the harmonious society requires that both masculine and feminine qualities should be equaled and respected, and male and female live harmoniously. Byatt, as such a writer who has deep concern on human society, has noticed the unique meaning of androgyny, to direct the way for her novel creation. She says that an artist's mind should possess the characteristics of androgyny, like Virginia Woolf and Coleridge.⁶⁹ Only in this way can the artist create great works. This can be reflected on her protagonists, for example, Elizabeth in her novel *The Virgin in the Garden* possesses the characteristic of androgyny⁷⁰, and Byatt expresses her admiration for this great Queen in English history.

Byatt in *Possession* points out that Christabel's *The Fairy Melusina* is discovered by the feminists after many years, because of the freshness she creates in it. "Virginia Woolf adduced it as an image of the essential androgyny of the creative mind" (39), and many feminists see her figure of snake as a self-sufficient individual. From the above analysis, we know that Melusina is connected with the serpent, and the serpent in history usually has two aspects: on one hand, it represents the masculine power of authority; on the other hand, it has the female face. Melusina as a serpent is androgynous. When Ellen Ash is reading *The Fairy Melusina*, she cannot help exclaiming that "What diligence, what confidence went to its contriving" (134). In Ellen's words: "Here is no swooning sentiment, no timid purity, no softly gloved

⁶⁸Virginia Woolf. *A Room of One's Own*. p.95-114.

⁶⁹Olga Kenyon. (1988) "A. S. Byatt: Fusing Tradition with Twentieth-Century Experimentation". *Women Novelists Today: A Survey of English Writing in the Seventies and Eighties*. New York: St. Martin's Press, p51-84.

⁷⁰刘爱琴, (2008) "历史讽喻与身份焦虑—A.S.拜厄特成长小说四部曲之<花园处女>", 载《外国文学研究》, 第3期, 第97页。

lady-like patting of the reader's sensibility, but lively imagination, but force and vigour"(134). However, the social constrain is that a maidenly English lady, like Christabel should confine herself on domestic things; if she wants to be a writer, then she can only write fairy tales, instead of the beautiful, terrible, and tragic *Melusina*. Irigaray who encourages the female writing, says that: "we engender something other than children: love, desire, language, art, the social, the political, the religion, for example. But this creation has been forbidden us for centuries, and we must reappropriate this maternal dimension that belongs to us as women".⁷¹ And Ellen Ash speaks that although the general public may have trouble in recognizing its genius, this epic is truly original, "because it makes no concession to vulgar frailties of imagination, and because its virtues are so far removed in some ways at least from those expected of the weaker sex" (134).

Christabel, like her protagonist, also possesses the androgynous mind. During the creation of *The Fairy Melusina*, Christabel keeps correspondence with Ash, who also suggests there is an androgynous mind. Ash constantly encourages her that: "You are a Poet and in the end must care for your own views—why not an Epic? Why not a mythic drama in twelve books? I can see no reason in Nature why a woman might not write such a poem as well as a man—if she but set her mind to it"(181-182). Thanks to the spiritual communication between Christabel and Ash, this epic can express the androgynous ideas. It is unimaginable that Christabel finishes this epic in her golden cage.

4.2 Reconstruction of Ecofeminist Principles

Women in the patriarchal society have suffered too much from social restriction and repression, which we have discussed in the previous parts. Byatt in *Possession*, through the historical narrative strategies, reveals the same oppressed miserable living situation of women in different periods, represented by Melusina, Christabel and Maud. Meanwhile, Byatt shows her distinctive vision on the reconstruction of ecofeminist principles: human beings in the modern society should have androgynous minds; male and female, nature and human beings, should respect each other and live harmoniously with each other, to achieve the unity of life.

Byatt expresses her understanding of life, through the words of Ash, that people are all part of some divine organism, which "breathes its own breath, and lives a little here and dies a little there, but is eternal"(310). Byatt also confesses her idea of biological cycle in Ash's poem "Swammerdam"—"The clue to life lay in the blind white worm/That eats away the complex flesh of men, /Is eaten by the farmyard bird who makes/A succulent dinner for another man/And so completes the circle. Life is One" (224). And the characters in the novel try hard to achieve such life circle.

Christabel follows the desire from her heart, releases herself from the enclosed space, to enjoy the happy, free, and nature-returned trip to Yorkshire with Ash. In the embrace of nature,

⁷¹Luce Irigaray. (1985). "Luce Irigaray and the Feminist Critique of Language", *Women's Studies Occasional Papers* 6, Canterbury, University of Kent, p.16.

she roams freely, marching "indomitably over the moors, the crinoline cage and half her petticoats left behind, the wind ruffling her pale hair" (310). The days they two stay together are the happiest time for both of them, and they immerse themselves into nature. Just at that time Ash confesses the reason why he falls in love with Christabel: Christabel manifests the organism's secret of perfection, "You are the life of things" (310).

Maud is such a woman that "she thickens men's blood with cold"(39). She has no illusions about love, and holds that if you are beautiful, people would possess you. So she usually self-consciously hides her long, blonde hair inside a scarf to avoid the disturbance from men. Roland suffers great pressure in "Ash Factory", and is supported by his girlfriend. When the two get together, everything is changing gradually. They have the same interests: they feel disgusted about the modern society, where "everything's a deliberate political stance"(295); they all desire an empty bed with no desire. Roland shows great pity for Maud's hair, "for the rigorous construction all that mass had undergone, to be so structured into repeating patterns"(295), and then he suggests Maud to untie it, for "life is so short", and "it has a right to breathe"(295). With the investigation of Ash-Christabel correspondence, they fall in love with each other. At the end of the novel, Roland receives three offers from the universities, instead of being laid off. Maud is recognized as the descendants of Christabel. And in the process of retracing, they gain strength and new conception into life and love. Their love is based on the mutual respect and understanding, and there is no boundaries. At the end, Maud and Roland admits that "love is terrible, it is a wrecker", but they could think of a way—a modern way to love, that is to say they should maintain the harmonious relationship between each other. The next day, "in the morning, the whole world had a strange new smell...It was the smell of death and destruction and it smelled fresh and lively and hopeful" (551).

Byatt with her versatile writing techniques gives the whole story a happy ending like all the Shakespearian comedies, to illustrate her humanist and ecofeminist suggestions. In the final letter to Ash, Christabel suggests two positive notes: the life-long power of the epic *The Fairy Melusina*, and something about their offspring. She asks,

Did you ever read...one of the few poor exemplars sold of *The Fairy Melusina*—and think—I knew her once—or as you most truly might—'Without me this Tale might not have come to the Telling'? I owe you Melusina and Maia both, and I have paid no debts. (I think she will not die, my Melusina, some discerning reader will save her?)(544)

She is right, of course. During the 1970s, her *Melusina*, together with her other works, was rescued by the feminists, and has been rousing more and more attention. Especially when Maud and Roland discover the historical truth, they will correct the misinterpretations about this poem and endow *Melusina*, as well as her creator, with her deserved significance and value. The other sign of hope is Christabel's grandson Walter, who, unlike his mother, Maia, shows an interest in poetry:

he chants verses to the amazement of his stable-and furrow-besotted parents. I have taught him much of the Ancient Mariner: he recites the passage of the blessing of the snakes, and the

vision of the glittering eye of the ocean cast up to the moon, most feelingly, and his own eyes are bright with it. He is a strong boy, and will live. (546)

The end of novel is full of hopes. The inscription of Christabel's tombstone vividly shows her good will of harmony with nature: "Let me lie still/Where the wind drives and the clouds stream/Over the hill/Where grass's thousand thirsty mouths/Sup up their fill/Of the sloe dew and the sharp rain/Of the, mantling snow dissolv'd again/At Heaven's sweet will"(79). Although her tombstone is "not marble, and roughened by weather" (79), Maud regards this is just "A slow return to nature and oblivion" (80). And Sir George, "like some old goblin"(87), goes up and down to protect his trees, and the quiet land where Christabel sleeps. Here, Byatt utilizes the character Sir George to indicate people's awareness of the deteriorating environmental situation, and even men have joined in the pilgrim of environmental protection. Only men and women work together to be friendly with the nature, can the comfortable and harmonious world achieve.

Byatt's ecofeminist suggestions are also clearly demonstrated in the postscript. Out of the expectations of all people in the novel, Ash encounters her daughter on a warm May day. The description of the meeting background penetrates the flavour of green. It is a meadow where they meet, "all the summer flowers in great abundance", and "it was abundant, it seemed as though it must go on shining forever. The grasses had an enameled gloss and were connected by diamond-threads of light. The larks sang, and the thrushes, and the blackbirds, sweet and clear, and there were butterflies everywhere ..." (553). This beautiful harmonious scenery is just the announcement of Byatt's ecofeminist idea: returning to nature!

Chapter Five Conclusion

As the above discussion indicates, *Possession*, as the masterpiece of Byatt, demonstrates her philosophy of literary creation. As a female writer, her literary creation is inevitably influenced by the three wave feminist movements. She stands at the turning point of the second wave and the third wave feminist movements, and she bravely takes the responsibility for further development of feminist criticism, absorbing Virginia Woolf's feminist thought, and foreboding the coming of ecofeminism. And the novel *Possession* is the full manifestation of her ecofeminist suggestion, which is based on her inheritance of previous theories of feminist literary criticism.

Byatt keeps sharp insight on life, especially women's lives, illustrating the close links between nature and women. As can be seen from the analyses, the destiny of women and nature are closely connected, and the links between nature and women are symbolic. Women in nature have connections with certain kinds of animals, and in the patriarchal society, women are especially associated with those demon images of animals, which usually having negative meanings. Colors, which are an essential part of nature, communicate and establish the integral facet of identity between men and women, and play an important role in the novel to reveal the theme. Women are always associated with water, snow, ice, for their marginalized cold living position. In the patriarchal society, women have been forced to retreat into the enclosed space, far from the society and mainstream culture. What is dominate in the society is male power, and women, instead, choose to live in the enclosed and frozen places as a way of preserving their dignity and life in the conflict between possession and dispossession, yet this paradox of life restrict their development. Not only Christabel in Victorian Period, but also Maud in the modern times, are in the same dilemma. And both of them take the similar strategy to evade the pressure from the male-centered society. Byatt shows her great sympathy for those women, and attempts to solve the problem all her life. Byatt also criticizes the avaricious access to possess all knowledge of the historical facts, and subverts the people's values in contemporary society and condemns biographical industry in modern times. In the light of feminist literary criticism, ecofeminism, as a new branch, can teach either women or men how to live harmoniously in the modern society. In *Possession*, Byatt finds a vent for the women's liberation movement from the perspective of ecofeminism. Androgyny is the ideal state for an individual, and neither male nor female could dominate the world. Male and female should respect each other, and cooperate together, taking advantage of each other's strength. Byatt's reconstruction of ecofeminist principles, aims to make the readers to see the essence of this novel: seeking for the liberation of women and returning to the natural and harmonious world.

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Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to all the people who helped me in the course of this dissertation writing. Firstly, I would like to say it would be quite impossible for me to present my dissertation in this form without the generous help of my supervisor, Professor Weng Dexiu. Her valuable suggestions, patient instructions, constant encouragements, and serious research attitude benefit me tremendously, and it is she who helps me step into the research field. She, with her extensive knowledge and optimistic living attitude sets an excellent example for my future study and life, and I am very lucky to be her student. Thanks again for her patient proofreading and practicable suggestions.

Secondly, my thanks also go to Prof. Ning Ping, Prof. Gu Yeping, and Prof. Cai Dianmei for their help in different literature research fields. And I am indebted to Prof. Cheng Xiaoguang, Prof. Wang Bing, and Prof. Bai Bin, for I have learned a great deal from their instructions.

Thirdly, I would like to thank my classmates and friends who have given me insightful advices, and helped me a lot in my writing.

Last but not least, my special thanks should also be extended to my parents for their love and encouragement. Without their mental and financial support, it would be impossible for me to complete my study.

