

THE RELICS OF THE PAST IN FOWLES' *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN* AND BYATT'S *POSSESSION*

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Abstract

The present study compares John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and A. S. Byatt's *Possession* in light of their approach towards the role of the relics of the past in historiography. These historiographic metafiction differ in the former's denial of the possibility of possession of the past because of the totally contaminated nature of the traces and the latter's ambivalence with regard to the influence of relics on the historian's historical explanation. The theories of Hayden White and Linda Hutcheon and the studies of Alun Munslow are employed to elaborate on the differences between the speculations of the novels with regard to the notion of evidence in historiography.

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Introduction

Both *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Possession*, as historiographic metafiction, paradoxically make "documentary historical actuality meet [...] formalist self-reflexivity and parody" (Hutcheon, 1989, 7). Both novels periodically revisit the past while they lay bare their own fictionality. Instead of the conventions of realism, parody and metafiction are employed to show the paradoxical connection with the past. In both novels, the reader is asked to recognize the "textualized traces of the literary and historical past" (Hutcheon, 1988, 127). The traces that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* deals with are contaminated by the narrator-historian's impositionalism and that of *Possession* are either interpreted misleadingly, or found wanting, or lost. However, the novels' approach towards historiography is different. The present article deals with the extent to which the traces can guide the historians of the two novels in their understanding of the past. While Fowles' novel problematizes—or even denies—the authenticity of the relics of the past, Byatt's novel suggests an ambivalence towards the role of the relics in understanding the past. The accounts of the impresario do not lead us towards an ultimate ending to the story but the document that Roland finds initiates a quest which causes a partial access to the knowledge of the past. Byatt's ambivalence is shown through Roland's paradoxical recognition of a sense of loss through possession of letters. For *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, historical fact and fiction are not distinguishable and all traces of the past are textually-contaminated, but for *Possession*, the truth beyond the traces may be partially discoverable through empiricist approach towards history; in other words, to some extent, the meaning of the past can be inferred by means of the traces. The present article attempts to deal specifically with their treatment of the relics of the past.

Much has been written about *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Possession*. In case of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Joanne V. Creighton's reader-response oriented analysis (1982), Deborah Bowen's narratological reading of the novel (1995), Dwight Eddins' existentialistic approach (1976), Robert Siegle's application of poststructuralist views of Barthes and Foucault to the novel (1983), Silvio Gaggi's comparison between Fowles' fiction and metatheatrical tendencies of the plays of Brecht and Pirandello (1983), and Frederick M. Holmes' exploration of the metafictional voices of the story (1981) are just some among the many. As with *Possession*, the wide scope of study covers different approaches. Jackie Buxton rejects the exclusive consideration of *Possession* as a postmodern piece of work just because of "its generic pastiche, its self-conscious interrogation of literary and historical Truth, and a plot that resembles a corridor of mirrors", the techniques that had been practiced before postmodernity (1996, 199). For him, *Possession* is "first and foremost a 'straight' narrative, a realistic fiction" (1996, 210). He argues that while historiographic metafiction foregrounds the textual nature of the archive and the impossibility of getting to total knowledge of the past, in *Possession* this trend is shattered by the postscript in which the reader acquires such knowledge. He concludes that "the novel offers modernist ideology in postmodern guise" (1998, 218). But Buxton's article does not refer to the novel's criticism of modern historiography. Katrina Sanders finds juxtaposition of both liberal humanism and postmodernism in the novel. The writer of the present article agrees with Katrina Sanders in finding "strong humanist impulse" in *Possession* (2000, 92). She truly argues that *Possession* exposes both "fallibility of historical knowledge" and "dissatisfaction with the values of postmodern literature" (2000, 93), but she discusses mostly in terms of modernism and postmodernism in general and does not cover the different approaches within the realm of historiography. Shiller focuses on the emplotment of contemporary "Victorianism" through the nineteenth century novel (1997, 546). She refers to Hutcheon's idea that the "textual traces"—our knowledge of the past through narrative—can, under the influence of the present, reshape the past (1997, 546). She acknowledges the textual past and the shaping power of the present; however, she contends that the past can be recaptured "in ways that evoke its spirit and do honor to the dead and silenced" (1997, 546). She relates Roland's and Maud's rediscoveries to LaCapra's view that the present explorations of the possibilities of past happenings can reveal historical narratives (1997, 547). Although Roland and Maud "possess" partial knowledge, what they understand about Ash and LaMotte shows "how the past is not simply a finished story to be narrated but a process linked to each historian's time of narration", as LaCapra puts it (qt. in Shiller, 1997, 547). According to Shiller, *Possession* reveals that just the documents do not make the scholar-detectives access knowledge of the past; instead, they have to pay attention to "what has been left out of the standard biographies" (1997, 547). Shiller argues that neo-Victorian novels, instead of clarification, tend to enhance ambiguities (1997, 550). She contends that *Possession* deals with the notion that the secrets in the lives of the figures of the past keep us from getting to a thorough knowledge (1997, 550). In Shiller's view, the type of history that *Possession* deals with is based on "interpretation, not on the discovery of historical 'truths'" (1997, 552). In this novel, the emphasis is on "the process of attempting to assimilate historical data, and the necessity of literary and historical conventions to make a coherent and satisfying narrative out of the raw details of past lives" (Shiller, 1997, 552). Susan Kieda discusses *Possession* in terms of the dual identity of the female, having both passion and intellect (2010). In her analysis, she refers to the allusions to fairy tales and

myths within *Possession* and relates them to the development of the female characters of the novel, Christable LaMotte, Maud Bailey, and Ellen Ash. She further argues that the novel is optimistic about the progress of society towards identification of woman as being composed of both passion and intellect. Regina Rudaityte traces the novel's ambivalence towards postmodernism (2007). In her view, the novel questions postmodernism through its most important features like parody and pastiche. Likewise, the novel criticizes poststructuralism and feminist criticism. The novel, according to Rudaityte, both imitates and reconsiders the romance and Victorian poetry. Rudaityte argues that the novel criticizes postmodern critical theories—poststructuralism specifically—by paying attention to “the author who is back and whose presence in the text seems to be vital” (2007, 121). She contends that notwithstanding many postmodern narrative techniques are employed in the novel, “Byatt seems to be trying to restore the author back to the text, displaying her belief in individual creativity against the anonymity advocated by poststructuralist theories” (2007, 121). Agata Buda examines *Possession* in light of its portrayal of the female figure through the Victorian and twentieth-century perspectives (2008). PilarCuder Dominguez describes *Possession* not only as a quest narrative but also as a detective story and gothic fiction (1995). Dominguez traces parallelism between the quest of Roland and Maud and that of the archetypal romance. The writer also relates the characters of the novel—Maud and Christabel, Roland and Randolph, Val and Ellen, Leonora Stern and Blanche Glover—in terms of both their physical and mental traits. Dominguez further extends the scope of his parallelism to the events and intertexts of the novel. Therefore, the black magician in “The Glass Coffin”, according to Dominguez, stands for Mortimer Cropper, and Ewan MacIntyre and Leonora Stern stand for the usual helpers of the protagonists of fairytales. In Dominguez's view, reconstructing the story of Christabel and Randolph through their textual and geographic quests, Maud and Roland are affected by the actions of their counterparts.

Critics have widely compared *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Possession* in light of their similarities and differences. Moreover, the two novels are frequently compared in light of their historiographic approach. In her comparison of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Possession*, Lisa Fletcher discusses that the latter adjusts to Byatt's idealization of pleasure of reading because of its “self-conscious moral realism” (2003, 28). Further, she argues that the novel is conventional in both its “heterosexual romance plot” and its “treatment of history” (2003, 29). She agrees that there are differences between Fowles' and Byatt's novels; however, she contends that some parallels can be found between Sarah Woodruff and Christabel LaMotte with regard to their “allegiance to the tenets and motives of heterosexual hegemony” (2003, 31). In Fletcher's view, characters like them, make “negotiation of the past and the present” possible (2003, 31). Cora Kaplan considers *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Possession* as examples of “historical pastiche” (2007, 87). She argues that in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, while telling and interpreting a Victorian story, a “modern pedant” repeatedly interrupts his story “to offer helpful asides on the period”; in *Possession*, however, the subtitle “*A Romance*” keeps us from “any expectation of traditional realism” (2007, 87). She also compares the “sentimental satisfaction” in the ending of *Possession* with the last “anti-romantic ending” of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and indicates that the latter “looks ever more intellectually and politically interesting in its refusal of domestic felicity, and in its refreshing skepticism about whether men and women can, after all, come together on common ground” (2007, 110).

The Relics of the Past, Modern and Postmodern Historiography

In the late eighteenth century, historiography started to be institutionalized and professionalized and was introduced as an academic discipline (Lorenz, 2009, 393). By the first decade of the nineteenth century, the “problem of historical knowledge” came to be the focus of attention of the thinkers of the time (White, 1973, 39). While the eighteenth century distinguished among true, fabulous, and satirical historiography, the historiography of the nineteenth century emphasized the true and objective account of past incidents (White, 1973, 267).

Historiography in its scientific sense can be traced back to Thucydides in 5 B.C.; however, it was Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century who established its procedures that are still followed (Southgate, 2009, 540-541). Lorenz points to Niebuhr, Humboldt, Coulanges and Bury as the other originators of modern scientific historiography (2009, 393). According to Ranke, the task of the historian is to prove “what actually happened” (Brown, 2005, 18). So, he tried to refer to documentary evidence to represent the facts in order to understand what actually had happened in the past (White, 1973, 163). Kaya Yilmaz mentions that Ranke “combined a critical reading of the surviving documents of the past with a careful reconstruction of the historical circumstances in which it was composed” (2007, 179). G. R. Elton, Arthur Marwick, and Peter Novick are among the philosophers of history who support reconstructionist, modernist, or empiricist approach to history (Munslow, 1997, 18). Because of their adherence to correspondence theory, modernist historiographers emphasize the possibility of recovering the past through “recovering the intentionality of the author of the evidence” (Munslow, 1997, 167-168). Munslow enumerates six key principles of modernist historiography. First, the historian can discover the past by means of reference and inference. Second, interpretations appear after facts. Third, fact must be distinguished from value. Fourth: history and fiction are different. Fifth: there is distinction between the knower and the known. Sixth: truth is not based on perspectives (1997, 38).

The modernist historiographers start inductively from the evidence to infer the reality of the past (Munslow, 1997, 127). They justify their inductive inference by careful observation of the trace of the past (Munslow, 1997, 41). For these historiographers, the trace of the past is the means of “accurate recovery of the past” (Munslow, 1997, 32). To “reconstruct the past as it really was”, they not only refer to “textual evidence”, but also place the evidence in its context (Munslow, 1997, 41). In their view, the trace of the past makes reconstruction of the past possible “without any imposition from the historian” (Munslow, 1997, 43). In Elton’s view, a detached historian is able to write history with the help of the trace of the past (Munslow, 1997, 168). For modernist historiographers, historical explanation starts from the raw material of the evidence that is interpreted in the form of a story that is, in turn, told objectively, without taking advantage of any literary devices (Munslow, 1997, 10). They attempt to recount the happenings of the past with a detached perspective by means of their traces (Southgate, 2009, 540).

Discovery of the actual happening of the past is the objective of modernist historiographers (Munslow, 1997, 37). But this orientation underwent changes in the second half of the twentieth century with the attacks on the reliability of scientific historiography on the part of postmodern historiographers (Iggers, 1997, 1-2; Southgate, 2009, 541). Aviezer Tucker states that in Rankean research program, the documents within archives are the only means of attaining trustworthy historical account (2009, 3). He argues that this method has become obsolete because of the developments in the methods

of historians. He points to “artefacts, shapes of landscapes, genetic analyses of present and fossil DNA, [and] works of art” as the means of obtaining reliable information about the past (2009, 3). In Munslow’s view, reconstructing the past by means of the evidence, modernist historiographers cannot be as objective as the way Elton expects (1997, 44). Harlan argues that the evidence can never be pure of “its accumulated meanings” and the author’s original meaning cannot be grasped even if the evidence is located in its context (Munslow, 1997, 107).

Munslow enumerates the tenets of postmodern history as such: instead of reality of the past, it addresses the reality-effect; discovering the intentionality of the author is not possible; “chains of interpretative signification” replace “recoverable original meaning”; referentiality is rejected; the historian can never be objective; and the past is sublime (1997, 166). Postmodern historiography questions the referentiality of sources and contends that the evidence cannot verify the truthfulness of the past (Munslow, 1997, 66, 69). Postmodern historiographers like White, Jenkins, and Ankersmit reject the Baconian notion that the pieces of reality which are there in the archives can lead us to the reality of the past (Munslow, 1997, 166). They question the correspondence between the evidence and the past (Munslow, 1997, 107). For them, the archive should not be taken empirically as the point of origin (Munslow, 1997, 122). In Munslow’s view, there are some intermediaries between the evidence and the historian: “absence, gaps and silences, the contrived nature of the archive, signifier-referent collapse, the historian’s bias and [...] the structure of the historian’s imposed and contrived narrative argument” (Munslow, 1997, 69).

So, what is the significance of the trace of the past in postmodern historiography? According to Munslow, in postmodern historiography, historical evidence is used for understanding both the events to which it refers and the “organization of the linguistic mechanisms underpinning the creation and constitution of historical knowledge” (1997, 122). Postmodern historiographers use the trace of the past to search its multiple meanings (Munslow, 1997, 130). Postmodern historiography declares that “evidence only signposts possible realities and possible interpretations because all contexts are inevitably textualized or narrativized or texts within texts” (Munslow, 1997, 26). Munslow agrees with White in his presumption that the historian’s inability of knowing the true story behind the evidence is because of the existence of countless stories (1997, 147). The historian, based on the evidence, finds different kinds of stories and turns them into a coherent emplotment (Munslow, 1997, 147-148). Ankersmit agrees with the use of the evidence to judge the veracity of historiography; however, he believes that it must be accompanied by “placing one historian’s text against another historian’s text” (Brown, 2005, 148).

Now the question is that to what extent the postmodern historiographer can configure evidence. Munslow agrees with the postmodern historiographers in rejecting the objectivity of the historian in his treatment of the evidence: “the historian’s dialog with his/her evidence cannot be undertaken through an objective, non-intertextual, non-figurative and value-free medium” (1997, 170). In Munslow’s view, approaching their evidence, the historians cannot get rid of “*a priorism*”, the notion that Elton and Marwick strongly reject (1997, 40-41). Munslow says that although postmodern history rejects correspondence theory, it does not imply that historians are allowed to choose “any tropic-plotment-argument-ideological configuration for the evidence” to get to a “historical version of literary deconstruction that allows any meaning to be imposed on the past

while declaiming any responsibility for it" (1997, 176). Instead, he views history as the outcome of the exchange between "the mental prefigurative process and the evidence" (1997, 176). Likewise, the "narrativized" evidence is "already an intertext that has previously been interpreted and textualized by other historians working within the archive and their episteme" (Munslow, 1997, 176). In Munslow's view, a moderate approach to historiography is more reasonable than that of modern historiographers' (1997, 98). Furthermore, he does not consider postmodern historiographers' assertion convincing that historical truth cannot be acquired through sources because it is basically impossible to know the past (1997, 98). He agrees with Collingwood in rejecting White's exclusively fictional consideration of history and attributing evaluative functions to the evidence for the emerged facts (1997, 175). Munslow concludes that "constructing history [becomes] an aesthetic and poetic act rather than an empirical one"; furthermore, historiography proves to produce "a particular kind of *historical* truth rather than *the* truth" (1997, 101).

"Fiction is woven into all": *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

In historiographic metafiction, the "real" existence of the past is not denied, instead, "our mode of knowledge of that past" is problematized: "We can know it only through its traces, its relics" (Hutcheon, 1988, 119). In Hutcheon's view, historiographic metafiction does not deny the referent, it problematizes "the entire activity of reference" (1988, 152). Through the "paradoxical combination of metafictional self-reflexivity with historical subject matter", historiographic metafiction interrogates "the nature of the referent and its relation to the real, historical world" (Hutcheon, 1988, 19). It challenges "any simple notions of realism or reference" by combining art with history (Hutcheon, 1988, 20, 52). It "inscribes and then undercuts both the autonomy of art and the referentiality of history" (Hutcheon, 1988, 56). To put forward an evidence of the paradoxes of postmodernism, Hutcheon says that as the historiographic and the metafictional are combined, "the claims of both 'authentic' representation and 'inauthentic' copy" are rejected; moreover, "artistic originality" and "the transparency of historical referentiality" are challenged in the same way (1988, 110). Hutcheon points to Michael Riffaterre's theories of history according to which the "reference in literature is never anything but one of text to text", and she concludes that in historiographic metafiction, history "could never refer to any actual empirical world, but merely to another text" (1988, 142-143).

As a historiographic metafiction, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* considers the past as a problematic concept which cannot be known except through its relics which are textually constructed. Depicting the problematic nature of writing and reading history, the novel demands the reader's "recognition of textualized traces of the literary and historical past" and his "awareness of what has been done—through irony—to those traces" (Hutcheon, 1988, 127). Through its parodic and self-reflexive metafictionality, the novel problematizes "historical reference" (Hutcheon, 1988, 40). In fact, instead of directing the narrator-historian to the end of the story, the impresario's observation—or evasion of observation—causes him to offer three different endings to the story.

Hutcheon corrects the misconception of the critics who do not differentiate between the narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and the Fowles-like observer who is present in the twentieth century (1980, 58). The novel is composed of several "worlds", the world of Sarah, the world of the impresario, the world of the narrator, and the world of the writer of the novel (Hutcheon, 1980, 57). Sarah attempts to write the history of her own life; the impresario goes directly to the age to witness the incidents; the

narrator makes use of the observation of the impresario as the evidence for construction of his distorted historical narrative; the author incorporates all these histories of the Victorian past both to rewrite the Victorian age and to explore the present time. Sarah distorts her own past to acquire the freedom of an author and to expose the hypocrisy of the contemporary authoritative voices. In spite of all his objectivity as the twentieth century witness of the nineteenth century, the impresario manipulates the notion of time to evade a happy ending. The intrusive narrator emplots the selected segments of the observation of the impresario into a satire directed against the folly of the Victorian Age. The author leaves the narrative open ended to question the notion of possibility of acquiring the reality of the past as it is through history. He further explores the present time in terms of its deviations from and continuities with the Victorian Age.

The impresario's observation is the reference that the narrator of the story uses to rewrite the Victorian past. The twentieth-century impresario is present in the year 1867 and his observation is emplotted by the twentieth-century historian-narrator of the story. The impresario is described by the narrator, as "a person of curiosity" and a "local spy" (Fowles, 3-4). In the last chapter, the narrator admits that new characters must not be introduced at the end of the novels. However, he mentions that the spectator appeared before in the train. The narrator claims that he takes advantage of the direct accounts of the impresario—as his reference—for representing the age. However, he—the narrator—implicitly acknowledges his—impresario's—biased outlook. He says that this observer "is the sort of man who cannot bear to be left out of the limelight, the kind of man who travels first class or not at all, for whom first he first is the only pronoun, who in short has first things on the brain" (461). He further describes the changed appearance and the fancy clothes of this "very minor figure" (462). He says that the impresario looks at Mr. Rossetti's house "as if it is some new theater he has just bought and is pretty confident he can fill" (462). The narrator continues that this observer, as before, "very evidently regards the world as his to possess and use as he likes" (462). The narrator is puzzled when the observer corrects his watch because it is unusual for a brand like "Breguet" and there is no other clock with which he can adjust his watch (462). The narrator convinces himself—and the reader—that the observer is "providing himself with an excuse for being late" (462). But the point is that he manipulates the time to suggest another ending. These examples testify the contaminated nature of the narrator's archive.

The narrator of the story seemingly reconstructs the events of the story by means of the emplotment of the selected parts of impresario's observation that are used as his archive; however, in chapter 13, he says that he does not know who Sarah is. He says that everything there is the product of his imagination and if he claims that he is aware of what goes on in his characters' thoughts, it is because conventionally "the novelist stands next to God" (95). Even if the novelist does not know everything, "he tries to pretend that he does". But, as a novelist who lives "in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes", he cannot be a traditional novelist (95). Then he directly mocks the literary conventions of the Victorian age like autobiographies, the characters who represent their authors, and the entitled chapters (95). He claims that he is "the most reliable witness" (96). In addition, the three endings of the story explicitly reject the possibility of truthful representation of the past. With Charles' decision to confess his relationship with Sarah to Ernestina, the narrator gives the first ending to his story. He claims that he is not aware of Sarah's fate and reports Charles' and Ernestina's marriage and their having "let us say seven children" (337). Then he points to Charles' being driven to business since his uncle and Mrs. Bella

Tomkins begot a twin. He says that today Charles' sons still control Mr. Freeman's shop. With regard to Sam and Mary—"but who can be bothered with the biography of servants"—they led an ordinary life "in the monotonous fashion of their kind" (337). For getting to the second ending, the narrator starts to tell the story from the point that Charles had received a note from Sarah. Then he goes on to relate their encounter in Rossetti's household. In this part, Charles came to understand that they had a child and it seems that they got along with each other. At this moment, the narrator informs the reader of the departure of the observer and his setting the time for fifteen minutes before (462). And the third ending starts with fifteen minutes before when Charles understood that Sarah had been aware about his broken engagement. Now the conversation between the two went on with Charles' accusation of Sarah of being much more "selfish and bigoted" than Mrs. Poultney (463). He went out of the room and on his way out, he saw the maid holding a little girl in arms. Then he left the house.

"We Need the End of Story": *Possession*

Munslow disagrees with both extremist modernist and postmodernist historiographers in their exclusive insistence on and rejection of the possibility of knowing the past (98). Byatt also acknowledges the difficulties and limitations of acquiring truthful historical knowledge through modern historiography while she denounces postmodern historiography for its despair about recapturing the past. In fact, she exposes the shortcomings of both. She suggests postmodern historiography to take the possibility of possessing the past into consideration. As a historiographic metafiction, *Possession* incorporates the past into the present; it also represents the past by blurring the boundary between history and fiction. It is skeptical of referentiality but does not deny its significance totally. For Byatt, the textualized narrative can be mediated for possessing the past but such possession is inevitably partial.

In the same way, in opposition to the exclusively postmodern historiography of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, *Possession* offers a moderate view which demands juxtaposition of different approaches. In addition, in its exposition of the problems and difficulties of acquiring the historical explanation, *Possession* shows an ambivalence towards the outcome of this process. So, while she acknowledges the examination of both the relics and the context in order to be directed towards the truth of the past, she simultaneously questions the possibility of *thorough* possession of the past. In fact, Byatt's view towards the relics of the past is not as one dimensional as that of Fowles. She adores the pleasure of getting to the end of the story, even if the ending is partial, provisional, or postponed to the future. However, she verifies that such pleasure may distance one from the truth. This is the reason of Roland's return to reading Ash's poetry.

When Roland Mitchel, the twentieth century research assistant, is looking for sources of Randolph Henry Ash in Vico's book, he accidentally comes across the yet-undiscovered letters of Ash to an unnamed woman—later identified as Christabel LaMotte. Roland starts to investigate Ash's archival remnants to decide on his concealed and untouched moments of life. He is introduced by Fergus—a deconstructionist academic and his rival—to Maud Bailey who studies LaMotte only in terms of her despise of men. For the sake of scholarship, they start to investigate the issue together. Roland thinks of the possibility of Christabel's accompanying Ash in his natural history expedition in Yorkshire. Then they want to know whether Blanche's suicide has anything to do with Ash's and Christabel's relationship and they think of the help of Beatrice Nest

who provides Maud with two letters from Blanche to Ellen (255). Reading the letters, Maud and Roland speculate that the evidence that Blanche had talked about was Ash's "stolen letters" (257). In order to prove their assumption, they go to Yorkshire where they collaborate to study the poets' works that had been composed during that time, taking advantage of Mortimer Cropper's Leonora Stern's books and the common images in Ash's and LaMotte's poetry (257). Visiting Yorkshire, reading *Melusina* and Ash's letters and poetry, and finding the local words and natural features of Yorkshire in them, Roland and Maud are convinced of Christabel's presence in Yorkshire along with Ash; however, they know that they are not "proofs" (290). In the forthcoming incidents, their quest is turned to chase and race (460). Fergus Wolff tells Blackadder and Cropper about Roland's and Maud's attempt to discover something personal with regard to Ash and LaMotte. Maud starts to discover Blanche Glover's motivation of suicide. She also goes through the letters to understand the way LaMotte spent the time between her Yorkshire journey and her inquest by the police. Leonora Stern provides her with a letter that makes it clear that LaMotte visited her family in Fouesnant in the autumn of 1859. In Brittany, Ariane Le Minier—who works with Leonora on LaMotte—gives Maud a part of Sabine de Kercoz's journal which makes it clear that LaMotte had been at her cousin's house during her months of pregnancy. In Brittany, they are followed by Blackadder, Leonora, and Cropper. Roland and Maud are thinking of the fate of the child, of the way and the reason Blanche was abandoned, and the way Ash and LaMotte parted, and if Ash knew there was a child (457). Beatrice Nest informs Maud of Cropper's plan to dig up Ash's grave (475). The group of scholars—Blackadder, Leonora, Beatrice, Maud, and Roland—along with Euan and Val gather to decide on a way to overcome Cropper. They follow Cropper and surround him as he finds the box which contained a hair bracelet, a thread of hair, a bundle of letters and an unopened letter from LaMotte to Ash along with a photograph of Maia's wedding. Reading the letter, they understand that Maud is a descendent of Ash and Christabel. The archive that they acquire from Ash's grave testifies their final discovery of truth. The morning after accomplishment of the task, life for Roland and Maud smelled "fresh and lovely and hopeful" although it accompanied "the smell of death and destruction" (551). However, the 1868 postscript problematizes the state of certainty of their scholarship since while they acquire the buried letter that clarified the identity of Ash's and LaMotte's daughter—the ancestor of Maud Bailey—they can never know that Ash had seen his daughter and also they can never have an access to Ash's letter that was never delivered to Christabel.

Willingly or not, Roland and Maud take advantage of the documents related to different fields of criticism in their academic quest. Of course while they find something missing in each one and add their own interpretations to what they acquire, in some cases their own views are modified or altered. They use the diaries of Crab Robinson, Blanche, Ellen, and Sabine de Kercoz, the biographical information—gathered with different techniques—of Blackadder and Cropper, the feminist views of Beatrice Nest, and the queer studies of Leonora Stern. They add their own textual and contextual criticism to these evidences. Interestingly, it is Euan the solicitor who causes their final victory. When Euan tells Val that he knows everything is over between Val and Roland, Val asks how he knows that. He responds: "Because I've been watching you and assessing the evidence for weeks now, it's my job" (449). At the end of the day, the Ash scholars know that they have to "reassess *everything*" because all Ash's post-1859 poems had been under the influence of his affair with LaMotte (526). The LaMotte scholars also think that they

have to reconsider taking LaMotte as exclusively lesbian and also they have to reread her works (526-527).

Besides changing the face of Ash's and LaMotte's scholarships, paradoxically, the discovered relics of the past turn Roland into a poet. Initially, with his discovery of the letters, Roland is willing to identify the lady and to reveal, if the letters continued, the ignored meanings in Ash's poetry. He thinks that even Ash's scholarship can alter through these letters since Ash's scholars have their certainties with regard to Ash's life and his "guarded, courteous and not of the most lively" correspondence (10). Ironically, what Ash has written on Vico does not matter anymore. In his dissertation, Roland has studied the matter of historical evidence in Ash's poetry but it becomes clear that the present letters would change the meaning of his poetry. Finding the letters, Roland reads a challenge in the eyes of the portrait of Ash: "So you think you know me?" (21). The discovered correspondence causes the "known Ash" to be "shifted a little" and Roland feels both "readiness" and "fear" (21). So, while he thinks he is ready to possess the past, he is afraid of dispossession of his present certainty. To Roland, the secret letters are "[u]rgent, unfinished", and "[s]hocking" (24). For Roland, letters are "a form of narrative that envisages no outcome, no closure" (145). As Roland gets near to the truth, he contemplates that "[c]oherence and closure are deep human desires that are presently unfashionable. But they are always both frightening and enchantingly desirable" (*Possession*, 456). Roland's meditation over "coherence and closure" is in line with the conflict between modern and postmodern historiographers. While modern historiography acknowledges the possibility of recovering the past truthfully, postmodern historiography denies it totally. Showing Byatt's dissatisfaction with both, *Possession* portrays a return to the archive. The archive that Roland finds and the subsequent partial knowledge that he acquires through it influence his life, both private and professional.

The narrator describes Roland's meditation "on the tiresome and bewitching endlessness of the quest for knowledge" (7). As a textual critic, "he sat, recuperating a dead man's reading, timing his exploration by the library clock" (7). So far, his usual manner of studying Ash has been concerned with "the movement of Ash's mind, stalked through the twists and turns of his syntax, suddenly sharp and clear in an unexpected epithet" (25). Previously, he did not like "Randolph's vanished body", his home or his sitting place, as did Mortimer Cropper, the collector of Ash's archive (24-25). But now, "these dead letters troubled him, physically even, because they were only beginnings" (25). Not the way Ash wrote the letters but their addressee is what he tries to discover: "Who?" (25). He used to despise the scholars like Cropper who were "enchanted by things touched by the great", but now he is willing to keep the original letters for himself: "He felt they were his" (27). Paradoxically, he becomes like Cropper, the biographer who considers himself as "the lord and owner of Ash" (33). Gradually Roland comes to understand that his possession of the letters is lost. Then, with the letters of invitation coming from different universities due to his article "Line by Line", he acquires the recognition that the letters have caused his distance from Ash although they have made him closer to his life (510). Feeling that he has lowered himself to the position of Cropper by being turned from a "reader" to a "hunter", Roland starts to reread Ash's poetry full-heartedly (510). In his view, what he has found has "turned out to be a sort of loss" (510). The one who struggled to acquire facts, now takes refuge in the realm of poetry (515).

Conclusion

As a historiographic metafiction, *Possession* self-consciously draws the reader's attention to its fictionality as a historical fiction; however, it does not reject the referentiality of history as *The French Lieutenant's Woman* does. There is an ambivalent attitude in *Possession* which foregrounds both the traces of the past as the possible means of representation of the past the possible incompleteness of such representation. On the surface, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is the love story of Charles and Sarah, the nineteenth-century characters whose life is rendered through the narrative of a narrator who makes use of observation of an observer. Going through the story, the narrator intervenes from time to time to assert his ideas, have a comment, or elaborate on a concept or a situation. The observation of the twentieth century impresario represents the archive available to the narrator who takes the role of the historian. Gradually the reader comes to understand that the story is not about Charles and Sarah but about the notion of *history* itself. Getting to the ending of the story, the narrator offers three endings to his reader. Through his multiple endings, he devalues the comprehensive and logical consequences to highlight the role of historian/storytellers in attributing endings to the events. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the storyteller, takes the role of a twentieth-century historian who in his portrayal of the events related to the fate[s] of Charles and Sarah, attempts to analyze the Victorian age. In *Possession*, the facts which had been acquired by the scholars of different fields of literary criticism—textual, poststructuralist, biographical, gender and queer studies—were altered by Ash's coincidental discovery of the evidence. Ash's discovered letter caused many previously-held facts with regard to Ash's and LaMotte's life and works to be contradicted. Byatt, does not take the influence of the historian and the context for granted. The historian can incorporate his knowledge of the context into the evidence to turn it into historical facts. Meanwhile, Byatt necessitates careful examination of the evidence to evaluate how true the historical facts are. Then she shows her ambivalence by not promising the possession of the whole truth. Byatt deviates from Hayden White's theories of postmodern historiography by denying both the intentionality of all historians and the fictive construction of all histories. In her ambivalent treatment of historiography, she acknowledges the significance of the relics of the past by contending that the history that is obtained through the authentic document is not necessarily a fictive construct and is possible to represent the past; however, such representation, she argues, may not be complete.

The relics of the past are the means of reconstruction of the past in both *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Possession*, but while they do not direct the historian—the narrator—towards a totalizing ending in the former, they become the source of the partial discovery of the past in the latter.

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