Janktová, Renata

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Brno studies in English. 2015, vol. 41, iss. 2, pp. [43]-56

ISSN 0524-6881 (print); ISSN 1805-0867 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2015-2-3
Stable URL (handle): https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/135025
Access Date: 17. 02. 2024
Version: 20220831

Brno Studies in English
Volume 41, No. 2, 2015
ISSN 0524-6881
DOI: 10.5817/BSE2015-2-3

Renata Janktová

Reshaping Meanings: D. H. Lawrence and the '*Lady Chatterley* Trial' in A. S. Byatt's *Babel Tower*

Abstract
The elaborate textual mosaic of A. S. Byatt's novel *Babel Tower* (1996) contains the records of two fictive court trials, a divorce hearing and a literary obscenity trial. The rendering of the latter is significantly shaped by both explicit references and implicit links to the 1960 trial of D. H. Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Whilst the direct references revive the case as a precedent for the fictive trial set in the late 1960s and help create a particular historical context, the implicit links derive from the involvement and presentation of D. H. Lawrence in *Babel Tower* and other parts of the *Frederica Quartet*. The article looks at how the utilization of the historical process with "Lady Chatterley", which works as a thematic link between the trials and informs the staging of Byatt's obscenity case, participates in the parodic make-up of the novel and the interpretation of Lawrence's literary legacy.

Key words
A. S. Byatt; Babel Tower*; D. H. Lawrence;* Lady Chatterley's Lover *trial; parody*

A former lecturer in English literature and an acknowledged literary critic, A. S. Byatt is an extremely well-read author, who is very open about both her sources of inspiration and creative methods. Her wide-reaching use of a great variety of literary and non-literary discourses plays a significant role in her fiction. As recognised, for instance, by Jane Campbell and Christien Franken, Byatt tends to look back at past rather than contemporary authors and works. Spanning several centuries and covering a variety of genres, her sources include old Norse mythology, Shakespeare, Victorian writers such as Browning, Tennyson, Wordsworth and

G. Eliot as well as 20th-century authors like Proust, Mallarme, Racine, T. S. Eliot and Iris Murdoch. D. H. Lawrence belongs to the latter group; nevertheless, his position compared to that of his colleagues is rather unique, considering the space and attention given him in Byatt's fiction, criticism, interviews and other personal testimonies. As Peter Preston points out, Lawrence is present in one way or other in most of Byatt's novels to date (2011), and yet until recently, Lawrence's influence on Byatt has received fairly little attention.

Despite the comprehensive introductory examination of the impact of Byatt's formative encounter with F.R. Leavis and his critical approach in the 1950s, Christien Franken (2001) pays surprisingly little attention to Lawrence's influence on her writing. Even though she mentions Byatt's identification of Lawrence (and Leavis) as major inspirational forces behind her first novel *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964), Lawrence is denied any particular significance in her summary of the literary influences working in Byatt's fiction. Jane Campbell's book *A. S. Byatt and the Heliotropic Imagination* (2004) duly recognizes Lawrence as Byatt's model for her visionary artist character Henry Severell in her first novel, and comments on her use of Lawrentian imagery to deliver her character's creative visions. Lawrence, and particularly his novel *Women in Love*, is furthermore discussed in relation to his role in the formation of female imagination and the identity of the main protagonist in the so-called *Frederica Quartet*. In *A. S. Byatt: Critical Storytelling*, Alfer and Edwards de Campos (2010) also examine the Lawrentian drift of Henry's visions whilst highlighting their imitative and textual nature.

Peter Preston, the first critic to place A. S. Byatt amongst Lawrence's most significant inheritors, acknowledges the latter's role as "a constant narrative antagonist, alternately admired and rejected in her writing (2003: 31). His articles "I am in a novel: D. H. Lawrence in Recent British Fiction" (2003) and "'Myths of Desire': D. H. Lawrence, Language and Ethics in A. S. Byatt's Fiction" (2011) study in detail various aspects of Lawrence's strong presence, particularly, in the *Frederica Quartet*. He claims that it is primarily Byatt's close knowledge of her predecessor's work that distinguishes her from numerous other contemporary writers, whose references to Lawrence are often compromised by lack of knowledge and misrepresentation.

The unpublished PhD thesis by Frances Kelly, *In "that Borderland Between": The Ambivalence of A. S. Byatt's Fiction* (2002) highlights the underlying conflict in the Byatt-Lawrence relationship and examines in great detail both authors' preoccupation with binary opposites, most notably those of body and mind, and male and female.

Most recently, Jack Stewart, another Lawrence scholar, has recognised Lawrence's prominent place in Byatt's writing. A chapter dedicated to *The Shadow of the Sun* in his *Color, Space, and Creativity: Art and Ontology in Five British Writers* (2008) analyses, among others, her portrayal of visionary experiences by linking both artists' engagement with visual art. Most importantly, his latest article "Lawrence Through the Lens of A. S. Byatt: *The Shadow of the Sun* and *The*

Virgin in the Garden" (2013) explains Lawrence's influence in a comprehensive way that goes beyond the frame of the two studied novels and addresses a wide range of issues from writing technique, imagery and symbolism, to the pursuit of visions and philosophies.

The aim of this essay is to contribute to the outlined debate by demonstrating how acutely is Byatt's sense of Lawrence's legacy linked to her preoccupation with a range of challenging issues such as the relationship between language and power, intellectual freedom, literary value, and gender differences. Focusing on her treatment of the landmark obscenity trial of Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960 in *Babel Tower* (1996), it shows how Byatt exploits the controversy of the historical process to power her own narrative by using parody and irony as the controlling tools of her critique. Finally, the presented enquiry supports my argument that comedy and irony play crucial roles in Byatt's continuing negotiation of her literary predecessor.

The first part of the essay looks briefly back at the 1960 trial and the new obscenity legislation that allowed it to happen and evolve as it did. The latter part focuses on how the use of irony shapes Byatt's narrative in relation to the historical facts, and affects her interpretation of Lawrence's legacy.

The *Lady Chatterley* Trial in *Babel Tower*

The trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960 followed the decision of Penguin Books Limited to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of Lawrence's death by publishing his last novel in the UK for the very first time. Disillusioned by his previous experience with the prosecution of his two major novels *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1921), Lawrence had decided to publish his book privately in Italy in 1928, whilst working on an expurgated version for his English publisher, which, however, remained unpublished until 1932, two years after his death. Until 1960, his English audience would thus have official access only to a heavily abbreviated text. Uncensored copies were, nevertheless, smuggled from the Continent so that at the time of the trial most expert witnesses confessed having read the full text many years earlier.

In 1960, Penguin Books were well aware of the continuing risk of obscenity prosecution. Their decision in favour of the publication was significantly shaped by their intention to test the new Obscene Publications Act of 1959, which had made fundamental changes to the previous legislation based on the Common Law. The new Act ruled that any book on trial had now to be assessed as *a whole*, in contrast to the previous concentration on isolated controversial passages. Even more importantly, in case of establishing its tendency to deprave and corrupt, its literary and other merits had to be taken into account that would justify its publication "for the public good" (Rolph 1961: 11). The evidence of experts was admitted, and proved, as the *Lady Chatterley* trial demonstrates, absolutely crucial. Last but not least, it limited the potential audience to be taken into account

from anyone "whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall" (13) to "those who are likely in all the circumstances to read it" (12). This means that the focus was shifted more appropriately towards the target audience of a potentially obscene article, that is, adult readers. The trial of Lawrence's novel, with the great publicity that surrounded it, indeed became a test case of the new law and a ground-breaking precedent for future obscenity prosecutions.

Byatt's handling of the event in *Babel Tower* corresponds with her view of the trial as "one of the great comic moments in British culture", voiced in her article about Lawrence's literary legacy called, symptomatically, "One Bright Book of Life" (Byatt 2002: 110). Her opinion is neither rare nor simply a result of well-informed retrospection. As a matter of fact, the process had sparked many controversies and immediately became an object of caricature in its own time. Bernard Levin (1980) recalls 'much high comedy even before the trial started' and approximates the proceedings to a 'circus'. Alongside descriptive, and relatively unbiased, accounts from the courtroom (one of them reporting three incidents of laughter on one particular day), the press nourished the public imagination through numerous cartoons produced on a daily basis during the trial. They frequently mocked the excited debates about the use of indecent vocabulary and the expressiveness of sexual scenes, implying that they were far less novel or shocking to the adult reading audiences than the court polemic appeared to suggest. The point of the irony was the contrast between the general public response to the proceedings and their presentation, and the patronising argumentation of both parties before Court, culminating in the notorious question as to whether *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was "a book that you would even wish your wife or your servants to read?" (Rolph 1961: 17). In his recent enquiry into the popular response to the trial, Nick Thomas views the incompatibility as a symptom of the increasing gap between "the ruling elite" and "the wider public" in a "changed society in which Victorian paternalism no longer had a place and with a changed moral climate in which public discussion of sex was to be encouraged rather than restricted" (620). (A similar sense of obsoleteness is generated in Byatt's fictive divorce trial staged in *Babel Tower*, where the voiced assumptions about a wife's role and position echo the 1950s rather than the late Sixties, in which the trial is set.)

As Rod Mengham sums up, the trial

> seemed to be conducted in two parallel universes, one in which the defence amassed evidence for the literary, social, and ethical value of the book, and the other in which the prosecution hammered away at how shocking the content and language were, disregarding the testimony of defence witnesses, most of whom they did not bother to question. (Mengham 2013: 160)

It is not surprising to find that those aspects of the event that had become subject to mockery in 1960 inform the depiction of the fictive obscenity trial in *Babel Tower*. The record of the trial represents one of a variety of discourses that cre-

ate the novel's carefully constructed textual mosaic and, together with a parallel-running divorce hearing, forms the narrative climax of the book.

The prosecuted literary work, called *Babbletower*, is written by Jude Mason, one of the novel's characters. It is a dark dystopia set at the time of the French Revolution, inspired by the works of the Marquis de Sade and Charles Fourier, with extremely detailed descriptions of sexual intercourse, torture and humiliation, including violence on children. Bearing in mind her contemporary audience and the shifts in permissiveness since the 1960s, Byatt needed, and "wanted to invent a book that was on the edge of what some people might think shouldn't be published, and cruelty to children is the real taboo" (*Washington Post*, 2004). The choice has also a tactical function as it reflects the historical setting of the novel at the time of the Moor Murders[1] trial, which plays an important part in the contextualization of Byatt's narrative.

Unlike *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Babbletower* lacks vulgar language and is written in an ostentatiously elevated literary idiom. In addition to other functions, its prolonged extracts, distributed throughout the novel, acquaint the reader with the text before they reach the obscenity trial section.

The presence of "*Lady Chatterley*" in Byatt's rendering of the *Babbletower* trial is twofold. Most of the explicit references to the 1960 trial recall it as a judicial precedent and have primarily an informative value for the reader. Having said that, they also help to adjust the reader's attention to the implicit, or intertextual, presence generated by numerous, more or less obvious, analogies. Many of them relate to the potentially humorous features of the *Chatterley* case mentioned above.

Perhaps the most obvious of them is the body of expert witnesses, comprised of "35 distinguished men and women of letters, moral theologians, teachers, publishers, editors and critics" (Rolph 1961: 5) that Byatt refers to as "forces of righteousness" (2002: 110) or "the file of the great and the good" (1997: 471). Byatt's ensemble, introduced in an obviously ironic mode, has a similar composition, with special enrichment – she also includes an ethnomethodologist. The ironic introduction of the "expert" into the story challenges the notions of moral propriety and literary competence of the expert witnesses, and gives us an idea of the centrality of comedy for the presentation of Lawrence's legacy. When asked for an explanation of his area of expertise, the character retorts:

> That is hard to say […] since no two ethnomethodologists can agree on a definition of ethnomethodology. We have very beautiful conferences, discussing the meaning of the term, ethnomethodology. (470)

When asked for a working definition, he explains: "We study what people actually think they are doing when they are in the process of doing whatever they do" (470).

Similar irony characterises the discussion about other possible witnesses for the defence. The reader's attention is deliberately drawn to the role of clergymen. One of the most ridiculed moments of the *Lady Chatterley* trial was when

a bishop proclaimed that the novel *ought to* be read by Christians. In *Babel Tower*, Byatt rewrites this as follows:

> There was a Bishop in the Chatterley case, says Hefferson-Brough. "Got rather mangled. Said the book promulgated marriage. Got reprimanded by the Archbish, I hear. Cantuor. Not a good precedent, on balance." Canon Holly says he knows a better Bishop, a radio Bishop with a large following, who might appear, who has thought much about the experience of pain and desolation. Raby says he is against bishops. Martin Fisher says, if they have a Bishop, we should have a Bishop. Jude says bishops are sods and buggers like everyone else. (548)

Invoking and parodying legal history, Byatt's representative of the church amongst the defence team calls *Babbletower*, formerly defined as "onnanistic babble" (548), "a deep, a profoundly Christian book" (553). In addition, he describes the controversial passages as "oh, *superbly* horrible, *brilliantly* effective, *beautifully* dreadful" (554; Byatt's emphases).

Byatt very clearly mimics the exaggerated rhetoric of the *Lady Chatterley* defence. In the follow-up of her comment about the comicality of the trial, she adheres to the opinion of her former university teacher, the literary critic and prominent Lawrence scholar F. R. Leavis, who had refused to appear as one of the expert witnesses in 1960 and subsequently criticised the Defence rhetoric and argumentation as inadequate and counterproductive. The reasons for his refusal are made obvious in his review of C. H. C. Rolph's record of the trial published by Penguin Books a year later. He claims that the ludicrousness of the Defence, who hailed the novel's superior literary and moral values, was intrinsically grounded in the fact that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is "a bad novel" and Lawrence's creative failure (Leavis 1967: 235). Leavis points out a significant contradiction in the Defence's emphasis on its "integrity", which, in his view, is precisely what the novel lacks. His condemnation goes as far as proclaiming that the author "is not the normal Lawrence in this novel" and criticises the expert witnesses' insistence on its knowledge being central to the understanding of Lawrence's work. In *Babel Tower*, Leavis, referred to as "that chap at Cambridge […] everyone's always talking about" (Byatt 1997: 473), is ruled out as a possible defence witness mainly due to his reluctance to become involved in the *Chatterley* case. One of the novel's characters, an alleged postgraduate student of his, nominates himself as a delegate, explaining that his former tutor is "cranky and paranoid, though undoubtedly a genius. I think I myself will better represent his critical approach" (473). (It becomes apparent a few moments later that, despite having written an apology in favour of *Babbletower* earlier, he may have never read it.) The fact that this character subsequently defects to join the prosecuting party can be read as a pun on Leavis's evasion of speaking out for his life-long protégé.

Like elsewhere in her fiction, many of Byatt's characters' names play with meanings and connotations, for instance the possessive servant-nanny Pippy

Mammoth, the extravagant psychoanalyst Elvet Gander, or the defence lawyer Peregrine Swift. In regard to the obscenity process, the names contribute to the parodic effect through exaggeration based on their link to the persons' characteristics and their role in the trial. Fitting examples are Cannon Adelbert Holly, whose rhapsodic statements have been quoted earlier, or the prosecution witness Hermia Cross, a fierce MP and Methodist lay preacher, who had instigated the prosecution.

Another analogy between the trials, including the divorce hearing running alongside the obscenity proceedings in *Babel Tower*, concerns a major paradox of the 1960 case. It was generally felt that it was Lady Chatterley herself, treated as a real person, who was on trial for pre-marital sex and adultery, rather than Lawrence's novel. In a commentary following a few days after the verdict, Kenneth Tynan makes a poignant remark that it looked as "if these charges somehow disqualified her from participation in serious literature" (1960: 21). He further reports that

> there were long periods of the trial during which an outsider might well have assumed that a divorce case was being heard; and it often seemed that the Crown was labouring under the same misapprehension, intensified by spasms of uncertainty as to whether the defendant was Constance Chatterley or Frieda von Richthofen. (21)

Byatt openly reflects on the situation in her novel, and imitates this misrepresentation by connecting the cases of Frederica and of Jude Mason, the author of the prosecuted *Babbletower*. The obscenity process is thus shaped in a way that virtually puts the novelist on trial, even though it is repeatedly emphasised that the author's intentions are irrelevant for the judgement. In fact, by having her characters balance on the edge of what may or may not be relevant for the consideration of literary merit Byatt draws attention to the sensitive issue of authorial intention and moral responsibility. The exposure of the author's grim childhood experience from a distinguished public school enables Byatt to move the suggested misrepresentation even further in line with the *Chatterley* case so that all Jude's school's masters and pupils appear to be sued alongside the actual defendant.

Similarly to the *Chatterley* case where the literary obscenity proceedings seem to have degenerated into a Victorian divorce trial instead of the appraisal of a work of art, the divorce hearing in *Babel Tower* creates a strong impression that the novel's heroine is being prosecuted for reading books. Hence, if Constance Chatterley was threatened with expulsion from "serious literature" for indecency, Frederica's role as wife and mother seems to be essentially compromised by her intellectual pursuits, which are presented as at least as malignant as her alleged marital misconduct. The gender bias, manifest in both instances, with its implications for the formation of the female identity, is foregrounded by Byatt as one of the key themes in *Babel Tower*. The interpretational clash at the Court makes Frederica feel that

> the story of her life has been changed by the way it has been told today – both the true bits, and the velleities, and the flat lies, one part of a new fiction, a new story, in which she – who is she, does she exist? – is entangled as in a fine, voluminous net. (Byatt 1997: 519–520)

Finally, I would like to mention an additional episode that shows yet another method of employment of the original material. Dealing with a work of literature, both trials start with the jury reading the books; the readings take several hours. In *Babel Tower*, an urgent complaint is raised – the chairs in the jury room are hard. This happens after the defence indicates that in the *Lady Chatterley* trial the jury had been allocated a special room with armchairs. The complaint falls short with the judge: the jury is resolutely sent off to the jury room with a lesson that "we have all sat on hard chairs, in our time, […], in schools, in libraries, and been none the worse for it" (533). Most readers appreciate the humour, and the episode successfully partakes in the parody thanks to the link established between the events. However, extra space is left for the "ideal reader" who knows that "hard chairs" had actually been an issue raised in the *Lady Chatterley* proceedings in 1960. The initial decision had equally located the reading in the Jury room, despite any discomfort. Eventually, the jury were allocated a special room with comfortable leather armchairs, possibly under the pressure of the immense publicity of the case (Rolph 1961: 39). Byatt's parody is thus enriched with intertextual irony based on her appropriation of a potentially comic moment from history whilst concealing a significant part of the historic fact.

D. H. Lawrence on Trial

D. H. Lawrence naturally figures in *Babel Tower* as the author of the novel, the legal history of which is used as the model for its fictive obscenity trial. His presence is, however, far more complex and carefully layered and developed throughout the novel. His involvement is a part of what Peter Preston points out as Byatt's "'writing-back' at Lawrence" (2011: 188), characteristic specifically of the earlier part of her work.

Babel Tower is the third part of the so-called *Frederica Quartet* – a series of four novels centred upon the main figure of Frederica Potter. It records, among others, the evolution of her relationship to D. H. Lawrence and, at the same time, reflects the novelist's standing as an artist. The first novel, *The Virgin in the Garden*, involves Lawrence in the teenage Frederica's revolt against authority, both paternal (personalised in her Leavisite father who prescribes *Women in Love* as a moral guide) and literary. As we follow her through the series, the initial refusal gradually transforms into a dialogue that eventually arrives at a kind of reconciliation halfway through *Babel Tower*.

Frederica's relationship to Lawrence is, like Byatt's own, characterised by profound ambivalence. Unable to escape his influence, she confesses: "I love Law-

rence and I hate him, I believe him and I reject him totally, all at the same time all the time" (Byatt 1994: 460).

As indicated above, her initial response to Lawrence's work, particularly *Women in Love*, was one of protest: "If I thought I'd really got to live the sort of life that book holds up for my admiration I'd drown myself in the Bilge Pond *now*" (Byatt 1994: 40). Nevertheless, gradually the characters of *Women in Love* grow closer to real people and Frederica begins to fear that she "might be Gudrun"(460). She also comes to acknowledge that her position partly resembles Lawrence's, admitting that "I have roots like D. H. Lawrence: my people better themselves a little, like Lawrence's ambitious women" (Byatt 1995: 259).

In *Babel Tower*, Lawrence's presence, at the most pronounced within the *Quartet*, occurs on two interconnected levels. One is Frederica's own mental world: the world of her reading and thinking, of which Lawrence is an integral and delicate part. The next is the world of jurisdiction, where Frederica is a mere outsider and Lawrence suddenly becomes the "other", manipulated outside her control yet with serious bearings on her life.

On the first level, Lawrence is the creator of one of the novel's central motives, the ideal of "oneness", which is challenged and put to test by Frederica. At the same time, he is featured as an original and engaging writer. His major novel *Women in Love* is discussed in considerable detail in Frederica's adult evening classes. Frederica draws her visual-artist students' attention to the rich imagery in Lawrence's writing and the relationship between verbal expression and nonverbal imagination. She comments on the novel's narrative appeal through the portrayal of its two female protagonists, who "are wonderful both as real women making decisions about love, about sex, about the future, and as myths, as mythical beings willing life or death" (Byatt 1997: 214). At the same time, she points out what she considers as an unsuccessful feature, namely the "unreality of Birkin, Inspector of Schools, who sees the world as a book he isn't writing" (215).

Compared with other authors featured in *Babel Tower*, the descriptions of Frederica's teaching of Lawrence are very detailed and sound rather authoritative, which is partly down to the strength of the authorial voice in these passages (with Frederica voicing some of Byatt's own views). It is Jude Mason, also a visiting model to the art school, who provides the corrective voice that counterpoises Frederica-*cum*-Byatt's serious, even slightly preachy tone. It is no coincidence that one of the major teaching scenes is a good example of how comedy works in Byatt's negotiations of Lawrence's art. This time, Jude interrupts Frederica in the middle of her passionate talk about the inescapability of "*meaning*" in Lawrence (212; Byatt's emphasis). He certainly does not look like someone capable of posing a genuine intellectual challenge, and the contrast between his (lack of) attire and posture, and his utterances help drive the comedy:

> He is partly dressed: below his spare haunches he is naked: he sits on the edge of the platform, his knees drawn up amongst his long grey veil of hair, his balls poised on the dust between his dirty feet. (213)

> […]
>
> "You should teach them Nietzsche. Man in a little skiff on the raging sea of Maya, of illusion, supported by the *principium individuationis*."
>
> Frederica is angry. The thread of the class attention is broken. Anything she can say will sound schoolmistressy or piqued. So will silence. She says,
>
> "I am talking about Lawrence."
>
> "I know. I can hear. Bits of it are not uninteresting. The knitting idea is not at all bad, writing does resemble that despised art. Continue. We may yet join your circle." (214)

Somewhat later, Jude reminds Frederica, than in addition to "the forms of vision and the forms of thought" (215), Lawrence also wrote about sex. Finally, when Frederica says that she does not believe the proposed Nietzschean idea of "the veritable creator", Jude retorts: "No. But maybe your David Herbert does or did, maybe his Birkin does or did or will. I'm afraid you're snarled up in your own narrow little utilitarian roots" (216).

The inclusion of the teaching scenes is important for several reasons. By teaching others, Frederica "is trying to understand something herself" (213). Teaching Lawrence and studying more recent authors, such as Amis, Wain, Murdoch and Golding, brings her, paradoxically, closer to his writing.

> Lawrence was greedy for knowledge, for learning, he was interested in natural history and cultural history, he felt people should get out of mining villages. These people mostly sneer at such things. (219)

On the next occasion when Frederica talks about her classes and *Women in Love* to her father, the novel stands no more like a wall between them.

Last but not least, the passages dedicated to Frederica's literature lessons do indeed act as lessons for readers unfamiliar with Lawrence's work. It is a necessary strategy that creates a counterbalance to his later appearances in the trials, marked by a great amount of simplification and generalization. Namely, the references in the *Babbletower* process use him as an established authority, whose place in the literary world is a solid fact. Frederica too is aware that "the Sixties do not find Lawrence daring" and that "he has been admitted to the Establishment" (212). The suggestion of finality is apparent in the debate about the status of the artist in relation to the assessment of literary merit, as Jude's position is contrasted with Lawrence's. Furthermore, the quality of his art is questioned in relation to an interesting array of writers; that is Lawrence lined up with William Burroughs and Mickey Spillane. As for Jude, the conclusion is that "judgements of literary merit are *provisional* in this kind of case, as opposed to that of D. H. Lawrence" (537; Byatt's emphasis).

Both authors, however, fall victim to legal oratory: just as Jude's novel is described as being "flattened" (535) by the discussions before the court, Lawrence's art is visibly downplayed by being used, and misinterpreted, as a point of argument in the trials. Moreover, Byatt plays with another widely disputed,

and mocked moment of the *Chatterley* trial, namely Richard Hoggart's linguistic manoeuvre that had declared Lawrence a Puritan. Thanks to his solicitor's eloquence, Jude Mason is placed in the same category in *Babel Tower*.

In Frederica's divorce hearing, Lawrence is, on the contrary, ridiculed for his "immemorial magnificence of mystic, palpable, real otherness" (Byatt 1997: 491), and reduced to a symbol of obsession with sex and bodily passion.

Paradoxically, it is Frederica, who brings Lawrence to attention in her explanation of her choice of husband based on sexual fascination and the attraction of opposites. As Peter Preston points out, she seems to have succumbed, temporarily, to "the Lawrentian [truth-in-the-body] myth of the 1950s and 1960s" (2003: 41) to ultimately realize that she cannot entirely "lose herself and find herself in the body", "like Lady Chatterley" (Byatt 1997: 125). Decontextualized in the courtroom discourse, Lawrence is implicitly made partly responsible for the failure of her marriage, and his inclusion in the argumentation, instigated by Frederica, ironically turns with full force against her. Moreover, her mistake validates to a certain extent the respondent party's assumptions about the potentially harmful power and influence of literature on the (female) mind, which again links the divorce case directly with both the historical (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*) and fictive (*Babbletower*) obscenity trials. The gender prejudice that had powered the ill-famed wife-or-servants question in the *Chatterley* case, still resonates in the judge's verdict in *Babel Tower*, in which he sympathises with Frederica's husband who had "expected to find a wife who behaved like a wife and accepted the constraints upon her freedom inevitably incurred by becoming a wife" (518). Obliterating any reciprocal faults on the husband's side, he concludes that:

> The higher education of women […] has encouraged skills and raised expectations which society as it is at present constituted is incapable of fulfilling or satisfying – skills and expectations perhaps incompatible with the fulfilled life of wife and mother. (519)

The deliberate juxtaposition of the divorce hearing and the obscenity trial is a significant building block of the parody. Whereas one court has Lawrence celebrated as an acclaimed artist, the other sees him mocked as an irrational eccentric ideologue.

Considering the Lawrentian opposition of body and mind, Frederica's remark before the court that "[a]ll intellectuals these days read D. H. Lawrence, who says we should listen to – to our passions – to our bodies" (491) is an ironic expression of one of the paradoxes that characterize Lawrence's literary destiny.

The shift in his portrayal from an exciting and intellectually challenging artist to a symbol of transgression and a cultural icon anticipates the situation in the closing part of the series. In *A Whistling Woman*, he is associated almost exclusively with sex and depravity, utterly divorced from his art.

Byatt skilfully operates with the peculiarity of belonging to the literary "Establishment" and of having, at the same time, the necessary appeal to become

a "counter-culture celebrity" – a symbol of liberation and permissiveness in the late 1960s and 1970s. The various perspectives and views of Lawrence's work presented not only in *Babel Tower* but throughout the tetralogy as a whole demonstrate its challenging complexity but also the delicacy of Byatt's attitude to the writer. However negative it may appear, Byatt's deconstruction of Lawrentian myths also plays a positive role in the demythologizing of the writer as an untouchable authority faced by Frederica, and Byatt, at the beginning of their literary encounter. The blending of the two tendencies, that is, the genuine admiration for Lawrence's art, on one hand, and the rejection of his idolisation reflects the ambiguity of Byatt's own relationship to her predecessor, which is central to the literary effect of *Babel Tower*.

Finally, Byatt's mockery of the *Lady Chatterley* trial is an important part of her portrayal of the 1960s. Having missed out on first-hand experience due to family and work commitments but also for failing to be addressed by the era's communal spirit and culture, she only learned about it retrospectively through careful research. In her view, the decade – all "very exciting and very pointless" – was characterised with "polymorphous perversity and the desirability of going back to the freedoms of a child", which could not appeal to her generation who had remembered the war and the concentration camps (Miller 1996). Her personal feeling that the importance of, and excitement about the period have been far too exaggerated is similar to the more recent views summarised by Thomas that regard the liberalisation process as an "ongoing continuum" (Thomas 2013: 622). Her representation of the counter-culture in *Babel Tower* and *A Whistling Woman* creates a strong sense of self-delusion and misapprehension and signals the dangers of utopianism, which she felt in the Sixties. Her critique takes again the shape of comedy, as for instance in her depiction of Frederica's lover's twin brother Paul Ottokar's private bonfire "happening" in *Babel Tower*, during which he burns Frederica's books. In *A Whistling Woman*, the same tone is used to describe Byatt's version of the students' revolution, including the Counter-University they set up. Lawrence's part in the movement is again based on misinterpretation and violation of his thoughts and beliefs.

Conclusion

As I have shown, Byatt's comic negotiation of Lawrence's literary legacy, including the trial of his novel, allows Byatt to address key questions with regards to the history of legal prosecutions of literary obscenity and gender difference. Lawrence is her natural as well as lucky choice: his unrestrained explorative treatment of obscene language and the connection between his art and his controversial opinions on gender difference and sexuality are amongst the major factors that lead to the obscenity charges against his books and have caused turmoil and contradictions in the reception of his writing and his literary standing until the present day. But Byatt's relationship to Lawrence is deeply ambivalent because he is

a source both of the gender assumptions she despises and of the sexual liberation she champions.

Lawrence's role in Byatt's critique of gender issues throughout the *Quartet* is thereby a complex problem. What stands out in *Babel Tower* is how the legal prosecution of literature depends on a set of problematic gender assumptions, many of which were already comic by the time of the 1960 trial. The trial of Lawrence's novel serves to highlight their ridiculous nature and sets the scene for the sexual and cultural liberations of the 1960s. At the same time, however, Byatt is also sceptical of Lawrence's own gender assumptions in his novels. Her ambivalent response to Lawrence is one that is mirrored in the wider culture, as Lawrence has proved to be a symbol of sexual liberation *and* a literary proponent of problematic gender assumptions.

Notes

[1] The Moor Murders trial was held in April to May 1966 against Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, the most condemned serial killers in Britain. Their victims were five children aged 10–17, who had been sexually assaulted and brutally killed. The case was called after Saddleworth Moor near Manchester where some of the victims' bodies had been found. Heavily followed by the media, the brutality and remorselessness of the crimes shocked the country, and the case still remains alive in the nation's memory. The murders had been carefully planned and preceded by the reading of highly controversial material such as reports on Nazi atrocities, Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, or the works of the Marquis de Sade. Fractions of courtroom records and newspaper texts related to the trial appear in Byatt's *Babel Tower* amongst the discourses that create the textual structure of the novel. The case is initially present mainly in the background of Byatt's narrative, but enters it directly with the opening of the Babbletower process where the Court is reminded of the role of reading in Brady and Hindley's crimes.

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Renata Janktová is a doctoral student in the Department of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia (UEA), Norwich. Her current research is focused on the literary relationship between A. S. Byatt and D. H. Lawrence, particularly on the dynamics of Lawrence's presence in Byatt's fiction.

Address: Renata Janktová, Department of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing, University of East Anglia, Norwich Research Park, Norwich, Norfolk, NR4 7TJ, United Kingdom. [email: R.Janktova@uea.ac.uk]