Text, Image and Embroidery : Threads and Scratches

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This paper explores the premise that image and text can be seen as part of the same fabric. My starting-point is one of A.S. Byatt's tales in the collection *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* (1994) – "The Glass Coffin" – and the illustration that was used as frontispiece to the story. In Byatt's fiction weaving and spinning provide a metafictional trope that underpins the act of rewriting tales as the interlacing of new threads into the intertextual fabric. It is tempting to mirror this trope and to refer metaphorically to illustrations as visual embroidery onto the textual fabric. This is precisely how Aubrey Beardsley saw it when he illustrated *The Rape of the Lock* (1896), which is "embroidered with nine drawings", as indicated in the subtitle of the edition.

Byatt' text is a reprise of a pre-existing text – Andrew Lang's "Crystal Coffin" – and of its illustration by Henry Justice Ford. I will argue that her tale can be described metaphorically as textual embroidery onto the visual fabric of the illustration. Originally a pen and ink drawing, Ford's illustration displays a graphic idiom that is close to the rendering of cross-hatching and broken lines in a wood-engraving. Using a pen and ink drawing that looks like a wood-engraving as illustration to a text establishes a configuration that combines two apparently irreconcilable states: the text as fabric made from woven threads and the text as surface that is engraved with incised traces. As appropriate to the scope of this paper I will address the link between technical modes of production and the metaphors that we use when we describe texts, images and story-telling.

Byatt's "Glass Coffin" and its illustration

The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye is a collection of short stories that were first published individually at different times by Chatto & Windus. As Helen

Mundler points out, quoting Jean Ricardou, the first two tales are an instance of "restricted intertextuality" (Mundler 9): "[t]he Glass Coffin" and "Gode's Story" are extracted from Byatt's novel *Possession* (1990). "The Glass Coffin" is embedded within the narrative: it is presented as an extract from the fictional *Tales for Innocents* written by the Victorian writer Christabel LaMotte after Grimm and Tieck (*Possession* 59) and illustrated by the artist Blanche Glover with wood-engravings (41-42). "Gode's story" is also an embedded story: it is an oral tale told by the Breton maid Gode and recorded between quotation marks by Sabine, Christabel's cousin, in her diary. Once collected in *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* both tales are "stripped of any surrounding narrative" (Mundler 10) and new intertextual patterns emerge as you read the five tales.

Out of *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* a composite figure of the story-teller emerges as craftsman/woman and collector of stories, winding and unwinding balls of yarn, working with thread and needle, mending, making or weaving pieces of fabric and tapestries. In *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* and *Possession* the mythical model of the story-teller is Arachne, the craftswoman whom Christabel LaMotte identifies with.

Unsurprisingly, when Philip Terry invited a number of contemporary authors to write texts with "some connection" to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Terry 1), Byatt chose to write about Arachne. "Arachne" is a succession of juxtaposed patches printed in varying typefaces which Terry describes as "mixed-genre narrative, weaving together elements of autobiography, essay, art history and sheer story-telling" (3). The text alternates between childhood memories, the retelling and analysis of Ovid's tale, an ekphrasis and analysis of Velazquez's painting *Las Hilanderas* (*The Spinners*, 1657), as well as literary and entomological considerations about spiders.

Both "Arachne" and *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* invite a reading of the text as fabric but also incorporate or point to other semiotic systems and/or crafts such as engraving, embroidery and painting. Byatt describes how the foreground of Velazquez's painting is occupied by spinners engaged in their work while in the background ladies are looking at a tapestry representing Titian's painting of *The Rape of Europa* (1562), a work that was copied by Rubens (*The Rape of Europa*, 1630). Byatt explains that the spinners as well as the two female figures standing in front of the tapestry relate the painting to the weaving contest between Arachne and Athena, as is now commonly assumed by scholars. The proliferation of textual and visual versions of Ovid's Metamorphoses is an instance of hypertextual translation into a variety of media, following what Byatt describes as "a line, a thread, of emulation, of reworking, from Ovid to Titian to Rubens" (Terry 143).

Rewriting and reprising also inform *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*. "The Glass Coffin" is one of the Grimm Brothers' tales. It was selected by Andrew Lang, retold and published as "The Crystal Coffin" in *The Green Fairy Book* (1892), the third of his twelve fairy books, which were for the most part illustrated by Henry Justice Ford (1860-1941). (Fig. 1) In Byatt's version, a tailor – a "master craftsman" (*Djinn* 4) – is drawn into a series of adventures. In the course of the story he discovers a stone chamber in which he sees three things: a heap of glass bottles, a glass dome that contains a castle "measurable with pins and fine stitches" (21), and a glass coffin. In the coffin he sees "a mass of long gold threads" (14). He takes it at first for "a box full of spun gold, to make cloth of gold" but it turns out to be the hair of a beautiful princess. He delivers the princess who has been imprisoned by a magician, who also turned her brother into a hound.



Fig. 1 — Henry Justice Ford, in Andrew Lang, "The Crystal Coffin", *The Green Fairy Book* (1892), p. 292.

In the same way as "The Glass Coffin" was extracted from *Possession*, Ford's illustration was taken from a text in which it was embedded and it was added to



Fig. 2 — Henry Justice Ford in Byatt, A.S.,
"The Glass Coffin", *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* [1994] 1995, p. 2.

the hypertext as a self-contained, autonomous unit. (Fig. 2) Because it is used as frontispiece, the illustration is given greater prominence than in Lang's text and it provides a visual suture between the hypertext – Byatt's version – and the hypotext, which is itself also a reprise from an oral tale transcribed by the Grimm Brothers: another "thread of emulation, of reworking" from the oral tales to the Grimms' transcriptions to Lang's collection and Byatt's version. Fairy tales are recycled texts, translated from oral sources, which lend themselves to processes of transfer. Therefore the choice of illustration – which was part of the editorial work (*Djinn* 280) – reinforces the metaphorical association of image and text as part of the same fabric. It suggests an analogy between the illustration and a design that you can transfer from its original place in the intertextual tapestry and stitch onto another piece of work. The organic fluidity of the line framing Ford's picture gives it the aspect of a mirror or a hanging tapestry: the figures holding the bottom corners seem to be about to lift them as they would the corners of a page. The illustration advertises itself as a page or tapestry, and as such it mediates our entry into the text.

Ford's illustration is an instance of the process line block of the 'Nineties (Houfe 142). His work must be set in the context of the *fin-de-siècle* art of the book and of changing modes of reproduction, since he was working at a time of transition when photomechanical processes were superseding wood-engraving (Gascoigne 33). It is embedded in the decorative revival brought about by aesthetes such as Charles Ricketts and Aubrey Beardsley, as well as Arts and Crafts designers, in the wake of Pre-Raphaelitism. Kelmscott Press book design was based on the congeniality of image and type, which is technically inherent to wood-engraving and wood-cutting. It put the emphasis on the iconic and calligraphic nature of text, therefore blurring the boundary between type and illustration (Skoblow 242). William Morris and Walter Crane advocated the integration of various media within a system of design that included engraving, embroidery and tapestry, and that allowed for cross-media transfers of decorative designs – as shown by the well-known example of the tapestry designed by Morris after Crane's illustration of the « Goose Girl » for *Household Stories from Grimm* (1882).

Artists such as Beardsley also regarded the book as "decorative artefact" (Frankel 262) but his technique "took full advantage of the technological artistic possibilities of process reproduction" (Kooistra 33). Ford's work, on the contrary, was not innovative. Educated at Cambridge, he trained as a draughtsman at the Slade School of Fine Art under Alphonse Legros and at Hubert von Herkomer's Bushey School of Art (Hares-Stryker, 36-37). He borrowed his graphic idiom from wood-engraved illustration under the influence of Edward Burne-Jones and Walter Crane (Houfe 143). Wood-engraving had been the dominant reproductive process until the 1880s and the development of the Victorian illustrated book relied on the technological union of image and type "married together in the press", to use the analogy drawn by Edward Curtis from a quotation of William Andrew Chatto. Chatto wrote in the *Illustrated London News* (30 April 1844) that the use of wood-engraving to illustrate the news had given "the very age and body of the time, its form and pressure" (Curtis 17), therefore colliding its technological, cultural and economic impact in mediological terms. Process line-block, on the contrary, emancipated the artist from the reproductive engraver as that intermediary stage was now bypassed. The original drawing was photographed and the negative was used to produce the relief block that preserved the autographic line, "every nuance, every dot and scribble" (Peppin 8). At the turn of the century photomechanical reproduction was praised by Alfred W. Pollard for its fidelity: "the photographer's camera is the most obliging of craftsmen" (Sketchley xvi). Pollard's praise, however, is a far cry from the

widely shared concern that photography was posing a severe challenge to graphic and pictorial arts (Curtis 40). Photography also displaced the union between the writer and the illustrator based on the "hieroglyphic" union of pen and pencil, of drawn and written lines as exemplified during the golden age of Victorian illustrated books, and temporarily revived by *fin-de-siècle* book designers (9).

The main difference between line-blocks and wood-engravings lay in the way lines were formed – either drawn or engraved. But as a final print the line-block could easily be confused with a wood-engraving, all the more as, Bamber Gascoigne underlines, "reproductive wood engravers were striving to imitate the drawn line of their original artwork and were often astonishingly successful in doing so" (Gascoigne 33g). Conversely illustrators like Ford still worked within the technological frame of reference that dominated 19th-century book illustration and his pen and ink drawings imitated the conventions of wood-engraving.

Fairy tales, wrote Andrew Lang in his preface to the *Green Fairy Book*, are "older than reading and writing, far older than printing" (Lang ix). The interest for craftsmanship, fairy tales and pre-industrial modes of production underlines Byatt's choice of textual genre and illustration. At this point it is useful to take up the idea of craft and to see how the interaction between image and text is rooted in their modes of production as artefacts. In that respect the analogy between diegesis and thread – whereby the text is seen as fabric – is set against a competing view of text as produced by engraved traces.

Threads and Scratches

The genealogy of signs rests on the image of the line as either thread or trace. The following section examines modes of production of text and image in a way that allows us to look at their common origin predating semiotic division between linguistic and pictorial signs. This development owes much to social anthropologist Tim Ingold and to mediologist Regis Debray.

The text can be seen as fabric woven from thread, writing as line-making and story-telling as threading a line (Ingold 51), according to a metaphor based on the Latin etymology of 'text' and 'textile', which both come from *texere* – 'to weave' – (61-62). The standard form of Gothic book-hand used in the Middle Ages was called textura "on account of the resemblance of a page of writing to the texture of a woven blanket" (70). It gave its shape to the first typeface used by Gutenberg. Ingold also points out that handwriting and weaving share similar kinetic features: they are both produced by an incremental back-and-forth motion (65). The metaphor is sustained in Byatt's fiction, and in "Arachne" she underlines the connection between three female figures of spinners-weavers: Penelope, Ariadne and Arachne, a configuration which conflates the tropes of the thread, fabric and motion – the making and unmaking of a shroud, walking the maze and the back-and-forth motion of the shuttle as material basis to the metaphor of text and image as woven artefact.

On the other hand, the Greek word *graphein* has produced different derivations. Graphein means 'to engrave, scratch, scrape' and consequently 'to write' and 'to draw' (Debray 302). It is similar to the Old English verb *writan* which means 'to incise runic letters in stone' (Ingold 43), and which has evolved into 'to write'. In this particular case, text and image are graphic signs generated by an incised trace on a solid surface. Writing and story-telling are seen as carving, tracing a

line, which was the case until the adoption of the cursive script (69). Ingold also argues that printed type derives from engraving rather than from handwriting (137).

Both meanings are related however, as shown by the two senses of the verb 'to draw', which means 'to pull threads' and also 'to scribe traces' (Ingold 129). Both meanings were also brought together by John Ruskin in his lectures on the art of engraving, given in 1872 and published under the title *Ariadne Florentina* (1873-1875). In his first lecture entitled "Definition of the Art of Engraving" he defines engraving as the "art of scratch":

> But **the primitive line**, the first and last, generally the best of lines, is that which you have elementary faculty of at your fingers' ends, and which kittens can draw as well as you – **the scratch**.
> […] **Engraving, then, is in brief terms, the Art of Scratch**. It is essentially the cutting into a solid substance for the sake of making your ideas as permanent as possible, – graven with an iron pen in the Rock for ever. ***Permanence*, you observe, is the object, not multiplicability**; – that is quite an accidental, sometimes not even a desirable, attribute of engraving. (27-28)
> […] To engrave is, in final strictness, "**to decorate a surface with furrows**." […] A ploughed field is the purest type of such art" (29-30, *emphasis mine*).

Ruskin calls the incising tool "a solid ploughshare" (67) and in order to support his demonstration he chooses Hans Holbein the Younger's woodcut "The Last Furrow" (or "the Ploughman"), from the series *The Dance of Death* (1526-1538) (74-75).

In the last conference, Ruskin explains that he chose the title of his lectures in connection with the genealogy of the "methods of labyrinthine ornament" (211), a tradition he traces back to the maze in Crete, to the "spiral waves of the waters of Babylon", Greek vase, Christian manuscript and to the arabesques of Venice and Rome (212). The primal graphic line is a scratch on a surface, a sign in the shape of a maze, which is "connected with writing" (211) and with:

> […] the orders of decorative design which are especially expressible by engraving, and which belong to a group of art-instincts scarcely now to be understood, much less recovered […] – the instincts, namely, for the arrangement of pure line, in labyrinthine intricacy […]. (211)

Then he goes on to describe an "old silken sampler" hanging on the wall of his hotel room and representing the "domestic life of Abraham" (212). He compares the "involution of such ingenious needlework" with "the truest works of Florentine engraving" (213), just as he has previously compared engraving with lacework (111-112). He adds the condescending but revealing remark that "[s]uch work as this means the patience and simplicity of all feminine life" (213).

As J. Hillis Miller has noted, Ruskin puts engraving, weaving and embroidery "under the double aegis of Penelope and Ariadne" (Miller 76). The semiotic congeniality between writing/story-telling and engraving/weaving is represented by the image of Ariadne's thread retracing the pattern of the carved labyrinth (Ruskin 211). By doing so, Ruskin conflates two modes of production – weaving fabric or incising a surface. However he separates threading and scratching along gender lines: needlework is a feminine activity whereas engraving and writing – elevated forms of needlework – are masculine.

He also retains another major difference. Engravings are produced by carving a trace into stone or wood. Such "labyrinths of safe incision" (61) differ from Ariadne's thread and Penelope's weaving insofar as they cannot be unmade: engraving entails "a permanent cut or furrow in something" (8). The incised line is a "conclusive" line, a line "without repentance" (31), in a word, a static line.

Ariadne's thread on the contrary is a moving line that can be wound into or unwound from a ball of yarn, just as Penelope's woven shroud can be unmade every night.

Ruskin also makes a significant pun on the word engraving: "[t]he central syllable of the word has become a sorrowful one, meaning the most permanent of furrows" (8). The idea that the primeval engraving is a scratch into the earth to make a grave is repeated in the closing lines of his last conference when he refers to the resting place of the engraver Thomas Bewick and his friend the book-binder Gilbert Gray: "[a]nd what graving on the sacred cliffs of Egypt ever honoured them, as that grass-dimmed furrow does the mounds of our Northern land?" (224). This genealogy is confirmed by Debray's analysis of the funeral origin of images based on the Greek etymology of the word "sign" that derives from the word sema, meaning "tombstone". The primitive steles and tombstones bearing the first graphic signs are the forebears of engraved and imprinted surfaces (Debray 29-30).

Ruskin underlines the cultural importance of wood-engraving and copperplate. He quotes the German historian Alfred Woltmann who argues that wood-engraving "prepared the way" for book-printing: "*[b]ook-printing and picture-printing* have both the same inner cause for their origin, namely, the impulse to make each mental gain a common blessing" (35). Yet Ruskin's conferences are also an indictment of modern methods of industrial mass-reproduction at a time when metal- and wood-engraving are in danger of being superseded by photographic processes and are losing their genuine qualities because of hack work (9-10).

Engravings are what Nelson Goodman calls multiple autographic objects (Goodman 1968): they are singular works in the first stage of their making, when a block or a plate is carved, and multiple in the second stage since printing consists in producing a number of copies. To Gérard Genette, who borrows and revises Goodman's categories, producing multiple copies is even the sole *raison d'être* of engraving (Genette 59). Significantly Ruskin dismisses "multiplicability" as a defining term for engraving, because he downplays reproduction in favour of the original creative gesture producing a scratch on a surface, and which, according to him, is losing its distinctiveness with the industrial use of woodblocks in 19th-century printing: the original scratch is now merely the first stage in a process of mass-reproduction. Its autographic quality loses its central importance as handicraft is threatened by industrial processes. This is why Ruskin consciously ignores the industrial division of labour or rather deplores what Ingold describes as "the decomposition of skill into the components of creative intelligence and imagination on the one hand, and routine or habitual bodily techniques on the other" (Ingold 127).

Drawing from Raymond Williams's *Keywords* (1976), Ingold locates the premise of the opposition between manual and creative work in England at the end of the eighteenth century, and he argues that "the issue revolved around the status of engraving" (127). Originally "it was the technique of engraving that broke the link between the gesture and its trace, [and] immobilized the letter or character" (139). Generally speaking, the transition from handwriting to print brought about "the disconnection of the gestural movement from its graphic inscription" (139), as the text was no longer "woven" but assembled. This division was going to have far-reaching consequences which are spelled out in the opposition between manual craft and industrial work. The main difference between the "flowing letter-line of the manuscript" (91) and the line of printed type is that the former is a moving line while the latter is static. The cultural moment in the Western world when the moving line turns into a static one, is also the moment

when the engraved line – the "scratch" – becomes multipliable thanks to the new printing technology.

Significantly, whenever the separation between manual and creative work, or image and type is counteracted, unity of design is advocated. For instance, critique of the industrial division of labour was part of Walter Crane and William Morris's socialist projects, which included a revival of handicraft and the restored unity of craft and design. In his essay "Art and Handicraft" in *The Claims of Decorative Art* (1892), Crane echoes Ruskin: "[i]n the midst of the full tide of mechanical invention and unheard-of ingenuity in the adaptation of machinery, we come back to the *hand*, as the best piece of machinery after all" (Crane 62). Four centuries before the Arts and Crafts movement, the technical congeniality between writing and drawing in printing was affirmed at the very moment when movable type started being used, with the production of block books from the 1450s to the 1470s: in this particular case, both written and drawn lines were cut in woodblocks as the text was still handwritten script.

There was also a way in which woodcuts were used as ancillary tools for handicraft: blackwork embroidery in England from the reign of Henry VIII to the early 17th century. Well-known examples of black silk embroidered on white linen appear in Holbein's paintings, such as *Portrait of Jane Seymour* (1536-1537) in which her shirt is embroidered in 'Holbein stitch' – a reminder that he was also working as fashion designer at the court of Henry VIII. Similar motifs and patterns were used for blackwork embroidery as well as in interior and exterior decoration, "producing a certain unity among all the decorative arts" (Geddes 11). One of the factors of evolution was the appearance of pattern books containing woodcut illustrations (29). The blocks were re-used for various publications, and were either imported to or produced in England – increasingly so from Elizabeth I's reign. Translation from woodcuts to embroidery became common:

> The visual affinity of black on white embroidery with printed illustration, gave rise to the use of motifs and designs which were often copied directly from engravings, not only from pattern-books specially intended for embroidery, but from herbals, bestiaries, and translations from Greek and Latin writings (such as *Aesop's Fables*). (29)

So when Byatt and her editor chose Ford's illustration from a previous work to accompany her text, they merely replicated what used to be a common way of using illustrative woodcuts, and participated in what Geddes calls "interchange of illustrative matter" (29). It now remains to define the relationship between text and illustration in "The Glass Coffin".

Embroidery

In "Arachne" Byatt traces the genesis of her own work back to her childhood's needlework classes:

> **Needlework of all kinds is a woman's art**. For that reason, perhaps, **I hated it as a child**. I remember trying to hem a dreadful bright purple apron in needlework lessons. I couldn't make the thread go forward. It went over and over producing lumps, bumps and knots, with no progression, stained with my blood, red and brown on grey-white […].
> **I never lifted my nose far enough** from the bloody point and the snarled threads, to see the pattern I was making, or following, **for we embroidered on 'transfers'**, someone else's shadowed form of flowers and leaves in **ghostly** blue lines, ironed on to the linen we worked. (Terry 136-137, *emphasis mine*)

As she grew up, she turned such laborious experience into a more creative and positive one, and the craft provided her with the fundamental metaphor for her writing as threading a line. Her intertextual system of cross-references works as an ever-connecting web of threads, described in a way that recalls the "thread of emulation, of reworking" (143) guaranteeing hypertextual continuity:

> [T]he movement, the intricate **knotting and joining and change in tension and direction of a thread**, became the image I had in my own mind of the things I wrote; you might have an expanse of rosy and flaming lights, you might have a tree of crimson and golden apples, but always you had the thread that **persisted, connected, continued**. (138, *emphasis mine*)

Byatt hated needlework as a child, because as gendered craft it was devolved to women who should not seek more elevated creative forms of fulfilment, a lesson the headmistress taught her pupils: "[s]he had, she said, written books and made tablecloths, and each was good in its kind, but tablecloths were more honest, and better, and gave more pleasure" (138). Byatt compares the "levelling" headmistress with "the fairy godmother who turned gold threads back into dull straw" (139).

In that respect the princess's golden hair in "The Glass Coffin" symbolises reclaimed creativity as against the "constraints, concrete and narrative, inflicted on women by men" – and also self-inflicted – as represented by the static glass coffin (Mundler 16). In Ford's illustration the drawing of the coffin imitates the vertical lines cut along the grain in a wood-engraving: it renders the transparency of the glass but it also gives it a textile texture, which reinforces the impression that a screen is to be lifted. Consequently the glass dome and the coffin look like a cocoon, therefore implying rebirth and metamorphosis. The flowing line of the gold threads is reclaimed by a woman writer who reads the impending liberation of the princess as the empowerment of women reclaiming handicraft as creative art after a long period of gestation. In doing so she ascribes a new meaning to the illustration and she locates Ford's picture precisely where a new thread is knotted and joined, producing a "change in tension and direction".

Setting an illustration made by a male artist side by side with a tale written by a female author such as Byatt creates a particular effect related to the definition of intertext as fabric or web and to the politics of gender division. In a way the configuration of text and image in Byatt's story replicates the gendered opposition between weaving/story-telling and engraving – inasmuch as Ford's illustration looks like one – as the two separate areas of respectively feminine and masculine competence described in Ruskin's lectures. Such a reading reverses the "marital trope" in *fin-de-siècle* illustrated books explored by Lorraine Kooistra whereby the "verbal/creative text" is male and the "visual/critical text" is female (Kooistra 4, 10), in which case, the ancillary illustration represents a dissenting voice and potential disorder, therefore questioning the male dominance of the text. Aubrey Beardsley's "embroidery" of Pope's text is an instance of such critical visual mode, all the more as embroidery is "something you do to a text" (Frankel 262). Byatt's text, however, is a later addition to the hypertextual series of translations from Lang to Ford. For chronological reasons, it is her text that "does something" to the illustration and in that respect what is performed by the new narrative can be construed as embroidery onto an older image and text.

Kooistra's concept of "bitextuality" – whereby the illustrated book is a composite "imagetext", as defined by W.J.T Mitchell – proves very useful as it allows to explore how illustrative image and text "coproduce meaning in dialogue with each other" (Kooistra 4) while regarding both modes of expression as text. For

practical and analytical reason, I will also use the word "canvas" instead of "text" in order to accommodate the role of embroidery in the configuration of image and text explored in this paper.

When you embroider on transfer, the underlying pattern traced on the surface of the page disappears because it is pricked by the needle and because its traces are covered by thread. This is why there are few surviving copies of pattern books for embroidery because the pages were pricked for the pattern to be transferred onto fabric (Geddes 29). As Ingold explains, the embroiderer "starts with traces on a surface, as on the page of her pattern book, but in her activity with the needle she translates those traces into threads. In so doing, moreover, she contrives to make the surface of the fabric disappear" (Ingold 52). This implies that the embroiderer preserves the flowing quality of the moving line, which supersedes the disappearing pattern. Continuity and motion are grounded in the kinetic analogy between handwriting and embroidering running stitches (93).Therefore Ford's original illustration can be assigned the role of pre-existing pattern onto which a new narrative is metaphorically embroidered, as Byatt's version offers a new interpretation of the tale. The use of the writer/embroiderer's pen/needle as incising tool can be construed as competing with male technique and power – be it sexual, economic or ideological. Ultimately Byatt – under the aegis of Arachne – incorporates the image into her own intertextual fabric or web, as suggested by the texture of the glass boxes imitating linen and the composition of the illustration in the shape of a page that is about to be turned, or a tapestry about to be lifted as the underlying pattern is superseded by the line of woven text in the act of story-telling.

However the representation of the coffin in Ford's illustration also invites a metatextual reading that takes into account the cultural importance of wood-engraving. This image is technologically ambivalent because it is a pen and ink drawing printed by process line-block, but it masquerades as a wood-engraving. As pointed out earlier on, it is sometimes difficult to tell one from the other as line-blocks "perform in printing exactly like a wood-engraved block" (Gascoigne 33). In Ford's illustration the surface of the glass boxes has a textile quality but its meaning is reversible: it evokes a cocoon but also a shroud, giving the picture a funeral aspect. This funeral aspect is underlined by Ruskin who conceives of engraving as originating in the primal scratch which he compares with a grave – "the most permanent of furrows" (Ruskin 8). And because it is used as frontispiece, the illustration is also given a monumental aspect that reinforces the funeral analogy – this time with a tombstone. As such the image encapsulates the memory of the origin of graphic signs as engraved traces – on the first funeral monuments and tombstones (Debray 26-27).



Fig. 3 — André Quillivic, *En pleine mer* (1921), in Byatt, A.S., "Gode's Story", *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* [1994] 1995, p. 25. © Adagp, Paris 2013.

This funeral aspect is also shared by the illustration to "Gode's Story", the second tale in *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye: En pleine mer* is a wood-engraving by the Breton engraver and sculptor René Quillivic (1921) and it represents fishing boats in a stormy sea (fig. 3). It illustrates a tale in which the hero sees the spirits of the dead in the Baie des Trépassés, riding the crests of "the long lines of the waves [that] came in from the Ocean, one after another after another, and always another" (*Djinn* 36). This image provides a link with Holbein's "The Last Furrow" as both of them are static, "conclusive" representations of motion – be it ploughing the

earth, or sailing along the troughs of the waves: the woodcutter or engraver's gesture while cutting the wood replicates the back-and-forth motion of the plough, which is comparable to that of the loom's shuttle but in so doing he arrests the motion whose trace turns into "the most permanent of furrows", to use Ruskin's expression. In that respect the coffin signifies the static aspect of engraved images that is counteracted by the narrative's thread – the moving line symbolised by the flowing hair of the princess – but also by the new photographic mode of reproduction which preserves the autographic quality of the original drawing.

To Byatt, embroidery on transfers was preliminary practice in the manual art of writing as handicraft, as threading a line. But when you look at her text and its illustration as woven into the intertextual fabric, you are looking at printed type and image, not at handmade artefacts. Embroidery is no longer a material mode of production here but a trope, used to describe story-telling as threading a line. As such it is the figurative memory of the original gesture producing signs as artefacts, and it is encoded within particular texts and images. The fact that Byatt "lifted her nose" from her embroidery symbolises the shift from the literal and material to the metaphorical level.

However the trope of embroidery encapsulates reconciliation between the two competing modes of production of signs – threads and scratches – because it involves the use of an incising tool – the needle – and of thread. It conflates the motionlessness of engraving and print with the flowing quality of the line in weaving and handwriting. Therefore it provides a metaphorical expression for the dialectic interrelationship between threads and traces, which, Ingold demonstrates, are "transforms of one another": "[t]hreads have a way of turning into traces, and vice versa. Moreover whenever threads turn into traces, surfaces are formed, and whenever traces turn into threads, they are dissolved" – making references to weaving and embroidery respectively (Ingold 2). As the new narrative thread takes over and incorporates the illustration, the older surface disappears, but once reproduced in print, the text and its illustration are now part of a new canvas, a new surface formed by the printed traces. On the one hand, print immobilizes type and image, breaking the link between the original gesture and the reproduction of its trace, causing the loss of the "scripting authorial presence" of the manuscript (Curtis 46), of the autographic scratches and lines of engravings and of drawings. On the other hand, reproducible type and image are technologically turned into a homogeneous mass-produced canvas allowing for wide dissemination and for further hypertextual reprise, a canvas for future plots and images to be embroidered onto it. In this respect, type and image are traces formed on the printed surface and this printed canvas is the technological aspect of text and intertext as metaphorical fabric. In the era of mass-reproduction the canvas has become one of the technological conditions for keeping the hypertextual process going and for the possibility of cross-media transfer. This in turn guarantees the essential mutability of signs that evolve with each translation and relocation.

Conclusion

Byatt is aware of the risk of self-repetition and "ossification" (Letissier 21). Her stories contain many instances of characters imprisoned within a closed system, such as the main character in her tale "The Story of the Eldest Princess", caught in a pre-formed plot: "I am in a pattern I know, and I suspect I have no power to break it" (*Djinn* 48); or like "a very fat and self-satisfied Spider in the centre of her shining Web" – Christabel's ironic self-definition (*Possession* 97). Threads may

lead you somewhere: the silk threads of baby spiders travelling in the air are the metaphorical threads of new stories signifying open-endedness (*Djinn* 71). But spider webs are also "tatters of the uninhabited" (Terry 147), and are lethal means of entanglement. The glass dome and the coffin look like a cocoon – but also like a spider's silken trap.

The spinners working in the foreground of *Las Hilanderas* represent handicraft as pre-condition for art, but also as a form of contest. Reflecting on the silken texture of Velazquez's painting, Byatt says that his "tribute to [Titian and Rubens] is thus an act both of homage and competition. He has painted the Titian, the Rubens, but converted the surface to woven silk" (Terry 142), – or rather what looks like woven silk.

Possession is a text which famously produces its own critical corpus through pastiche of Victorian texts and of contemporary works of criticism. The reader's pleasure of recognition, of undoing the threads, and establishing connections is inscribed in her texts as constant *mise en abyme*, while fictional articles such as "Arachne's Broken Woof: Art as Discarded Spinning in the Poems of LaMotte" (*Possession* 43) dissuade any claims of critical originality on the part of the reader. Yet Byatt is concerned with ways of avoiding postmodernist tautology and her work also reflects anxieties about the survival of culture and the possible failure of transmission: if her writing must remain "a fluid, endlessly interconnected web" (Terry 143), the threads must be as solid as spider silk, a "crystalline cable" which is made of "rock-solid protein" (157), in other words, a mesh of lines that acquires the quality of a glass vessel. Likewise, for signs to endure, they require the flowing quality of threading lines as well as the monumental and definitive quality of scratches.

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