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► **To cite this version:**

Armelle Parey. Revolutionary Closure in A. S. Byatt's Neo-Victorian Fiction. *Études britanniques contemporaines - Revue de la Société d'études anglaises contemporaines*, 2019, "Revolutions", 56, [14 p.]. <10.4000/ebc.6565>. <hal-02388442>

HAL Id: hal-02388442

<https://hal.science/hal-02388442v1>

Submitted on 28 May 2024

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ebc/6565>

DOI: 10.4000/ebc.6565

ISSN: 2271-5444

Publisher

Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée

Brought to you by Université de Rouen Normandie – Bibliothèque Universitaire



Electronic reference

Armelle Parey, "Revolutionary Closure in A. S. Byatt's Neo-Victorian Fiction", *Études britanniques contemporaines* [Online], 56 | 2019, Online since 01 March 2019, connection on 28 May 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ebc/6565> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.6565>

This text was automatically generated on February 16, 2023.



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Introduction

- 1 For Frank Kermode, 'It is one of the great charms of books that they have to end' (23). The question is: *how* do they end? For Kermode, ending means closing and closure, which is both necessary and satisfying because it contributes to the process of making sense of one's life for the reader: 'to make sense of their span, [men] need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and poems' (Kermode 7). Yet, endings and closure are not synonymous as closure may or may not characterise the ending. Indeed, while the ending of a novel refers to the final pages of a text, closure, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith explains, conveys 'the sense of stable conclusiveness, finality or "clinch"' (2) and Marjorie Garber notes: 'it seems to imply a wrapping up, a completing of the circuit' (271). In Noël Carroll's words, 'The notion of closure refers to the sense of finality with which a piece of music, a poem, or a story concludes. It is the impression that exactly the point where the work does end is just the right point. [. . .] Closure yields a feeling of completeness' (2). For Catherine Belsey, closure—a feature of classic realism—means 'disclosure, the dissolution of enigma through the re-establishment of order' (Belsey 70). Closure thus seems to correspond to some extent to the 'closed ending' as opposed to the open ending associated with modernism and promoted in E.M. Forster's concluding words in his last lecture: 'Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not rounding off but opening out' (Forster 149). The notion of closure was again challenged by deconstructionist critics (see Abbott 210) and rejected by 'the postmodern suspicion of closure, of both its arbitrariness and its foreclosing interpretative power' (Hutcheon 66).
- 2 Surprisingly, closure is often a characteristic of a number of neo-Victorian novels that represent Victorian times while foregrounding the distance between the time represented

and the time of the representation. Indeed, in Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's words, truly neo-Victorian 'texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*' (Heilmann and Llewellyn 4). This distance usually allows for revision and sometimes, alternative versions of stories or history, or explorations of aspects of the Victorian era originally left in the shadows by its novelists.¹ One of the dimensions of the genre is indeed its political agenda. Endings are of particular interest in this context since they are always significant in a novel as the sign of the *Zeitgeist*.² Marianne Hirsch thus points out that in the field of feminist studies, the revision of endings is one of the 'emancipatory strategies' available to writers (Ingersoll 110). The notion of revising or re-visioning endings is particularly interesting in the case of neo-Victorian novels because of the tradition they write against or in relation to: indeed, even though conventions could be circumvented,³ the ending has tended to be considered as a supposedly highly conventional locus in Victorian fiction since it was openly mocked by Henry James who described it as 'a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs and cheerful remarks' (590).⁴ Despite the studies conducted by Barbara Weiss, Maryanne C. Ward and Alison Booth that point to the complexity of Victorian endings, the latter are still assumed to offer the epitome of stability and closure and for Louisa Hadley, this mistaken view informs neo-Victorian endings: 'In their transformation of Victorian endings, Neo-Victorian fictions engage with a stereotypical view of Victorian endings as neat and fixed' (Hadley 182). In fact, critics often concur that neo-Victorian novels that supposedly offer a revision of the past are rather timid or reactionary when it comes to conclusions: Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn thus observe that 'Neo-Victorian fiction does, of course, fall into the trap of providing us with that tying up of everything in a neat little package [. . .]' (Heilmann and Llewellyn 13) and that 'the neo-Victorian marks a return to the classic form of the nineteenth-century novel in a way that, structurally at least, seems often to negate the experiments of the modernist movement' (Heilmann and Llewellyn 16).

- 3 The neo-Victorian is a facet of A. S. Byatt's oeuvre. 'Precipice-Encurled' (1987), *Possession* (1990) and the two novellas included in *Angels and Insects* (1992) all qualify as neo-Victorian⁵ and it will be interesting to read these in the context of both the above statements regarding the genre and Byatt's unorthodox stand regarding endings in 1990. In an interview with Nicolas Tredell after the publication of *Possession*, she declared:

I think closure is the really revolutionary narrative mode at the moment. Well, it must be, these things come in circle. I think part of the excitement about fairy tales [. . .] is that they do have a beginning, a middle and an end, and I think people have a huge hunger for this. (Tredell 59)

- 4 Byatt thus supports the traditional form of narrative since Aristotle who edicted that 'A whole is what has a beginning and middle and end' (1450b). She actually disagrees with—or at least qualifies—Virginia Woolf's famous statement on fiction:

The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel [. . .] Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? (150)

- 5 As far as Byatt is concerned, 'We may be hit by random impressions, but if we're intelligent we immediately put them in order' (Tredell 60), which means plotting them.
- 6 Byatt has expressed her indefatigable belief in narrative on many occasions⁶ but it is necessary to contextualise this particular statement on closure being a 'revolutionary narrative mode'. It was indeed made at a time when closure was considered as 'an ideological imposition' by the post-structuralists, as Nicholas Tredell himself says (59), part of 'a mode of "totalizing" representation' (Hutcheon 59). Closure was then perceived as reactionary, a characteristic of the classic realist text (Belsey 70) and replaced in postmodern novels by unfixed, unstable endings. That's why she says closure is revolutionary.
- 7 This paper proposes to assess how revolutionary closure is in Byatt's neo-Victorian fiction. The word 'revolutionary' may sound at odds with Byatt's work that was never associated to experimentalism and the literary avant-garde. Indeed the first meaning of the word 'revolution' and of the adjective derived from it is: 'complete, drastic and usually far-reaching change in ideas, social habits, ways of doing things, etc.' (Chambers). However, the second meaning which evokes 'one complete circle or turn round an axis' (Chambers) may be accurate to depict the kind of closure achieved in Byatt's neo-Victorian texts, since it is linked to the idea of a cycle, to a return to a point that is not exactly the same as the previous one, as in a spiral: using traditional closure, yet not the same. This, in Earl Ingersoll's study of gender and endings, is to be found in 'narratives following the feminine pattern of circle or cycle' (193). Ingersoll indeed derives a 'feminine paradigm' from Marianne Hirsch's work on a female plot⁷ in which 'No clearcut [sic] sense of closure ensues and the narrative remains prospective and proleptic, poised at break of day, or focused on the process rather than the product of vision' (Hirsch 118 quoted in Ingersoll 111).⁸ On the other hand, the idea of closure as 'clinch' is part of what Ingersoll calls the 'masculine paradigm': 'the masculine model of linearity and dramatic climax' (Ingersoll 193), *i.e.* traditional narratives that are characterised by a final explanation, that offer a 'climax variety of ending' (Ingersoll 29), a paradigm Ingersoll bases on Peter Brooks's argument in *Reading for the Plot*.⁹ This paradigm, Ingersoll says, remains the norm even if it finds its contradiction in pastiches and multiple endings for instance, because this very contradiction in fact only reaffirms the centrality of the paradigm, 'confirm[ing] the traditional notion of ending as the final determinant of a narrative's meaning' (Ingersoll 112). Finally, Ingersoll identifies a real alternative in novels that do not even try to write back to the masculine paradigm but completely ignore it, 'working in a space where the older model no longer has a presence' (Ingersoll 18), favouring fragmentation and inconclusiveness.¹⁰
- 8 Finally, the issue of closure and endings in Byatt's fiction can be harnessed to the question of the writer's appraisal and concern for the representation of the past. Indeed, the three neo-Victorian works this paper will now consider display different appropriations of closure that attest to a self-reflexive and self-conscious approach to the representation of the past.

(Un)spiralling in 'Precipice-Encurled'

- 9 'Precipice-Encurled' is Byatt's first neo-Victorian text. It displays the genre's self-reflexive representation of the past and operates a blend of fact and fiction with real and

invented characters. A story originally published in the collection entitled *Sugar and Other Stories* (1987), it is much shorter than the other texts considered here but is significant for its circular structure.

- 10 Indeed, the narrative has an embedded structure like a spiral, following an encircling movement that illustrates the title of the story. The story is divided into parts respectively dedicated to the real-life but minor figure of Mrs Bronson, a scholar-biographer character who researches the past, the poet Robert Browning and the stories of fictional Juliana and Joshua Riddell aborted by the latter's untimely death which are at the heart of the narrative. After Joshua's death, the narrative follows a quick unspiralling or inverted movement that returns to the scholar's appreciation of Mrs Bronson in the present (tense). This is more however than an instance of circularity, 'a return to any aspect of the beginning' (Gerlach 10) which Gerlach perceives as 'one form of antithesis', *i.e.*: 'any opposition, often characterized by irony, that indicates something has polarized into extremes' (Gerlach 10). Indeed, the very first part and the final return to Mrs Bronson bear clear marks of similarity but also of difference. Nearly the same sentence opens both paragraphs 'The woman sits by the window' (185) becomes 'The lady sits by the window' (213) but the lady now disappears in the excerpt of letters and behind the well-known figure of the poet. Similarly, the present tense appears in both sections but while in the first part it depicts the characteristics of the lady, it is now used to report the actions of the poet. The assertive succession of Browning's actions related at the end of the last but one paragraph¹¹ parodies the stability and finality enforced by the scholar biographer on the past.
- 11 The story does not have a happy ending as it is about missed opportunities, frustrated love: 'Both love stories are left without conclusions' (Campbell 96) and this appears in the structure of the story that is at odds with Ingersoll's masculine paradigm and does not follow a linear unfolding but folds back upon itself. 'Precipice-Encurled' however concludes with a final paragraph of only one sentence which reads like 'a coda', a segment 'that distances the reader from the story by altering the point of view or summarizing the passing of time' (Gerlach 12): 'Aunt Juliana kept, pressed in the family Bible, a curious portrait of a young girl, who looked out of one live eye and one blank, unseeing one, oval like those of angels on monumental sculpture' (214). Juliana is here referred to as 'Aunt Juliana', which indicates the passing of time and indirectly confirms the character's earlier fears that she would never marry. The changes brought by time are stressed with the indefinite article in 'a young girl' that is thus posited as distinct from Juliana. Contradicting the sense of closure partly set up by the spiral structure of the story, by the scholar's narrative and by the very coda itself, this last sentence depicts an uncompleted piece of work—Joshua's unfinished drawing of Juliana—and thus foregrounds the sense of incompleteness. It picks up on the theme of suspension by focusing on the open-endedness of the interrupted portrait.
- 12 Finally, like the encounter in the postscript in *Possession* that escapes the characters of the twentieth-century scholars, this piece of information is beyond the range of the scholar-biographer and questions the making of official memory, all the more so with the comparison established between the unfinished portrait and 'monumental sculpture', a phrase that connotes memento and memorial.

Closure and Ambiguity in *Possession*

- 13 Even though Byatt considers *Possession* as a truly feminist book (see Tredell 60), some critics have taken issue with the novelist for what they read as conservative politics in *Possession* on several counts. For Buxton, for instance, it is 'hardly a subversive text; indeed its ideology is a heterosexual, humanist one' (216) notably because the relationship between Blanche and Christabel does not survive. The desire to reach conclusions—as in making sense of facts and obtaining explanations—is a positive driving force in *Possession*. The novel itself abounds with conclusions if we believe Jean-Louis Chevalier who found 'six moments of a crowning—or contributing to the crowning framework [...] before the actual coronation of the epilogue' (117). To some extent, *Possession* displays Ingersoll's 'masculine paradigm'. Indeed, it offers closure which, in Carroll's words, 'correlates with answering all the presiding macro-questions that the story has propped' (Carroll 5), that is answering the questions that structure the entire text or most of it, questions that 'have been planted by the author in a way that makes them practically unavoidable for the intended audience' (Carroll 4). Thus, in *Possession*, the detective plot is solved and, as programmed by the subtitle to the novel, the contemporary romance is granted 'a happy ending that involves requited love; but it is an updated pattern since freedom and flexibility dominate Roland's proposal to Maud' (Parey 2012, 195). But Byatt deflects this sense of closure by exaggerating it, by multiplying the conventions to the extent that it seems 'comic' to Mariadele Boccardi (64), and by adding the last pages headed 'Postscript 1868' that partly challenge the conclusions previously reached, so that both participate in Byatt's questioning of the representation of the past. Indeed, Byatt maintains ambivalence in the ending: the tying up of all the threads, the solution to the detective investigation in the last chapter(s) is complicated by the postscript that reveals that Ash knew all along about the existence of the child. This foregrounds the textuality of the past and our limits in knowing the past but it also adds to the reader's sense of closure since, in Boccardi's words, 'from a readerly perspective, it provides the full (dis)closure of events, thus satisfying their desire for knowledge' (Boccardi 75). Closure is also challenged by the postscript's own ambiguity since on the one hand, it closes the story by rounding off the character of Ash and, on the other hand, it opens it up by challenging the conclusion previously reached. Furthermore, the atmosphere of the postscript has an unreal quality and conveys transience.¹²
- 14 Additionally, Byatt actually wrote a very brief sequel to *Possession*, which Jane Campbell calls 'the Fourth ending of *Possession*' (Campbell 275), that was published in a special issue of *Victorian Poetry* devoted to women poets in 1995. This addendum/appendix to *Possession* was requested by Linda K. Hughes, a specialist in nineteenth-century literature, and has never been included in re-editions of the novel. Yet, it is worth considering it as a new or additional ending to Byatt's novel as it develops the ambiguity Byatt displays towards closure.
- 15 The text is a letter supposedly signed by Maud Mitchell-Bailey after finding unpublished fragments of poems in Christabel's handwriting. The inclusion of writings by fictional characters in an academic journal on Victorian poetry pursues the game of the porous border between fact and fiction which prevents stability and closure, as Maud Mitchell-Bailey addresses a real-life critic and makes a reference to A. S. Byatt's story 'The Djinn in

the *Nightingale's Eye*' (1994). The additional text continues both the twentieth-century story and the Victorian one. We gather from it that Maud and Roland married and Maud's new hyphenated name and signature symbolises the possibility of combining work and love that was denied to Christabel. As for the Victorian story, the added pages complete it but also raise new questions. Like the postscript in which she wanted to tip the balance in favour of Ash,¹³ '[her] favourite character' ('a conversation'), this letter implies some sort of reward for LaMotte who suffered from her daughter's dislike in *Possession*. The aspect that is continued is indeed that of the relationship between Christabel and her unbeknown-to-herself daughter, balancing the encounter between Ash and Maia in the postscript and contradicting the 'Me she did not love' in Christabel's last letter to Ash (501). Indeed, Maia's drawing and Christabel's poems on both sides of the same piece of paper suggest some artistic connection between the two. Moreover, Maia Bailey now calls herself or is at least referred to as Maia LaMotte, which supposes an acknowledgement somehow of the direct filiation and raises questions as to how, when and by whom the acknowledgement was brought about. Besides, the reference to 'other works' supposed a sustained drawing activity.

- 16 Besides, the letter accompanies drafts of poems by Christabel that are about the end of life and death, one of them beginning with 'When I come to my last home' (3). This new appendix to *Possession*, like the postscript, challenges the sense of closure achieved, and contains its own contradiction between the topic of finality in the poems and the unfinished aspect that the letter insists on: 'fragments' that are 'not signed' with no known 'finished or printed version of them' found behind 'unfinished' drawings. Finally, by adding to the narrative of *Possession*, this fragment points to an unfathomable past that remains beyond our reach but also to the arbitrariness of any narrative. In the words of the narrator in Mary Norton's *The Borrowers* (1952): 'stories never really end. They can go on and on and on. It's just that sometimes, at a certain point, one stops telling them' (212).

Unexpectedness in *Angels and Insects*

- 17 Contrary to *Possession*, neither of the texts that make up *Angels and Insects* comprise a twentieth-century vantage point of view but they share an omniscient narrator. Byatt wrote at length in *On Histories and Stories* about how and why she wrote the texts which she refers to as 'my two linked historical novellas, *Morpho Eugenia* and *The Conjugal Angel*, published together as *Angels and Insects*' (92) but she does not elaborate at all on the 'link' and comments on the novellas separately. The diegetic link seems tenuous indeed, in the guise of Captain Papagay, a minor character who appears in the last paragraph of the first story set in 1859, and whose widow is one of the fictional characters in the second story set a few years later, in 1875. Richard Todd however has vaguely remarked that 'certain themes recur in the two stories' (30) and wondered if 'each story, taken in isolation, is quite the same as the effect of their juxtaposition under one title' (30). Without elaborating on the idea, Ingersoll asserts the novellas should be read as a single text and that the whole—like Julian Barnes's *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*—forms a variety of a 'composite novel' (228)¹⁴ that defies the usual masculine plot. For Ingersoll, *Angels and Insects* is indeed an example of a novel ignoring the "masculine paradigm" and looking for other structures and types of narrative and a different teleology. However,

considering the ending to each text separately is also worthwhile since it attests to the variety of Byatt's skills to comment on the representation of the past.

- 18 'Morpho Eugenia' (set in 1859) starts in a constricting Victorian ballroom where manners have to be respected and ends on a ship on its way to the Amazon with a different woman from the one the protagonist courted for the best part of the story and married. As pointed out by Ingersoll, the narrative initially misleads the reader with the perspective of a marriage-plot (229–30) but Adamson marries Eugenia in the course of the story and not at the end, shaking the reader out of their expectations. Moreover, after recounting the wedding night, the narrator intervenes:

And so they lived happily ever after? Between the end of the fairy story with its bridal triumph, between the end of the novel, with its hard-won moral vision, and the brief glimpse of death and due succession, lies a placid pseudo-eternity of harmony, of increasing affection and budding and crowing babes, of ripe orchards and heavy-headed cornfields, gathered in on hot nights. (69)

- 19 Not only does this metafictional comment take up a common phrase that draws attention to the literary conventions used elsewhere and in the very text but it also evokes the underlying assumption regarding the ordinariness usually deemed 'nonnarratable'—i.e.: 'marked by its incapacity of generating a story' (Miller 273)¹⁵—and announces indirectly that it will deal with precisely this. The following pages go on to contradict the notion of a happy ending when Adamson develops frustration (72) with his work and his wife and her family—as he finds Edgar Alabaster raping one of the child-servants (106–107). The end of this period of frustration in the character's life and the ending to the story is brought about by the guided discovery of an incestuous relationship between his wife and one of her brothers. This revelation brings about a sense of closure insofar as the succession of white children is explained to William and to the reader but it also opens new horizons for the character (including new romantic ones) and thus prepares for an open ending. Significantly, this discovery does not answer any of the 'macro-questions' planted in the reader's mind in the beginning of the story. Ingersoll's traditional masculine paradigm is therefore disregarded.
- 20 After William's realisation of what has been going on behind his back, the third-person narrator adds '[t]wo more pictures' (158). The word 'pictures' conveys the static quality of the plotless scenes depicted, as opposed to stories or episodes. These pages act like an epilogue but one of a different kind as it gives information only about a few of the characters involved, it does not move very much in time and it certainly does not seal the fates of the characters. Composed of two parts, the second one only brings the events up to date, as it were, with the use of the present tense: 'their blood swims with the excitement of the future, and this is a good place to leave them, on the crest of a wave, between the ordered green fields and hedgerows, and the coiling, striving mass of forest along the Amazon shore' (160). The ending to 'Morpho Eugenia' is deliberately inconclusive: the narrator ostensibly leaves William Adamson and Matilda Crompton in transit and in transition, the ocean a liminal place. The characters are on their way to new adventures abroad, which may remind the reader of a Victorian tendency to use immigration as an alternative to death as an outcome for unruly characters in the nineteenth-century novel. It is true that there is no place in Victorian England and the literary canon for the unusual and illegal couple that William and Matilda now form but a link might also be drawn with the unfinished ending to Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* in which the heroine probably goes abroad with her husband scientist. The

narrative of 'Morpho Eugenia' ends a paragraph later with the apparently casual introduction of their Captain. The narrative never returns, even indirectly, to William and Matilda as Captain Papagay's apparently fated journey mentioned in 'The Conjugal Angel' is a different one (see Ingersoll 234).

- 21 Casually pronounced dead in the early pages of 'The Conjugal Angel' (168) in the course of the characterization of his widow by the narrator, Arturo Papagay re-appears in the last chapter of this second novella, ten years after his supposed drowning in the Antarctic. It is a 'conventional surprise ending' (Ingersoll 231) and it is a happy ending but it is significant that it does not have any direct link to the main part of plot of the story. Again, it does not answer any macro-question asked by the narrative. The plot itself, around the seances at Arthur Hallam's former fiancée, reaches closure in the previous chapter when Emily Jesse decides to give up the seances. A happy domestic ending sees the main characters gathered around the fireplace for tea. Through Sophy's thoughts, the whole event is described as 'a miracle' (287), stressing all the elements that made the situation possible and all those that might have rendered it impossible.
- 22 One of the common points between the two novellas that make up *Angels and Insects* is that they both renew and challenge the notion of closure. They take up the convention of the happy ending but the latter is defamiliarized as it is shown to be unlikely and contingent, and in 'Morpho Eugenia', detached from any notion of stability. Both novellas close on a night scene, which can read as a signal of closure but the outdoor location with an insistence on the elements propounds the idea of ongoing life. Finally, both force the reader to acknowledge the contrived fictional ending to the stories with, in 'Morpho Eugenia', 'Imagine...' (159) and in 'The Conjugal Angel', 'she thought [...] of how in stories, and very occasionally in sober fact, the cold and the sea give back what they have taken' (290).

Conclusion

- 23 In the end, closure may well be a persisting narrative mode. It operates a revolution in the sense that novels return to it with a change. Following the poststructuralist defiance towards plot and closure respectively observable, for instance, in B. S. Johnson's 'book in a box' *The Unfortunates* (1969) and David Lodge's cinematic ending to *Changing Places* (1975), the novel of the 1990s returned to plot, and to its arc ending in closure but with marked self-consciousness.
- 24 A recent instance of neo-Victorian fiction, Patricia Duncker's *Sophie and the Sybil* (2015) is self-conscious of belonging to the genre, with the inclusion of metafictional remarks about John Fowles's liminal *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). Duncker's novel also actually quotes George Eliot's famous comment on endings: 'Conclusions are the weak point of most authors, but some of the fault lies in the very nature of conclusion, which is at best a negation' (Duncker 67, Kermode 174). The final chapter, as in *Middlemarch*, is entitled 'finale' and Eliot is quoted almost verbatim in epigraph: 'for who can quit Young Lives after being long in Company with them, and not Desire to Know what befell them in After Years?' (Duncker 278).¹⁶ Duncker thus acknowledges 'a return to the classic form of the nineteenth-century novel' (Heilmann and Llewellyn 16) and self-consciously reproduces the Victorian epilogue. In her neo-Victorian fiction, Byatt never copies the supposedly typically Victorian last pages derided by Henry James and illustrated in *Middlemarch*. Byatt's own appropriation of closure in her neo-Victorian texts attest to

self-reflexivity and of her self-conscious approach to the past. Byatt may challenge closure by insisting on its contrived aspect, she may couple it with elements of incompleteness, she may apply it to the reader unprepared: elements that all foreground the construction of fiction and of our knowledge of the past. Yet, Byatt does not renounce closure because closure is part of the cycle of stories. As she commented in 'The Greatest Story Ever Told', 'We are all, like Scheherazade, under sentence of death, and we all think of our lives as narratives, with beginnings, middles and ends. Storytelling in general, and the *Thousand and One Nights* in particular, consoles us for endings with endless new beginnings' (*On Histories and Stories* 166).

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NOTES

1. Diverse examples include Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) that rewrites the story of Magwitch, the convict in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002) with their focus on Victorian lesbian characters, and Patricia Duncker's *Sophie and the Sybil, a Victorian Romance* (2015) that features George Eliot as one of its protagonists.
2. In Guy LARROUX's words, 'S'il est vrai que la convention gouverne les dénouements romanesques, il n'en reste pas moins que c'est probablement aussi la partie du livre où l'on aperçoit le mieux le travail de contestation [...] et où l'on saisit le mieux le signe des temps' (Larroux 9).
3. See, for instance, Maryanne C. WARD.
4. An example is to be found in the last pages of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* where Esther is granted a husband and house by her guardian and concludes her narrative on her domestic happiness or in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* whose 'Finale' goes over all the characters.
5. *Possession* can even be considered as the 'archetype and prototype of neo-Victorianism' (Gutleben 67–79).
6. For instance, when talking about Tom McCarthy whom she describes as a brilliant writer, she says he's wrong about killing narrative. 'People are born and they get married, terrible things happen to them, wonderful things happen to them and then they come to an end and really you can't kill [narrative], it sort of creeps up somewhere else' (Byatt 'Conversation').
7. It has been pointed out to me that Marianne Hirsch's notion of a female plot is influenced by Julia Kristeva's thoughts on women's perception of temporality as cyclical, based on repetition and eternity (see Kristeva 16).
8. Louisa Hadley's use of the phrase 'feminine endings' for neo-Victorian endings is different as it refers to the neo-Victorian 'transformation of their Victorian models at the level of the

feminine' (181), *i.e.* the specific representations of femininity visible in the endings to neo-Victorian novels.

9. Feminists have naturally taken issue with this sexist view of narrative. In Canadian writer Carol Shields's words, 'The old idea of the novel, the conclusion, the tying up and everything does not work very well with women's lives. It's what some feminists call the ejaculatory way of telling a story. Women's lives are more of an up and down, up and down, around, in a circle' (Shields 2000) and 'women's writing has already begun to dismantle the rigidities of genre [. . .] and to replace that oppressive narrative arc we've lived with so long, the line of rising action—tumescence, detumescence—what some feminists call the ejaculatory mode of storytelling' (Shields 2003: 35).

10. A recent example would be Rachel Cusk's latest work to date: in *Outline* and *Transit*, she purports to free narrative from a controlling agency and teleology through what seems to be neutrally reported conversations.

11. 'The poet returns to Venice, meets in the lady's drawing-room the Pretender to the French and Spanish thrones, discusses with him the identity of the Man in the Iron Mask, exposes himself, undaunted, on the Lido, to sea-fret and Adriatic gust, reads tombstones, kisses hands, and remarks on the seagulls' (214).

12. See, for instance, Parey 2018.

13. See interview with Noakes 20.

14. Many thanks to Gerald Preher for bringing to my attention Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris's study of the genre in which they give the following definition: 'The composite novel is a literary work composed of shorter texts that though individually complete and autonomous are interrelated in a coherent whole according to one or more organizing principles' (Dunn and Morris 2). Dunn and Morris list *Angels and Insects* amongst their examples of composite novels published in 1993 (xxxii) but do not comment on it.

15. 'The nonnarratable is so immersed in the ordinary stuff of daily experience that it cannot arouse a potential listener's or reader's interest in what might be called the sequentiality, the "and then..." of narrative' (Ingersoll 191). For Peter Brooks, 'the unnarratable' is 'the quiescence of the "normal"' (Brooks 103).

16. 'Who can quit young lives after being long in company with them, and not desire to know what befell them in their after years?' (Eliot 890).

ABSTRACTS

Bearing in mind A. S. Byatt's stand regarding endings and narrative in 1990—'I think closure is the really revolutionary narrative mode at the moment' (Tredell), this paper examines the notion of closure in her neo-Victorian fiction, the latter genre being generally considered to be timid or reactionary when it comes to conclusions, offering merely a repetition of the closure commonly attributed to Victorian fiction. The endings to 'Precipice-Encurled', *Possession* (including its mini-sequel in *Victorian Poetry*) and *Angels and Insects* are thus discussed in the light of Earl Ingersoll's paradigms in his study of endings in relation to gender, *Waiting for The End*. Finally, the issue of closure and endings is harnessed to the question of Byatt's appraisal and concern for the representation of the past. Indeed, the three neo-Victorian works display different appropriations of closure that attest to a self-reflexive and self-conscious approach to the representation of the past.

Cet article examine la notion de fermeture dans la fiction néo-victorienne d'A. S. Byatt, genre qui est généralement considéré comme timide ou réactionnaire dans son traitement de la fin, se contentant de reproduire le type de fin fermée communément associé au roman victorien. Les fins de 'Precipice-Encurled', *Possession* (y compris la suite brève parue dans *Victorian Poetry*) et *Angels and Insects* sont ainsi analysées par le biais des paradigmes établis par Earl Ingersoll dans son étude sur la fin et le genre, *Waiting for the End*. En outre, la question de la fin dans ces trois textes néo-victoriens est mise en rapport avec une représentation auto-réflexive du passé.

INDEX

Keywords: Byatt (A. S.), 'Precipice-Encurled', *Possession*, *Angels and Insects*, neo-Victorian fiction, closure, ending, Ingersoll (Earl G.), representation of the past

Mots-clés: Byatt (A. S.), 'Precipice-Encurled', *Possession*, *Angels and Insects*, fiction néo-victorienne, fermeture, fin, Ingersoll (Earl G.), représentation du passé

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