

The Rational and Sensual Passage to Consciousness: Deciphering the Concealed Textual Layers in *the Virgin in the Garden*

Somasree Santra

Asst. Prof. of English, Department of English, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University Kolkata, India

Corresponding Author: Somasree Santra

Abstract: The *Virgin in the Garden* is a piece of artistry that interrogates the conceptions confined inside the frame and its authentic motivation. The fiction appears to be an amazingly scholarly and cultured amusement within which insight, sophistication, sensuality and desire, Elizabethan drama and modern farce and humour, converges abundantly and uncertainly. Principal amidst the novel's communal involvements one can observe sexual urge and passion through its modes of premarital, marital, extramarital and homosexual affairs. These in turn advocate complications that these accord, conceive and generate difficulty in the thread of action. The copiousness of emblematic essence and people's speculation in figurative expressions are indicated through Byatt's playwright character at the time of Elizabeth I. The resemblances of the human disposition, although there are disparities of the two temporal lengths of period, metamorphose into the considerable and primary interests of the novel. The existences of Byatt's actual literary characters are deeply and intensely affected by the actual writers and fictional characters of the books. Frederica opines on associations between literary characters and the actual people in her life repeatedly. Massively affected by the literary characters, the affinity between Byatt's characters, particularly concerning the antipodal sex can be distilled through an imaginary and fictive spectrum. The paper intends to portray the intricate layer of rationality that lies within the subtext and facilitates the main text as the prominent characters like Frederica and Alexander derive their cognitive essence and sensual pleasures out of it. I also endeavour to explicate the rational passage from which Frederica derives her feminine identity and consciousness and moves ahead to the path of intellectual and sensual maturity.

Keywords: sexual urge, figurative expressions, intricate layers, rational passage, feminine identity, sensual pleasures

Date of Submission: 06-04-2019

Date of acceptance: 22-04-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

With the astonishingly knowledgeable and erudite Potter family in *The Virgin in the Garden*, Byatt embark on starting her series of four novels. Through Byatt's recital we attain an orientation of the Potter family. It includes the knowledgeable and contumaciously agnostic father who is a school master, his reticent and learned wife, their reserved and unsociable mathematically talented and dexterous son, Marcus, and their two cognitively arduous daughters. It also had the amiable, benign and intellectual, Stephanie and belligerent, headstrong, smart, Frederica. Published in 1978, the novel features the weird and bizarre half- brother, Marcus and the radiant and brilliant daughters of the Potter family. With Elizabeth II just being crowned the Queen of England and the World War II just getting ended, the plot discloses abecedarian dramatic production of the life of the earlier Queen Elizabeth. The novel concludes as the utmost ardent and enthusiastic of the Potter children, Frederica comprehend the essentiality of eluding from her squelching family. Being occupied in the production of *Astrea*- a verse play by poet, Alexander Wedderburn, regarding the fresh femininity of Elizabeth I, the novel depicts a family for whom literature means a lot. With his capability to view another cosmos trapped inside this one, a macrocosm full of hypothetical beliefs confined inside substance and susceptible to perceptions which appear to decimate his own form, Marcus is startled to the verge of frenzy and delirium. Similar to the ancient Elizabethan era which is seized for its contemporary raconteurs, *Astrea* is also incarcerated within this opulently enzymatic novel which is vibrant to the poetic veracity of obsolescent science. Composed regarding Elizabeth I by one of its characters, the storyline, action, drilling and acting of the play commences with the execution concerning Elizabeth I. It incorporates the tempestuous occurrences of a talented, aberrant and eventfully separated family and attains an enthralled, bemused and exhausting culmination.

The research work attempts to recognizes the materialistic, mythical and factual education of the words 'Virgin' and 'Garden'. Being attributed as chaste, genuine, virtuous on one hand and as an epithet for Mary, the

mother of Jesus and the Vestal Virgins in Rome, the Virgins who protected the temple at Delphi, renowned for its Oracle on the other, the word 'Virgin' includes several undertones and implications. The 'Garden', also being attributed as the Garden of Eden comprises portion of notion of formation of the Abrahmic religions. The place where the first man and woman, Adam and Eve existed after they were created by God, the Garden, is explained in the Book of Genesis as the Paradise Garden. It was the place where Adam was sculpted from the dust of the ground and Eve from one of Adam's ribs by God. Adam is particularly asserted not to eat from the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil, a tree strangely gratifying and charming to the eye. God commanded both Adam and Eve to cultivate and protect the garden which they inhabit. Eve immaturely and naively expatiate on the edict of not consuming the fruit. She conveys that even if she comes into contact with the tree she would depart her life when she is probed by the serpent on shunning away to devour from the tree. Adam conceals himself from God, being conscious and embarrassed about his bareness and Eve is suffused with inclination and eagerness to be like God. They attain insight and intelligence after they consume the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge as the serpent persuades the form of inadequacy and weakness in Eve psychically. As they have contravened and flouted him by having the forbidden fruit, God evacuates them from the Garden and adjudicates them with the punishing decree of "death". This incepted with the serpent first, then Eve and finally Adam after locating and encountering them. God endows cherubim with the responsibility to defence against any access into the garden with an Omni directional "flaming" sword to forestall Adam and Eve from retracing in the posterity. The Cherubim assures the penalty of death to keep Adam and Eve from feeding of the "Tree of Life", which would provide them with incessant existence. Formerly construed as the authentic substance from which Mankind was constituted and the substance to which they would rebound, the serpent is provided with an innate craving to consume "dust". Established on a familiar perception of the Old Testament texts, the Serpent is correlated with Satan in consonance with Christianity and Judaism. Voraciously consuming them at whatever time he grabs the fortuity, Satan is depicted as the perennial detractor and rival of Mankind in the other passages of Hebrew scripture. A likeness to his nefarious and vile character after the malediction, God's pronouncement to serpent, that he would "eat dust" portrays the affinity between Genesis and Revelation in the Christian exegesis. We are able to gather a morsel of facts on the Garden in the Book of Genesis itself.

As inimical to striving at cultivation, being "Civilized" when man existed on God's reward as "primitive" hunters and collectors still pursue, the Garden of Eden exhibit cultural remembrance of "Simpler times". It did not portray a topographical space in consonance with the excogitated blueprint of few anthropologists. As well as a myriad of other verdancy that could nourish Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden was abode to both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Most of Milton's "Paradise Lost" transpires in the Garden of Eden and its themes are intermittently illustrated in brightened manuscripts and paintings. These included the "Sleep of Adam", "Creation of Eve", "Temptation of Eve" by the serpent, the "Fall of Man" where Adam obtains the fruit, and the "Expulsion". While a scene at the Garden of Eden is delineated by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel Ceiling, we usually discover an insignificant portrayal of the idyll of "Naming Day in Eden". *The Virgin in the Garden* is "in tradition of realist fiction which goes back to George Eliot but draws on modernist images and on contemporary interest in the novel as a mirror of itself" in the perspective of Juliet Dusinberre. Bill, the father and scholarly school master is wedded to an extremely knowledgeable woman, toiling with the insistence of family life, Winifred. Frederica is an ardent and enthusiastic bibliophile and an astute, ingenious and aspiring schoolgirl. Along with them the Cambridge undergraduate English major, Stephanie and Marcus, their mathematically talented, introvert brother constitutes the whole Potter family. Kelly addresses the novel as a "theatre drama". A play set in 1953, the year of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, *The Virgin in the Garden* is "one of the most impressive works of the 1970's" according to Kenyon. Composed by the playwright and don, Alexander Wedderburn, "Astrea" portrays Frederica as the Queen in his play. While the apparently conspicuous maturation and youth of Frederica, the existential vigour of the Potters and the interpretation of the societal and cultural insight and responsiveness of the new Elizabethan age are fascinatingly confederated by the novel.

Alfer accentuates on analyzing Byatt's employment of both literary examination and pragmatist adherences. She even confabulates the temporal essence and archival information, the communal framework as well as analogies, optical and lingual modes of understanding. The hypothetical and substantial in the fiction is also dealt by her in her own deeply unfolding essay. The actuality that verisimilitude and mindfulness are not reciprocally restricted forms of exhibition is very intensely and appropriately depicted by Alfer. She indicates the authenticity in Byatt's observation as a conceivably supraliminal fictional approach. She also advocates the familiar intuitiveness into the attributes of sense construction through Byatt's analytical practice and her impugning of pragmatist dimensions. Frederica anticipates regarding literature, and very particularly about "Paradise Lost". She considers it as "a closed world, made of language, and religion, and science, the science of a universe of concentric spheres which had never existed; and had constructed the minds of generations. It was part of her". She contemplates about her existence as she is "magnetized by print, by lettering, she takes sensual

pleasure in reading anything at all, instructions about Harpic and fire alarms, lists, or the title of books” (Byatt 99)

As Stephanie comprehends Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” as the poem she most cared for, the scene portrays the character’s dealing with the notions of realism, legitimacy, fantasy and practicability through the cerebration guided by acquisition of knowledge. She furthermore anticipates that people “might so easily never have hit on the accidental idea of making unreal verbal forms, they might have just lived, and dreamed, and tried to tell the truth” (Byatt 78). Thus, through the medium of the plot setting of Stephanie and Frederica absorbed in dialogues with texts, *The Virgin in the Garden* presents exceptionally proclaiming acumen within the course of its perusal. As the proximity and potentiality abaft the characters contemplating and sensing intensely is perceived by the reader, it is pointed out that an indispensable and crucial origin of survival can be produced through reasoning in abstruse premises. The writer’s objective is embodied by the characters for whom contemplating on hypothetical and indefinite ideas is compelling and pivotal. Byatt specifically indicates: “I see thinking like an activity like running; experience isn’t all narrative, and love and relationship. Many of my important experiences have come from seeing what Milton is saying” (Kenyon 1). Literature suffices to be a rational, creative, corporeal, tangible, sensitive and passionate desideratum for both Frederica and Stephanie. As Frederica articulates her words around *Women in Love*, we discover that the legitimate and authentic literary characters view themselves awkwardly or agonizingly adjacent to each other at several instances throughout the novel. One character is recognized by the reader as “real” while at the same time they become “imaginary”, fictitious and fanciful in several aspects. They appertain to the “real” existence and associate their survival to the literary characters of Byatt which develops in a notably appealing and captivating circumstance. By affecting both the manners in which Alexander broods and muses about Ophelia and how he ponders about Marcus is brought to prominence by Byatt through the bifold measure of entwining a literary character with a particular individual.

Byatt’s characters and the existing literary characters grow appealingly and intriguingly conjoined and indivisible. Frederica comprehends the soliloquy after hearing the speech from Alexander’s “Astrea”. It was the fictional composition by her friend, “by the young Prince, thrust into the Tower by Mary Tudor, [is] a moment of history, and fiction, that Frederica had lived often enough, since she had grown up on the heady romantic emotion of Margaret Irvin’s Young Bess” (Byatt 100). The readers senses that the characters of Byatt have existed in some author’s work as Frederica obtains the notion of having dwelled fascinatingly in a writer’s fiction in the unimaginable and actual life. By moving towards books and literary characters and mulling over intricately manifold association between literature and existence, Frederica quests for edification on how to spend her life. She decipher individuals as she envisions that the potentiality of Foster’s *Howards End* and Lawrence’s *Women in Love* that had inveigled her to an enormous extent to determine on tying the connubial knot with Nigel. Stephanie prefers to contemplate on writers above her own survival and gets alleviated and comforted.

Frederica desired to acquire knowledge about Alexander prior the rendezvous with him. She possessed an analogous character aspect in her cognitive fancy in the manner that “some women might desire unknown actors at first and through them Benedick [from “Much Ado About Nothing”] and Berowne [from “Love’s Labour Lost”] or Hamlet. Through this medium she contemplates regarding the notion that one is able be in love with or through literary personas. She creates the fictive and the actual alter positions. The conception that one’s discernment of amorous affinity is profoundly impacted by the fictional and fanciful spectrum is delineated and exemplified by Alexander. Alexander, tending of his beloved, Jenny emerges out to be considerably an apparent ambit to which the characters’ apperceptions are impregnated with literature. They are unable to halt contemplating regarding literature even while fornicating is portrayed through consociation with people of the unlike sex. Frederica’s instinct proliferates with reflections and anticipation that she has acquired from her perusal while being intimate with Wilkie, “with a moment of nausea of Lawrence’s description of Constance Chatterley’s florid spreading circles of satisfaction” (Byatt 420). Likewise Alexander envisages and cogitates about T.S. Eliot, his modulation and tenses (Byatt 45) while copulating with Jenny. Exhibiting itself in an exceptionally suggestive manner, *The Virgin in the Garden* is where the abutments between abstraction and reality are bedimmed and the actual individuals amalgamate the narrative standard. The characters encounter the actual professors, biographers and scholars from the present life, such as Helen Gardner, Lady Longford, and Frances Yates (Byatt 246). They are frequently conversed about abreast the actual works and writers. The reader becomes demented and begins to ponder whether the texts or authors adduced to really prevails. A satire of the resuscitation of Hermione in “A Winter’s Tale” (Byatt 362) is sighted by Stephanie as she watches Alexander’s “Astrea”. As Frederica’s remark portrays that the actual and imaginative can be viewed being mindful of one another, we realize that she is keenly preoccupied in juxtaposing and collating Shakespeare, Racine and Shaw. She discovers herself speculating that detecting reiterating reflections in the author’s compositions, for example “blood and babies in “Macbeth”, blood and light and dark in “Phedre” make both Shakespeare and Racine appear similar to Alexander Wedderburn to a great extent (Byatt 201).

Frederica cogitates about the standard of 'realness' in fiction as from her early girlhood she was inspired and affected by the literary notions and beliefs of her father. Spanning to the crux of humane quiddity she feels that fictiveness can be by some means more concordant with facts and more authentic and absolute than actuality itself. Anticipating the manner in which language concocts and begets the imaginative fictional world and the world *alfresco* to that, Byatt deals with the metafictional pertinence with language from a myriad of perspectives. She portrays the utmost bodacious and distinguished characters such as Frederica, Stephanie and Alexander, who senses the paramount significance of words. Byatt recurrently broods about the application of words, their impact and their coalition and representations works elicit. The peruser can perceive Frederica's credence on words as she discover and imbibe the world surrounding her and develops it to be an accustomed one by fundamentally confiding on words. Correspondingly, Stephanie girdles round the world orally, "what she touched with words was for her defused and neutralizes; acceptable" (Byatt 280). She eventually emerges to be sharply cognizant of the reality that her association to the cosmos is constructed with words.

As the characters insubstantially appurtenant on words are in confounding communion to the ardent and concupiscent rendering of the Potters, Byatt impersonates distinct readers. Marcus, who "had been allergic to poetry, which had lain about his house all his life, like so much dust or pollen, all over, and how he considered himself desensitized" (Byatt 310), is sceptical of words. He ascertains that words are "Crude indicators any way and their messages only approximations at best" (Byatt 145) owing to his dearth of words. This is compared with Frederica and Stephanie's adoration and ardency for words. Daniel contrives that the verbalized world can possess veracity and rectitude within it by being involved in "King Lear" as he is an intense and fervent reader. As Frederica endeavour to develop amorousness in language, the fiction also delineates the manner in which she and Alexander converse regarding language, cadence and pattern. The belief that Byatt's literary characters can poise contiguous to factual text and can be placed within the same as they acquire their route to schools and scholastic course is abundantly alluded through the above mentioned passage. Frederica questions Alexander after his subsequential composition of "Astrea", "Do you know you are how an established O level set text?" (Byatt 12). Byatt calls attention to a captivating amalgamation of the imaginative and the real exterior to the piece and presenting the manner in which both can coalesce and consolidate within the reader's or author's awareness. She extrudes the notion of the way a character scuffles to perceive his individual expression amongst the opinions of disparate actual writers.

Frederica becomes deprived of certitude in the inscrutable integrity. She contemplates that there exists a considerably enormous potentiality in retaining objects discretely after she grows preoccupied with a concept from *Howard's End*- 'only connect'- and by Lawrence's conviction on uniformity and integrity. She perceives the "Laminations" as she attains the notion for bemoaning cognizance in *The Virgin in the Garden*, "powerful sense of freedom, truthfulness and even selflessness" (Byatt 209). The book dispenses the utmost disclosing description of the composing mechanism portrayed in the fiction which in conjunction with its acknowledgement obtains the axial position in the fiction. Frederica combines the works which eventually turns out to be a constituent of her "Laminations" in the thick of innumerable different works which comprise her diary notes, book reviews and accounts of her espousal. As Marcus goes through the compositions by his friend Lucas Simmons, the peruser can observe the existence of the narrator. One can even feel the systematized impact of the invasive raconteur who insinuates notions on writing and the disposition of characters: "He [Marcus] has no desire, unlike every other person in this story, to prove his skill at reading people". (Byatt 145) As the pansophical third person narrator outlines the occurrences and the individuals in the imaginative world of the text as real to existence, the fiction can be interpreted in a pragmatist manner. Here, the narrator centre upon the tale in a row depending on the concocted imaginary characters by stimulating his ubiquity by means of the phrase: "unlike every other person in this story". Don Alexander clasps his learner, Frederica on his lap, "There was no doubt no private or star separate school girls to hold on your knee, if the truth were to know. And *Lolita* still unwritten" (Byatt 351). Here, we can detect the charismatic and delightful existence of the narrator remarking from the position that is exterior to the elemental sphere.

Alexander and Frederica can be viewed as devious and scheming constituted literary characters, analogous to another literary composition such as *Lolita*. This can be observed as they promulgate from the attainable cognizance and heedfulness and signifies the narrator's escalation in the temporal length. Thus, they become alluded to *Lolita*. We can discover the exhibition of arduousness and dilemma of writing regarding an action of rendering as the narrator remarks on his or her speculations and anticipation on writings within reach. The narrator tends to acquiesce the utmost enthralling exemplification of instinctual and involuntary sagaciousness. Some passions are the regular subjects of fiction and some, though certainly passions, are more recondite and impossible to describe. A passion for reading is somewhere in the middle; it can be hinted but not told out, since to describe an impassioned reading of Books [by Wordsworth] would take many more pages than books itself and be an anti-climax. Nor it is possible like Borges poet, to incorporate books into this text though its fear of the drowning of books and its determination to give a Active substance to a figure seen in a dream might lend a kind of Wordsworthian force to the narrative. (Byatt 251) Byatt contrives the characters and the

schematic scenario as flimsy and imaginary. The manner in which she composes about the fervour and zeal concerning the action of reading, we find that there should not prevail any deficit of detrimental momentum. Byatt accomplishes in effectuating the fundamental and umbilical regards of the fictional work as being discoursed about by the storyteller.

While Frederica asserts that none of the configurations are congenitally dissonant and inappropriate as she altercates with Wilkie regarding the antiquated composition and emotional and subconscious verism. She utters, "A form is as good as the writer who chooses it." (Byatt 359). This indeed appears adjacent to Wilkie's proposition: "When you decide to be a lady novelist, and get set to write a long novel by Proust out of George Eliot, and it won't get up and walk, its words decay and real people turn out to be hectic puppets". (Byatt 359) The narrator remarks on the facets of disposition by means of the worth and esteem of the characters. It is being assayed that reading can certainly be composed concerning an approach that proclaims it as a galvanizing, instantaneous, vigorous and influential deed. This is done by pledging the enterprise to demonstrate the contrary of the remark regarding the distress of visualizing the function of reading as sustaining the potentiality of recitation. Wilkie and Frederica seem to remain engrossed with the construction of characters who would seem not as "hectic puppets" in the writer's palm but bang the reader as "real people" who can be associated with. This is viewed while conceding the concurrent disbelief of nineteenth century manner of composing the works. Wilkie and Frederica's conversation appear to focus the crucial affairs of *The Virgin in the Garden* and traversing the pragmatist sphere evolves as the most significant issue for Byatt.

II. CONCLUSION

The characters ponder correspondingly or with an indistinguishable avidity concerning literature and writing in a fiction which expostulates Racine's meter. It can be altercated that the antagonistic coercion is adduced by Byatt at the very point of time when Alexander advocates, "If we were in a novel they'd just cut this dialogue because of artifice. You can have sex in a novel, but not Racine's meter, however impassioned you may be about it" (Byatt 349). Frederica indicates that she harbours adoration for Alexander because he possesses the ability to write. She also antiphons to his inquiry whether the rationale abaft their reciprocal ardency for one another can be contemplated admirably. Alexander implies that it is Frederica's adroitness and dexterity that he relishes, by retorting: "well novels would say not, People in novels don't love each other because they can both see that Racine is- is what he is...If we were in a novel it would be most suspect and doomed to sit her dryly discussing literature" (Byatt 349). With a speck of heedfulness towards the conception that confabulating about literature can annihilate them as depleted, Alexander and Frederica endure their enunciation on Pound, Lawrence and Wordsworth. They also explicate on the writer's notions regarding sensation, poetry, contentment and endearment within the same setting. Byatt divulges and harbingers upon the approaches of acuity and emotionality while it directs towards a discordant connubial existence. She accomplishes this by analyzing the characters as imaginative and materializing in one's fictional work. Thus, she dispenses an absorbing and stimulating confabulation on the actuality and imaginativeness of the characters in *The Virgin in the Garden*.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Alexander, F. "A.S. Byatt". Post-war Literatures in English. edited by H. Bertens, Groningen. 1992: 129-34.
- [2]. Alexander, M. Flights from Realism: Themes and Strategies in Postmodernist British and American Fiction. Edward Arnold. 1990.
- [3]. Alfer, A. and M.I. Noble, editors. Essays on the Fiction of A.S. Byatt. Greenwood Press. 2001.
- [4]. Allen, G. Intertextuality. Routledge. 2000.
- [5]. Alter, R. Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre. University of California Press. 1975.
- [6]. Bradley, M. The Modern British Novel. England Clays Ltd. St. Ives Pic. 1993.
- [7]. Campbell, J. A.S. Byatt and the Heliotropic Imagination. Wilfrid Laurier University Press. 2004.
- [8]. Elam, Diane. Romancing the Postmodern. Routledge. 1992.
- [9]. Franken, C. A.S. Byatt: Art, Authorship, Creativity. Palgrave. 2001.
- [10]. Hutcheon, L. Narcissistic Narrative. The Metafictional Paradox. Wilfrid Laurier University Press. 1983.
- [11]. Kelly, K.C. A.S. Byatt. Twayne Publishers. 1996.
- [12]. Kenyon, O. Women Novelists Today: A Survey of English Writing in the Seventies and Eighties. Palgrave MacMillan. 1988.
- [13]. Lodge, D. The Novelist at the Crossroads and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism. ARK Paperbacks, 1986.
- [14]. Ommundsen, W. Metafiction? Reflexivity in Contemporary Texts. Melbourne University Press. 1993.
- [15]. Wallhead, C. M. The Old, the New, and the Metaphor: A Critical Study of the Novels of A. S. Byatt. Minerva Press. 1999.