摘 要

英国文学批评家、小说家A.S.拜厄特在当今国际文坛享有极高的声誉，被誉为当代最有魄力、最有智慧的小说家之一。她善于运用深刻细腻的笔调、多变的体裁塑造各异的人物形态，在作品中表达她本人的许多思想观点，从而赋予作品丰富深刻的内涵。

拜厄特于1990年发表的小说《占有：一部传奇》是她最成功的一部作品，一问世即在英语世界引起哄动，获得了当年的英国文学最高奖布克奖。评论家们纷纷从不同的角度、用不同的方法解读这部作品，如女性主义、人物原型解读、小说中童话故事的象征意义以及小说的叙事技巧等等，取得了丰硕的研究成果。在诸多批评实践中，虽然有很多评论家注意到了作家独特的女性主义思想及在作品中对女性形象的描写和刻画，并依据女性主义理论对《占有：一部传奇》中所刻画和描写的从远古到当代的女性生存状况进行解读，但是还很少有批评家把目光放在拜厄特对于男性生命处境的思考上。

本论文旨在通过具体分析作者在小说文本中对男性人物的刻画和描写来探讨拜厄特对当代社会男性面临的问题的思考，揭示男性面临女权挑战和社会思潮变革身心受到的压力和面临的危机，指明在社会发展的过程中，性别角色的区分对两性都带来了不同程度的伤害。

关键词：占有　男性　性别角色　生存状况　拜厄特

Abstract

A. S. Byatt has been hailed as one of the great post-modern novelists and insightful critics in Great Britain. She is considered the most consciously intellectual woman writer since George Eliot, and her erudition is equaled by her deep understanding of human passion.

Byatt's Booker Prize-winning novel *Possession: A Romance* (1990) is considered her masterpiece and has drawn increasing critical attention since its publication. Many critics have made approaches to this work from different perspectives such as feminism, archetypal criticism, symbolism, or the narrative strategies of the novel, and have made fruitful achievements.

Among the different criticisms made on *Possession: A Romance*, some pay attention to Byatt's unique feminist proposition, and try to shed light on her concern for female existence. Yet few critics have focused on Byatt's reflection on men's existential status.

The present thesis endeavors to focus on and interpret Byatt's descriptions of male characters' life experiences and their predicaments in the post-modern society, and to arouse readers' critical thinking on how to achieve a genuine equality between women and men.

Key Words possession men gender role existence Byatt

ORIGINALITY RESEARCH STATEMENT

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Introduction

Possession is a gripping and compulsively readable novel. A. S. Byatt exquisitely renders a setting rich in detail and texture. Her lush imagery weaves together the dual worlds that appear throughout the novel—the worlds of the mind and the senses, of male and female, of darkness and light, of truth and imagination—into an enchanted and unforgettable tale of love and intrigue.

—Lisa Whipple

Byatt has contrived a masterly ending to a fine work; intelligent, ingenious and humane, Possession bids fair to be looked back upon as one of the most memorable novels of the 1990s.

—*Times Literary Supplement*

The novel thus foregrounds and problematizes the processes of studying literature from the past, highlighting the many ways readers can approach any text.

—Julia Whitsitt

What a book! This is a novel for every taste...an altogether magical performance.

—*Washington Post Book World*

Possession: A Romance, the Booker Prize winning novel of 1990, covers a length of more than 500 pages and consists of 28 chapters. It is an unprecedented postmodern exercise of fictional writing in which one can find everything: romantic quest, campus satire, detective story, myths, fairy tales, journals, correspondence, and even literary criticism. It tells two intertwining stories: a secret Victorian-era romance reconstructed from the lost correspondence between the poets Randolph Henry Ash and Chistabel LaMotte, and a present-day biographical journey of two academics: Roland Michell, a biographical, historical critic and Ash scholar, and Maud Bailey, a successful feminist theorist and LaMotte scholar. When reading between the lines, one feels that the novel weighs much more than the single word "romance" can cover, and the author's perspective on the living conditions of both sexes is condensed in

the title "*Possession*".

In *Possession*, Roland Michell is a young academic of late 20th century who struggles to eke out a living as a part-time tutor and research assistant. He makes a startling discovery in the London Library when examining a copy of Vico's *Principi di una Scienza Nuova* which once belonged to the famous Victorian poet Randolph Henry Ash: he finds two letters written in Ash's handwriting which were addressed to a woman that the poet had just met and obviously desired to meet again. After doing some research, Roland discovers that the recipient of the letters was Christabel LaMotte, a Victorian poetess who wrote fairy tales and an epic *The Fairy Melusina.* He then starts a literary and biographical research together with Maud Bailey, one of the leading experts in LaMotte studies.

The suspicious relationship between the two poets arouses great academic interest in Roland and Maud. They then begin a biographical journey: starting from LaMotte's home in Lincolnshire, to North Yorkshire to which "Christabel [LaMotte] had contemplated accompanying Randolph [Ash] on his natural history expedition in June 1859" (Byatt 2005: 231), and to Brittany. In the end, with the letters and journals they find, they uncover a secret romance between the two Victorian poets: Ash and LaMotte fell in love, spent a holiday secretly together, yet LaMotte ended their relationship and left Ash after discovering she was pregnant. The findings compel a reassessment of the previous researches on both Ash and LaMotte, since Ash is thought to have lived in domestic bliss with his wife, Ellen, for over forty years, while

LaMotte is believed to have a secluded lesbian relationship with her friend Blanche Glover till Glover's mysterious suicide.

As Maud and Roland almost trace out the whole story, news of their discovery leaks out and several rival academics, such as Leonora Stern, James Blackadder, Mortimer Cropper, and Beatrice Nest, get involved in the hot pursuit of the Victorian pair. Out of different motives, all these academics want to gain possession of the letters and to put the final pieces of the romantic jigsaw puzzle together. The story reaches its dramatic climax in a stormy night at the Ashes' graveyard in the Sussex countryside, where these researchers find LaMotte's last letter to Ash. When Maud reads it aloud, all their doubts and suspicions about the relationship between the two Victorian poets are answered: LaMotte gave birth to a daughter named Maia, but did not keep her child. The girl was adopted by LaMotte's sister Sophie and never knew that Ash and LaMotte were her real parents. With the exposure of Maia's origin, Maud's is disclosed: she is a descendant of Ash and LaMotte, for Maia is her great-great-grandmother. Along the way, the two researchers Maud and Roland find adventure, love, and a radically new critical interpretation of the two Victorians; while at the same time, they decide to develop their own romance "in a modern way" (Byatt 2005: 550).

Possession: A Romance was first published in 1990. The novel won the Booker Prize for Fiction—the highest British literary prize—the same year, and Byatt was awarded the Irish Times/Aer Lingus International Fiction Prize. Since its publication, the novel has drawn increasing critical attention, and has been recognized as "the

most dazzling novel of the year" by *U. S. A. Today*, and "an ambitious and wholly satisfying work, a nearly perfect novel" by *Publishers Weekly*. Readers are either fascinated by its rich and varied themes, or enchanted by its complex and colorful artistic skills.

Though the novel has been published for over ten years, readers as well as professional critics are still as enthusiastic about it as when it was first published, and attempt to interpret its themes and explore its narrative style from every conceivable perspective.

French scholar Lucile Desblanche notes *Possession*'s underlying concern with the nature of possession, commenting that the novel "winds its theme through the variations of dependency in love, repression of passion, professional rivalry, supernatural powers and the obsession of biographers and academic writers with the object of their study" (Desblanche 2000: 89-95). Some other literary critics study the affluent images and specific characters appeared in the novel.

There are also commentators who have noticed Byatt's postmodern consciousness. Thelma J. Shinn, author of *Worlds With Women: Myth and Mythmaking in Fantastic Literature by Women* (1986), comments that *Possession* "can be termed a meronymic novel because it balances poetry with prose and past with present in a blend of the Romance and Realism styles of Victorian and contemporary novels" (Shinn 1995: 164). Scholars such as Frederick M. Holmes, Ann Hulbert, Dana Shiller, and Kate Kellaway highly appreciate Byatt's historical imagination and her invention of Victorian literary genre. Besides, Julia Whitsitt,

professor of Lander University, believes the novel "foregrounds and problematizes the processes of studying literature" ([on-line]) and inspires her readers to form self-consciousness while reading literary works through her 2001 article *Three at One Blow: Using Possession to Introduce Theory.*

The novel was introduced to China rather late, yet it has attracted the attention of more and more readers and critics. Jiang Xianwen, professor of University of South China, has studied A. S. Byatt and her novel *Possession* from the perspectives of feminism and its narrative strategies. He also writes the foreword for *Possession*'s 2005 edition for Chinese readers. Cao Li, professor of English at Tsinghua University, explores the issue on "the distance and tension between historical truth and literary construction" (2005: 173) based on her thorough analysis of the literariness of the novel. In recent years, a lot of postgraduate students have taken *Possession* as the subject of their MA thesis and have made comments on its themes, its mythological archetypes, and its narrative strategies, among which feminist interpretation of the novel is the most distinguished.

In brief, critics have commented the novel both on its content and on its structure. Though a few scholars have noticed Byatt's unique feminist proposition, and try to shed light on her concern for female existence, few of them have focused on the author's reflection on men's existential status.

The present thesis, following the exploration of those precursors mentioned above, lays its focus on the male characters' existential status reflected in *Possession: A Romance*. Conventionally, men are considered to be the beneficiaries of the

patriarchal society. In people's concept, it is men who enjoy superiority over women in society, and thus possess materials, women and other nice things. However, in *Possession*, male characters are not described simply as beneficiaries, nor do they enjoy superiority all the time in their relation with women. Instead, they are constrained and sometimes even beaten. As an acute observer and sober thinker, Byatt wisely presents her reflection on men's existential status in the novel, which is expressed in the title of the novel. Her concern of and reflection on men's existential status together with her descriptions of female characters makes her feminist idea unique. And it is her feminist propositions that enable her to acquire a unique position in the history of female writing.

In the following chapters, the thesis will first trace back to the history of women's writing in order to see in what ways Byatt's writing either inherits the female tradition or is different from it. Then the thesis will focus its study on the male characters depicted by Byatt in *Possession.*

The present thesis is made up of five parts:

It begins with an introduction to the content of the novel.

Chapter One is a reflection on women's literature from 1840 onward. Special focus will be put on A. S. Byatt's reflection on the existential status of both genders, which enables her to acquire a unique position in the history of women's literature.

Chapter Two and Three discuss the existence of male characters and the predicaments they confront from both social and psychological perspectives depicted by A. S. Byatt in the novel.

In the part of conclusion, the author of the thesis makes an endeavor to answer the questions: possessing or being possessed? Who are possessed? And it will serve as a summary of the ideas the author has expressed in the thesis.

There are two main approaches employed in the thesis. The first approach is to study the psychological and social differences between men and women. The subject of this approach is the social category of gender roles, and the question on how gender roles influence people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours will be examined. A second approach is textual analysis. The thesis will come close to Byatt's portrayal of the characters and her treating of the stories to interpret her unique and insightful feminist propositions. Moreover, it will base its exploration and explanations for men's real status reflected in the novel on the detailed analysis of the text.

Chapter One Byatt's Feminist Propositions and Her Position in the History of Female Writing

Byatt's writings are deeply rooted in the fertile soil of the female literary tradition. Being a writer as well as a literary theorist, she inherits the tradition of her female precursors on the one hand, while on the other, she follows closely with changes that have occurred in society and gender relations ever since the second wave of western feminist movement and makes her own propositions which make her writing unique. To better appreciate the unique charm of Byatt's writings, it is necessary to learn in some detail about the female literary tradition first. This chapter will focus on both the female literary tradition and the characteristics of Byatt's writings.

1.1 Three Historical Phases in Women's Writing

Since the birth of literature, the relation between nature and human society, the relations among various forces within human society, especially the relations between two groups of human beings, men and women, have always been the subjects of literary works. No doubt women's writings have aroused drastic literary consciousness of women's authorship and concerns about the authentic depictions about women's lives since the 1840s. Generation after generation, women writers have endeavored to create an authentic female literature, "promis[ing] woman's view of life, woman's experience" (Lewes 1852, cited in Showalter 2004: 3), and have made great progress on their long way pursuit of equality and freedom.

In her *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter, the American literary critic

who coins the term gynocritics, distinguishes what she believes to be the three historical phases of development of women's writing: "Feminine, Feminist, and Female" (2004: 13), and accordingly, establishes the notion of the female tradition.

The feminine phase is identified as "the period from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840s to the death of George Eliot in 1880" (Showalter 2004: 13). Beginning from the 1840s, the career of novelist was becoming a recognizable profession for women. In general, female writers in this historical period, such as Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and George Sand, still wrote under the great influence of their "brothers" and "fathers" in literature, for male precursors in literature "incarnate[d] patriarchal authority" (Gilbert and Cubar 1979, in Rosen 2004: 274). Women writers experienced an "anxiety of authorship", which made them fear that the title "female artist" by definition is "inappropriate to her sex" (Gilbert and Cubar 1979, in Rosen 2004: 275). Emily Dickinson acutely observed the phenomenon about "infection in the sentence", sighing "Publication—is the Auction/ Of the Mind of Man". However, they still endeavored to express their ideal through literary works. A large number of these female authors wrote with male pseudonyms, hoping to obtain recognition of their equal intellectual and artistic achievements with their male counterparts.

In their works, the heroines usually accept the social constructs of their gender roles. They own moral virtue and value domestic bliss, trying to prove their values through their service and sacrifice in love, marriage, and family, etc. At the same time, these fictional characters also actively seek spiritual freedom and make

decisions for themselves, trying to win respect from others. And it is these female characters' brave pursuit of freedom and dignity that makes the works in this period memorable.

Take Charlotte Brontë for example. Before her, the western literary history was overwhelmingly male with only a few women successful in writing. The fact made her creation of *Jane Eyre* more prominent. In the fiction, the heroine Jane Eyre has a keen sense of right and wrong, and is proud of her status as an educated and independent woman, despite her humble social position and appearance. By creating Jane, Brontë was in fact pursuing her ideal—"the emancipation and development of a free woman's spirit" (Knight 1989: 48).

Though some critics complained that the literature of women in this phase was "too much a literature of imitation" and demanded that women should express "what they have really known, felt and suffered" (Showalter 2004: 27), the women's novel had moved in the direction of an "all-inclusive female realism, a broad, socially informed exploration of the daily lives and values of women within the family and the community" (Showalter 2004: 29).

The feminist phase is defined by Showalter as from 1880 to 1920 since "the major women's rights struggle of the nineteenth century was the campaign for women's suffrage, which began in the United States with the 1848 Seneca Falls meeting and continued through 1920 when the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment gave U. S. women the vote" (Kolmar and Bartkowski 2000: 54). In this period, feminist activists began to look into the legal and social disabilities women

faced and to argue for the most basic rights for women.

In the field of literature, female authors during this period "challenged many of the restrictions on women's self-expression, denounced the gospel of self-sacrifice, [and] attacked patriarchal religion" (Showalter 2004: 29). "More often than not, these authors depicted the harsh and often cruel treatment of female characters at the hands of their more powerful male creations" (Bressler 2004: 149). Through their diction, the plights of women were dramatized. Those women writers intended to arouse critical thinking of people and demanded changes in the social and political systems, hoping the new systems would grant women male privileges and require chastity and fidelity from men.

The heroines in the novels of feminist authors have more self-awareness. They "refuse to be defined as a 'nonsignificant Other'" (Bressler 2004: 143). Their identities are often artists, writers, or intellectuals, for example, Beth in Sarah Grand's 1898 novel *The Beth Book*. Beth is creative and brilliant in nature. Yet she is frustrated both with the treatment of her father when she was young and with her disastrous marriage as an adult. In searching a way out of the harsh reality, Beth discovers a secret room in her house and takes it as her private space. In this secret private space, she finds a way of self-expression and disciplines herself as a writer.

To some extent, *The Beth Book* is the representative of the stories feminists tell in this phase. Just as Showalter comments in *A Literature of Their Own*:

> In retrospect, it looks as if all the feminists had but one story to tell, and exhausted themselves in its narration. They represent a turning-point in the female tradition, and they turn inward. Beginning with a sense of unity and a sense of mission, a real

> concern for the future of womanhood, an interest in the "precious specialty" of the female novelist, they ended, like Sarah Grand, with the dream that by withdrawing from the world they would find a higher female truth. Given the freedom to explore their experience, they rejected it, or at least tried to deny it. The private rooms that symbolize their professionalism and autonomy are fantastic sanctuaries, closely linked to their own defensive womanhood (2004: 215).

In the Female phase (1920--present), women writers reject the imitation which was prominent during the first phase and the protest dominating in the second. Instead, they start an attempt on a "courageous self-exploration" (Showalter 2004: 33).

In the decade immediately after 1920, proponents of women's suffrage were disappointed to discover that the winning of women's vote did not radically alter the outcome of elections. In fact, women voted in relatively small numbers and the main body of voters remained to be their husbands, fathers, and brothers. Seeing no obvious improvements in women's status, feminist writers continued their "attempts to understand women's erasure from literary and historical knowledge as well as from public intellectual and political life" (Kolmar and Bartkowski 2000: 116).

In 1919, the British scholar Virginia Woolf wrote her masterpiece *A Room of One's Own*. In the text, she hypothesized the existence of Shakespeare's sister, who was as equally intelligent as Shakespeare. Because of her gender, her talents can never flourish, for she cannot afford her own room. Woolf thus declared that men had and continued to treat women as inferiors, and argued that "women must challenge the prevailing, false cultural notions about their gender identity and develop a female discourse that will accurately portray their relationship 'to the world of reality and not to the world of men'" (Bressler 2004: 146).

The feminist movement of the 1960s grew out of the civil rights movement and brought about some of the changes that earlier feminist movements had sought, in order to push for changes in women's roles and legal status. Under its strong influence, the exercise of women writers' self-exploration in their works has been further developed, and female writing hence becomes more dynamic in both form and theme, as Showalter comments:

> The contemporary women's novel observes the traditional forms of nineteenth-century realism, but it also operates in the contexts of twentieth-century Freudian and Marxist analysis...we are beginning to see a renaissance in women's writing that responds to the demands of Lewes and Mill for an authentically female literature, providing "woman's view of life, woman's experience" (2004: 35).

In fictions written by novelists such as Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble, Beryl Bainbridge, and A. S. Byatt, readers can easily sense their efforts to incorporate female tradition with a new range of language and experience and their sober thoughts on gender relations—which are far more important than the enclosed self-consciousness and propositions in sexual revolution.

Among these brilliant writers, A. S. Byatt stands out for her concern on female tradition, her unique feminist proposition, her mastery of language, and her keen reflection on the authentic lives of both genders. Being a novelist and literary critic, she has a profound understanding of the female writing tradition and shows an intensely historical concern for the female existence and tradition. She always sets the present in the past in her novels, "aiming at a two–way communication of novel and history in order to find a historical formula for the contemporary situation" (Meng 2004: 67). At the same time, she extends her theme to the promotion of living

for both women and men. What is represented is not only the life of women but also her reflection on the existential status of men. And the next section will go to some details about A. S. Byatt's life and her feminist ideas presented in her most successful novel *Possession: A Romance.*

1.2 A. S. Byatt and Her Feminist Propositions

1.2.1 The Life of A. S. Byatt

Dame Antonia Susan Byatt (usually known as A. S. Byatt), born on August 24, 1936 in Sheffield, England, is a distinguished critic as well as a novelist with an international reputation.

She is the oldest of the four children of John Frederick Drabble, a judge and a writer, and Kathleen Marie (Bloor) Drabble, a secondary-school English teacher, who gave up teaching in order to be a full-time mother. Her parents provided their children with a home that was rich in books and highly valued their intellectual achievements. When Byatt was ten years old, she spent weeks in bed recovering from a near-fatal ovarian infection. During the many hours she was confined to her bed, she developed her life long reading habits and read plenty of Browning, Charles Dickens, Tennyson, Rossetti, Keats, and Jane Austen. At the age of thirteen, Byatt and her sister, the noted writer Margaret Drabble, were sent to Mount School, where she first began to write seriously. In 1957 she graduated from Cambridge University with a B. A. degree. The next year, Byatt studied at Byrn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, and then went to Oxford to study on 17th century British literature for

a doctor's degree under Dame Helen Gardner. She lectured at London University extramurally between 1962 and 1971, and from 1972 to 1981 worked as lecturer in English at University College of London.

Byatt is a productive writer. Her works include *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964), *The Game* (1967), *Possession: A Romance* (1990), *Angels and Insects* (1992), *The Biographer's Tale* (2000), and the quartet, *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), *Still Life* (1985), *Babel Tower* (1996), and *A Whistling Woman* (2002), all of which are novels. She has also published collections of highly acclaimed short stories include *Sugar and Other Stories* (1987), *The Matisse Stories* (1993), *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye: Five Fairy Stories* (1994), *Elementals: Stories of Fire and Ice* (1998) and her most recent book *Little Black Book of Stories* (2003). Two of her novels have been adapted into movies: *Possession* and *Angels and Insects*. Her critical works include *Degrees of Freedom: The Novels of Iris Murdoch* (1965), *Wordsworth and Coleridge in Their Time* (1970), *Passions of the Mind: Selected Essays* (1991), and *On Histories and Stories* (2000). In recognition of her contribution to British culture, she was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1990, Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1999, and was awarded the Shakespeare Prize by the Alfred Toepfer Foundation in 2002.

1.2.2 Byatt's Feminist Ideas

A. S. Byatt is a political feminist. She is interested in feminist themes, especially in women's freedom. In her works, she is greatly concerned with the situation of female

existence and actively advocates the improvement of women's lives. Her most successful novel, the Booker Prize winner *Possession: A Romance*, best exemplifies her unique feminist thoughts.

Byatt believes that women are able to avoid the obsession of emotions and sex, and arrange their own lives in the same way as men do ever since she was fairly young. She thinks women can "keep their sex in one compartment and their life in another" (Salon Interview [on-line]). She illustrates this point more clearly in an interview with Laura Miller:

> I was drawn to Queen Elizabeth I when I was making my personal iconography. There was Mary Queen of Scots who was driven by sex and made a lot of very silly choices. She finally got her head cut off because she married twice for sex and caused her second husband to kill her first husband. This caused Elizabeth I to cut her head off. Elizabeth obviously was torn, too. She wanted to marry. She flirted with every single man in her environment, but she knew she could only survive by not letting sex or marriage get the better of her. And she survived triumphantly, really. She reigned for a very long time (Salon Interview [on-line]).

Byatt creates LaMotte and Maud in *Possession* to express her ideas. LaMotte is an intelligent Victorian poetess who writes children's stories, lyrics and an epic *The Fairy Melusina*. She rejects marriage and lives a reclusive life with her lady friend Miss Blanche to avoid the distorting vision of the male-centered society. She meets Ash, the poet, at Mr. Robinson's breakfast, develops a passionate love for Ash through correspondence, and even makes a secret journey with him to York. Yet after that, she ends their relation resolutely and retreats eventually to her solitude, living with her sister for the rest of her life. Taking pain, LaMotte decides to avoid the fate of being possessed by a man and keeps her independence. Another female character

Maud is a modern feminist scholar who runs a Women's Resource Center in Lincoln University. She hides her beauty in a turban and chooses to work alone "with ease and grace...inside these walls and curtains, her bright safe box" (Byatt 2005: 151). She has a brief affair with Fergus Wolff, but is annoyed by this lover's tugs "which had once tied her to him" (Byatt 2005: 155), for "she is afraid of what she might lose if she were to lose control and give in to him" (Xia 2004: 42). The affair reinforces her opinion that "love is terrible, it is a wrecker" (Byatt 2005: 550). In her connection with Roland, Maud and Roland at first keep a relationship like friends when working and living together, they "touched each other without comment and without progression" (Byatt 2005: 458) and agree "the touching should not proceed to any kind of fierceness or deliberate embrace. They felt that in some way this stately peacefulness of unacknowledged contact gave back their sense of their separate lives inside their separate skins" (Byatt 2005: 459). At the end, the couple decide to love each other in "a modern way" (Byatt 2005: 550).

In the same interview, Byatt also expresses her idea about having children: "realistically, however much men help with children, children are the problem of women, at least when they're little. Children emotionally disrupt ambitious women" (Salon Interview [on-line]). She illustrates this idea in her description of LaMotte.

In *Possession*, the Victorian poetess writes a book named *Tales for Innocents*, in which one story is about "a women who had said she would give anything for a child, of any kind, even a hedgehog, and had duly given birth to a monster, half-hedgehog, half-boy" (Byatt 2005: 59). Here, Byatt makes use of her heroine's pen to inform her

readers of "Victorian women's fear, or any woman's fear, of giving birth to a monstrosity. It was related to Frankenstein, the product of Mary Shelley's labour pains and horror of birth" (Byatt 2005: 59).

Moreover, LaMotte, in her personal life, knows that having children can be a restraint on women as authors and struggles to get rid of it. In one of her letters to Ash, she writes: "women in childbirth cry out exceedingly against the author as they see it of their misfortunes" (Byatt 2005: 543). LaMotte sends her newly born baby-girl to England, where her sister Sophie brings her up as her own without revealing to the girl her real parents. During the years thereafter, in pursuing of "solitude and self-possession" (Byatt 2005: 545), LaMotte never gives any hint of revelation, though she suffers each single day from the fact that her daughter does not love her. Till the end of her life, she still firmly holds that "if I had kept to my closed castle, behind my motte-and-bailey defences…I [should] have been a great poet" (Byatt 2005: 545).

Thirdly, Byatt employs water as a symbol of female power and highly praises its power in *Possession*. The Victorian poetess Christabel LaMotte composes children's tales and an epic *The Fairy Melusina*, and the heroines of her texts "are typically watery beings" (Byatt 2005: 266).

In the epic, LaMotte bases her story about Melusina on one variation that originally belonged to the oral tradition of Western France (Vade 1992: 792). Melusina bore a curse from her enraged mother: she would turn into a monstrous half-serpent creature every Saturday of her life. If she married, she would become

mortal, but the enchantment would be renewed if her husband ever saw her in her serpent form. She later extracted from Raimondin (her husband-to-be) an oath that he would never attempt to see her on Saturdays and married him. After their marriage, Melusina aided Raimondin in everything from land clearance to castle building and gave birth to ten sons. So she represented a typical primordial goddess of fertility. However, her husband broke his vow, peeped at her, knew her secret, and burst out at Melusina, "oh, most false of serpents, by God and His great deeds, you are nothing but a phantom, and no heir born of you will be saved", making the curse come true. She was forever transformed into a serpent, and lived as an exile.

Before Melusina met her husband, there's a plot in which she sang at a fountain:

> Melusina, singing to herself on the brink of the mystic [Thirsty] fountain, is a potent being of great authority who knows the beginnings and ends of things—and is, as has been pointed out, in her aspect of water-serpent, a complete being, capable of generating life, or meanings, on her own, without need for external help. (Byatt 2005: 267)

Thus Melusina is an image of the androgyny. As Fergus Wolff remarks in the novel, "the new feminists see Melusina in her bath as a symbol of self-sufficient female sexuality needing no poor males" (Byatt 2005: 39). In Byatt's world, women are no longer "the second sex", but rather are independent beings.

In addition to Melusina, Dahud, the matriarchal Sorceress-Queen in LaMotte's poem *The Drowned City* is another example. Dahud "rules a hidden kingdom below the unbroken waters of the Armoric Gulf" (Byatt 2005: 266). By creating an imaginary "wonderland" under water, Byatt's feminist proposition comes clear:

> The women's world of the underwater city is the obverse of the male-dominated technological industrial world of Paris or Par-is, as the Bretons have it. They say that Is will come to the surface when Paris is drowned for its sins (Byatt 2005: 248).

From the above, readers can see that female characters in A. S. Byatt's *Possession* are always highly intelligent and independent. They know they are "marginalized" in the male-centered society, yet still actively seek spiritual and physical freedom. In their "conflict between possession and dispossession", the female characters choose to "live in the enclosed and frozen places as a way of preserving their dignity" (Meng 2004: 3) and to make decisions for themselves. Through the description of these women characters, Byatt expresses her unique feminist perceptions.

As a woman writer, Byatt understands that the lives of women are complicated, and never tries to offer a narrative in which she is good and he is bad. Instead, she depicts women with distinctive characteristics, frustrations that both sexes encounter, and men beaten by the harsh reality, thus voices her "unique and insightful contemplation upon human history, life, love and marriage through her portrayal of the characters and her treating of the stories" (Xia 2004: 2). Along with her unique feminist propositions presented in the novel, Byatt's sober consideration of men's existential conditions enriches her themes and contributes greatly to *Possession*'s prominent success. So in the following chapters, the thesis will focus on the male characters depicted in the novel.

Chapter Two Male Characters in *Possession*

> We have arranged our life contrary to the moral and the physical nature of man, and we strain all the forces of our mind in order to assure man that this is the true life. Everything which we call culture, our sciences and our arts, these improvements of the comforts of life, are attempts to deceive man's moral, natural needs (Tolstoy, cited in Dudley 2004: 55).

With the gifted and acute female perception of the universe, Byatt notices not only the predicaments women face throughout the human history, but also the heavy burden on men's shoulders and the difficulties they meet daily, and at the same time, tries to seek a solution for the freedom of both sexes.

In the modern society, men, as well as women, are under great pressure when strive for a living. Patriarchy demands male domination "in women's sexuality, gender roles, and family relationships" (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2001: 10) and sets higher standards for men to fulfill. Unfortunately, with the development of technology, various electronic facilities now assist human life in every sphere, and men are losing their physical advantage over "the other sex". Moreover, "since the first wave of feminism at the beginning of last century, women's defiance of men's traditional sex roles and social status has become a castrating factor to upset, annoy and irritate men's nerves" (Brannon 2005: 15). Under the dual pressure, men in the contemporary world find it harder to act in accordance with the traditional gender arrangements.

In this chapter, the author of this thesis will focus on the socially shaped attributes and behaviors given to the male, on each male character's predicaments predicted by Byatt in *Possession*, and on how they shed light on men's lives as a

whole.

2.1 Men as Gendered Beings

> Men are not born, growing from infants through boyhood to manhood, to follow a predetermined biological imperative encoded in their physical organization. To be a man is to participate in social life as a man, as a gendered being. Men are not born; they are made (Kimmel and Messner 2005: xv).

For several thousand years, human society has remained a patriarchal society. Patriarchy means "the rule of father. It refers to the fundamental and universal status of male dominance, authority and control exercised by men over women, embodied in social institutions of power, such as family, law, and government, and their legitimating ideologies" (Sharon and Xin 1995: 220).

Under patriarchy, the issue of gender becomes prominent. And men, the gender that owns hegemonic power, assume more responsibilities in performing their gender roles.

The term gender, in contrast to sex, describes "the traits and behaviors that are regarded by the culture as appropriate to women and men" (Rhoda Unger, 1979). The American historian Joan W. Scott defines gender as "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Scott 1985: 42, cited in Charon and Xin 1995). Accordingly, gender becomes "a central feature of social life—one of the chief organizing principles around which our lives revolve" (Kimmel and Messner 2005: vii). It shapes not only the attributes and behaviors of each sex but also "the

sex-related characteristics that individuals assign to themselves" (Brannon 2005: 15). The definition clearly points out that gender is the reflection of power relations between men and women; and at the same time, as social beings, men have no other choice but to define themselves according to their gender and to accept the characteristics patriarchy saddles on their shoulders.

"Gender role refers to the expectations that go along with being male versus female" (Helgeson 2005: 4). "The term gender role is used interchangeably with the term sex role" (Helgeson 2005: 6). In the present thesis, gender role is to be used because social attributes of the two genders are the emphases here, and the term sex role might confuse the readers literally, for sex usually refers to "biological categories of male and female" (Helgeson 2005: 3).

Patriarchy endows men with more power than women. The power relation between these two gender groups is embedded in another term—hegemonic masculinity. In his *Gender and Power* (1987), Australian sociologist R. W. Connell writes:

> Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities. These other masculinities need not be as clearly defined—indeed, achieving hegemony may consist precisely in preventing alternatives gaining cultural definition and recognition as alternatives, confining them to ghettos, to privacy, to unconsciousness (186).

Here Connell explains hegemonic masculinity as men's dominance and authority over others, mainly women.

Patriarchal society renders men power and demands men to live up with their hegemonic masculinity at the same time. However, as the saying goes: more power,

more responsibility.

The power requires men to hide their inner timidity and frailty as individuals and to be equipped with masculinity—"the characteristics of being male" (Sharon and Xin 1995:198) which includes emotional and moral toughness, aggressiveness, competitiveness, smartness and sturdiness—to reinforce their hegemony and maintain their social status. Besides, men have the obligation to look after the "weaker, submissive and domestic sex (i.e. women)", and to promise them pleasure, excitement, and satisfaction in mentality, psychology and sexuality. As a result, men's lives and experiences are "constrained and underdeveloped by the relentless pressure to exhibit other behaviors associated with masculinity" (Kimmel and Messner 2005: xiii).

Just like American sociologist Joseph Pleck argues in his *The Myth of Masculinity*:

> Living up to male sex role norms often depends upon the availability of external resources that are socially determined. The norms are so idealized that only the tiniest minority can fulfill them...everyone is prone to feel the possible failure to live up to conventional sex roles. Several studies provide data on men's perception of discrepancies between themselves and the ideal male and particularly that "large proportions of men believe they lack certain desirable masculine traits, as well as feminine traits" (1984: 144).

The normative gender role pattern is surely not fit for every individual man. Some of the norms and requirements set for them in the contemporary society are beyond their abilities. Naturally, in such an artificial setting, men in general are under great pressure and are powerless in many aspects of their lives.

"Warren Farrell (1993), [who] began as a feminist, became a masculinist, and

then said that neither really apply" (Helgeson 2005: 40), portrays the shocking facts of men's powerlessness in life in his *The Myth of Male Power:*

> There are indicators of male powerlessness in our society that ought to be recognized. For example, men are the ones drafted into the military. In addition, society instills in men the notion that they are the breadwinners of the family, whereas women have the option of working or staying at home to raise children if they can afford it. Men also have been socialized to not ask for help, one result of which is that men commit suicide more frequently than women...violence against women is repudiated by society, but violence against men is accepted, if not glorified, in the form of sports...finally, and most important, men die six years earlier than women (Farrel 1993, cited in Helgeson 2005: 40-41).

Men's powerlessness in life further tests that: in patriarchy, as the constructed gender in power, men's lives and experiences are constrained and underdeveloped by the relentless pressure to perform socially expected behaviors associated with masculinity. They experience frustrations in their social life, in their relationship with others, in individual achievements, and also in their inner worlds. "Anxieties widely exist in nearly every man" (Li 2004: 52).

2.2 Men in Relationships

As constructed beings, men are labeled as gender with hegemonic masculinity regardless of their own natural choice. Just like the two sides of a coin, while women are constrained and objectified in patriarchy, men are inevitably put under pressure. Among the many frustrations they encounter in life, relationship with others is the prominent one. In their life experiences, many men have problems establishing and maintaining intimate relationships with others. In this section, the author of this thesis will make an analysis of the male-female relationships and relationships

among males in Byatt's *Possession.*

2.2.1 Male-Female Relationships

The relationship between men and women is simplex in traditional gender roles. Men's masculinity obligates them to look after the weaker, submissive sex. "Women, almost without exception at all times and in all places, adored and oppressed. Man, who has never neglected an opportunity of exerting his power, in paying homage to their beauty, has always availed himself of their weakness" (Paine, in Kimmel and Stephen 2004: 80). The patriarchal society endows men power over women. When they have a constant relationship with women, they would take the latter as their personal property and enjoy taking "possession" of her (Byatt 2005: 550). "The men (says Commodore Byron, in his account of the inhabitants of South Africa) exercise a most despotic authority over their wives, whom they considered in the same view they do any other part of their property, and dispose of them accordingly" (Paine, in Kimmel and Stephen 2004: 81). Generally speaking, men need the power over women and struggle to maintain it since they cannot resist the benefits they gain from women.

Therefore, whenever the rule stated above is broken and the traditional gender relation is violated in reality, men "suffer more negative consequences for gender-role violations than women…[because] they are moving toward a lower status" (Helgeson 2005: 6). Hence they are frustrated, get anxiety and even fear. And their negative feelings stand in the way of love and intimacy between men and

women.

Take the Roland-Val relationship described by Byatt as an example.

Roland Michell and Val meet at a Freshers' tea party in the Student Union and then live together for a long time. In the first few years, Roland does well with his studies and they live on his "DES grant" (Byatt 2005: 17). When Roland is gaining "his successes", Val speaks "less and less", and when she argues, "she offered him increasingly his own ideas" (Byatt 2005: 16). Roland notices this and confidently believes he himself is "good" (Byatt 2005: 17).

Later, things become different. Though Roland has got his Ph D degree, there is no suitable job for him. Without a permanent employment which can provide a sufficient financial base to assume his male breadwinner role, Roland's sense of masculinity is challenged. When Val begins to play the role of the breadwinner in their cohabitation, he immediately "saw himself as a failure and didn't want to do anything so decisive, in terms of himself and Val" (Byatt 2005: 14-22).

Val loves Roland. She cohabits with Roland from their undergraduate years, works hard to support his research work. When Roland leaves in the end, she cries sadly for days. Nevertheless, like other women who get accustomed to the description of patriarchal gender roles, she holds the "assumption that men, but not women, should hold or desire permanent employment" (Henson and Rogers 1999, in Kimmel and Messner 2005:295). Therefore, she keeps using the word "menial" (Byatt 2005: 17-24) to describe her work and expects Roland to take the responsibility as a man and offer them a better future. Her expectation gives Roland

great pressure and makes him fear her.

For Roland is unable to earn a better living for the two of them, "he half wished ...that a merchant banker would take her out to dinner, or a shady solicitor to the Playboy Club" (Byatt 2005: 18). Here, readers can see that since power is granted to the one who contributes better in his relation with the other in the patriarchal society, Roland's self-confidence as an active being is greatly restricted. Because of the rigid description of gender roles assigned to men and women, love is destroyed.

Similar things happen later in his relation with Maud.

In order to uncover the relationship between the Victorian poets Ash and LaMotte, Roland pays a visit to Maud Bailey, a famous LaMotte scholar who runs a Women's Resource Centre in Lincoln University.

By the time they meet, Roland is only an unknown researcher, working part-time for his mentor. Comparing himself with Maud, Roland behaves to be "meek" (Byatt 2005: 156), which can be perceived as less manly. His extreme poverty makes him "appear an inadequately weighty person to be entrusted with the letter-reading" (Byatt 2005: 139); while Maud has already acquired fame and authority in the academic world. This directly causes Roland's "fear of Maud Bailey" (Byatt 2005: 139).

They get into connection during their collaboration of tracing the Ash-LaMotte romance. Emotionally, Roland likes Maud. Yet at the same time, he is aware of their social status and differences:

Maud was a beautiful woman such as he had no claim to possess. She had a secure

> job and an international reputation. Moreover, in some dark and outdated English social system of class, which he did not believe in, but felt obscurely working and gripping him, Maud was County, and he was urban lower-middle-class, in some places more, in some places less acceptable than Maud, but in almost all incompatible (Byatt 2005: 459).

Hence he restrains his feelings for her, hesitating to express his love, and dares not ask her "how much, or what, all this (i.e. their touch on each other) mean" (Byatt 2005: 458-59). His inner world is extremely insecure and contradictory:

> Roland looked at her with love and despair. He had nothing in the world but Maud—no home, no job, no future—and these very negatives made it impossible that Maud would long go on taking him seriously or desiring his presence. (Byatt 2005: 469)

It is only when Roland begins to get positions offered him by universities all over the world by the end of the novel, dare he suggest they love each other "in a modern way" (Byatt 2005: 530).

2.2.2 Male-Male Relationships

In contrast to the relationship between men and women, the relationship between men themselves is rather complex within patriarchy.

First of all, "men [are] not just happily [bound] together to oppress women. In addition to hierarchy over women, men create hierarchies and rankings among themselves according to criteria of masculinity" (Li 2004: 54). A. S. Byatt has vivid descriptions of this kind of male-male relations in the novel.

In *Possession*, the relation between Roland and Blackadder is quite complex. To some extent, they are presented as father and son, dominant and dominated. Freud

has expounded that the experience of Oedipus complex is inevitable for men. Roland, the protagonist and male character, like Oedipus, is also inescapable from this "ever-ongoing, never-to-be-resolved Oedipal crisis" (Li 2004: 44). There are many symbolic scenes in the novel. James Blackadder, expert of Ash studies and supervisor of Roland's doctorial dissertation, plays the role of a father for Roland, and therefore, as a possible model for his rebellious tendencies. Employed by Blackadder, Roland works in his Ash Factory. The Ash Factory is "hutched in the bowels of the building", hot, sunless, "beset by wailings and odd shrieks" (Byatt 2005: 31), and therefore, womb like. This plot is highly symbolic: as a father, Blackadder implants Roland's life in the womb—the Ash Factory—and has him gestated there. Roland, then, has to "go through a high locked portal, which brought you up into the sunless Egyptian necropolis, amongst blind staring pharaohs, crouching scribes, minor sphinxes and empty mummy-cases" (Byatt 2005: 31) to make *his* way out. This process mimics the various stages from impregnation to birth and the perils the fetus encounters on the way. The fatherly Blackadder facilitates the development of Roland's academic ability and hires him part-time after his graduation, which helps ease his pressure in life. Therefore, at the very beginning of the novel, Roland is largely dependent on Prof. Blackadder. He "most frequently thought of himself" through "the complicated relations [with] Blackadder" (Byatt 2005: 13).

Yet every child will have to grow up. Then Roland's secret journey away from his supervisor identifies the developmental stage in every boy's life when he realizes that he must get rid of the initial identification and dependence on his father. Later,

his rivalry in academic research with the fatherly professor is another exemplary analogue of Oedipus complex.

In terms of social status, Blackadder, a well-known Ash expert, is Roland's supervisor, hence enjoys superiority over the latter. Financially, he has got fund for his academic research in Ash Factory and employs Roland as his research assistant. In this way, he has predominant influence over Roland. He assigns Roland tasks, and thereby, exploits Roland's labour. These two men are bound together in their academic research. But within this bond, there exist hierarchies.

Secondly, for those with equal social status, "whether due to the development of the masculine psyche or cultural prescriptions, men are viewed as highly competitive with friends" (Walker 1994, in Kimmel and Messner 2005: 389). The fierce competition in men's world inevitably makes individuals feel peer pressure or threats from time to time. Their capacity for intimacy is sharply restricted.

In *Possession*, there's a pair of male friends—Roland and Fergus. Personally, Roland loves Fergus, takes him as exciting and civilized, enjoys talking with him, and wants "to be able to go on liking him" (Byatt 2005: 18). When Val criticizes Fergus, calling him "That pretentious blond bombshell" and "That pretentious sexpot" (Byatt 2005: 18), Roland feels embarrassed and sorry for Fergus. However, the fact that Fergus outperforms Roland in job interviews forces Roland to see him as a "rival". Later, "he came to no more meals, and Roland feared Fergus thought this was a function of his, Roland's, resentment" (Byatt 2005: 18). As a result, a promising friendship between the two male academics ends rather unpleasantly.

Competition also exists between acquaintances.

There's a plot in *Possession*: After Roland and Val parted, a young solicitor Euan MacIntyre comes into Val's life and later becomes her fiancé. Euan happens to be the friend of Sir George Bailey's solicitor, Toby Byng. He hears of the copyright issue of LaMotte's correspondence with Ash. Out of curiosity and kindness, he comes to meet Roland and Maud, together with Val and Toby, tells Roland and Maud about what they've learnt about it, and offers legal service.

For Roland, Euan is of great help technically, but he cannot treat Euan objectively. Instead, Roland secretly observes the solicitor, compares him with himself, and feels a kind of loss:

> Euan's charm and enthusiasm had not only smoothed the resentment and sullenness out of Val's face but had somehow brought a brightness and recklessness to Maud herself. He fancied she spoke more freely to Euan and Tony than she had done to him. He fancied Val took pleasure in taking over the pursuit...He looked for his own primary thought, and said to himself that before Maud came he had had Randolph Ash and his words, and now even that, that above all, had been changed and taken from him (Byatt 2005: 477-78).

Rather frustrated, Roland feels himself "marginal" (Byatt 2005: 474) and hates himself for living in such a situation.

A more fierce competition takes place between James Blackadder, the British literary scholar, and Mortimer Cropper, the American Biographer. The former's firm belief that "British writings should stay in Britain and be studied by the British" (Byatt 2005: 13) is challenged by the threatening blank cheques of the latter all the time; while the latter thinks: "because of James Blackadder, there was no time for patience and finesse" (Byatt 2005: 415) in his searching for R. H. Ash's life. Cropper

thinks "himself [is] the lord and owner of Ash", while Blackadder believes "his place (in Ash study) [is] better" (Byatt 2005: 33). Their competition lasts for years. Unfortunately, in their nearly crazy struggle for the possession of part of the Ash documents, both of them lose something important for existing as real men and appear as incomplete beings: as scholars, they lose their fidelity in pursuing the truth of knowledge; while as men, they see wealth and benefits only, failing to perceive the beauty of life, and thus, become numb slaves of wealth and success.

Chapter Three Possessing or Being Possessed

Possessing or being possessed, this is the question A. S. Byatt raises in the novel. In this chapter, the author of this thesis will make an attempt to see Byatt's answer to it. To answer this question, it is necessary to highlight three sub-themes dealt with by A. S. Byatt first: gaze, homophobia, and what achievements mean to men. In the patriarchal system, "gaze" "carries with it the power of action and possession" (Kaplan, 1983) and constitutes "the objectification or 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of women" (Mulvey, 1975). Homophobia is so powerful that it discriminates against those minorities who dare deviate from the conventional gender roles. And it is through achievements that men prove their male identity. Evidently, all of them—patriarchal gaze upon women, the powerful homophobia, and men's ambitious pursuit of achievements—are employed to maintain the masculine power to control and possess. Yet Byatt reveals a fact that they can be reread as subversive factors to weaken the masculinity. Therefore, this chapter will draw its attention to reveal the underlying signification of gaze, homophobia, and men's ambition for achievements.

3.1 Men under Gaze

The word "gaze" is defined as "look long and steadily (at sb/ sth), usu in surprise or admiration" in *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary.* The British feminist theorist and filmmaker Laura Mulvey first identifies men's gazes as

"the voyeuristic gaze of the camera, the gaze of the male characters (especially the male protagonist) in the film, and, finally, that of the male spectator"; and states how these three kinds of male gazes "in classical cinema constitutes the objectification or 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of women in classical cinema" (Mulvey 1975, in Sharon and Xin 1995: 143-44).

It is true that in the major literary genres, films for example, women have been placed explicitly as sexual objects under the gaze of men.

However, in response to women's liberation movement, feminist critics have deconstructed women's passiveness and objectification, and in some literary works by women authors, male characters are put under the gaze of women characters. Byatt, as an acute observer and an active thinker, is prominent among them.

Reading *Possession*, one can find that men, regardless of their social status, are constantly under gaze.

Back to the glorious Victorian time, the renowned poet R. H. Ash and his contemporary poetess Christabel LaMotte fall in love. They take a secret journey to York together and enjoy a honeymoon-like holiday there. On their way to York, each of them "looks at" and "watches" the other every now and then.

Ash looks at LaMotte all the time. "When [LaMotte] was most determinedly looking at her book, or the flashing fields and vanishing cattle, [Ash's] eyes would rest on her" (Byatt 2005:298). In Ash's imagination, it is all "the whiteness of her, which was part of her extreme magnetism, and the green look of those piercing or occluded eyes" (Byatt 2005: 301). Then when they have settled in the lodgings and

when there are no strangers present, "he studied the pale loops of hair on her temples ... if he loved the face, which was not kind, it was because it was clear and quick and sharp" (Byatt 2005: 301-302). "He saw her waist ... remembered her nakedness as he knew it, and his hands around that narrowing" (Byatt 2005: 312).

So in Ash's eye, the poetess is eroticized as a "sex other", and his "gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession" (Kaplan 1983: 264).

The American literary and film critic E. Ann Kaplan argues in 1983, "the sexualization and objectification of women is not simply for the purposes of eroticism; from a psychoanalytic point of view, it is designed to annihilate the threat that woman poses" (264). Then Ash's constant "watch" and gaze upon LaMotte function not only to objectify LaMotte, but also to ease his own concealed fear of losing power over LaMotte.

LaMotte, on the other hand, as an open-minded poetess armed with some feminist ideas, has got strong will and character, and knows her position as a woman (being peeped at and thought inferior). Instead of being the passive recipient of men's gaze, she actively gazes back.

While talking with Ash, "she looked directly at him" (Byatt 2005: 299); hearing his suggestion: "Will you go up first, dear?", she "stood looking at him, strained but mocking, and smiled" (Byatt 2005: 306); when he looks at her and catches her eye, "she might have lain with her face turned away, but did not" (Byatt 2005: 308); and when she thinks herself is unobserved:

> She watched him with her sharp look when she thought herself unobserved, but not

with solicitude, nor yet with affection, nor yet with the greedy curiosity he could not suppress in himself. She watches him as a bird watches, the sort that is chained to a stand, some bright-plumed creature of tropical forests, some gold-eyed hawk from northern crags, wearing its jesses with what dignity it could muster, enduring man's presence with a still-savage hauteur, ruffling its feathers from time to time, to show both that it tended itself with respect, and that it was not quite comfortable (Byatt 2005: 303).

Different from the convention, in Ash-LaMotte relationship, the male character is often under the gaze of his female partner. In the same way as men's gaze objectifies women, men are also objectified. In effect, it aggravates men's already existing anxiety.

Moreover, women's increasing initiative in relationship weakens men's hegemonic masculinity. In the novel, readers can notice that when the two are together, LaMotte always goes beyond the traditional female gender role of being dependent and submissive. It is LaMotte who is more aggressive and direct verbally and physically.

In York, the two poets live in Mrs. Cammish's lodging as husband and wife, but Ash "noted that she assumed no manners that might be thought wifely. She handed him nothing. She did not lean forward intimately, she did not defer" (Byatt 2005: 303). When the lovers go out and walk by the sea, "she did not take his arm, though once or twice, when they coincided, she took hold of it, and stepped along beside him rapidly for a time" (Byatt 2005: 304), and therefore keeps her independence from Ash. At night, when the two are in bed, "when he took her in his arms, it was she who said, harshly, 'Are you afraid?'" (Byatt 2005: 308); and physically, "she met him with passion, fierce as his own, and knowing too, for she exacted her

pleasure from him…but made no more specific move to pleasure him, the male—nor did she come to that, all those nights" (Byatt 2005: 308).

LaMotte's "lack of diffidence and her surprising matter-of-fact directness" (Byatt 2005: 306) shock Ash and make him anxious. Obviously, her deviation from the traditional female gender role is a threat to his hegemony.

Confronted with the threat, Ash labels her actions as "strange" (Byatt 2005: 308) and decides that "he would change all that" (Byatt 2005: 304). In addition, he judges her as unpleasant and unwanted from his dominant male perspective:

> It seemed to him, what in essence she was, sitting at Crabb Robinson's breakfast table, listening to men disputing, thinking herself an unobserved observer. Most men, he judged, if they had seen the harshness and fierceness and absolutism, yes, absolutism, of that visage, would have stood back from her. She would have been destined to be loved only by timid weaklings, who would have secretly hoped she would punish or command them, or by simpletons, who supposed her chill look of delicate withdrawal to indicate a kind of female purity, which all desired, in those days, at least ostensibly (Byatt 2005: 302).

In her article "The Dread of Women" (1932), the German Freudian psychoanalyst Karen Horney goes to literature to show that "Men have never tired of fashioning expressions for the violent force by which man feels himself drawn to the woman and side by side with his longing, the dread that through her he might die and be undone." Knowing it, it is easier to approach Ash's extreme judgement on LaMotte: he just wants to conceal his own dread, "the dread of women not only in castration (more related to the father) but in fear of the vagina" (Kaplan 1983: 265).

As time passes, the hidden anxieties of men caused by the gazing women do not perish. On the contrary, whereas LaMotte's gaze upon Ash is yet "not with solicitude,

nor yet with affection, nor yet with the greedy curiosity" (Byatt 2005: 303), the gaze Roland encounter in the 20th century of women demonstrates a stronger power of emasculation.

In Chapter Two of the novel for example, Val witnesses Roland's diligent yet unnoticed biographical research and labels him as "Mole" (Byatt 2005: 14). Similarly, in Chapter Eight, Maud uses a feminist gaze upon Roland and concludes he is "a gentle and unthreatening being...Meek...Meek" (Byatt 2005: 156). From the scenes, one notices that Roland's hegemonic masculinity is under threat and deconstruction when gazed by women, though "he disliked".

In a larger social context, Roland is also unavoidably gazed every day as described in the novel:

> He was a compact, clearcut man, with precise features, a lot of very soft black hair, and thoughtful dark brown eyes. He had a look of wariness, which could change when he felt relaxed or happy, which was not often in these difficult days, into a smile of amused friendliness and pleasure which aroused feelings of warmth, and something more, in many women. He was generally unaware of these feelings, since he paid little attention to what people thought about him, which was part of his attraction (Byatt 2005: 14).

With such descriptions about him, Roland at the same time is put under the gaze of readers as well. Clearly, under such a gaze, Roland is put onto a position of sexual object and is in fact emasculated, which makes his image totally different from the traditional masculine image of men.

It is argued that "the emasculation is prevailing in present society since women's striving for equality with men" (Li 2004: 37). Roland is a typical example of an emasculated man who is "compact" and "clearcut", hence lacks the physical power

to counterbalance the castration threat. To make things worse, he would frequently think of himself in terms of his "complicated relations with Blackadder, Cropper and Ash" (Byatt 2005: 13), but not his independent identity. The fact itself manifests Roland's femininity inside. Essentially, "he saw himself as a failure, for he is unemployed, scraping a living on part-time tutoring, dogsbodying for Blackadder and some restaurant dishwashing" (Byatt 2005: 14). Without the physical aggressiveness or success in career, he demonstrates his bewilderment, cautiousness, fear and anxiety. That explains Roland's choice to flee from Val and their apartment.

In *Possession*, there are descriptions about other men who are under gaze, both reluctantly and voluntarily.

Feminist theorists (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, in Rosen 2004: 271-85) have long argued that "the disease of maladjustment to the physical and social environment" such as claustrophobia and agoraphobia are caused by patriarchal socialization. As a pair of parallel and complementary symptoms that women suffer, they "carry patriarchal definition of 'femininity' to absurd extremes and thus function as essential or at least inescapable parodies of social prescription." For years, they "did and do strike a disproportionate number of women."

Byatt also mentions in *Possession* that "women's imagination of space...about agoraphobia and claustrophobia and the paradoxical desire to be let out into unconfined space, the wild moorland, the open ground, and at the same time to be closed into tighter and tighter impenetratable small spaces—like Emily Dickenson's voluntary confinement, like the Sibyl's jar" (2005: 61).

Given these "socially conditioned epidemic[s] of female illness" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979), it is surprising to find that men, the opposite gender, also suffer from them.

In the novel, Prof. Blackadder is invited by a television journalist Shushila Patel to be shown on a late-night news analysis programme *Events in Depth* to talk about his concern with the Ash-LaMotte correspondence. At first, "Blackadder was quietly but fiercely excited at the idea of putting the power of television behind his cause" (Byatt 2005: 431). However, later, when being interviewed by Ms Patel and shot by cameras, thus under the gaze of both a woman and numerous audiences, he "was getting claustrophobia." The five minutes on show "seemed eternal" for him, and "he had only the vaguest recollection of what had been said" (Byatt 2005: 436).

It is a sharp contrast to his co-speaker Prof. Leonora Stern's behavior:

> The two women (i.e. Shushila and Leonora), like gaudy parrots, talking very rapidly about female sexuality and its symbols when repressed, the Fairy Melusina and the danger of the female, LaMotte and the love that dare not speak its name, Leonora's huge surprise when it seemed that Christabel might have loved a man (Byatt 2005: 436).

A man as Blackadder is, he cannot avoid the fate of being gazed or being objectified. Under gaze, he suffers female disease, thus shows his frailty and femininity inside. When Prof. Leonora outperforms him in the show, he can only "watch with a mixture of fine distaste, technical admiration and sheer trepidation as Leonora built up a memorable thumb-nail miniature Christabel" (Byatt 2005: 434). And when "left alone with Leonora, Blackadder was apprehensive" (Byatt 2005: 434). Obviously, his masculinity is under fatal threat.

Moreover, in the interview, it is only when the American professor Leonora Stern agrees to his idea by saying "the letters should be in the British Library…and I'd like Christabel to have honour in her own country and Professor Blackadder here, who's the greatest living Ash scholar, to have charge of correspondence" (Byatt 2005: 436), does Blackadder feel relaxed. He has to admit that "you (i.e. Leonora) influenced me enough to make me articulate (in the TV programme) at all—" (Byatt 2005: 437).

As readers know, in the predominant culture of the West, one of the major themes in the construction of masculinity defined in Hebrew Bible is that "the rule for men is: Be self-reliant. 'Men are supposed to be confident, independent and autonomous . . . A "real man" doesn't need others, particularly women. He depends on himself, takes care of himself, and relies on nobody'" (Clines 1995: 212-41). Blackadder severely violates the role set for his gender by patriarchy, thus makes himself degraded. And it explains his uneasiness, helplessness, desperation, embarrassment, and anxiety when being gazed.

Interestingly, in the same novel, there is another male figure Prof. Cropper. Unlike Blackadder, he is glad to be shown in public.

> He gave his lecture, "The Art of a Biographer," in a fashionable City church whose Vicar liked people to come, and eclectically made sure they did…Cropper loved lecturing. He was not of the old school, who fix the audience with a mesmeric eye and a melodious voice. He was a hi-tech lecturer, a magician of white screens and light-beams, sound-effects and magnifications. He filled the church with projectors and transparent cages of promptings which helped him, like President Reagan, to orchestrate with impromptu naturalness a highly complicated presentation (Byatt 2005: 416).

It seems that Cropper is rather active. Yet by arranging his personal show, he actively promotes the objectification of himself, and therefore, deserves the same fate with Blackadder.

Pleck says, "the development of appropriate sex role identity is a risky, failure-prone process, especially for males" (1987). In Byatt's creation and descriptions of male characters, readers see that anxiety and insecurity are widely indicated in sex role identity, and the anxiety of powerlessness shows the fragility and the precariousness of masculinity.

3.2 Homophobia

"Homophobia is defined as the fear of homosexuality or the fear of appearing homosexual" (Helgeson 2005: 322). It is deeply rooted in the patriarchal tradition. People who have traditional gender-role attitudes possess negative attitudes toward homosexuality. This is not surprising because homosexual behavior is a threat to traditional beliefs about gender roles for men and women, and thus fatally damage masculinity. In the field of social studies, "there has been much less research on gay and lesbian relationships compared to that of heterosexual relationships" (Helgeson 2005: 389). As a result, bias along with misunderstanding construct a number of myths about homosexuality or the love toward the same sex. People tend to believe that homosexual relationships are transient, immoral, abnormal, and women and men in these relations are unhealthy, unhappy and have low self-esteem. Lesbians and gays are thus confronted with discriminations and violence, rejected by the

community they live, and threatened by unemployment, beatings, rape, and even death.

However, researches show that these common beliefs are not true. "90% of lesbian couples lived together and the average relationship lasted 5.4 years, with some lasting as long as 20 years... the majority of gay and lesbian relationships are close and mutually satisfying" (Helgeson 2005: 387-88). According to American Psychological Association, "homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social and vocational capabilities" (Conger, 1975) and "homosexuals were as psychologically normal as heterosexuals" (APA, 2003). In fact, homosexuality, like heterosexual identity, is simply a matter of sexual tendency and identity. It is not healthier to be heterosexual. What is unhealthy is homophobia itself. It places negative messages, stress, condemnation, and violence on gay men and lesbians, for the existence of homosexuality threatens male dominance, and, therefore, is taken as a societal disease in patriarchy.

Patriarchy is defined as an enforced belief in male dominance and control. As Suzanne Pharr, the American writer and social justice activist, argues in her "Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism":

> [Patriarchy entitles] men ownership of women, power over women, and assumed right to control women for their own means...When the male abuser calls a woman a lesbian, he is not so much labeling her a woman who loves women as he is warning her that by resisting him, she is choosing to be outside society's protection from male institutions and therefore from wide-ranging, unspecified, ever-present violence. When she seeks assistance from woman friends...he recognizes the power in woman bonding and fears loss of her servitude and loyalty: the potential loss of his control (Pharr 1988, in Ruth 1998: 279-81).

In such a social context, a lesbian is to be perceived as someone who deviates from her "proper" gender roles, who has no societal institutions to protect her and who stands in contradiction to the sacrifices she has made to confirm to compulsory heterosexuality, and who is a threat to the nuclear family, to male dominance and control. At the same time, gay men are "the objects of extreme hatred and fear by heterosexual men because their breaking ranks with male heterosexual solidarity is seen as a damaging rent in the very fabric of sexism" (Pharr, 1988). They are seen as "betrayers [and] traitors who must be punished and eliminated" (Pharr, 1988). To make things worse, men who show affection for the same sex are perceived as "not being 'real men', that is, as being identified with women, the weaker sex that must be dominated and that over the centuries has been the object of male hatred and abuse, [and] misogyny gets transferred to gay men with a vengeance and is increased by the fear that their sexual identity and behavior will bring down the entire system of male dominance and compulsory heterosexuality" (Pharr 1988, in Ruth 1998: 282-83). Therefore, the word homosexuality carries with it the "full threat of loss of power and privilege, the threat of being cut asunder, abandoned, and left outside society's protection" (Pharr 1988, in Ruth 1998: 282).

In *Possession*, the Victorian woman character Blanche Glover, female partner of Christabel LaMotte, has artistic ambitions—"painting large canvases in oil as well as carving the skilful and mysterious wood engravings" (Byatt 2005: 41-42) which she "firmly believe[s] has value, though it is not at present wanted by many" (Byatt 2005: 334). Her name Blanche is a feminine form of the word which means "white, blank",

"implying the 'blank page' of female discourse and history" (Meng 2004: 34). She chooses painting as the way of expressing herself, escapes the fate of working as a governess, which she identifies as a slave, and tests her ideal of "living useful and fully human lives" as independent single women in the company of her female mate, "without recourse to help from the outside world, or men" (Byatt 2005: 333). Yet her utopian ideal is totally shattered by the patriarchal reality.

In Victorian time, "heterosexual marriage, as the only legitimate place in which sexual activity could take place, had a large degree of privilege within the society—reflected in the reluctance to make any alteration in its terms and conditions...[and] the lives of individual homosexuals...[are] usually in a context of scandal" (Hall 2000: 15-20). It is clear that Miss Blanche Glover, the "occluded lesbian" (Byatt 2005: 43), is seen as an alien in the community she lives in and suffer physically and psychologically.

The first and most direct impact on her is poverty. In "Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism", Suzanne argues that "economics, violence, and homophobia are the three weapons of patriarchy/sexism" (1988, in Ruth 1998: 279). In Victorian time, most women did unpaid housework at home, and those who stepped out of their homes could only seek low-paid jobs. To live without a man usually meant lacking of financial support. Patriarchy employs forced economic dependency to put women under male control and severely limits women's options for self-determination and self-sufficiency. Hence, Blanche is rejected by her contemporary community. Except LaMotte, no one recognizes her talent in art. She can sell only a limited number of

her works and ends up in extreme poverty—being not able to afford more paint for her painting or even her own funeral.

Furthermore, her experiment in the "fiercely inimical" world damages her self-esteem and leads to the destruction of her ideals. It is difficult for her to keep the sense of well-being and self-esteem against accusations of being different in the social context where "neither men nor other more conventionally domesticated women (who live in homophobic fear) will hope for anything, or expect any result other than utter failure (in her life)" (Byatt 2005: 333). In the end, the creative painter commits suicide because she thinks herself a superfluous creature in this world. So the Victorian "witch" Blanche, who dares live a lesbian life openly, is successfully terminated by homophobia.

Alongside with its fierce penalty for lesbians, homophobia serves as a barrier to closeness in male relationships. Patriarchy devalues homosexuality; it then uses the norms of homophobia to keep men perform their gender roles.

In *Possession*, there is no description about gay relations, still readers can sense the influence of homophobia upon male characters. The protagonist Roland has a male friend—Fergus Wolff. Personally, Roland likes Fergus and the latter seems to like him. Roland enjoys talking with Fergus, and even cooks "a pheasant for his rival in the departmental rat-race...although the pheasant was tough and full of shot" (Byatt 2005: 17) when his girlfriend Val, who dislikes Fergus, is absent. However, when the two male friends meet, they just smile at each other. It is a great contrast with the intimacy between Maud and Leonora (a pair of female friends), which

always includes a solid hug.

In their "Intimacy and Structure", the writers Mazur and Oliver suggest that "men see danger in affiliations with other men" (539-58). The major underlying reason is expatiated upon in researches:

> Because men do not want to appear to be homosexual, they limit their physical contact and their emotional closeness with other men, reserving those kinds of contacts for romantic relationships with women. (P. J. Stein, 1986) Men who score higher in homophobia report less trust, less understanding, fewer expressions of caring, and less empathy in their relationships with other men (Devlin & Cowan 1985: 322).

Therefore, men, like Roland and Fergus, are subconsciously warned by the society in which they grow up of the danger of being trapped in homosexuality. In such a social context, men in general have to restrain their intuitive affection towards other males. They are under social control and forced to maintain right by homophobia.

It is clear that homophobia, as a kind of internalized bigotry in nearly every society today, causes great damage to everybody. On the one hand, homophobia affects the lives of lesbians and gays. Working as a powerful weapon of patriarchy, it is the underlying reason for discrimination and violence against the minorities who dare deviate from the conventional gender roles. On the other hand, heterosexuals also suffer from homophobia. Under its influence, women are forced to behave obediently in the framework of patriarchy; while men avoid appearing as homosexuals even more deliberately. The reaction of men to homophobia shows their timidity in essence—"lacking of confidence in their power and panic for the treats of

the overturn of the patriarchal order" (Pharr, 1988). To conclude, just as Suzanne Pharr asserts, "all people lose when homophobia wins" (Pharr 1988, in Ruth 1998).

3.3 Men and Achievements

In most "civilized" cultures, a man is supposed to be social and is expected to work in the public sphere. The "code of respect" in the current society also demands that "a man should feel responsibility for his own social position [of a good provider]" as Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb argue in their *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972: 36). Besides, "Success and failure occur explicitly within the Darwinian arena of capitalism, and the fate of the male characters, in particular, is tied to their ability to control their own economic fortunes" (Dudley 2004: 90). Consequently, men have to identify themselves through the work they are doing or have done or by the assignment they have got. In order to attain better individual achievements, they try to conceal their vulnerabilities and dress themselves up in traits which are highly valued and typically attached to men, such as independence, decisiveness, bravery, ambition, and will-power. They cannot afford to accept failure.

In *Possession*, Roland Mitchell first appears as a half-unemployed Ph D, living an impoverished life with his girlfriend Val. He tries to get himself employed. Unfortunately, good job opportunities always go to his more aggressive and outgoing competitors such as Fergus. When Roland is discharged or gets refusal in job hunting, he feels he is a failure. As a man, he is expected to play the role of a breadwinner in his relationship with Val. But the reality is that he possesses no money, home, nor

fame—the symbols of masculinity that confer power and privilege—and even has to rely on Val's earnings. Consequently, life becomes a series of challenges to his existence. Quite contrary to his status as the stronger gender, he loses his hegemony, feels insecure and is thus silenced even before his intimate partner.

On the issue of whether they should continue living in the apartment or not, "Roland thought they ought to look for somewhere else, but held back from proposing it, because he was not the breadwinner, and because he didn't want to do anything so decisive, in terms of himself and Val" (Byatt 2005: 22). Though he is excited about his discovery of Ash's correspondence in the London Library and is eager to share his new discoveries with Val, he feels sorry for boring her and decides "he could not tell her about his secret" (Byatt 2005: 24) as soon as he senses her indifference. In their daily life, he can always feel "the practical, calculating anxiety...[about] his extreme poverty, which might make him appear an inadequately weighty person...[and feel] fear of Val" (Byatt 2005: 138).

It is clear that with no achievements in his career, Roland is unsure of his place and is impotent to make any changes in his life. He then attempts to get out of the predicament by all means, even at the cost of his fidelity and honesty. He works as research assistant for his supervisor Blackadder, but "he was reluctant to tell Blackadder [his findings]. He enjoyed possessing his knowledge on his own" (Byatt 2005: 7). When he senses that the two letters written by Ash that he has found in London library may lead to new discoveries,

> he was seized by a strange and uncharacteristic impulse of his own. [For him] it was

suddenly quite impossible to put these living words back into page 300 of Vico and return them to Safe 5. When no one was looking, he slipped the letters between the leaves of his own copy of the Oxford Selected Ash (Byatt 2005: 10).

As a scholar who has received higher education, Roland's morality makes him feel guilty of his theft and nervous for his treacherous actions behind Blackadder's back. The predicament he is in increases his inner anxieties. However, such crises are terminated when he and Maud trace out the secret romance between Ash and LaMotte, and he gets job offers to serve as a lecturer from universities all over the world at the end of the novel, for his paper "'Line by Line' on R. H. Ash" is highly appreciated. After that, he becomes more straightforward on insisting on his opinion about the ownership of the letters between Ash and LaMotte, and more brave and active in beginning a new relationship with Maud Bailey.

So it is the teaching position he gets that resolves his identity crisis. As a man, he needs to prove his value and realize his masculinity through success.

Another typical male character worth mentioning here is James Blackadder, Roland's mentor. He is a serious English specialist on Ash Studies and has devoted his life to the editing of *Ash's Complete Works.*

Earlier, when he was a university student, young James was very brilliant and creative actually. *He* "wrote poems…devised an essay style of Spartan brevity, equivocation and impenetrability" (Byatt 2005: 32). Both his family and his mentor Dr. Leavis had great expectations of him, and their expectations restrained young James and made him lack confidence in his own capacity. When he "imagined Dr. Leavis's comments on them [his poems], he burned them" (Byatt 2005: 32); and in

the seminar where his academic talent and learning are to be judged,

> he himself had two choices: to state his knowledge, or to allow the seminar to proceed, with Leavis enticing unfortunate undergraduates into making wrong identifications, and then proceeding to demonstrate his own analytic brilliance in distinguishing fake from authenticity, Victorian alienation from the voice of true feeling. Blackadder chose silence, and Ash was duly exposed and found wanting (Byatt 2005: 32).

His choice is right from the perspective of accomplishment, for he is no longer the unknown James Blackadder now but has grown into renowned Professor Blackadder.

However, as an individual, he is not happy with his life; nor is he satisfied with his academic achievements. Generally speaking, he "was discouraged and liked to discourage others" (Byatt 2005: 13). And deep in his heart, he "felt that he had somehow betrayed Randolph Henry Ash, though he might more justly have been thought to have betrayed himself, his grandfather, or possibly Dr. Leavis" (Byatt 2005: 32). He earns his fame through Ash study. However, in a TV show, when being interviewed and asked by "what's important about Randolph Henry Ash" (Byatt 2005: 432), he sadly gets aware of the fact that he dose not have a coherent vision of his work. Following the trend of the academic circle, Blackadder becomes well-known, attracts funds for his Ash Factory, and achieves higher social status at the price of his natural gift and real interest. He depends on R. H. Ash so much that "he could not detach himself from Ash enough to see what was not known" (Byatt 2005: 433), and in doing his research, "all his thoughts would have been another man's thoughts, all his work another man's work" (Byatt 2005: 33).

Unfortunately, new findings on Ash's love affair cast down nearly all the

previously existing assumptions on the poet's life and works at the end of the novel. As a result, all of Blackadder's efforts and accomplishment in this field prove to be of no value, and the whole world for the poor professor is shattered.

Mortimer Cropper is a more extreme example of men possessing wealth and success, yet is also possessed by his desire to be wealthy and successful. Cropper is an American literary entrepreneur, editor of Ash's correspondence and indefatigable collector of his manuscripts and memorabilia. He aims to "know as far as possible everything he [Ash] did—everyone who mattered to him—every little preoccupation he had" (Byatt 2005: 108). Over years, he has already got the "largest and finest collection of Randolph Henry Ash's correspondence anywhere in the world" (Byatt 2005: 108). Still, he is driven by the desire of possessing more, even to a crazy extent.

Despite the "academic courtesies" (Byatt 2005: 109) he always mentions, he would do anything to enlarge his collection of Ash's belongings, both legal and illegal. For him, academic courtesy is but pretence to help him make more profits. Personally, he hates Prof. Blackadder for his insistence that "British writings should stay in Britain and be studied by the British" (Byatt 2005: 13) and Prof. Beatrice for her "semi-exclusive [lien] in Ellen Ash's Journal" (Byatt 2005: 110).

All his life, Cropper proves his values as a scholar and his male identity through his collection of Ash's possessions. He does everything out of his desire for vanity, fame, and gain. In essence, he is alienated. And his craze for wealth reaches its climax at the end of the novel. In order to find the last piece of the story between Ash

and LaMotte—what happened to their child—Cropper schemes to dig up the grave of the Ashes in the Sussex country to find LaMotte's last letter to them. A group of researchers go to the graveyard in a stormy night and get what they long for finally.

With the finding of the letter, they successfully reconstruct the life of the Ash and LaMotte and renew the contemporary knowledge about the Victorian poet and poetess. However, by robbing the grave of Ash, not only Mortimer Cropper but also those participant scholars degrade themselves morally and can no longer maintain their decency as individuals. Every scholar in the story wants to possess the whole story of Ash and LaMotte and to possess part of the historical documents. In fact, while crazily seeking possession, they are tragically possessed by their desire to be a real and successful man defined by the patriarchal system. Byatt, as an acute observer of life, catches this theme and expresses her idea through Maud Bailey's words: "All scholars are a bit mad. All obsessions are dangerous" (Byatt 2005: 360).

Roland, Blackadder, and Cropper represent males from different backgrounds and with different characteristics in the contemporary society. Despite their differences in nature and social status, they have one thing in common: as men, they need to realize their value through achievements. Yet in the pursuit of achievements, they are forced to give up the most valuable things as individual human beings such as their personal interest, honesty and naivety. Then a shocking but long ignored fact is uncovered: Quite contrary to the common sense that one's fate is in his own hands, men are trapped in their rigid gender roles and are possessed and manipulated by patriarchy. In the process of tailoring themselves to the requirements of the

patriarchal societies, they get lost and are doomed to end with misery.

Conclusion

This thesis has endeavored to explore A. S. Byatt's reflection on men's existential status in the patriarchal society through the textual analysis of *Possession: A Romance.*

As a modern feminist scholar, Byatt has a thorough understanding of the female writing tradition and shows an intensely historical concern for the female existence. In *Possession*, she wisely incorporates female tradition and her "unique and insightful contemplation upon human history, life, love and marriage through her portrayal of the characters and her treating of the stories" (Xia 2004: 2). She creates highly intelligent and independent women characters, praises female power, and actively advocates the improvements of women's lives. Yet different from the feminist writers in the earlier time, she never tries to offer a narrative in which "she" is good and "he" is bad. In the novel, she depicts women with distinctive characteristics, frustrations that both genders encounter, and men beaten by the harsh reality. Byatt's unique feminist propositions, together with her sober thoughts on the existential status of both genders, make her acquire a prominent position in the history of women's literature.

In people's common sense, men, the dominant gender in the patriarchal society, are expected to take possession of the material world, and thus benefit greatly from their superiority over women. Yet through the analysis of *Possession*, it is not difficult to find that the male characters are also constrained. They suffer, and experience senses of loss in their lives. In patriarchy, men's self-worth is built on

their achievements. They are expected to be technically brilliant and devoted to work, and to contribute more in their relation with women. Such expectations on men result in their greed and craze for wealth and fame and obstruct the development of their relations with others. Moreover, the patriarchal gaze upon women and the powerful homophobia—tools that patriarchy employs to maintain the masculine power to control and possess—can be reread as subversive factors to weaken the masculinity.

So finally the thesis comes to its conclusion: men, as gendered beings, are required to be equipped with masculinity to reinforce their hegemony and maintain their social status, regardless of their individual nature and capabilities. They have no other choice but to submit themselves to the gender roles assigned by patriarchy. As a matter of fact, they are trapped in their rigid gender roles and are possessed by the patriarchal system.

Feminists have long "realized their [women's] historically inferior position that men had imposed on them in society" (Lu 2005: 18). They claim that women are constrained in the roles available to them, and take positive actions to improve the existence of women in every single aspect. Yet "too often, though, we treat men as if they had no gender...as if their interior experience of gender was of no significance" (Kimmel and Messner 2005: xv). In addition, men often think of themselves as genderless, "as if gender did not matter in the daily experiences of their lives" (Kimmel and Messner 2005: x). They blindly obey social and traditional norms set for them, and are always frustrated. Being unaware of the causes leading to their anxiety, men suffer and sometimes even try to dismiss their problems through

escapism, which is by no means a positive way.

As the statement in *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* goes: "The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen as a women's issue" (Shaw and Lee 2001: 548). Men cannot separate from this procedure of pursuing for the better. Thus, the discussion on how to reform the rigid gender roles set in patriarchal society and to achieve a genuine equality between men and women is necessary and urgent. A new type of masculinity needs to be created to console modern men. And what type of new masculinity should be constituted or whether we need the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity are still open for the society because the study on masculinity is a new area for wider research, and more laborious work.

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Appendix I Characters in *Possession: A Romance*

Randolph Henry Ash: Victorian poet, a literary canon of his time. He marries Ellen Best and is originally thought to have lived in domestic bliss with her for over forty years. He meets Christabel LaMotte at Robinson's breakfast party, loves her, and has a secret journey to Yorkshire with her. LaMotte leaves him after being pregnant and he does not know about his daughter till his death.

Christabel Madeleine LaMotte: Victorian poetess who writes fairy tales and an epic *The Fairy Melusina*, elder daughter of historian Isidore LaMotte. She is at first believed to live a secluded lesbian life with her friend Miss Blanche Glover until the latter's suicide. She meets Ash at a breakfast party, falls in love with him, and they have a secret journey to Yorkshire together. After discovering she is pregnant, she ends their relationship, goes to her cousin's in Brittany and gives birth to a daughter named Maia. The girl is adopted by LaMotte's sister Sophie. LaMotte then lives with them as a "maiden aunt" and retreats into voluntary silence till her death in 1890.

Blanche Glover: a minor Victorian painter. She meets LaMotte at a lecture of Ruskin's and lives with her for six years, then commits suicide in 1861.

Sophie: younger sister of Christabel LaMotte, wife of Sir George Bailey, of Seal Close, in the Lincolnshire Wolds. She adopts LaMotte's daughter Maia.

Maia Thomasine Bailey: daughter of Ash and LaMotte. She is adopted by LaMotte's sister Sophie and doesn't know her real parents.

Isidore LaMotte: author of *Mythologies*, 1832. He's the father of Christabel and Sophie LaMotte.

Crabb Robinson: a friend of Isidore LaMotte. It is at his breakfast party that Ash and Christabel LaMotte meet.

Sabine de Kercoz: an almost unpublished French writer and cousin of Christabel LaMotte through her paternal grandmother. LaMotte visits her family in the autumn of 1859 and suggests that she keep a journal to practise her writing skill. Her journal covers LaMotte's visit there and reveals more details about LaMotte's romance with Ash and her pregnancy.

Ellen Ash: wife of poet Randolph Henry Ash. She lives a depressed and boring life after marriage. After Ash's death, she gives many of the manuscripts of his poems to the British Museum.

Patience Best: Ellen Ash's younger sister.

Faith Best: Ellen Ash's younger sister.

Roland Mitchell: a Ph D of Prince Albert College, London, and part-time research assistant to Professor James Blackadder in his Ash Factory. He is the modern time protagonist of *Possession.* He first finds the previously unknown letters written by Victorian poet Randolph Henry Ash in the British library, and figures out the Ash-LaMotte romance together with Maud Bailey—a scholar in LaMotte studies.

Maud Bailey: the leading scholar in LaMotte—a Victorian poetess who happens to be Maud's distant ancestor. She runs a Women's Resource Centre in Lincoln

University. She and Roland collaborate to figure out the Ash-LaMotte connection and fall in love during the process.

James Blackadder: a dour English scholar who has been editing Ash's *Complete Works* in "what was known as Blackadder's Ash Factory" since 1951 and is Mitchell Roland's mentor.

Mortimer Cropper: an American scholar entrepreneur, a trustee of Newsome Foundation in Albuquerque, which funds the Ash Factory. His greatest desire is to retrace every footstep of Ash's life and to possess everything that once belonged to Ash. He robs Ash's grave to find the metal box buried there which he suspects to contain a big secret about the poet.

Leonora Stern: a bisexual feminist scholar from Tallahassee, Maud's friend, who is possessed by LaMotte's romantic attachment to her female partner Blanche Glover and edits their correspondence.

Beatrice Nest: an English spinster professor who has been struggling to edit the journals of Ellen Ash for twenty-five years.

Fergus Wolff: Roland's friend whose field is literary theory, he once had a love affair with Maud Bailey during a conference in Paris.

Val: Roland's girlfriend who has been living with him since their first year of college life. She is the breadwinner for the two of them when Roland is half employed.

Sir George Bailey: an indirect descendant of Christabel LaMotte who runs her former home in Lincolnshire. Roland and Maud discover in his house—LaMotte's

old room to be exact—a bundle of letters that Ash and LaMotte had written to each other, indicating that the two Victorian poets' relationship is more than merely literary.

Joan Bailey: Sir George Bailey's invalid wife who lives with him in Lincolnshire.

Euan MacIntyre: a solicitor who later becomes Val's fiance.

Toby Byng: a friend of Euan. He is Sir George Bailey's family solicitor. He reveals the copyright case of LaMotte's correspondence with Ash to Euan, Val, Roland, and Maud.

Ariane Le Minier: a French student in the University of Nantes who works on Sabine de Kercoz. She admaires Leonora Stern and offers Sabine de Kercoz's journal which reveals LaMotte's whereabouts during her pregnancy.

Lord Ash: an elderly Methodist peer who was a descendant of a remote cousin of the Victorian poet Ash and heir to the ownership of the unsold manuscripts of Ash the poet.