LATVIJAS UNIVERSITĀTE

BAKALAURA DARBS

RĪGA 2013

UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

THE SYMBOLISM OF SNAILS AND THRUSHES IN A. S. BYATT'S *BABEL TOWER*

GLIEMEŽU UN STRAZDU SIMBOLISMS A. S. BAIJATAS ROMĀNĀ „BĀBELES TORNIS"

BACHELOR THESIS

Author: **Darja Čebotareva**

Matriculation Card No. dc09007

Adviser: docents Aleksejs Taube

RĪGA 2013

ANOTĀCIJA

Šī bakalaura darba tēma ir „Gliemežu un strazdu simbolisms A. S. Baijatas romānā „Bābeles tornis"'. Baijata izmanto daudz atsauču uz gliemežiem un strazdiem un visām atsaucēm ir īpaša simboliska nozīme. Darba mērķis bija atklāt gliemežu un strazdu simboliskās nozīmes Baijatas romānā „Bābeles tornis". Pēc detalizētas teksta analīzes pētījuma rezultāti atklāja, ka strazds tiek izmantots romānā, lai ilustrētu cilvēka divdabību. Gliemežu spirālveida forma, kas satur ģenētisko informāciju, atgādina DNS spirāles, un parāda to saistību ar dzīvi. Visi gliemežu apraksti romānā norāda uz gliemežu divdabību un uz viņu korelāciju ar pretējiem jēdzieniem. Var secināt, ka gliemežiem un strazdiem ir ļoti daudz dažādu simbolisko nozīmju šajā romānā.

Atslēgvārdi: A. S. Baijata, Bābeles tornis, mūsdienu britu daiļliteratūra, gliemeži, strazdi, simbolisms

ABSTRACT

The subject of the present bachelor thesis is 'The Symbolism of Snails and Thrushes in A. S. Byatt's *Babel Tower*'. Byatt uses a great number of references to snails and thrushes, all of which have a specific symbolic meaning. The purpose of the paper was to discover the symbolic meanings of snails and thrushes in Byatt's novel *Babel Tower*. After a detailed text analysis, the results of the study revealed that a song thrush is used in the novel to illustrate the dual human nature. Snails' helical shape, which carries the genetic information, resembles the spirals of the DNA and suggests their association with life. All descriptions of the snails in the book point out the duality of snails' nature and their correlation with opposite concepts. It might be concluded that snails and thrushes have a great variety of symbolic meanings in the novel.

Key words: A. S. Byatt, Babel Tower, contemporary British fiction, snails, thrushes, symbolism

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Antonia Susan Byatt is a critically acclaimed British writer, who received a Booker Prize for her novel *Possession* (1990). Byatt's contemporary novel *Babel Tower* (1996) is a part of the quartet of novels about Frederica Potter. The other three novels are: *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), *Still Life* (1986) and *A Whistling Woman* (2002). *Babel Tower* is the third novel in the quartet and its main narrative focuses on Frederica's separation from her husband Nigel Reiver, the life with her son Leo and the divorce trial.

Nevertheless, there is also a second narrative line: a fictional novel-within-the-novel *Babbletower: A Tale for the Children of Our Time*, written by Jude Mason, one of the characters of *Babel Tower*. *Babbletower* describes the events which take place at the end of the eighteenth century. It tells the story about a group of revolutionaries who ran away from the laws and obligations and formed their community in a place called La Tour Bruyarde. The novel has been influenced by the ideas of Marquis de Sade and Fourier and it shows what happens to a community that praises individual and sexual freedom over rules and laws.

In the novel *Babel Tower*, A. S. Byatt uses a great number of references to snails and thrushes, all of which have a specific symbolic meaning in the book. Snails and thrushes are mentioned throughout the book in the main narrative of *Babel Tower,* in the embedded novel *Babbletower* and in the fairytale *Flight North*, which is read by Frederica Potter and Agatha Mond. The symbolism of snails and thrushes in the novel *Babel Tower* is a topic, which suggests detailed analysis, since, according to Umberto Eco, a symbol's meaning cannot be fixed, because symbols possess such qualities as openness and vagueness.

The background study of the present bachelor paper is the critical analysis of the literature on symbolism and its characteristics, as well as postmodernist fiction. The analysis of the novel *Babel Tower* was carried out in order to reveal the multiplicity of symbolic meanings of snails and thrushes in the book.

The goal of the paper is to reveal the symbolic meanings of snails and thrushes in A. S. Byatt's novel *Babel Tower*.

The enabling objectives to achieve the goal are as follows:

1. To read and analyze the relevant theory on the history of the development and characteristic features of postmodernism;
2. To read and analyze the relevant theory on symbols and symbolism in literature;

3. To read and analyze the relevant theory on snails and thrushes;
4. To find and analyze the symbolic meanings of snails and thrushes in the novel *Babel Tower;*
5. To draw relevant conclusions.

The hypothesis of the paper is the following: In the novel *Babel Tower,* A. S. Byatt uses a great number of references to snails and thrushes, all of which have a specific symbolic meaning, which can be interpreted after a detailed text analysis.

In order to do the research and draw relevant conclusions, the notions of postmodernism, symbol and symbolism in fiction have to be discussed. Initially, for this purpose several texts were analyzed, among them are texts by Umberto Eco and Barry Lewis. The empirical part of the present bachelor thesis comprises the analysis of the novel *Babel Tower*, including the novel-within-the-novel *Babbletower: A Tale for the Children of Our Time*.

1 ANTONIA SUSAN BYATT

1.1 Byatt's Biography

Antonia Susan Byatt is a critically acclaimed British writer: '[she] is one of Britain's most accomplished writers of contemporary fiction, combining post-modern self-consciousness about the ability of language to represent reality with a vivid sense of characterization and narrative engagement' (Shaffer, 2011: 51). Although Byatt has written a lot of great works, one work in particular made her popular: '[n]oted for her allusive and intellectual style, Byatt is nonetheless a bestselling author, her popularity secure since her 1990 novel *Possession: A Romance* won The Booker Prize' (Shaffer, 2011: 51). Byatt is not only a writer, she is also a scholar and a literary critic 'known for [her] erudite works whose characters are often academics or artists commenting on the intellectual process' (Luebering, 2011: 248).

A.S. Byatt, who 'was born in Sheffield, Lincolnshire, on 24 August 1936' was raised in the environment, which made an impact on her as a person and the idea of what she wanted to do in her life (Kastan, 2006: 351). It is generally believed that habits and lifestyle in a person's childhood have a crucial influence on a person's actions later in life and it is known that '[b]oth [of her] parents valued intellectual achievement, providing a home rich in books, conversation, music, and art' (Kastan, 2006: 351). Thus, the fact from Byatt's biography proves that childhood is one of the most important periods in a person's life, since it builds the character.

It is seen from Byatt's biography that her passion for literature developed when she was still a small girl and Byatt became more and more passionate about literature since then: 'during this time [at age ten] she developed her lifelong reading habits' (Kastan, 2006: 351). Moreover, this passion grew into becoming her professional career. It can be noted that Byatt was influenced by some of the leading writers of the nineteenth century: 'Byatt became a self-styled "greedy-reader" as a child, devouring texts by Jane Austen, George Eliot, Charles Dickens' (Shaffer, 2011: 51). Writing was really important for Byatt and it is seen in the following fact from her biography: '[w]hen she was thirteen […] [she was] sent to Mount School, a Quaker boarding school in York. Byatt first began writing seriously at Mount School, escaping to the basement boiler room to do so' (Kastan, 2006: 351).

It is known that Byatt's family valued qualitative education: 'Byatt, like both parents and all of her siblings, attended Cambridge University' (Kastan, 2006: 351). It can be concluded that

Byatt's family not only provided a positive environment for Byatt to study literature, which later inspired her to read and write passionately, but they also provided their daughter with good education. Besides, a lot of Byatt's characters are well-educated people, some of whom are intellectuals and/or educators. For instance, the main heroine in *Babel Tower*, Frederica Potter, has a Cambridge degree and has a strong desire to continue her education.

It is known that Byatt also devoted herself to teaching and for a long time in her life she was not only concentrated on writing, but also participated in other academic activities: '[s]he was educated at the University of Cambridge, Bryn Mawr College, and the University of Oxford and then taught at University College, London, from 1972 to 1983, when she left to write full-time' (Luebering, 2011: 248). It is noted that Byatt wrote her highly praised novel *Possession* and won the Booker Prize award after she left teaching and concentrated fully on writing: 'Byatt's most acclaimed novel is *Possession* (1990), which won the prestigious Booker Prize' (Hager, 2009: 86).

1.2 Byatt's Writing Style

Byatt's style is considered to be rich and allegorical: '[t]he Internet magazine *Salon* has called Byatt the "patron saint of bookworms." This is an apt description that hints at her rich and allusive style' (Hager, 2009: 86). Shaffer also mentions that Byatt is '[n]oted for her allusive and intellectual style' (2011: 51). It is easy to believe that a writer like Byatt has a rich style, since her educational and literary background is highly impressive: '[o]ne of Byatt's favorite themes throughout the entire body of her work is that of the independent, intelligent, literary woman and how she is to exist, without betraying her true nature, in a culture that stereotypes and limits women' (Hager, 2009: 87).

Byatt is often described as a postmodernist writer and technique-wise, her writing also mostly falls into a postmodernist category. It is important to note that there are a lot of different features in Byatt's works, but it can be said that a lot of these features are typical for postmodernist writers: '[a]s a writer of richly patterned narratives that often yoke together ideas and story material in surprising combinations, Byatt has frequently been characterized as a postmodernist literary figure' (Black, 2008: 773).

Slipperiness of language is another feature of Byatt's writing, which is characteristic of postmodernist literature: 'Byatt believes that literature is capable of expressing a moral

dimension, and that language can indeed capture both abstract truths and felt experience. At the same time, Byatt takes obvious pleasure in the contingency and slipperiness of language' (Kastan, 2006: 352). Furthermore, Byatt 'commonly employs narrative strategies now associated with the postmodern text: multiple voices, nonlinear narrative, parody and pastiche, linguistic play, open-endedness' (Kastan, 2006: 352). It is also important to note that 'Byatt has been called the great ventriloquist for her ability to write convincingly in so many voices, so many styles' (Hager, 2009: 87).

However, a writer, and especially a writer like Byatt, cannot simply be classified as practicing one single technique and style: '[o]ccasionally given the seemingly contradictory tag "Victorian modernist", fiction-writer A. S. Byatt […]' (Black, 2008: 772). The reason why Byatt's writing cannot simply be put under one category is that it has an immense number of features and techniques which Byatt demonstrates in her works. For example, she '[i]s known for intricate, self-referential, erudite, and deliberately intellectual work that spans the divide between Victorian realism and twentieth-century experimental fiction in striking fashion' (Black, 2008: 772). Moreover, '[h]er short fiction, like her novels, is characterized by interpenetrating genres and story lines, frequent toying with plot and point of view, rich description, and dense language' (Black, 2008: 772).

Byatt has also been recognized as a feminist writer: '[c]riticism of Byatt's work to date has been divided on the degree to which she can be identified as a feminist writer and / or as a postmodernist writer – both being labels with which Byatt herself has quarrels' (Kastan, 2006: 352). As already mentioned before, Byatt is an author, who has a rich variety of techniques and methods she uses in her works. Besides, '[i]t must be acknowledged that literary critics have applied the terms "feminist" and "postmodernist" to an enormously wide range of viewpoints, stances, ideologies, and methodologies; both terms exist on vigorously contested continuums' (Kastan, 2006: 352). Overall, Byatt's '[t]exts were praised for their ambitious subject matter and complex narratives, but some reviewers were critical of Byatt's overly intellectual and allusive style' (Shaffer, 2011: 52).

According to Jane Campbell, 'In the seventeen years between […] Byatt published four volumes of short stories, two novels, and two novellas. As we have seen, these intervening texts mark significant extensions of her range of genres and discourses as well as her increasing skill in narrative' (2004: 231). Thus, Campbell highlights Byatt's ability to write in several genres, using various features of narrative.

Byatt describes her own works, saying that ‘perhaps the most important thing to say about my books is that they try to be about the life of the mind as well as of society and the relations between people’ (Black, 2008: 773). Byatt also adds: ‘I admire – am excited by – intellectual curiosity of any kind (scientific, linguistic, psychological) and also by literature as a complicated, huge, interrelating pattern’ (Black, 2008: 773).

2 POSTMODERNIST LITERATURE

2.1 Definition of Postmodernism

In the book *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, Barry Lewis talks about the emergence of postmodernist fiction. Lewis acknowledges the domination of postmodernism in the second half of the twentieth century: '[f]rom the vantage point of the new millennium, it is clear that the dominant mode of literature in the second half of the twentieth century was postmodernist writing' (Sim, 2011: 169). Barry Lewis also claims, that postmodernist fiction 'emerged […] in the early 1960s' (Sim, 2011: 169). According to Lewis, '[b]y 1989 […] postmodernism had established itself as the dominant paradigm for the culture' (Sim, 2011: 169). Thus, it can be concluded that the growth and development of postmodernism was rapid.

Postmodernism is a successor to modernism and there is no doubt that two of these directions are connected with each other in many ways: '[t]he relation between Modernism and Postmodernism is intertwined because one cannot be defined without the other' (Ayan, 2010: 134). To identify the exact years when Modernism gradually turned into Postmodernism seems highly challenging, especially with literature: '[t]he contours of the postmodern paradigm are much less clear in literary studies than elsewhere' (Connor, 1997: 112). That is why A. S. Byatt is so difficult to characterize as a writer. Moreover, '[b]oth [modernism and postmodernism] are basically defined in relation to each other as contemporary movements rejecting all former styles but in very different moods' (Ayan, 2010: 134). Overall, it is very difficult to distinguish when modernism ends and postmodernism starts, since they have a great number of features in common. Meryem Ayan quotes Linda Hutcheon, who explains the relation between modernism and postmodernism: 'the modern is ineluctably embedded in postmodern but the relation is a complex one of consequence, difference and dependence' (Ayan, 2010: 134). Ayan also points out that 'postmodernism was seen as a mild reaction to modernism because [according to Hutcheon] "the continuity of fragmentation, ephemerality, discontinuity, and chaotic changes" were the same evaluating criteria of both movements' (Ayan, 2010: 134).

It is clear that postmodernism is difficult to define and Barry Lewis gives an explanation as to why it is so: 'the concept [of postmodernism] saturated the media and academia to such an extent that the term became problematic as an explanatory force due to its all-embracingness' (Sim, 2011: 169). The 'all-embracingness' is characteristic of A. S. Byatt's novel *Babel Tower*,

since Byatt includes a great number of different modes of writing in the book. It is also the reason why it might be challenging to classify the genre Byatt writes in and to put her in a certain category.

As already mentioned before, it is clear that modernism and postmodernism share a lot of common features. However, it might be useful to distinguish them by focusing on the most important distinctions between these two movements: '[a]ccording to Hassan's table, modernists look for "totality" and "closed form," while the postmodernists view form as "antiform", "uncontrollable," and "chaotic" where anarchy and change can play in entirely open situations' (Ayan, 2010: 135). Therefore, postmodernist authors are much freer in terms of the form of their work. Moreover, modernist writers view works as 'examples of genre and judge them by their "master codes" that prevail within the boundary of the genre, whereas the postmodernists simply view a work as a text with its own particular "rhetoric" and "idiolect" but that can be compared with any other texts of no matter what sort' (Ayan, 2010: 135).

It is essential to characterize postmodernist texts and Barry Lewis suggests, that 'the texts of the postmodernists were self-reflexive, playful and exceedingly aware of the medium of language in an attempt to revivify the novel form' (Sim, 2011: 169). Means of language are definitely important for a writer like Byatt, as she is exceptional at playing with the language and using it in many different ways. For example, in *Babel Tower*, Byatt quotes texts in Latin and French, as well as includes a novel within a novel. Another description of postmodernist fiction by Barry Lewis suggests that '[i]t is as if the "avant-garde" had become the mainstream' (Sim, 2011: 170). Connor mentions the 'peculiar contradiction, which is nowhere so sharp as in literary modernism, between radical disruption of form and traditionalism of content and ideology' (1997: 112).

Even though the exact date of the start of postmodernism is difficult to identify, there are some characteristic features in literature that can help to identify the period of time that a certain work belongs to: '[t]he first half [of the twentieth century] witnessed the impact of innovative modernist style but the second half witnessed the decline of modernism and the rise of postmodernism with all its ambiguities, uncertainties and paradoxes' (Ayan, 2010: 133). Thus, it is necessary to discuss some of the prevailing traits of postmodernist fiction, which include 'temporal disorder; the erosion of the sense of time; a pervasive […] use of pastiche; a foregrounding of words as fragmenting material signs; the loose association of ideas; paranoia;

and vicious circles, or a loss of distinction between logically separate levels of discourse' (Barry Lewis in Sim, 2011: 171).

The readers' knowledge plays an important role in the interpretation of a literary text: '[b]esides the fundamental assumption of repetition being justified by literary exhaustion, another basic element to be taken into consideration should be the presence of literary-aware readers, capable to participate in the creation of a novel in a typically postmodernist manner' (Toma, 2010: 215). What is meant here is the dialogue, which is created between the author and the reader with the help of, and through, the text. As it was mentioned before, A. S. Byatt expects her readers to be intelligent and literary-savvy.

In order to understand what postmodernism is, the author of this paper will analyze its features; consequently, the features of postmodernist fiction are discussed in greater detail further.

2.2 Features of Postmodernism

2.2.1 Temporal Disorder

Barry Lewis quotes Linda Hutcheon and her idea that 'postmodernist writing is best represented by those works of "historiographic metafiction" which self-consciously distort history' (Sim, 2011: 171). Thus, the distortion of historical events is very common for postmodernist works: '[t]his [distortion of history] can be accomplished by several means […] apocryphal history, anachronism or the blending of history and fantasy' (Barry Lewis in Sim, 2011: 171). Therefore, apocryphal history uses false descriptions of famous events, whereas anachronism disturbs the chronological order by flaunting evident inconsistencies that involve detail or setting (Barry Lewis in Sim, 2011: 171-2).

Barry Lewis also talks about the fact that postmodernist fiction not only 'disrupt[ed] the past', but also 'corrupted the present' (Sim, 2011: 172). For that reason postmodernist works present an extra challenge for a person when he or she is reading the text. Postmodernist fiction 'disordered the linear coherence of narrative by warping the sense of significant time, *kairos*, or the dull passing of ordinary time, *chronos*' (Barry Lewis in Sim, 2011: 172). Barry Lewis mentions one novel, where '[t]he sheer abundance of incidents that occur over one night […] distends time beyond recognition' (Sim, 2011: 172).

It is also important to note that there are two temporal levels in the novel *Babel Tower*: one in the frame narrative and another in the embedded story. The frame narrative tells the story, which is set in the 1960s, whereas the embedded story takes place at the end of the eighteenth century.

2.2.2 Pastiche

According to Barry Lewis, '[p]astiching an individual writer is rather like creating an anagram, not of letters, but of the components of a style. Pastiche is therefore a kind of permutation, a shuffling of generic and grammatical tics' (Sim, 2011: 172). It is notable that Byatt's novel *Babel Tower* includes another novel within the book, as well as letters, poems, law documents, court proceedings and other forms of discourse.

It is suggested that pastiche 'arose from the frustration that everything has been done before' (Barry Lewis in Sim, 2011: 173). Consequently, using what has been done before in a new and sophisticated way seems to be the solution for writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: '[c]ontemporary artists had to face the fact that many of the stylistic possibilities had already been exhausted as permutations are finite. So postmodernist writers tended to pluck existing styles […] from the reservoir of literary history, and match them with little tact' (Barry Lewis in Sim, 2011: 173). It is claimed that many works 'between 1960 and the turn of the millennium borrow the clothes of different forms […]. The impulse behind this cross-dressing is more spasmodic than parodic' (Barry Lewis in Sim, 2011: 173).

2.2.3 Fragmentation

Fragmentation stands for openness and inconclusiveness of the text. Barry Lewis talks about texts that are not stories in a conventional sense of the word. As an example of a non-traditional story, Lewis mentions multiple endings, which provide the reader with a number of potential outcomes for a plot (Sim, 2011: 174). It is remarkable that A. S. Byatt's novel *Babel Tower* contains multiple openings, which are introduced by the phrases: 'it might begin' and 'or it might begin' (1996: 3, 4, 6, 12). However, Byatt's decision to write several introductions for the novel is purely logical, since the first beginning belongs to the novel within the novel, which is called *Babbletower* and is written by Jude Mason, one of the characters in the book; the second

beginning is the start of *Babel Tower* itself, whereas the third and the fourth beginnings are their continuation.

Modernism and postmodernism 'gave great prominence to "fragmentation" as a feature of twentieth century art and culture but in different approaches' (Ayan, 2010: 134). Therefore, fragmentation is just as important in postmodernist texts, as other features are. Modernism and postmodernism appeared to have 'the same vital elements as "fragment forms" that comprise collage and juxtapose incomplete or fragment stories and forms that incorporate an element of chance or randomness; plucking sentences from newspapers, parody, pastiche and the omniscient narrative stance' (Ayan, 2010: 134).

Another way to make the text open and inconclusive is 'to break up the text into short fragments or sections, separated by space, titles, numbers or symbols' (Barry Lewis in Sim, 2011: 174). Byatt uses this technique in *Babel Tower* and the reason for that is the existence of one novel within another novel. Every time there is a passage in *Babel Tower*, which is actually a fragment from *Babbletower*, it is separated from the rest of the text by small images of shells at the beginning and at the end. It may be suggested that the images are shells of snails and snails have a symbolic meaning in the book. Thus, the novel *Babel Tower* consists of a big number of fragments, some of which form the novel *Babbletower*, while others belong to *Babel Tower*. Consequently, it is up to a reader to connect the fragments of *Babbletower* together in order to get a whole picture of what is happening in *Babbletower* and not confuse it with the novel *Babel Tower*, which is the central novel in the book. Even though some postmodernist works consist of a number of fragments that are hardly connected with the plot or do not form a whole, Byatt's *Babel Tower* contains fragments that are indeed cohesive.

2.2.4 Experimentation

One of the most prominent postmodernist features is unconventionality: '[b]oth modernist and postmodernist authors have valued formal innovation and believed that narrative form implicitly speaks of the nature of reality and how it is experienced' (Ayan, 2010: 133).

Toma also states: '[i]n the study of postmodernist literature undertaken by several literary critics […] most of them underlined the rebellious, anti-traditionalist vein postmodernism feeds on' (2010: 213). This is one of the most important aspects of postmodernism: it is not traditional and it is unconventional: '[i]n his famous antithetical table, Hassan evinces the disruptive propensity of postmodernism by associating it with terms such as " antiform", "antithesis",

"decreation" and "deconstruction"' (Toma, 2010: 215). It is clear that postmodernism as a movement is innovative. And even though '[b]oth modernist and postmodernist authors have valued formal innovation' (Ayan, 2010: 133), postmodernism will always be one step ahead of modernism.

2.2.5 Intertextuality

Intertextuality is another characteristic trait of postmodernism. It includes 'fragments of other texts such as newspaper articles, paintings, films, poems, songs, signs, diary entries and photographs into literary texts has a life of its own because life is viewed as series of texts intersecting with one another' (Ayan, 2010: 133). Irina Toma defines intertextuality by saying that it 'denotes the myriad conscious ways in which texts are alluded to or cited in other texts, creating thus a network of quotations, imitations, references, polemical refutations in which all texts have their being' (Toma, 2010: 216).

Irina Toma comments on the topic of intertextuality by mentioning David Lodge and his perspective:

> [Lodge's] 1992 [*The Novelist Today; Still at the Crossroads?*] conclusion is that the multiplicity of directions the contemporary novel has embarked upon (journalism, fabulation, myth or metafiction) is still attuned to the contemporary cultural pluralism which allows an astonishing variety of styles to flourish simultaneously. Lodge's significant addition to his first essay is the placing of today's writing under the effect of the "crossover" feature, meaning that relatively few novelists are wholly and exclusively committed to one of these directions alone. Instead, they combine some of these literary modes by making use of different tools, out of which intertextuality rises into prominence. (2010: 215)

Intertextuality makes any text more multifaceted: '[p]ostmodern narratives embody the openness of the text through different forms of inter-textuality, the explicit relationships of a text to other texts. Inter-textual weaving has a life of its own because cultural life is viewed as series of texts intersecting with one another' (Ayan, 2010: 133). In addition, intertextuality is 'illustrative of the recuperative function of literature; by making use of intertextual references the postmodernist text creates a complex type of writing which integrates within itself a large web of other texts recovering and reinterpreting their meanings at the same time' (Toma, 2010: 216). Intertextuality is also present in Byatt's works and it is one of the postmodernist features that she uses a lot. Perhaps, due to intertextuality in her writing, she is the author, whose works might be challenging for some readers.

Intertextuality and fragmentation play a very important role in providing the text with a number of various interpretations that are done by the reader: '[i]t is vain to try and master a text with a single interpretation because of multi-layered intertextualities in texts' (Ayan, 2010: 135). Dealing with a postmodernist text, it is essential to understand that 'meaning is never single and simple but multiple and complex' (Ayan, 2010: 136). That is definitely one of the most characteristic traits of the postmodernist literary texts. Overall, it can be said that '[t]he overt citation or simulation of older texts in a contemporary one represents the most effective tool in achieving the crossover effect and decisively an outstanding trait of most postmodernist texts' (Toma, 2010: 215).

In conclusion, '[w]henever the issue of postmodernist fiction is approached, there come forward features such as fragmentation, plurality, metafictionality, decentering dislocation, indeterminacy and confusion between myth and reality' (Toma, 2010: 213). Analyzing A. S. Byatt's novel, *Babel Tower*, as well as her other works, it can be said that Byatt is a postmodernist artist, as her works incorporate all of the features of postmodernism mentioned above, which make her texts rich in style.

3 SYMBOLISM

3.1 Definition of a Symbol

A symbol is not easy to define and multiple definitions will be discussed in this chapter. According to the Cambridge Learner's Dictionary online, a symbol is 'a sign or object that is used to represent something' (Online 1). This also seems to be the most common definition as it appears (with slight changes) in many dictionaries. According to the Cambridge British English Dictionary online, 'an object can be described as a symbol of something else if it seems to represent it because it is connected with it in a lot of people's minds' (Online 2). Consequently, it can be said that people's associations about different things play an important role in the idea of what may or may not be called a symbol.

According to the Oxford Dictionary online, the definition of a symbol is as follows: 'a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract' (Online 3). This is the first definition that looks at the substance of an object, concentrating on its materialness or abstractness. The online website *Dictionary.com* also highlights the idea that a symbol is 'a material object representing […] often something immaterial' (Online 4).

According to Tresidder, '[s]imply defined, a symbol is an object, a living thing or a feature of the natural world that has been chosen to represent a human concept or quality' (Tresidder, 2008: 1). It is known that the symbols discussed in this paper are snails and thrushes in A. S. Byatt's novel *Babel Tower*.

In his book *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (1984) Italian philosopher Umberto Eco points out that '[a] symbol was originally an identification mark made up of two halves of a coin or of a model' (Eco, 1984: 130). Then he adds '[t]wo halves of the same thing, either one standing for the other, both becoming, however, fully effective only when they matched to make up, again, the original whole' (Eco, 1984: 130). It can be concluded that two things that are connected have to be present in order to form a symbol.

According to one definition, '[a] symbol is something representing something else by virtue of an analogical correspondence' (Eco, 1984: 130); according to another definition, '[s]ymbols concern a continued system of terms, each of which represent an element of another system' (Eco, 1984: 131). The second definition suggests that there are likely to be more than two things involved in the content of the symbol.

Eco mentions a lot of different opinions and discussions concerning a symbol. Some of the philosophers whom he mentions are Lalande, Delacroix, Brunschvicq, van Biéma and others. However, it is Lalande, whose work suggested that '[a] symbol can be everything and nothing', to which Umberto Eco adds ironically '[w]hat a shame' (Eco, 1984: 131). It is absolutely understandable why Eco uses those words: the definition, which comes from Lalande's work barely helps the readers with the understanding of such complex notions as a symbol.

Umberto Eco also mentions Firth and his 'exhaustive survey of all the possible uses of *symbol*' (Eco, 1984: 132). Eco says that '[Firth] notices that there is a web of contrasting relationships, from concrete to abstract (fox for cunning), from abstract to concrete (logical symbols), of vague metaphors (darkness for mystery)' (Eco, 1984: 132).

3.2 Features and Interpretation of Symbols

Since defining a symbol is challenging on its own, perhaps it is more useful to look at the features that are characteristic of a symbol. Umberto Eco highlights the ambiguity of a symbol, saying '[w]hat is frequently appreciated in many so-called symbols is exactly their vagueness, their openness, their fruitful ineffectiveness to express a "final" meaning, so that with symbols and by symbols one indicates what is always *beyond* one's reach' (Eco, 1984: 130). Therefore, it can be said that a symbol possesses a multiplicity of meanings. Consequently, a symbol's meaning cannot be fixed, since there exist an infinity of different connotations of each symbol and the meanings may depend on people's ideas, their cultures and traditions. It is also said that 'nobody can assign to symbols a final truth or a coded meaning' (Eco, 1984: 147).

On the other hand, Eco also mentions Peirce who has a contradictory point of view on the ambiguous nature of symbols. '[Peirce's] decision contrasts with the most common terminological usage, and he certainly never thought that symbols convey a vague message' (Eco, 1984: 136). As a result, Peirce 'speaks of symbols for those expressions that mean directly and univocally what they are designed to mean' (Eco, 1984: 136). Nevertheless, it is important to concentrate on the phrase 'the most common terminological usage', which proves that Peirce's opinion is not what the author of this paper will take into account (Eco, 1984: 136).

Umberto Eco describes why according to Hegel symbols are so indefinite: '[i]n symbols the correlation between signifier (expression) and signified (significance) is not a conventional one (the lion is a symbol for strength because it is strong); nevertheless, the motivation

determining the correlation is in some way undetermined' (Eco, 1984: 142). It is later explained that besides strength, there are other qualities which the lion has; however, those qualities are unrelated to the symbolic idea: '[i]t is exactly this selection or reduction of the relevant qualities that provides for the ambiguity of symbols' (Eco, 1984: 144). For instance, 'red color' may represent 'love' and 'blood', as well as other connotations. Thus, it is essential to take into consideration the distinct aspects of symbols when trying to interpret them.

Since it is clear that a symbol may have several meanings, it is significant to analyze what those meanings might be: '[t]here are […] many expressions (usually sentences or texts) that suggest, beyond their *prima facie* interpretable "conventional" or "lexical" meaning, an additional "intended meaning"' (Eco, 1984: 137). According to Eco, this 'intended meaning' is likely to be 'indirect' (Eco, 1984: 137). Later in the text, Eco claims that '[m]any of the devices people call *symbols* have something to do with these phenomena of "indirect meaning", but not every device conveying an indirect meaning can be called symbolic' (Eco, 1984: 137). Thus, such aspect of a phrase as an indirect meaning does not solely belong to symbols. To conclude, a symbol has a great number of meanings, which differ in intention, as well as in the easiness of interpreting the message.

It might be interesting to consider that 'many so-called symbols are characterized […] by the fact that the correlation is not precoded but invented at the same moment in which the expression is produced' (Eco, 1984: 138). Thus, in every single situation one and the same symbol may represent completely different ideas. However, it might be argued that some symbols only have one meaning, which has probably been agreed on a long time ago. Moreover, some symbols were intended to signify the concrete idea, which makes it impossible for the meaning to be invented on the spot. Nevertheless, the author of this paper focuses on symbols with multiple meanings.

Umberto Eco sums up what Goethe says about symbols: 'Goethe says that […] symbols designate indirectly. […] symbols are intransitive. […] symbols speak to perception. […] symbols are immediate and motivated. […] symbols embody the general in the particular' (Eco, 1984: 142). The idea of symbol's abstraction is stressed here. It is added that 'symbols are polysemous, indefinitely interpretable; they realize the coincidence of the contraries; they express the unexpressible, since their content excedes the capability of our reason' (Eco, 1984: 142). Once again, it is said that symbols have an indefinite number of interpretations and the analysis

in this paper is based on the idea that symbols in Byatt's work *Babel Tower* are 'indefinitely interpretable'.

Taken into account everything said before about the vagueness and ambiguity of symbols, it is suggested that symbols are difficult to interpret: '[i]n "genuine symbolism," the forms do not signify themselves; rather they "allude to," hint at a wider meaning. Any symbol is an enigma […]' (Eco, 1984: 144). The idea is continued in these lines: '[t]hey are genuine symbols precisely because they are ambiguous, full of half-glimpsed meanings, and in the last resort inexhaustible' (Eco, 1984: 145).

After consideration of the features of a symbol, it has become clearer what the words 'a symbol can be everything and nothing' meant (Eco, 1984: 131). The same idea repeats later, it says that 'symbols are empty and full of meaning at the same time' (Eco, 1984: 145). In general, it can be concluded that 'their [symbols'] interpretation is always problematic' (Eco, 1984: 147). Since the understanding of symbols is such a complex matter, it seems logical that '[t]he power consists in possessing the key for the right interpretation or (which is the same) in being acknowledged by the community as the one who possesses the key' (Eco, 1984: 152).

3.3 Symbols in Literary Texts

The existence of symbols is traced back to the time when literature as such did not exist. People drew various symbols on cave walls and stones. However, the importance of symbols and the way they work has been the same for a long period of time: '[f]or thousands of years they [symbols] have enabled [people] to embody and reinforce deep thoughts and beliefs about human life in single, immediate and powerful images' (Tresidder, 2008: 1). Tresidder also points out the dominance of images, which may serve as symbols, over written texts: '[i]n communicating large ideas, images long predated writing' (Tresidder, 2008: 1).

Tresidder clarifies the difference between symbols and signs, saying that '[t]he essential difference between a symbol and a sign is that signs have practical, unambiguous meanings: Private, No Smoking, Danger. Symbols have greater imaginative resonance and more complex, sometimes ambiguous meanings' (Tresidder, 2008: 1). It is clear that Tresidder, as well as Eco, highlights the idea that such a quality as ambiguousness belongs to symbols, since they are more versatile in their meanings. Tresidder also claims that symbols expand to a lot more than just representations of ideas: '[t]raditional symbols form a visual shorthand for ideas – and yet their

functions and meanings extend to much more than that' (Tresidder, 2008: 1). Thus, the symbols create a powerful and productive field of meanings that belong to them.

It is important to note that symbols may exist in any form of art, like literature, painting, sculpture and others, as well as among such notions as nature, daily lives and others. For that reason, the meanings of symbols may be divided into the most significant and universal, as well as subsidiary. It is also important to state that some symbols are universal, while others are not; some symbols are culturally variable and some are not. It is essential to take into account the universality and the cultural variety of symbols in the analysis of symbols in literature. Moreover, it might be useful to remember that 'their [symbols'] meaning is sometimes unexpected and sometimes self-evident' (Tresidder, 2008: 3).

Doubt and symbol are closely connected due to the large amount of interpretations of a certain symbol: 'symbol is *open*; […] It is *undoubtedly* a symbol, since its interpretation is *doubtful*, and there were only *doubtful* reasons for its textual appearance. […] The content of the symbol is a *nebula* of possible interpretations' (Eco, 1984: 161). Moreover, a symbol cannot exist without certain imprecision: '[t]he symbol says that there is something that it could say, but this something cannot be definitely spelled out once and for all; otherwise the symbol would stop saying it' (Eco, 1984: 161).

In the conclusions to his article, Umberto Eco states that

> If one makes an abstraction from any possible underlying metaphysics or mystical assumption, the symbol is not a particular sort of sing, endowed with mysterious qualities, nor is it a particular modality of sign production. It is a *textual modality*, a way of producing and of interpreting the aspects of a text (1984: 162).

Symbols and their interpretations exist within the text, as well as outside the text: '[t]he main characteristic of the symbolic mode is that the text, when this mode is not realized interpretively, remains endowed with sense – at its literal or figurative level' (Eco, 1984: 163). It is important to note that symbols need to be interpreted by the reader in order to come into existence. Thus, the reader plays an important role in the literary interpretation of symbols.

It is clear that symbols exist in order to help the author express some ideas: '[u]sually, in the symbolic line of thought, symbols are considered as the vehicle of a transcendent Voice who speaks through them' (Eco, 1984: 147). Eco states '[i]f in a text everything can be read beyond its conventional (and delusory) meaning, then *every* text is a reserve of symbols' (1984: 156). Moreover, if every text is a reserve of symbols and every symbol has a multiplicity of meanings,

then texts are endless in terms of their interpretations and messages they convey. Also, there may be as many interpretations as there are points of view and readers.

4 THE NOVEL *BABEL TOWER*

4.1 *Babel Tower* as a Part of the Quartet of Novels about Frederica Potter

The quartet begins with *The Virgin in the Garden*, then followed by *Still Life* and *Babel Tower*, and completed with *A Whistling Woman* in 2002: '[w]ith *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) Byatt began a series of denser, more consciously experimental novels' (Black, 2008: 772). All four books of the quartet 'follow the life of a single heroine, Frederica Potter, as she attends Cambridge and becomes an academic' (Black, 2008: 772). The common feature in the books is that '[t]hese narratives use realist techniques – such as highly developed, extensively psychologized characters, and detailed scenery and social setting – together with dense metaphor, allusion, and symbolism' (Black, 2008: 772). This thesis focuses on Byatt's novel *Babel Tower*: '[s]et in the 1960s, *Babel Tower* is a memoir of what some critics labeled the "permissive society" of the post-World War II era, a period plagued with political and moral scandals' (Hager, 2009: 86).

Critics also mention 'the conflict between realism and postmodernism in the final two novels of the quartet' and this is not surprising for such an intellectual writer as Byatt (Shaffer, 2011: 52). It is important to mention that '[t]he third novel, *Babel Tower* (1996), deepens Byatt's experimentation with self-conscious fiction: it combines a main narrative about Frederica's life, and particularly her divorce trial, following the sudden death of her sister at the end of *Virgin*' (Shaffer, 2011: 52). However, there is also a second narrative line, which is '[c]onstructed around a novel-within-the novel, *Babbletower*, a viciously satiric reflection on the dangers of individual and sexual freedom set during the Reign of Terror, by a charismatic rebel named Jude Mason, who is being prosecuted for obscenity' (Shaffer, 2011: 52).

4.2 The Plot of *Babel Tower*

A.S. Byatt's novel *Babel Tower* is the third novel of the quartet. The book focuses on Frederica Potter's life, her journey and the key events in her life. At the beginning of the book, Frederica lives with her husband Nigel Reiver, her son Leo, Nigel's sisters Olive and Rosalind, and the housekeeper Pippy Mammott in Bran House. Later it becomes clear that Frederica is not happy with her life and the reason for that is her marriage to Nigel. Frederica's husband does not

allow Frederica to see her friends from Cambridge, to work or to get another academic degree. Frederica lives in seclusion, unable to lead the life she had thought she would have before she married Nigel.

One night Nigel and Frederica have a fight, which is a common occurrence in their relationship; however, this time the fight gets more extreme than usual and at one point Nigel even throws an axe at Federica and hurts her. After a couple of other unpleasant incidents that might be considered as inexcusable behavior, Frederica decides to leave Bran House at least for some time and stay with her friends. She is not sure how to handle the situation and does not have any clear ideas about what to do later; she just knows that she has to go away. Frederica's son, Leo, being a clever young boy, makes a decision to go with his mother.

Frederica and Leo live in Thomas Poole's apartment at first, trying to figure out the next step. Thanks to her friends, Frederica teaches literature, as well as does some work at a publishing company. At a certain point in her life, Frederica realizes that she cannot go back to the life she had and the only way out is to divorce Nigel and get custody of her son Leo. However, Frederica's case is not as strong as she would like it to be, since Nigel is the one who possesses the house where he believes Leo belongs, the resources to provide his son with what he defines as a good life, the help around the house to assist Nigel with cleaning, cooking and raising a child. Frederica, on the other hand, does not have the money that Nigel has, nor does she have a permanent job. Moreover, Frederica's evidence against Nigel is weak: she cannot prove his adultery or his aggression towards her. In contrast, Nigel's lawyers are aware of Frederica's infidelity after she left the house, as well as the drawbacks of her lifestyle.

The last few chapters of the book present the trial processes of two cases: the divorce of Frederica and Nigel, and the future of the novel *Babbletower* written by Jude Mason. Frederica wins the case and not only does she get a divorce, but she also gets custody of Leo. Jude Mason's novel is banned and this court's decision absolutely weakens him. Mason locks himself in his apartment and Frederica finds him a few weeks later, trying to help him.

4.3 *Babbletower*: the Novel within the Novel

It is noteworthy that Byatt's novel *Babel Tower* contains another novel within it: Jude Mason's novel *Babbletower*. The distinction between two novels is easy, because every passage

that belongs to *Babbletower* is separated from the rest of the text by small pictures of a snail's shell. Not to mention the differences between characters, plots and writing styles.

Babel Tower begins with an extract from *Babbletower*, since there are small pictures of a snail's shell at the beginning and at the end of the passage. The beginning of the book describes the thrush and how it catches and eats the snails on a beautiful spring day. Byatt starts the book with the words: '[i]t might begin' (1996: 3) and then continues: '[t]he thrush has his anvil or altar on one fallen stone in a heap, gold and grey, roughly squared and shaped, hot in the sun and mossy in the shade' (1996: 3). The description of nature follows, and then the scene how a thrush kills a snail is described in greater detail: '[t]he thrush appears to be listening to the earth. In fact he is looking, with his sideways stare, for his secret prey in the grass, in the fallen leaves. He stabs, he pierces, he carries the shell with its soft centre to his stone. He lifts the shell, he cracks it down' (Byatt, 1996: 3). The readers find out that after swallowing a snail, the thrush begins to sing.

Babbletower: A Tale for the Children of Our Time tells the story about a group of revolutionaries who ran away from the laws and obligations that dominate the world which they used to live in. Two lovers, Culvert and the Lady Roseace, are two of the main characters in *Babbletower*. Culvert is definitely at the centre of the story, because he decides to create a better environment for living, where freedom prevails. Thus, he becomes the leader of the community, which runs away to live in isolation in a tower called La Tour Bruyarde.

The story takes place in France during the Revolution, which means the end of the eighteenth century, or the Age of Reason. This fact highly influences the plot of the fictional novella written by Jude Mason, who is also one of the characters in *Babel Tower*. The main idea how Culvert plans to create a society, which has freedom to do whatever they want, is to explicitly talk and perform any sexual desires a person might have.

It is no coincidence that the story takes place at the same time when the world got familiar with a philosopher called the Marquis de Sade and his views on religion, society and human nature. According to Taube, de Sade's principles form the essence of Jude Mason's novel *Babbletower* (2006: 124). Moreover, the full name of the book within *Babel Tower* is *Babbletower: A Tale for the Children of Our Time* and it can be concluded that 'our time' means the 1960s, since the action in Babel Tower takes place in the 1960s precisely. The readers learn that '[t]he book appears in March 1966' (Byatt, 1996: 415). Moreover, it can be said that Jude Mason was not the only one interested in de Sade's ideas about libertine sexuality, since

Frederica Potter was also attracted by Mason's work and even suggested it for publication. When Frederica receives a copy of the book from Jude Mason, he writes to her a note, saying '[f]or Frederica, who thought that I couldn't, and then decided that I could' (Byatt, 1996: 415). Thus, the subtitle of the fictional novella, as well as the plot of *Babel Tower* suggest that the views of Marquis de Sade were still extremely debatable and controversial in the 1960s (Taube, 2006: 117).

There is yet another interesting idea behind the full name of the *Babbletower*, which is *A Tale for the Children of Our Time*. As already mentioned before, by giving his novel this name, Jude Mason addresses the 'children' of the 1960s. If one thinks about a period in life called childhood, he or she usually imagines the affection of the parents, who protect the child from the dangers of the outside world. According to Taube, from a child's perspective, he or she is the one who demands attention and fulfilment of every desire he or she might have; therefore, one possible interpretation of the title could be Jude Mason's address to those people who are adults, but who have the qualities of demanding constant attention and satisfaction of their needs and desires, like children do (2006: 134). Another idea suggested by Taube is that once a person gets used to being treated like a child, he or she might develop similar qualities when he or she is an adult; moreover, the realization that the world is not the same as it was when it was seen through a child's eyes, might also lead to rebellion against those aspects of the world, which restrain a person's freedom (2006: 134).

Aleksejs Taube also suggests that rebellion is typical for people and is a part of maturing and coming to terms with the way the world is; moreover, the requirement to respect the laws is another quality, which grown up people have to get accustomed to (2006: 134). However, not all people are ready to obey the laws and respect the interests of others, because it also sets limitations to people's actions and significantly limits their freedom (Taube, 2006: 134). Consequently, the fictional author of *Babbletower* might be addressing those adults, who remained childlike due to their unwillingness to accept the adult world with its laws and regulations (Taube, 2006: 134). All members of La Tour Bruyarde are those 'children' who ran away from the laws to create a community based on liberty in any form. Culvert, the leader of the community, had the same idea as its other members; however, it became clear later that he craved power and control over others (Taube, 2006: 129). Thus, Culvert escaped from one society, which was based upon laws and restrictions, only to create his own rules and become the leader, who is in control of his followers.

By refusing the laws and control in the society of the time during the French Revolution, the community, who lived in the Tower, could only be controlled by their desires and the wishes their human nature had (Taube, 2006: 132). Their inability to grow up and lose the children's lust for complete freedom leads them to believe that La Tour Bruyarde might be the key to their independence; nevertheless, hiding from the oppressive nature of the bourgeois community in the Tower brought them in the position where yet another set of laws and rules were established by their leader Culvert, who strived for power and control (Taube, 2006: 129).

The image of Culvert might seem heroic, because he is the leader in La Tour Bruyarde; nevertheless, it might be suggested that it is due to his vulnerability and insecurity that he revolts against the bourgeois society and seeks freedom in the Tower (Taube, 2006: 134). The reason for Culvert's rebellion might also lie in his denial to accept any norms that society has (Taube, 2006: 134). What is more, his idea of freedom involves the elimination of all the rules, but it becomes clear in the novel that it is an illusion and the society without any rules is destined to create chaos (Taube, 2006: 128). Thus, people still need certain rules in order to create freedom for themselves and Byatt's novel suggests that those who break rules will never get freedom, but rather chaos instead (Taube, 2006: 134).

The presence of Marquis de Sade's philosophy is visible in the novel-within-the-novel *Babbletower*, because a group of people try to create an ideal community in segregation from the society (Taube, 2006: 116). One of the core principles of that community is the free expression of sexual desires, no matter what they might be (Taube, 2006: 132). In this line of thought, *Babbletower* demonstrates what life would really be like in a society, which exists according to the ideas of Marquis de Sade. The methods and the philosophy, which Culvert propagates in the Tower have the potential to create a community, which possesses freedom; however, that does not happen and a utopian society fails to bring freedom to people who live in it. Thus, it may be suggested that Byatt portrays a utopian community in *Babbletower*; however, after a careful consideration it becomes clear that due to the failure of creating an idealized society, the novella may be characterized as a dystopia (Taube, 2006: 123).

Culvert is obviously the founder of the society and by creating a new type of discourse in La Tour Bruyarde, he hopes to escape the regulations of the society in which he used to exist. The important point is that even though the life in La Tour Bruyarde seems to be liberating, it actually is not: Culvert is the only one, who creates the rules that others must follow and he also controls the behaviour and actions of the other members of the society, manipulates them and

punishes if they break any laws (Taube, 2006: 125). Consequently, the existence in Culvert's castle is no less restricted than the society, which the revolutionaries ran away from; moreover, the community instead of being based upon equality is indeed based on the dominance of one man (Taube, 2006: 134).

Culvert hides his true intentions, saying that he craves justice and freedom, whereas it might be suggested that the one thing he actually desires is power (Taube, 2006: 129). His longing for power and control over human desires is revealed later in the story, when his true intentions are exposed. Perhaps, this power gives Culvert extra pleasure, since he is in charge of the other people (Taube, 2006: 125). According to Taube, unlike Culvert, Colonel Grim is aware that men have a natural impulse to harm others and he is the only one who doubts the idea of a society which is absolutely free (2006: 128). Colonel Grim is also aware that in order for any community to survive, it needs control; therefore, every society without control is inclined to bring chaos (Taube, 2006: 128).

Culvert, being the progenitor of the community of people who live in La Tour Bruyarde, insists on people being honest with their desires, because no matter what they are they are natural; moreover, he claims that the sexual wishes will benefit the society (Taube, 2006: 125). However, many desires remain unclear due to the difficulty of verbal communication (Taube, 2006: 125). According to Taube, Culvert believes that the language needs to be modified in order for people to be able to name forbidden cravings they have, which was not permitted by the society that they ran away from; therefore, Culvert introduces gatherings of storytelling that might help the people in the community to give names to their secret passions, hidden desires and suppressed feelings (2006: 125). For that reason he creates the Theatre of Masks.

Culvert also believes that the Theatre of Masks will benefit the society and its members; nevertheless, Culvert's intentions are not purely altruistic (Taube, 2006: 125). According to Taube, by teaching people to open up about their inner desires, Culvert will gain knowledge about his society and since by gaining knowledge, a person also gains power, the knowledge will reinforce Culvert's power over the community in La Tour Bruyarde (2006: 125).

4.4 Symbolism in *Babel Tower*

4.4.1 Snails and Thrushes

Throughout the book, the readers may notice a constant mentioning of snails and thrushes. It is necessary to note that snails and thrushes are mentioned in both novels: *Babel Tower* and *Babbletower*.

In the analysis of symbolism of snails and thrushes in A. S. Byatt's novel *Babel Tower*, the author of this work will examine both their self-evident and surprising meanings; both universal and particular meanings of symbols. Throughout the course of history, animals have always been widely used for symbolic purposes. According to Tresidder, '[…] animals, birds, fish, insects, plants or stones […] like humans themselves, were once seen as reflections of a greater reality, having qualities expressive of laws and moral "truths" inherent in the cosmic order' (2008: 3).

First, the author will examine the general facts about snails. Then, the symbolic features of snails will be discussed. 'Snails are members of the class *Gastropoda*, which also includes slugs. They live both on land and in the water, both fresh and salt water' (Werness, 2006: 375). It is important not to underestimate the significance of these creatures, since '[t]he class is one of the largest and most diverse in the animal kingdom, including eighty percent of living mollusks, and some 40,000 species' (Werness, 2006: 375). However, snails are not only worth discussing because of their diverse class, but also because of the immense number of meanings that they possess both in culture and in literature.

The number of symbolic meanings of snails is endless. Different cultures and different peoples interpret one and the same symbol in many diverse ways. In his book, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in World Art*, Werness quotes Tresidder: '[i]n Africa and Central America […] the snail is a lunar and fertility symbol – "[p]eriodically showing and hiding its horns like the moon, the snail also suggested by its helical shell the spiraling processes of cyclical continuity' (2006: 376). On the other hand, '[i]t [a snail] is found in Aztec iconography as a symbol of rebirth or resurrection' (Werness, 2006: 376).

In Byatt's novel *Babel Tower*, snails have many diverse meanings that express various ideas, abstract qualities or feelings. However, there is one meaning, which is the most evident in the whole book. The small images of a snail's shell are used to separate the extracts from the novel *Babbletower* written by Jude Mason, one of the characters in Byatt's novel, from the text of *Babel Tower* itself, which is a formal function.

The number of symbolic meanings of various birds is infinite. However, the number of diverse symbolic meanings of thrushes is probably smaller than that of the snails. It is also true

that different cultures read the symbol of thrushes in distinct manners. In the book *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in World Art*, 'nightingale' is described as 'a European thrush', adding that '[i]n the West, the nightingale's song is linked with pain, suffering, and the anguish and ecstasy of love' (Werness, 2006: 295).

4.4.2 The Description of Snails in the Novel

The references to thrushes and snails are common throughout both the novel *Babel Towel* and the novel-within-the-novel *Babbletower: A Tale for the Children of Our Time*. References to snails are of two types: textual and pictorial. The latter is seen on the pages of the book, where each passage from Jude Mason's novel *Babbletower* is separated from the rest of the text by small images of helical snail shells. There are a number of descriptions of snails in the book: 'they live in the dark and yet come into the light – they make silvery light with their weeping pathways in life, and hot fiery light in death. They are neither fish nor flesh nor fowl, and so magical, as things undecided and magical, because they are not fixed', as well as 'they go between us and those who sleep under the earth'; 'they are not evil beings, but wanderers, between this world and the next'; '[t]hey are creatures of the night, […] but they are creatures of the Sun, too' and finally, 'they go between earth and sky, they go between fire and water, they can play the king and the queen too' (Byatt, 1996: 263). The descriptions of the snails have one feature in common: all of them point to the duality of snails' nature and their correlation with opposite concepts (Taube, 2006: 131).

The helical shape of the snails, as well as their names (*Helix Hortensis*; *Helix Nemoralis*) point to the fact that snails share similar features with the DNA, which consists of two spiral lines (Taube, 2006: 131). Moreover, snails carry the genetic information on their shells: 'Frederica […] likes the idea of the snails wearing their genetic code for all to read on the spiral of their shells' (Byatt, 1996: 465). According to Taube, this curious discovery might symbolize the idea that human nature, similarly to that of snails, also possesses a dual quality (2006: 131). Obviously, human life is encoded in the DNA and genes, and since snails symbolize that aspect, there is even more reason to assume that people have dual nature; moreover, people have the capability of doing good and evil deeds (Taube, 2006: 131).

Furthermore, since snails 'are neither fish nor flesh nor fowl, and so magical, as things undecided and magical, because they are not fixed' and since 'they are not fixed', Taube suggestes, that even though people have potential for creation, as well as destruction, this

potential is not determined at birth (Byatt, 1996: 263; 2006: 131). Thus, it is unknown which side will develop more and prevail as a person becomes more mature (Taube, 2006: 131).

Even though, snails are known to be some of the slowest creatures on Earth, as well as possessing qualities, which might be unpleasant to some people, it is essential not to underestimate these creatures. It is mentioned in *Babel Tower* that there is 'a colony of those snails we look after for her [Jacqueline], we do real experiments, we see what they eat and what colour the babies are. We have a big snail book, we measure them, we write it all down, it's useful' (Byatt, 1996: 54). The presence of snails in the book is highly significant, since human nature is similar to those of snails and has a dual quality to it. It is characteristic of both, snails and human beings, to have a contradictory nature.

4.4.3 The Symbolic Significance of Snails

According to Johnson, the symbolic meaning 'of snails is revealed in […] *Babbletower*, when Culvert meets the crone in the tower. She describes how the Feast of Misrule used to be celebrated at the turn of the year. Each festive dish involved eating snails, some of them roasted alive in their shells' (2010: 66). Part of the feast includes making little lamps from the snails' shells after the snails are eaten. Even though a snail has a shell as its hiding place, it is still used to portray vulnerability, which can be seen in the following phrases: 'and they roasted more snails on its crest in great iron pails, dropping the hot oil into the shells so you could hear the creatures wince and sigh and screech as best they could' or '[…] were row upon row of little lights bravely burning, which, when Culvert considered them closely, could be seen to be helical snail shells full of oil with burning wicks in the oil' (Byatt, 1996: 262, 259). The image of a snail that is curled up in the shell is used a number of times in the novel in the references to the Lady Mavis and her children. Thus, an image of a snail being rolled up in its shell is used to portray sensitivity.

Snails have another symbolic meaning in the book: they play an important role in the description of the relationship between Frederica Potter and John Ottokar. The following description emphasizes the association of snails with life and existence: '[o]n an impulse she touches his sex, the two balls moving loose and separate inside the cool bag of skin. The penis shrinks like a soft curled snail, and then swings out blindly, a lumbering and supple serpent becoming a rod or a branch' (Byatt, 1996: 361).

There is another storyline in the novel, which is connected with snails and this storyline is focused on scientific research, which includes the areas of neuroscience and genetics. Early in the book we learn that Jacqueline and Marcus are 'doing something with Jacqueline's snails', since Jacqueline is 'finishing a Ph.D on those snails': '[t]hey get up at four o'clock to go and count them, and so on' (Byatt, 1996: 53). Jacqueline, a biologist, is a friend of Marcus and Marcus is Frederica's younger brother.

The narrative thread which deals with researching snails in terms of their DNA and genetics draws the attention to snails' association with life and their dual qualities: 'Jacqueline is monitoring two colonies of *Helix hortensis* and two of *Helix nemoralis*, studying the genetic changes in the populations, which can be read in the varied bands on the creatures' shells' (Byatt, 1996: 54-55). It is also repeated later, that '[t]hey [snails] carry their history on their outsides […] on their backs you can read their genetic make-up' (Byatt, 1996: 358).

Later we also learn that Jacqueline 'works on her snail populations' with geneticist 'Dr. Luk Lysgaard-Peacock, half-Danish, half-Yorkshire' (Byatt, 1996: 236). Jacqueline's research touches upon the subject of correlation between snails and thrushes: 'Jacqueline had begun to notice that thrush-anvils where she and Christopher Cobb had counted shells were deserted, that eggs were not hatching in nest-boxes, that dead owls were appearing in barns and farmyards' (Byatt, 1996: 57). It is stated later that thousands of birds died in the countryside of Britain and song-thrushes were some of those birds that were found dead. It is suggested that 'the resulting drop in the thrush population is an unknown variable in the future of the snail population in Jacqueline's study' (Johnson, 2010: 67). Dr. Luk Lysgaard-Peacock clarifies how the connection between snails and thrushes is important for the research on neuroscience and population genetics:

> […] [S]everal populations of the striped snails […] were studied […] to record the predominance or rarity of certain patterns – variations in striped, their number and thickness, their absence, their colour. […] we hope to see Darwinian selection in action […] we look for changes in snails with changes in environment. Some are pink, some are yellow, and there is evidence that unbanded snails are more numerous in beech-woods, and striped snails in hedgerows, where they may be disguised from thrushes. We came here because there is a thrush's anvil here where we collect the broken shells – as you see – and count the numbers, and their changes in pattern. (Byatt, 1996: 357)

Jacqueline Winwar explains the connection between snails and thrushes in the book as well: 'the thrushes are diminishing […] Several of the anvils are abandoned: the thrushes have

been killed by the pesticides in the food chain, we think […] in many places they [thrushes] are gone […] then we expect to find changes in the snail populations' (Byatt, 1996: 358). Thus, it may be concluded that the correlation between thrushes and snails is found on the first page of the novel *Babel Tower*, which also happens to be the beginning of *Babbletower* and the connection between these two species continues throughout the novel. Moreover, the correlation between these two creatures might suggest their common feature: duality, which is also characteristic for people.

It is also mentioned in *Babel Tower* that 'Frederica becomes mildly interested in both Lysgaard-Peacock and his snails' and later Byatt writes about Frederica's further interest in the snails: 'Frederica copies part of an article lent by Luk Lysgaard-Peacock into her *Laminations,* partly because she likes the idea of the snails wearing their genetic code for all to read on the spiral of their shells' (Byatt, 1996: 463, 465). Frederica's interest in the snails is described earlier in the book as well: 'Frederica turns over the shells collected by Luk Lysgaard-Peacock. She looks at the lovely coils and spirals, the helical houses of the vanished creeping creatures, horned, slimy, glistening, seven-thousand-toothed' (Byatt, 1996: 358).

It is notable that Byatt's use of snails in the novel is far greater than it may be suggested. For example, a description of Marcus and Jacqueline: '[t]he figures are so small, it is at first only just possible to make out which is which. Both are wearing anoraks and rubber boots; it is damp, good snail weather; both are thin and, and walk springingly' (Byatt, 1996: 54). Later in the text, Byatt uses the reference to a snail's shell in order to describe Marcus's feelings: 'she bombarded him with her own problems, which his curiously apt mathematical mind solved ingeniously without his emotions needing to uncoil from their shell' (Byatt, 1996: 55). This description might highlight the vulnerability and the sacredness of one's emotions. Snails are also mentioned in another description of Marcus and Jacqueline spending time together: '[e]very pleasurable walk on the moors, looking for snails, listening to larks climbing and plovers calling, was as surely accompanied by the vision of all this rotting and vanishing' (Byatt, 1996: 58). Thus, the readers may see how the symbolism of snails in the novel is seen in under so many different circumstances and in so many contexts.

It is concluded by Jennifer Anne Johnson that snails are 'connected with science, literature, sex, legends and beauty as well as symbolizing the fragility of life in the face of inevitable violence, either on the thrush's anvil or due to the cruelty of men' (2010: 69). Therefore, it is important to note that the significance of a thrush is not purely positive in the

novel. Besides being used for portraying honest characters, a thrush is also the bird who stabs and swallows the snail.

According to Campbell, 'the snail motif introduces each of the sections of Babbletower, which are scattered through the text, and in fact the snail itself is a text'; moreover, '[t]he snail as sacrificial victim is to reappear in the novel's embedded text, *Babbletower* […] in the snails that are believed to be magical spirits and must, according to custom, be roasted alive in the New Year celebrations of Misrule' (2004 :232).

4.4.4 Snails and the DNA

Snails are also presents in the description of Frederica's interaction with Luk Lysgaard-Peacock: 'Frederica considers Lysgaard-Peacock's own face. […] She smiles at him, and he smiles back, not wholly present in his smile, thinking about snails and the DNA' (Byatt, 1996: 359). Snails' helical shape and their association with genetics are also emphasized later in the book, when Frederica thinks about John Ottokar and his identical twin: 'Lysgaard-Peacock hands her two shells, both yellowish-green and unmarked. "Genetics love twins," he says. "Most particularly twins with different histories."' (Byatt, 1996: 359). Therefore, it is shown how snails are connected with genetics, DNA and even humans. This connection is also highlighted a little earlier in the books as well:

> "I like to quote Bacon," says Luk Lysgaard-Peacock. "On diversity, I like to quote Bacon. I try to read the language of the DNA on the backs of my snails, and I think of what he said. 'It is the common wonder of all men, how among so many millions of faces, there should be none alike: now, contrary, I wonder as much, how there should be any. He that shall consider how many thousand several words have been carelessly and without study composed out of 24 letters; withal how many hundred lines there are to be drawn in the Fabrick of one man, shall find this variety is necessary.' The alphabet of the DNA has only four letters, but they can produce an apparently infinite variety. Even in snails." (Byatt, 1996: 358-9).

It is notable, that the connection between the snails and DNA is established on the first page of the book: 'Characters are carved on the stones. […] Here are broken alphabets, α and ∞, C and T, A and G. Round the stones are the broken shells, helical whorls like empty ears in which no hammer beats on no anvil' and the connection is also seen in the sentence: '[i]n the stones are the coiled remains of their congeners, millions of years old' (Byatt, 1996: 3). The letters C, T, A and G remind the reader about the DNA alphabet. Morever, the infinity symbol ∞ and the words like

‘helical whorls’, ‘coiled’ highlight the connection between helical snail shells and the double helix of the DNA.

Byatt uses the snails to make the descriptions more vivid and the plot more fascinating: ‘He [Luk Lysgaard-Peacock] hands her another shell, this one boldly divided by spiral dark stripes on a pale ground. “A present,” he says’ (Byatt, 1996: 359). The snails’ association with life is also highlighted in *Babbletower*, and the following phrases show the connection between a human quality and a snail: ‘[w]hat spirit-life is in snails?’ and ‘for there is spirit-life in snails, my dearie’ (Byatt, 1996: 262).

4.4.5 The Lady Mavis and Turdus Cantor

Byatt is known for her playfulness with the language and she does it marvellously. There is a character in *Babbletower* called the Lady Mavis. In the fictional novella she sacrifices herself by throwing herself from the Tower for the sake of the society. According to the online dictionary, ‘mauvis’ means a ‘song thrush’ in French (Online 5). Since Byatt is a great master of her work, there is a logical explanation for this fact. *Babel Tower* begins with the extract from Jude Mason’s novel *Babbletower* and it is the depiction of a thrush stabbing the snail’s shell and eating ‘the bruised flesh’: ‘he swallows. His throat ripples. He sings. His song is liquid syllables, short cries, serial trills’ (Byatt, 1996: 3). The thrush cracks down the shell on ‘his stone’ and he also ‘stands on the stone, which we call his anvil or altar’ (Byatt, 1996: 3). The reference to a song thrush in particular is also meaningful, since the thrush that is described at the beginning of the book sings his song as a victory over snails: the bird ‘sings his limited lovely notes [...]’ and ‘repeats his song’, and then the author asks the question: ‘[w]hy does his song give us such pleasure?’ (Byatt, 1996: 3).

In her article in the *International Journal of English Studies* (IJES), published by the University of Murcia, Spain, Jennifer Anne Johnson writes about how easy it is to assume that Byatt uses the references to thrushes in order to demonstrate the ferocity of nature: ‘[t]he image of a thrush cracking a vulnerable snail on a stone in order to prise out the tender flesh might, at first sight, suggest symbolism related to the random nature of accident and death, the harsh cruelty of nature in particular or of all life in general’; however, it becomes clear later that ‘this interpretation falls short when we read the complex mesh of references to thrushes […] throughout *Babel Tower*’, because it is suggested that ‘[t]he song thrush is connected with a line of wise thrushes in literature’ (2010: 58).

Despite the name of Lady Mavis and its interpretation as a song thrush, Lady Mavis is compared to none other than a snail in the description where she falls from the Tower: 'her head hit a sharp rock, like a snail dropped by a thrush, and burst apart as Culvert managed to rush across the moat from a side gate with a railed bridge' (Byatt, 1996: 277). Not only does Lady Mavis's comparison to a snail show that she failed to make the community less evil by sacrificing herself in that way, but it might also suggest that Lady Mavis, just like every other human being, has a potential for good and evil acts. It is also notable that snails are described as brave several times in the book: 'little lights bravely burning' and 'the brave little snail-lights' (Byatt, 1996: 259, 267). Thus, since the Lady Mavis is compared to a snail in the novel, her desperate action to throw herself from the tower might be seen as a heroic act for the sake of the society.

After Lady Mavis's fall from the Tower, Turdus Cantor says about Lady Mavis: '[s]he is wrong […] if she thinks she will terrify those who hurt her son out of their course', while Colonel Grim responds: '[s]he will give them a taste of blood' and Samson Origen adds 'that self-punishment will shame the wicked. So many women hurt themselves, thinking their pain will hurt their persecutors, who take pleasure in it' (Byatt, 1996: 277). Therefore, it might be concluded that Lady Mavis's intention to sacrifice herself did not evoke any changes in the community.

Johnson described the Lady Mavis in her article, saying that she is '[t]he woman who Culvert perceives as being in opposition to his projects, mainly due to her concern that his plans for communal childcare will destroy the bond between mothers and their children' and Johnson claims that Culvert's plan is indeed to destroy the bond between mothers and their children (2010: 62). The Lady Mavis and her husband Fabian are the only couple who wish to remain monogamous and the Lady Mavis believes that they will not be supported because of that decision. Fabian tells Mavis that 'it would be a blow against freedom of desire to indulge in variety for fear of social disapproval. For such conventional prescription of behaviour is what we fled. And if we desire only each other, whom we know and trust, that too should be possible to accommodate in freedom' (Byatt, 1996: 208).

In the scene where the Lady Mavis is breast feeding her son, Florizel, it is described how shame is undesirable and a lady who is not ashamed to bare her breasts should be considered as 'well placed and useful'; however, the reality is different:

> But the truth must be told: something in Culvert was disgusted by the sight of these breasts, and of the milk dribbling from the infant lips as it gushed too plentifully forth. He

> felt a desire, as he saw her placidly feeding the child, to run at her with his hands, or even with a weapon, to pierce or bruise those assertive rounds, to mix hot blood with the pallid milk, to slice, to sever… (Byatt, 1996: 209)

It is suggested by Johnson that 'the repulsion that the Lady Mavis inspires in him [Culvert] guides the reader toward a realization that this man, so obsessed with sex, is in fact a woman-hater' (2010: 62). Culvert destroys the Lady Mavis by hurting her children, which also leads to the Lady Mavis's suicide. Felicitas, Mavis's daughter, is described in the book like a snail: 'she often lay curled like a desperate snail in its shell' and after Mavis commits suicide, 'now Mavis herself becomes another snail-like victim as she crashes headlong from the papapet, rejecting her avian nature and willing her own destruction' (Byatt, 1996: 270; Johnson, 2010: 63). According to Jane Campbell, Mavis's 'child, Felicitas, clings to her at the end just as Leo clings to Frederica —whereas Frederica does get away from Bran House' (2004: 242). Therefore, Bran House might be compared to La Tour Bruyarde and Frederica and the Lady Mavis are the prisoners: Frederica – of her husband Nigel and Mavis – of Culvert's community.

Byatt's play with the words extends to yet another character from *Babbletower*: Turdus Cantor. According to the online dictionary, 'turdus' means a 'thrush' in Latin and according to the Latin-Latvian dictionary, 'cantor' means a 'singer' in English (Online 6; 1994: 28). Therefore, Byatt once again makes a reference to a song thrush, just like she did with the Lady Mavis. Byatt's playfulness with the language, which is seen in the names of the characters Lady Mavis and Turdus Cantor, both of which mean a song thrush either in French or Latin, may highlight the duality of a complicated human nature, which has the potential for both selfish and selfless actions. Jonathan I. Israel quotes the famous philosopher of the eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who accepts dual human nature: '[t]he key, he [Rousseau] argues, is to acknowledge that there is a basic duality, two divergent principles in man, one raising him to the pursuit of eternal truths, the other dragging him downwards within himself, rendering him a slave to his passions' (Israel, 2001: 62). The members of the community who live in La Tour Bruyarde are indeed slaves to their passions, including their leader Culvert. Even though, their goal was to create freedom, they failed and became the slaves of their desires.

It is suggested that Turdus Cantor and Lady Mavis, the characters whose names may be interpreted as 'thrushes', are used by Byatt in order to illustrate that these characters are truthful and honest. Johnson suggests that '[a] study of the character Turdus Cantor soon reveals that he is one of […] [the characters] in the community of Babbletower who resist the dominance of their

leader Culvert' (2010: 61). Turdus Cantor frequently questions Culvert's proposals and ideas, which helps Cantor to disclose Culvert's true motifs and intentions. It is not a coincidence that the last words spoken in the novel *Babbletower* belong to Turdus Cantor. In addition, Turdus Cantor's words are also the last words in the novel *Babel Tower*. Byatt describes the scene as three friends, Turdus Cantor, Samson Origen and Colonel Grim, walk away from La Tour Bruyarde, leaving behind 'the heap of bones, white bones, fresh bones, skulls and ribs and shins and carpals and tarsals chucked together, with a rag of cooked flesh here and there upon them' and she also mentions that there might be shells lying around near the Tower, hinting at the shells of the snails:

> "Let us go away from here," said Turdus Cantor. A beast began to howl somewhere far away in the forest, and a great bird turned and turned above them in a hot blue sky. So the three old men began to walk away across the valley, looking back from time to time at the Tower, and the grim mound at its foot, until it was so far away that its human origin could not be distinguished, and it looked like a chance heap of rocks, sprouting green here and there, with what might be shells or pebbles clustered palely at its foot. And they went on walking, and if the Krebs did not catch up with them, they are walking still. (Byatt, 1996: 619).

Jane Campbell mentions the question at the beginning of the novel: '[w]hy does his song give us such pleasure?' (Byatt, 1996:3) , saying that '[t]he motif of pleasure in pain links all the book's narratives as well, and the novel's closing episode, from *Babbletower*, brings the imagery of the thrush and the snail full circle' as Turdus Cantor, Samson Origen and Colonel Grim walk away from the 'experiment, which began as a quest for pleasure and ended in sadism, view the heap of human bones that is all that remains of the community' (2004: 233)

At one point in *Babbletower*, the Lady Roseace, Culvert's lover, says that she feels 'old and tired […] and unable any longer to play my [her] part in your [Culvert's] grand design of free life within the walls of La Tour Bruyarde', but Culvert refuses to let her go, since he prepared a machine that 'has always been in my [his] mind' (Byatt, 1996: 411, 414). This machine is a sophisticated device made for execution by combining both pleasure and pain, another two opposites brought together. Culvert destroys both the Lady Mavis and the Lady Roseace 'in a way which is appropriate to the female roles that they fulfill' (Johnson, 2010: 64). Therefore, Culvert takes away Mavis's children from her and kills Roseace with the help of the torture machine.

4.4.6 *Flight North*

There is yet another character, whose name may be translated as a song thrush. Her name is Dol Throstle and according to the online dictionary, 'throstle' means a 'song thrush' (Online 7). Dol Throstle is a fictional character in a children's story called *Flight North*. This story is being narrated by Frederica Potter and Agatha Mond to their children Leo and Saskia. Agatha Mond is a woman that Frederica lives with and shares responsibilities for their children after Frederica decides to get a divorce and understands that she cannot live with a man. The fictional character 'Dol Throstle is the cook's maid who accompanies Prince Artegall and Mark, his page on their Tolkienesque journey in *Flight North*' (Johnson, 2010: 64).

It is suggested that Dol Throstle 'does exert a guiding influence on the two boys and is the one who first gives Artegall the idea of fleeing north to find refuge from spies and assassins with his father's legendary cousin, Hamraskar Kveld-Ulf' and it is also said that 'Dol Throstle has told the truth' (Johnson, 2010: 64). It is concluded by Johnson that '[i]n general, Dol Throstle's part is that of a valuable companion who gives good advice and tries to protect her fellow travelers from some of the dangers that lie in wait for them' (2010: 64). Therefore, it might be claimed that Dol Throstle, a character whose name is associated with a song thrush, is a trustworthy and reliable character. Since Turdus Cantor and the Lady Mavis (another two characters whose name may be interpreted as a song thrush) are also dependable characters, it may be suggested that A. S. Byatt uses the references to thrushes a symbol to portray reliable characters. Jennifer Anne Johnson also highlights the good qualities of the characters who are associated with thrushes: '[i]n each of Byatt's thrush-related characters, the bird has positive connotations that are generally associated with wisdom, guidance, truthfulness and foresight' (2010: 66).

4.4.7 Frederica Potter and Nigel Reiver

It may be suggested by the author of this paper that Frederica's husband, Nigel Reiver, has some similarities with Culvert. Culvert's cruel actions against the Lady Roseace are somewhat parallel to the relationship between Frederica and Nigel. Frederica's husband treats her viciously; for example, he throws an axe at her and performs a set of actions that might be considered furious. Besides, Frederica finds out about a secret place in Nigel's room, which contains sadistic pornography. It is also known from the novel that Nigel Reiver studied at a boarding school, which separated him from his mother already at an early age. Not only does this

information show the resemblance between Nigel and Culvert, but it also points at Marquis de Sade and his philosophy about human desires. According to Jennifer Anne Johnson, 'Nigel's inability to have a mature sexual relationship between equals is the product of his early separation from his mother' (2010: 64).

It is also notable that Frederica was against sending her son Leo to a boarding school, like Nigel's mother did. She wanted Leo to be with her for a longer period of time before he leaves her. Since Frederica's vulnerability is portrayed in her relationship with Nigel, it might be suggested that she might be compared to a snail and her husband to a thrush, which reminds the reader about the beginning of the book, when the thrush crashed snails' shells on his altar. Thus, Frederica might be seen as Nigel's victim, or rather a victim of her own marriage. Moreover, Frederica's life in Bran House is similar to the lives of people in La Tour Bruyarde, where Culvert is the progenitor of the society and the revolutionaries are trapped in yet another set of laws, this time created by Culvert. In addition, the people in La Tour Bruyarde become Culvert's prisoners, just like Frederica became Nigel's prisoner in Bran House: 'Nigel, a practical businessman, has little use for language except as a means of getting what he wants; he attempts to control Frederica by using love-language as well as the appeal —and the brute force— of his body' (Campbell, 2004: 241).

4.4.8 The Image of the Tower of Babel

It is known that the name Babel Tower and its story comes from the Book of Genesis: 'Babel is the Hebrew name for Babylon and has been considered since Genesis 11:1-9 as a symbol of humanity's arrogant, unbridled failed attempt to build a tower that would exceed bounds set by God' (Becker, 2000: 34). It is also recognized that 'God imposed [a punishment] for this violation', which was 'the confusion of tongues' (Becker, 2000: 34). In the book *A Dictionary of Symbols*, Cirlot describes Babylon as a 'symbol of considerable interest', adding that 'Babylon is an image of a fallen and corrupt existence – the opposite of the Heavenly Jerusalem and of Paradise' (2001: 22). As a result, the Tower where Culvert and his community live might also represent a failure to create a utopian society of absolute freedom for the revolutionaries.

The tower is mentioned in the epigraph to Byatt's novel *Babel Tower,* in the poem called *Circe* by W. H. Auden. In the second stanza of the poem, the readers come across the message, which the society in seclusion enforces on people's behaviour: '[i]n no time one reaches the gate

over which is written large: MAKE LOVE NOT WAR' (Byatt, 1996: xi; Taube, 2006: 123). On the other hand, there is a warning in the second excerpt of the poem, which says: 'the Tower where a laugh is forbidden and DO HARM AS THOU WILT is the Law' (Byatt, 1996: xi). Therefore, if people allow their vicious desires to take control over them, it is likely that people will eventually hurt each other (Taube, 2006: 123-4). It might be suggested that in order to succeed in the game between desires and control, one needs to prevent himself or herself from letting the desires direct the mind (Taube, 2006: 124). In the community of La Tour Bruyarde in *Babel Tower*, Culvert gave in to his passions for power and pleasure, unable to control his desires to the full extent.

The Tower in the fictional novel *Babbletower*, as well as the name of Byatt's book *Babel Tower* has a number of significant ideas that it may symbolize. First of all, Jude Mason shows in his novel that by escaping from the bourgeois society, which runs by certain rules and restrictions, the revolutionaries tried to create a society characterized by total freedom of expression and action and the lack of rules. However, as it was mentioned before, people need to follow certain norms, since the lack of those norms is likely to lead to chaos (Taube, 2006: 134). Secondly, the extreme desire to break free from the power and control may lead to the denial of the beliefs and values, which are characteristic of life in human society (Taube, 2006: 134). According to Aleksejs Taube, it is essential to acknowledge that people need society as a place where they can fulfil themselves and be human (2006: 135). For that reason, if one rejects the society with its norms and restrictions, he or she rejects the idea of freedom and the idea of being a human being (Taube, 2006: 135). Thirdly, just like people yearned for the impossible in the Book of Genesis, the same happened to the community of La Tour Bruyarde. Their vigorous longing to realize all their darkest fantasies and to get rid of all the restrictions in the search for freedom led them to dreadful consequences by making them the slaves of their passions (Taube, 2006: 132). In conclusion, the tower in Byatt's novel may stand for chaos, failure and outrageous consequences which were caused by the society's rejection of laws and their desire for freedom (Taube, 2006: 128, 134).

In his book, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols*, Udo Becker talks about the pattern of the Tower of Babylon or Babel Tower as the name of Byatt's novel suggests. Becker mentions various 'designs of the tower', saying that '[f]requently encountered "designs" of the tower, especially in the representations from the Middle Ages, that show it as having a snail-shaped, rising ramp, are not derived from representations of ziggurats, but probably depict the tower of

the mosque of Samarra' (2000: 34). Thus, it is suggested that Babel Tower resembles a snail, which is a curious observation. Since 'rising ramp' and 'the tower of the mosque of Samarra' are mentioned in the text, it can be assumed that the Tower of Babel resembles not just any snail, but a helical snail. It is known that in the novel *Babel Tower*, Byatt makes references to the snails with helical shapes precisely.

4.4.9 The Beginning of the Novel *Babel Tower*

It is notable that there are multiple beginnings in Byatt's novel *Babel Tower*. The first beginning is marked with a helical snail shell, which means the beginning of the fictional novel *Babbletower: A Tale for the Children of Our Time* written by Jude Mason:

> It might begin:
> The thrush has his anvil or altar on one fallen stone in a heap, gold and grey, roughly squared and shaped, hot in the sun and mossy in the shade. The massive rubble is in a clearing on a high hill. Below is the canopy of the forest. There is a spring, of course, and a little river flowing from it. (Byatt, 1996: 3)

The second beginning introduces the main narrative that concerns Frederica Potter and her story line: '[o]r it might begin with Hugh Pink, walking in Laidley Woods in Herefordshire in the autumn of 1964. The woods are mostly virgin woodland, crowded between mountainsides, but Hugh Pink is walking along an avenue of ancient yews, stretched darkly over hills and across valleys' (Byatt, 1996: 4). The third beginning is as follows: '[o]r it might begin in the crypt of St. Simeon's Church, not far from King's Cross, at the same time on the same day' (Byatt, 1996: 6). Finally, the forth and the last beginning says: '[o]r it might begin with the beginning of the book that was to cause so much trouble, but was then only scribbled heaps of notes, and a swarm of scenes, imagined and re-imagined' (Byatt, 1996: 12).

It is obvious that every beginning starts with the same words: '(or) it might begin'. Richard Todd talks about the significance of the four beginnings and how the structure of the novel contains an important message:

> *Babel Tower* offers three openings that correspond to the three main strands of the story, prefaced by a fourth that provides a kind of continuo. These alternate beginnings are of organic importance to both the book's form and content, for they initiate an interwoven, or braided structure. That structure can be figured as a helix or spiral of arbitrary length

> which, when imagined vertically, assists in our understanding of the book's title. (1997: 63)

Thus, '[i]n place of a prologue, Babel Tower presents the reader with four separate beginnings' and 'the first opening into the book provides no narrative thread; instead, it introduces a cluster of motifs' (Campbell, 2004: 232). Moreover, according to Jane Campbell, '[v]isually, the snail motif introduces each of the sections of Babbletower, which are scattered through the text, and in fact the snail itself is a text' (2004: 233). Overall, it might be concluded that Byatt uses the symbolism of snails and thrushes in *Babel Tower* in a great variety of meanings and with a special purpose to every single meaning.

CONCLUSIONS

The initial goal of the paper was to reveal the symbolic meanings of snails and thrushes in A. S. Byatt's novel *Babel Tower*. The literature on the topics of postmodernism, symbols and symbolism in fiction was analyzed within the framework of the theoretical study of the paper. The results obtained from the theoretical study of the paper reveal the features of postmodernism in the novel *Babel Tower*, the characteristics of a symbol and the notion of symbolism in literature.

The main narrative of the novel Babel Tower, as well as the novel-within-the-novel *Babbletower: A Tale for the Children of Our Time* were analyzed. The results acquired in the course of the analysis of the novel demonstrate the great variety of symbolic meanings that snails and thrushes possess in Byatt's novel.

Babel Tower begins with Jude Mason's novel *Babbletower* and it is the depiction of a thrush stabbing the snail's shell and eating it. It is easy to assume that Byatt uses the references to thrushes in order to demonstrate the ferocity of nature; however, it becomes clear later that this interpretation is far from the only one in the book, since there are a number of different references to thrushes.

There is a character in *Babbletower* called the Lady Mavis, who sacrifices herself by throwing herself from the Tower for the sake of the society that lives in the Tower. Even though 'mauvis' means a song thrush in French, the Lady Mavis is compared to a snail in the book. The comparison shows that she failed to make the community less evil by sacrificing herself in that way.

Another character's name in *Babbletower* is Turdus Cantor and his name might also be translated as a song thrush from Latin. The reference to a song thrush may highlight the duality of a complicated human nature, which has the potential for selfish and selfless actions. It is also suggested that Turdus Cantor and Lady Mavis are used by Byatt in order to illustrate that these characters are truthful and honest; moreover, they are the only ones who oppose the domination of Culvert, their leader. There is yet another character, whose name may be translated as a song thrush: Dol Throstle. She is a fictional character in a children's story called *Flight North* and she portrays a guiding and truthful character.

The most obvious reference to snails is seen on the pages of the book: each passage from Jude Mason's novel *Babbletower* is separated from the rest of the text by small images of helical

snail shells. All descriptions of the snails in the book point out the duality of snails' nature and their correlation with opposite concepts. The helical shape of the snails, as well as their names (*Helix Hortensis*; *Helix Nemoralis*) also point to the fact that snails share similar features with the DNA, which consists of two spiral lines; moreover, metaphorically, snails carry the genetic information on their shells. This curious discovery might symbolize the idea that human nature, similarly to that of snails, also possesses a dual quality. Hence, people have the capability of doing good and evil deeds.

The design of the Tower of Babel is also important, since the representations of the Tower of Babylon from the Middle Ages show the tower, which has a snail-shaped, rising ramp. Thus, it is suggested that Babel Tower resembles a helical snail, which is a curious observation. It is also notable that there are four different beginnings in Byatt's novel *Babel Tower*. Furthermore, every beginning starts with the same words: '(or) it might begin' and this interesting fact suggests the idea that the structure of the novel contains an important message: it suggests a braded form, which resembles a helical snail shell.

The image of a snail that is curled up in the shell is used a number of times in the novel in the references to the Lady Mavis and her children. Thus, an image of a snail being rolled up in its shell is used to portray sensitivity. Snails have another symbolic meaning in the book: they play an important role in the description of the relationship between Frederica Potter and John Ottokar, where the association of snails with life is emphasized. In addition, the snails in the novel are connected with science, literature and beauty. In general, it might be concluded that the symbolism of snails and thrushes in the novel is revealed in many different circumstances and in many different contexts. Thus, the snails and thrushes have a great variety of symbolic meanings in the novel.

The name of the book, *Babel Tower*, represents the image of a fallen world. As a result, the Tower where Culvert and his community live might also represent a failure to create a free utopian society for the revolutionaries. It might be suggested that in order to succeed in the game between desires and control, one needs to prevent himself or herself from letting the desires direct the mind. In the community of La Tour Bruyarde in *Babel Tower*, Culvert gave in to his passions for power and pleasure, unable to control his desires fully. However, as it was mentioned before, people need to follow certain norms, since the lack of those norms is likely to lead to chaos. Just like people yearned for the impossible when they tried to build the Tower of Babel in the Book of Genesis, the same happened to the community of La Tour Bruyarde. Their

vigorous longing to realize all their darkest fantasies and to get rid of all the restrictions in the search for freedom led them to dreadful consequences by making them the slaves of their passions. In conclusion, the tower in Byatt's novel may stand for chaos, failure of a utopian project and the outrageous consequences which were caused by the society's rejection of laws and its desire for freedom.

There are numerous options for further research on the present topic, since snails and thrushes are also mentioned in Byatt's fourth novel of the quartet: *A Whistling Woman*. In the main narrative of *A Whistling Woman*, Jacqueline continues to examine the snails, whose shells are found by studying the areas around the anvils of thrushes. There is a scientist, who works with Jacqueline on the research and this scientific work is an important part of the last book of the quartet. However, the analysis of two novels is too vast to be included in the present bachelor thesis. Moreover, there are also links between thrushes in *Babel Tower* and the works of other authors, such as Robert Browning, J. R. R. Tolkien and Thomas Hardy, which may be analyzed in order to find more symbolic meanings of thrushes in *Babel Tower*.

THESES

1. Characteristic traits of a symbol include vagueness and openness; therefore, each symbol possesses a multiplicity of meanings.
2. Although a thrush is considered to be a predatory creature, its meanings in the novel are both violent and the opposite of violent.
3. Turdus Cantor and Lady Mavis, the characters whose names may be translated as 'song thrushes' from Latin or French, as well as Dol Throstle, are used by Byatt in order to illustrate that these characters are truthful and honest.
4. All descriptions of the snails in the book point to the duality of snails' nature and their correlation with opposite concepts.
5. The helical shape of the snails, as well as their names (*Helix Hortensis*; *Helix Nemoralis*) point to the fact that snails share similar features with the DNA, which consists of two spiral lines; moreover, metaphorically, snails carry the genetic information on their shells. This curious comparison might symbolize the idea that human nature, similarly to that of snails, also possesses a dual quality. Hence, people have the capability of doing good and evil deeds.
6. The design of the Tower of Babel is also important, since the representations of the Tower of Babylon from the Middle Ages show the tower, which has a snail-shaped, rising ramp. Thus, it is suggested that Babel Tower resembles a helical snail.
7. There are four different beginnings in Byatt's novel *Babel Tower*. Furthermore, every beginning starts with the same words: '(or) it might begin' and this interesting fact suggests that the structure of the novel resembles a braded form, or a form of a helical snail shell.
8. Snails also play an important role in the description of the relationship between Frederica Potter and John Ottokar, where the association of snails with life is emphasized.
9. In addition, the snails in the novel are also connected with scientific research and neuroscience, as well as DNA, which suggests the basis for all life.
10. It might be concluded that snails and thrushes have a great variety of symbolic meanings in the novel.

REFERENCES

1. Ayan, M. (2010) Weaving Modernist and Postmodernist Intertextual Narrative. *Ploiesti*, LXII (1): 134-140.
2. Becker, U. (2000) *The Continuun Encyclopedia of Symbols*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc
3. Black, J. (Et al), (2008) *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature*. Broadview Press
4. Byatt, A. S. (1996) *Babel Tower*. New York: Random House
5. Campbell, J. (2004) *A.S. Byatt and the Heliotropic Imagination*. Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press
6. Cirlot, J. E. (2001) *A Dictionary of Symbols*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd 1962
7. Connor, S. (1997) *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers
8. Eco, U. (1984) *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Indiana: Indiana University Press
9. Hager, A. (General ed.), (2009) *Encyclopedia of British Writers 1800 to Present*. New York: DWJ Books LLC
10. Israel, J. I. (2001) *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*. New York: Oxford University Press
11. Johnson, J. A. (2010) Soothsaying Song Thrushes and Life-Giving Snails: Motifs in A. S. Byatt's *Babel Tower* and *A Whistling Woman*. *Journal of English Studies*, 8 (2010): 57-71.
12. Kastan, D. S. (2006) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
13. Latīņu-Latviešu vārdnīca (1994) Rīga: Zvaigzne
14. Luebering J. E. (Ed.), (2011) *English Literature from the 19th Century through Today*. Britannica Educational Publishing
15. Shaffer, B. W. (General ed.), (2011) *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction*. New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing Ltd
16. Sim, S. (ed.), (2011) *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge

17. Taube, A. (2006) *A Postmodernist Perspective on Reason and Unreason in Enlightenment Culture*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Riga: University of Latvia
18. Todd, R. (1997) *A. S. Byatt*. Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers Ltd
19. Toma, I. (2010) Postmodernism and the Canon. *Ploiesti*, LXII (2): 214-217.
20. Tresidder, J. (2008) *The Watkins Dictionary of Symbols*. London: Duncan Baird Publishers
21. Werness, H. B. (2006) *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in Art*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc

Online sources:

1) Available from http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/learner-english/symbol?q=symbol [Accessed May 20, 2013].
2) Available from http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/symbol [Accessed May 19, 2013].
3) Available from http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/symbol?q=symbol [Accessed May 19, 2013].
4) Available from http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/symbol?s=t [Accessed May 21, 2013].
5) Available from http://www.multitran.ru/c/M.exe?t=110800_4_2&s1=%EF%E5%E2%F7%E8%E9%20%E4%F0%EE%E7%E4 [Accessed May 16, 2013].
6) Available from http://www.multitran.ru/c/M.exe?l1=2&l2=1&s=thrush [Accessed May 16, 2013].
7) Available from http://www.multitran.ru/c/M.exe?l1=1&l2=2&s=throstle [Accessed May 17, 2013].

DOKUMENTĀRĀ LAPA

Bakalaura/maģistra darbs „Gliemežu un strazdu simbolisms A. S. Baijatas romānā „Bābeles tornis”” izstrādāts LU Anglistikas nodaļā.

Ar savu parakstu apliecinu, ka pētījums veikts patstāvīgi, izmantoti tikai tajā norādītie informācijas avoti un iesniegtā darba elektroniskā kopija atbilst izdrukai.

Autors: _____ (*paraksts, datums*)

Rekomendēju/nerekomendēju darbu aizstāvēšanai

Vadītāja: _____ (*paraksts, datums)*

Recenzents: _____

Darbs iesniegts Anglistikas nodaļā _____.05.2013.

Dekāna pilnvarotā persona: bakalaura/maģistra gala pārbaudījuma komisijas sekretāre/s _____ (*paraksts)*

Darbs aizstāvēts bakalaura/maģistra gala pārbaudījuma komisijas sēdē

_____ prot. Nr. _____

Komisijas sekretāre/s: _____ (*paraksts)*