

An Examination of A.S Byatt's Approach of Feminism in his Fiction

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MINDGATES SOFTTECH SOLUTIONS

Abstract

Byatt is a British author whose work is based on the writer's personal experiences in life and attempts to interpret them via the medium of art. Her innovative invention of generating the agony that is usually buried earned her the prestigious Booker Prize for literature.

Keywords: *Strobilanthes cuspidata, antioxidant, cytotoxicity, Vero cell lines*

Introduction

Antonia Susan Byatt, née Drabble, was born in Yorkshire in 1936. She attended a Quaker school in York as well as Newnham College in Cambridge, Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, and Somerville College in Oxford, where she completed her post-graduate studies. She taught at London University's Extra-Mural Department and the Central School of Art and Design before becoming a full-time Lecturer in English and American Literature at University College, London, in 1972. She left her work in 1983 to dedicate her whole time to writing. She lectured and spoke about her work all around the world, frequently with the British Council, and served as Chairman of the Society of Authors from 1986 to 1988. Between 1990 and 1998, she served on the British Council's Literature Advisory Panel. She has served on the judging panels for several literary prizes, including the Booker Prize for Fiction, and is regarded as a distinguished critic, regularly contributing to journals and newspapers such as the Times Literary Supplement, The Independent, and The Sunday Times, as well as BBC radio and television programmes. She was also a member of the Kingman Committee on English Language Teaching [1987-8]. If adopted fanatically, the idea of an attractive woman as pencil thin becomes a self-destructive stereotype; it is the ultimate sign of dehumanisation and death. Advertisers employ this internalised stereotype to capitalise on the feelings created in people who have begun on the hopeless process of shaping themselves into the restricted, stereotyped picture. Women who embrace the 'Barbie-doll vision of themselves' might easily be persuaded to spend a lot of money on the latest styles.

Originally, the term "stereotype" referred to a printing stamp used to generate many copies from a single model or mould. In his 1922 book *Public Opinion*, the eminent journalist and commentator Walter Lippmann used the word to describe how society went about classifying people—stamping human beings with a set of qualities as well. He recognised the following four elements of stereotypes:

1. They are straightforward.
2. They were purchased second-hand.
3. They are wrong and incorrect because they seek to assert that each individual human being in a certain group possesses a set of similar characteristics. Stereotypes are logically impossible since each human is unique.
4. They are averse to change. Stereotyping, according to feminists, is a key impediment to women's quests for self-identification and self-location.

It is necessary to know the term 'self' for the discussion of problematic of self-location. The psychological definition of the term is based on the set of feelings and attitudes that people possess, and a certain sense of who they are. The term has two distinct sets of meanings. One set is related to people's attitude about themselves, their picture of the way they look, the impact they believe they have on others, and their perceived traits, abilities, eccentricities and weaknesses. This collection consists of

‘self-image’ or ‘self-concept’. “Attitudes, feelings perception and evaluation of self are as an object. The second set of meanings relates to the ‘executive functions’-processes by which the individual manages, copes, thinks, remembers, perceives and plans. The first set sees self as an object, the second as a process. Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow experimented with people and formulated two theories. Rogers’ Theory of self does not involve complex personality structures or stages of development. Rogers emphasized the whole of experience the phenomenal field. It is the individual’s subjective frame of reference, not related to the external reality. He had realized that the self was an important element in the experiences of a person. In addition to the present self, there is also the ideal self that a person would like to be. Everyone strives to attain their concept of the ideal self, but a few achieve it.

Most societies have tried to regulate sexuality by placing it firmly within their marriage and kinship structure. However, in societies that evolved male dominated forms of family, marriage became an instrument of control over female sexuality. In the west, Engel preceded the feminists in critiquing the sexual morality inherent in such maledominated family structures. He saw the destruction of the patriarchal family as a necessary step towards freeing women from men’s control. Efforts to promote sexual liberation in the west were accompanied by a very high rate of breakdown of families and marriages. At the same time, subjective expectations of marriage became more and more exaggerated. Walking out of marriages, in search of more exciting liaisons is no longer, only a male prerogative. Women frequently exercise this option. However, even though the idea of lifelong sexual loyalty in marriage is no longer assumed in the west, the majority of believers in sexual liberation expect a new form of sexual commitment —serial monogamy. For whatever duration that a couple is together, the new morality assumes that they will refrain from sexual involvement with others. The entire history of women’s struggle for self-determination has been muffled in silence over and over. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance, practically she is completely insignificant; she pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. This is the ironical paradox of a woman’s life. Men need her, love her, worship her, and write about her but they do so in relation to their own selves. The desires and aspects of a woman’s life, which do not relate to them ordinarily, do not interest them. Women’s writing struggling against internalization of role models thrust on women has learnt to express the untold narrative of being a woman. Woman’s writing is important today, more than ever before. Literature is a cultural construct and provides us with valuable insights into the development of societies. It helps psychological understanding and reformulations of epistemological constructs. Women’s writing focuses on both, the manifestation of a female sensibility, a feminine reality, and on its significance as a means of bringing, about an awareness of this-reality. Gender, like other categories such as race and class, is a significant category of social and political reality. So far, women’s writing has been dismissed as hardly of any consequence because religious and political thought had assigned them as beings less national and intellectual than the male of the species. Freedom is perhaps the first requirement, for ‘taboos’ and inhibitions do not allow the pursuit of experience. Women have been kept in kitchens and parlors, in purdah and in luxury, but deprived freedom. The needs of society, child marriages, child bearing and child rearing were the causes that have kept women tied to their chains. Women’s lives had been split into two-the physical and the intellectual- and the latter had been left underdeveloped by the artificial constructs of society. Romance thrived on this underdevelopment and romantic notions served to keep women happy, longing for their demon lover. Paradoxically, while on the one hand women were placed outside culture, outside history, outside time on the other they were treated as the custodians of culture, preserving it and continuing it through procreation, traditions, rituals and conservation. Surprisingly their own relationships and values were referred to as subculture even when families were extended, boundaries were crossed and kinship founded through them. In 1912, suffragettes in England exploded into militant action, breaking windows in London shops and even at the Prime Minister’s home. Some 150 of them were arrested, including Emmeline Pankhurst, and in prison they continued

their protest, refusing to eat driving the prison authorities to force-feed them. In many ways, the twentieth century can be called the age of women; all over the world their rights and wrongs, their wishes and desires, have been the subject of fierce and heated debates. The need for feminist literary criticism as expressed by her, is because in its earliest years feminist criticism concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassment of women in classic or popular male literature and the exclusion of women from literary history.

Every nation is a socio cultural ensemble, which has a symbolic denominator in the form of its ail, Philosophy and religious manifest. Such a denominator has a solidity rooted in a particular mode of reproduction. It is also echoed in the corresponding symbolic denominator of another socio cultural ensemble. This seems natural when the entities involved are linked by history. There are certain formations that summarize the dynamics of socio cultural organism. It is a question of groups being defined according to their place in production, but especially according to their role in the mode of reproductions and its representation, which, while being the specific socio cultural traits of the formation in question, are diagonal to it and connect it to other socio cultural formations. Feminism is a rich, complicated and often contradictory body of research, aimed at examining gender in society. It is generally believed that Charles Fourier who conceived of women's emancipation as the buttress of global social transformations invented the word feminism. A simple definition of feminism means a study of women not as objects but as subjects of knowledge. Abigail Adams, Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, George Sand, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, John Stuart Mill, Emma Goldman, Friedrich Engels, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Henrik Ibsen, Margaret Sanger, Rosa Luxemburg, Mme. Curie, and Diderot among others contributed to the original history of feminist thought and theory. The attempt to include and account for women continues with Gloria Steinem, Bell Hooks, Bella Abzug and Naomi Wolf. Although Mills and Engels among others contributed to feminism, they have found fault with feminism in that it had yet to develop a viable theoretical framework. Academics such as, Heckman and Hartsock, Phillips, Gross, Moore, Tong, Whelehan and Oakely have more recently contributed to developing more complex understanding of feminine/gender knowledge through epistemological development. One of the most valuable contributions of feminism is to deal with epistemology, ways of knowing, or the theory of knowledge, which has been discussed in detail in the later pages. Donna Langston, in her *Changing our Power* (1978) has defined feminism. Feminist theory is a body of ideas which attempts to explain the status of women in society, how this status is originated, why it persists and what must be done to change this status. This definition makes a good jumping point. The inequality regarding women persists even today, although in a very different form now than in generations before. Strong women in history-suffragists, civil rights workers, and feminists have worked hard to get their status to the point it is right now, but young feminists are learning through theory that they have to pick up the torch and continue to strive toward improvement of their social status. A large part of modern feminist theory has to do with the last part of Langston's statement- "What must be done to change this status". Simone de Beauvoir's question, "what is a woman?" has set the agenda for feminist theory for twenty years. It has pointed feminists towards an examination of the social, economic and linguistic structures that give meaning to the biological sex differences that have traditionally defined women. As they attempt to analyze these questions, feminist theorists take philosophical perspectives that result in complicated and often indistinctly defined political and theoretical divisions. These divisions often fall under such labels as liberal, radical, cultural, socialist, Anglo American, French and post structuralist feminism. Each of these theoretical stands falls somewhere along a continuum, on which gender is defined according to essentialist or constructivist paradigms. Women have always been seen as essential subject of discussion. From the beginning of the women's movement, women have felt compelled to redefine their history, biology, psychology,

literature and epistemology as different from the circumscribed definition that the masculine patriarchal tradition imposes leading to intellectual and sensual strategies.

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