# Fictional Names Masquerading as Literary-Historical Monikers: Onomastic Simulacra in A. S. Byatt's *Possession*

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Jean Baudrillard's theory on the nature of simulation proposes that a shift from reality to representation progresses until the artificial surpasses the authentic. Phase three simulation occurs when distinctions between representation and reality virtually disappear. In *Possession*, A. S. Byatt erodes boundaries between fictional representation and literary-historical reality to the extent that stage three simulation is achieved in her novel. Most strikingly, this phenomenon occurs through onomastic imitations as the created names of her fictional poets and faux scholars appear as real to the reader as the actual names of literary-historical personages.

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Jean Baudrillard's 1981 theoretical work *Simulacra and Simulation* examines the relationship between the symbolic and the real in the context of cultural construction. For Baudrillard, a shift from reality to representation progresses in phases until eventually the artificial not only becomes indistinguishable from the authentic, but surpasses it to appear more real than the real, in effect, creating a hyperreality where life imitates art. According to Baudrillard, stage one is a "reflection of a profound reality," stage two "masks and perverts a profound reality," stage three "masks the *absence* of a profound reality" (italics his), and stage four bears "no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (1981: 6). Baudrillard's theory undermines ideas of authenticity and origin as "instead of a true reality, we get various types of simulacra, which present themselves as real. The more simulation becomes complete, the more we have a sense of the real, of being immersed in reality" (Hegarty, 2004: 49). From this perspective, human experience may be just a simulation of reality and not so disparate from works of fiction that offer a version of that reality on the printed page.

A. S. Byatt's 1990 novel *Possession*, recipient of the Booker Prize, features two modern-day scholars who reconstruct a Victorian love affair through their analyses of the lovers' poems and correspondence. In her crafting of this postmodern work, Byatt achieves Baudrillard's third phase as distinctions between reality and representation disappear and "the simulation is not an imitation, but a replacement" (2004: 50). In *Possession*, Byatt's creation of nineteenth-century poets and twentieth-century scholars "masks the *absence* of a profound reality" (Baudrillard, 1981: 6) in large part because her characters' names add to their plausibility as potential literary-historical personages. Byatt erodes boundaries that traditionally separate fictional representation from literary-historical reality, forcing readers to distinguish between characters and personages and between love story and literary history, as each category in these sets seems equally plausible or perhaps equally artificial. Created characters, like the Victorian poets Christabel LaMotte and Randolph Henry Ash, appear to be as real as their historical contemporaries, Christina Rossetti and Robert Browning, two authentic poets who enter the fictional realm when referenced in the novel. Likewise, late twentieth-century characters Roland Michell, a graduate research assistant to an Ash specialist, and Professor Maud Bailey, a LaMotte scholar, become indistinguishable from their historical peers, the post-modern academics of the late 1980s, but Michell and Bailey are not to be found in any MLA directory. Throughout *Possession*, Byatt draws attention to the interchangeability between fictional personae and historical personages, most poignantly when Bailey suggests to Michell, "Maybe we're symptomatic of whole flocks of exhausted scholars and theorists. Or maybe it's just us" (1990: 291).

In *Possession*, Byatt takes one aim of fiction — to recreate reality to the extent that readers suspend their disbelief — and inverts it. No longer must readers suspend their disbelief to embrace the existence of Byatt's imagined poets and scholars; instead they must sustain their belief in the historical poets and scholars who, by novel's end, seem less real than their counterfeits. But how does Byatt achieve this extraordinary effect? Primarily the novelist attains Baudrillard's stage three simulation in *Possession* through onomastic imitations that appear as real, both denotatively and connotatively, as the originals. The names of the factual and the fictional poets and scholars that populate Byatt's novel are virtually indistinguishable. Even nuanced readers may be challenged to differentiate between invented and borrowed names. Boundaries between the imagined and the real erode further as a consequence of Byatt's inclusion of known poetry (lines of verse from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and Robert Browning, among others) and created poetry (entire poems and poem fragments she fabricates for Ash and LaMotte's oeuvres). Byatt's imitation of Victorian poetry is so exact that readers may believe these invented poems to have been penned in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The novelist's seemingly genuine faux nonfiction is equally convincing. Michell and Bailey uncover a cache of Ash and LaMotte letters concealed within a Victorian doll bed. Byatt fabricates distinct journals replete with multiple entries for Ash's wife, for LaMotte's lover, and for LaMotte's cousin. Byatt's simulated poems, correspondence, and journals appear as authentic to readers as their historical antecedents, the very poems, correspondence, and journals that serve as models for Byatt's imitations. These constructed documents are repositories of ever more names, both those borrowed from history and those Byatt creates to mimic historical personages.

Scholar-author Byatt intentionally injects her knowledge of literary theory into much of her fiction. Of this phenomenon, Ann Hulbert observes, "True to the requirements of up-to-date university fiction, *Possession* is full of the fashionable rhetoric of literary theory" (1991: 47). Even Byatt describes herself as "an old-fashioned mythographer and metaphor-seeker at heart" (Alban, 2003: 9), to which I would add an additional moniker: master of simulacra. The word itself appears in the novel in several places and in several contexts. In *Possession*, Baudrillard's theory functions as both literary device and motif. Appearances of the terms *simulacra* and *simulacrum*, and references to their concepts, are too frequent to be accidental or incidental. Chapter 20 includes a letter from Christabel LaMotte to a Mrs Cropper. In reference to the nature of the afterlife, the poet wonders, "What do we clasp if we are granted the unspeakable Grace — of Clasping — again? Orient and immortal wheat [. . .] incorruptible — or the simulacra of our Fallen Flesh?" (1990: 420). When Professor Bailey first views Bethany House, the historic residence of Christabel LaMotte, she observes, "It's a good restoration job [. . .]. It makes you feel funny. A simulacrum" (1990: 230). The character's next observation alludes to Baudrillard's third phase of simulation when the restored dwelling surpasses the original structure, creating the hyper real: "It would have been sootier. It would have looked older. When it was younger" (1990: 230). Baudrillard's theory is invoked again in reference to literary artifacts. American scholar and collector Mortimer Cropper — descendant of nineteenth-century letter recipient, Mrs Cropper, and possessor of the letter — justifies disseminating copies of literary artifacts rather than their originals in order "to prolong their life indefinitely and to send their representations, fresh, vivid, even, as you have seen, more vivid than in the flesh" (1990: 418). From Cropper's perspective, and Baudrillard's, the viewing public perceives replications to be more real than the actual artifacts that serve as their models. A similar phenomenon occurs when readers encounter Byatt's created poets and scholars who seem "more vivid, even" on the page than poets and scholars "in the flesh."

Even as Byatt incorporates Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation, she likewise infuses her novel with onomastic sensibility. Names, and their origins and meanings, concern her Victorian poet-lovers as well as her twentieth century scholar-detectives. To avoid scandal in Great Britain, a pregnant but unwed Christabel LaMotte departs Bethany House to spend her confinement with French cousins across the Channel. The young Sabine Lucrèce Charlotte de Kercoz asks her older English cousin about the "curious name of Dog Tray." Of her pet's name, the poet informs Sabine:

> [. . .] he had been named as a joke, for a line in William Shakespeare's *King Lear* — "The little dogs and all — Tray, Blanche and Sweetheart, see they bark at me." [. . .] He used to live in a house where there was a Blanche and where I was jokingly called Sweetheart — [. . .] In the nursery rhyme of Mother Hubbard, in some versions, the dog who finds the cupboard bare is called Dog Tray. Maybe he was truly named for that old woman's dog, who found nothing but disappointment. (1990: 381–382)

In her explanation, LaMotte presents Dog Tray's name as a hybrid construction, derived from both canonical and non-canonical texts, connecting Shakespeare to Mother Hubbard, linking tragic drama with nursery rhyme, and blurring distinctions between high and humble literatures and personages.

Discussions of names and their origins occur with regularity between characters. When Randolph Henry Ash eventually meets his daughter, May, the young girl, ignorant of her roots, does not recognize him as her biological father nor will she. Introductions prompt a discussion of their respective names. When Ash provides May with information about the etymology of her given names, he simultaneously offers her clues to her origins:

> She had another name, she said, which she did not like. He said perhaps that might come to change, names grew and diminished as time ran on: he would like to know her long name. So she said [. . .] that her name was Maia Thomasine Bailey. [. . .] He told her that Maia was the mother of Hermes, thief, artist, and psychopomp; and that he knew a waterfall called Thomasine. She had known a pony named Hermes, she said, fast as the wind, she could tell him, and she had never heard of a waterfall with a name like Thomasine. (1990: 553)

The waterfall *Thomasine* is near the site of LaMotte's conception of Ash's child. Their daughter will be born in secrecy, christened *Maia Thomasine Bailey*, adopted and reared by her maternal aunt. Yet even his daughter's preferred form of her given name, *May*, recalls a discussion of trees chronicled in the Ash-LaMotte correspondence. Describing a "*fine Hawthorn*" on her property, LaMotte writes that "*the May must never be brought into the house*" (1990: 196). Ash's own tree name connects him to the hawthorn, known as the May-tree as it traditionally blooms in that month. Ingenuously, Byatt provides not a family tree comprised of public names, but tree names that comprise a secret family. In addition to the father/ash and the daughter/hawthorn is the mother/alder, a tree associated with LaMotte in Ash's epic, *Ragnarök*. In a poetic simulation of Norse legend, Ash describes the creation of the first man and woman:

> And so the laughing Gods, pleased with their work
> Made man and woman of the senseless stumps
> And called them Ask and Embla, for the ash
> And alder of their woody origins. (1990: 262)

In addition to serving as Nordic counterparts to Adam and Eve, Ask and Embla are code names for Ash and LaMotte. The names reappear in the *Ask to Embla* poem cycle. Of these poems, scholar Maud Bailey observes, "They're good. He wasn't talking to himself. He was talking to her — Embla — Christabel [. . .]" (1990: 290). In Old Scandinavian, *Embla* is "the first woman, made by the Gods from a tree" and *Ask* is "the first man, made by the gods from an ash" (Embla, 2013). However, etymologically *Embla* is associated with the elm and not Byatt's alder, perhaps an intentional or accidental genus variant.

In a letter to Randolph Henry "Ask" Ash, Christabel "Embla" LaMotte's overt reference to the fragility of the May-tree's blooms that "*must never be brought into the house*" (1990: 196) is also a covert reference to the exclusion of Ash from Bethany House, the female sanctuary she shares with fellow artist and lover, Blanche Glover. In his reply to her letter, Ash admits to riding past their property, but stopping short of actual trespass. According to Celtic lore, the hawthorn "marks the entrance to the other world" (Campbell, 2005: 345), a place inhabited by fairies. Such

creatures figure prominently in LaMotte's stories and poetry. Ash responds, "*I did not feel it was within my right to saunter past . . . the foamy May-tree*" (Byatt, 1990: 199), to enter LaMotte and Glover's private realm without invitation. The Scottish adage "Ne'er cast a cloot til Mey's oot" (2003) warns against removing protective layers of clothing before the hawthorn blooms, a harbinger of warmer temperatures. Ironically, with the arrival of summer, and while on a coastal fieldtrip, the poets will do just that — shed protective clothing and Victorian restraint — resulting in the conception of their daughter, May.

May's last name, *Bailey*, bestowed through adoption, eventually reveals May and her biological mother, LaMotte, to be the ancestresses of late twentieth century scholar Maud Bailey. Though May remains ignorant of her biological connection to Ash, over a century later, in seeking to confirm an Ash/LaMotte liaison, Professor Bailey inadvertently uncovers her own blood relation to May's mother through a name mentioned in a letter and clues embedded in LaMotte's poetry, which the scholar successfully interprets. This act of a faux history giving birth to a faux present is repeated as savvy readers duplicate Bailey's acts of deciphering and identification; here the fiction replicates the reality once again. As she completes her investigation into the literary mystery, Bailey fulfills her decree that "Literary critics make natural detectives" and finds answers to questions she posed mid-novel: "[. . .] who was the Father, what was the origin, what is the secret?" (1990: 258). Bailey's answers include the names of two people and a single place: Randolph Henry Ash, Whitsuntide, Maia Thomasine Bailey. Secrets are doubled as Maia is revealed to be not just the poets' concealed daughter, but the scholar's recovered ancestress.

Byatt's simulations of actual Victorian names occupy two narrative levels in two distinct time periods. The first level of fictional names includes those imitations that appear in the novel to identify characters pertinent to the hybrid plot, a fusion of romance and detection. The second level of simulated names in the novel identifies the characters that appear in the poetry of Ash and LaMotte, essentially the names of characters created by Byatt's creations, and names that serve as clues to the eventual detection of the poets' covert liaison and resultant progeny. That these two levels of names exist in separate fictional time periods that mimic actual historical eras, the mid-Victorian age and the latter twentieth century, further complicates the onomastic grid of the novel. An examination of both onomastic levels in both time periods reveals the qualities these character names possess that allow Byatt's simulacra to equal and perhaps supersede the historical names after which they are modeled and which they imitate. In accordance with Baudrillard's theory, eventually the artificial surpasses the original in terms of its perceived authenticity, a feat Byatt achieves in *Possession* as distinctions between artificial and actual names blur, if not disintegrate wholly.

Characters in Byatt's *Possession* resemble actual personages of their respective time periods. Critics note connections between Byatt's fictional poets, Christabel LaMotte and Randolph Henry Ash, and their historical contemporaries. As Catherine Burgess observes:

> The poets, as well as their poems, are loosely based on Victorian originals. Ash is modeled most closely on Robert Browning, the poet who eloped with Elizabeth Barrett. [. . .] Christabel is modeled on Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti, both "spinster" poets who lived secluded lives and fell in love with married men. (2002: 52)

Resemblances also exist between the styles and themes of the original Victorian verse penned by the historical poets and the simulated verse Byatt pens for their fictional counterparts. As Hilary Schor notes, "Her male poet, Randolph Henry Ash, has elements of Robert Browning in his excessive physicality and the linguistic play of his works [. . . while] her female poet, Christabel LaMotte, borrows Elizabeth Barrett Browning's reclusiveness, allusiveness, and coyness. But her letters seem to owe more to Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson" (2000: 249), as does her verse:

> Men may be martyred
> Any where
> In desert, cathedral
> Or public Square.
> In no Rush of Action
> This is *our* doom
> To Drag a Long Life out
> In a Dark Room. (Byatt, 1990: 123)

LaMotte's untitled poem depicts a cloistered environment that offers women protection from public exposure even as it denies them public lives. The lines recall the reclusive habitats and habits of Rossetti and Dickinson and resonate with similar themes expressed in their poetry. In its style — marked by brevity of phrasing and fondness for capitalization — a strong connection exists between LaMotte's verse and Dickinson's.

We should be wary, however, to read too much into these similarities between fictional and real poets as "Byatt chooses to create fictional characters with a life independent of any historical model in order that they should have their own" (Burgass, 2002: 52). Still, these lives that Byatt creates for her characters are imbued with a simulated reality that makes them difficult to distinguish from their historical counterparts. Certainly, *Possession* is no *Roman à clef* in which fictitious characters act as thinly veiled substitutes for living personages, but there is an uncanny familiarity about Byatt's characters, particularly for readers cognizant of the lives of Victorian poets and familiar with their poetry. Their very names, Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte, bear striking resemblance to names of actual Victorian poets, and the connection or confusion between fabricated and real is furthered not only by similarities in the styles and themes of their writing, but by additional names that appear in their faux oeuvres that resemble the fictional names that appear in the authentic oeuvres of revered Victorian poets.

Christabel LaMotte is associated with Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti in the shared cadence of their names. The most obvious connection between the three poets is their three-syllabic first names: *Christabel*, *Emily*, and *Christina*. Closer resemblance exists between Christabel LaMotte and Christina Rossetti in their names' shared etymology. In theological terms, *Christ* means "anointed one" (*OED*, 2013). *Christabel* is a *beautiful Christ*, while *Christina* with its diminutive ending suggests *little Christ*, and both names imply *female Christ*. When Christabel's sexual relationship with the married Ash and the birth of their love child, May, are revealed to the literary research party, scholar Blackadder, indeed a serpentine man, is quick to rename LaMotte's identity: "Not only a lesbian but a Fallen Woman and an

Unmarried Mother. Every archetype" (Byatt, 1990: 461). Yet Blackadder neglects to proclaim the most obvious and positive of archetypes: the female Christ, the medieval image inherent in the name *Christabel*. Similar to the historical Christ, Christabel remains single, if not chaste, out of her devotion to a higher calling.

Another source for Christabel LaMotte's given name is Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1816 ballad "Christabel," in which the title character is bewitched by Geraldine's "serpent's eye" (2013: 1696). In a letter, Ash asks LaMotte directly if her father named her "for Coleridge's heroine of his unfinished poem" (Byatt, 1990: 192). A Romantic poet, Coleridge's creative process merges the visible with the invisible, the explainable with the inexplicable. Likewise, LaMotte populates her works with fairies that float on air and serpents that swirl in water, but fantastical elements are matched by descriptions of natural phenomena more wondrous. Byatt includes an encounter between the two poets, an adult Coleridge and an infant LaMotte, which further erodes the space between the real and the simulated in her novel. Coleridge is reported to have said of the infant's name, "'*It is a beautiful name and will I trust not be a name of ill omen*'" (1990: 196), a confirmation of his character's uncertain fate and an ominous crib-side proclamation.

Christabel's last name, the French *LaMotte*, most likely derives from the early English word *motte*, a reference to a "large artificial earthen mound with a flattened top, usually surmounted by a fort [or] castle" (*OED*, 2013), and indicative of "moat," the protective body of water surrounding said fortress. The name *LaMotte* also connects to a literary-historical personage, the French author Friedrich de la Motte Fouque, who is further aligned to the fictional LaMotte by a similarity in their creative works. The title character of de la Motte Fouque's 1811 novella *Undine* is a water spirit that marries a knight to gain a soul, but Undine must keep her mermaid form concealed. When her husband spies her serpent tail flailing the waters of her bath, their relationship is undone. Christabel LaMotte's masterpiece, *The Fairy Melusine*, is a lengthy narrative poem about a mermaid, Melusine, and an errant knight, Raimondin, who seeks sanctuary in her kingdom. That Melusine resides in a watery realm further reinforces the appropriateness of her author's last name, *LaMotte*.

This water fairytale is not original to de la Motte Fouque. Other versions of the Melusine story pre and post-date his. Jean d'Arras's late fourteenth-century "Tale of Melusine" is the earliest known written version in French. In British poetry, allusions to the Melusine tale appear in Coleridge's "Christabel" (1816) and John Keats's "Lamia" (1820). Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" (1836) is the rendition most familiar to twenty-first-century readers and receives mention in *Possession*: "[Christabel] spoke of the fishtail and asked me if I knew Hans Andersen's story of the Little Mermaid who had her fishtail cleft to please her Prince, and became dumb, and was not moreover wanted by him" (Byatt, 1990: 404). Replications and variations of the Melusine story across the centuries and in various European cultures suggest a series of succeeding simulacra of a lost original, if ever such an Ur-story existed. Byatt even provides Christabel with a folklorist for a father as "*What better Father could a poet have?*" (1990: 192). Papa LaMotte aspired "*to do for the French what the Brothers Grimm did for the German people — recount the true* pre-history *of the race through the witness of folktale and legend*" (1990: 190).

He first introduces the legend of Melusine to Christabel in her childhood. Christabel recreates the legend for her own time and purpose as she seeks to synthesize "*the orderly and humane with the unnatural and the Wild [. . .] the hearth-foundress and the destroying Demon*" (1990: 196). Inadvertently, Byatt's scholars re-enact the scene of revelation when Michell spies Bailey departing from her bath. Draped in a damp green robe, she is likened to a "long Chinese dragon" (1990: 163), linking the fairytale to real life, at least to the reality of fictional characters. The poem Byatt creates for her character Christabel to compose is perhaps the most recent incarnation of this legend, but is Byatt's entry via LaMotte an authentic addition to this body of stories or just a replication of a series of replications? Baudrillard assigns "a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality" to stage three simulacra (1981: 6), which Byatt mimics effectively in providing multi-layered sources for both LaMotte's *The Fairy Melusine* and Ash's *Ragnarök*.

As was the case with Christabel LaMotte, Randolph Henry Ash's name bears a resemblance to the names of actual poets in his era. Sound associations exist between the faux poet and his historical compatriots in the dignified weight of their triplicate names: Randolph Henry Ash, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Additionally, though the cadences of their names differ, stylistic and thematic connections exist between the fictional Randolph Henry Ash and the actual Robert Browning. Like Browning, Ash imbues his characters with distinct personalities. That Ash's narrative voices echo those that speak in Browning's dramatic monologues — "Porphyria's Lover" and "My Last Duchess" come to mind — is evident in the opening lines of "Swammerdam": "Bend nearer, Brother, if you please. / I fear I trouble you. It will not be for long. / I thank you now, before my voice, or eyes, / Or wit fail, that you have sat with me / Here in this bare white cell" (Byatt, 1990: 221). Critics have noted topical associations between Ash and Tennyson. Burgass believes "There is also something of Tennyson in Ash, as Tennyson's studies of geological, astronomical and biological literature fed into his poetic treatment of contemporary topics" (2002: 52). A fieldtrip to the Yorkshire coast provides amateur marine biologist Ash the opportunity to not only collect samples for his laboratory and images for his poetry, but to consummate his relationship with LaMotte at a safe distance from his wife.

In its etymology, *Ash* is a common Germanic word denoting the "well-known forest tree" (*OED*, 2013). The High German form of the word *ash* is *ask*. This variant of Ash's name appears in his "Ask to Embla" cycle. Literary scholar Beatrice Nest, a character in Byatt's novel, observes that the poems describe "every phase of intimacy, opposition and failure of communication" that "convince the reader of the real thinking and feeling presence of her to whom they are addressed" (Byatt, 1990: 127). Names and naming feature as a dominant motif in Ash's love poetry, as evidenced by lines Byatt provides: "We two remake our world by naming it / Together, knowing what words mean for us / And for the others for whom current coin / Is cold speech — but we say, the tree, the pool, / And see the fire in air, the sun, our sun, / Anybody's sun, the world's sun, but here, now / Particularly our sun " (1990: 127). Because Nest is an Ellen Ash specialist, she mistakenly believes the poems explore the poet's marital relationship. Michell and Bailey, discerning the true identity of Embla, realize that the poems cover the trajectory of Ash's extramarital relationship with Christabel LaMotte.

While the name *Embla* represents one species in the complex grove (alder, ash, hawthorn/May-tree) that Byatt plants to shelter her secret Victorian family, *Embla* is also an anagram for *blame*, suggesting that Ash is chiefly at fault for his affair with LaMotte and for its dissolution. Thus the *Ask to Embla* cycle becomes a vehicle through which Ash *asks* for LaMotte's forgiveness. Curiously, the name *Embla* also appears in an actual Victorian era poem by Charles Montagu Doughty: "Another band Isurium's queen outsends, / With forged words, Embla's heavy heart to tempt" (Doughty, 1906: xx.221). Within the context of Doughty's poem, Ash's *Ask to Embla* suggests a plea for a lovers' reconciliation, which in the novel does not occur. The poet's surname in its proper form appears in a line from LaMotte's *The Fairy Melusine*. That the water serpent's rejected human lover is a double for the poet Ash is verified when the knight asks, "Must we two part? / Shall our hearth's *ash* grow pale?" (Byatt, 1990: 258). Ash's embedded name in *The Fairy Melusine* is followed by a line that appears word for word in *Ask to Embla*: "And shall those founts / Which freely flowed to meet our thirsts, be sealed?" (1990: 258). These overlapping literary clues prompt scholar Maud Bailey to ponder in a manner reminiscent of Baudelaire, "Which came first? His line or her line?" (1990: 258). Which lover's plea is the original? Which the simulacrum?

Equally significant to Byatt's incorporation of Baudrillard's concepts are the names she creates for her contemporary scholars. Maud Bailey's given name is associated with "maudlin" and suggestive of "an old woman; a hag" (*OED*, 2013). Though Maud is not an old woman, her modest dress and reserved deportment, both of which she wears as armor against unwanted advances, are decidedly matronly. An ill-chosen sexual dalliance with burgeoning scholar Fergus Wolff — his name speaks volumes — causes Maud to retreat from intimacy and to seek the solitude of "clean narrow white beds" (Byatt: 1990, 361), an allusion to Virginia Woolf's 1925 novel, *Mrs Dalloway*, and to her middle-aged protagonist's similar resignation: "The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. Narrower and narrower would her bed be" (31). A connection between Byatt's character and the title character of Tennyson's "Maud" (1855) is made explicit when Bailey rebuffs a fellow scholar's inquiry into her private life: "Maud became like her namesake, icily regular, splendidly null" (Byatt, 1990: 343). Dorothy Mermin links the death of Tennyson's Maud in his poem to "an attempt to recapture the irrecoverable past, a refusal to accept the fact of loss" (1973: 267), a theme that applies to Byatt's Maud in her scholarly efforts to "recapture the irrecoverable past" through unearthing — literally Ash's coffin will be exhumed by Cropper — the buried affair between Ash and LaMotte.

Maud's surname *Bailey* derives from Middle English "bayle," the "external wall enclosing the outer court, and forming the first line of defense, of a feudal castle, and, in a wider sense, any of the circuits of walls or defenses which surrounded the keep" (*OED*, 2013). Other characters allude to the etymology of Bailey's surname. Ex-lover Fergus Wolff concludes a professional inquiry regarding a conference submission entitled "The Queen of the Castle: What is kept in the Keep?" with the double entendre "Please give me the go-ahead on my siege-paper" (Byatt, 1990: 153). As a blood descendant of Christabel LaMotte, Maud Bailey is a version of the poet she researches, a genetic simulacrum. Like her ancestress, Maud has constructed protective emotional and physical barriers between self and others. A final onomastic puzzle piece

connects the two women. Though the characters' last names never appear in sequence on a single page in the novel, the expression "motte-and-bailey" shapes itself off the page. This phrase designates a "fort on the top of a motte surrounded by a bailey" (*OED*, 2013). These motte-and-bailey women are similar in "their desire to remain aloof from messy and potentially harmful involvement" (Burgass, 2002: 37). "Like Christabel, who isolated herself from society in order to live her chosen way of life as a poetess, Maud feels an urgent need for solitude" (Steveker, 2009: 14) to pursue her life as a scholar. A key subplot in the novel involves the delayed romance between Professor Maud Bailey and research assistant Roland Michell. Maud must lower her drawbridge, so to speak, to allow Roland entrance into shared scholarly pursuits and physical intimacy. In a similar manner, Christabel LaMotte relinquishes her guard with Randolph Henry Ash while on their clandestine fieldtrip, but then raises the drawbridge, precluding future intellectual and sexual involvements. Withdrawal, physical and emotional, is LaMotte's defense as she attempts to safeguard her daughter from both Ash and the prurient world. Likewise, scholar Bailey erects a protective wall around her research subject, LaMotte, whose poetry provides the substance for her literary criticism. Bailey has dedicated her life to LaMotte studies, specializing in Christabel's stories and poems of fairy enchantment. Their complimentary occupations as poet and critic connect the women across time and space. Bailey's intellectual, biological, and psychological connections to LaMotte further the notion of simulation as the professor appears to be a replication of the poet in mind, body, and spirit.

The name *Roland Michell* conjures images of a romantic knight on quest. In terms of its etymology, his given name aligns with the "legendary nephew of Charlemagne celebrated in the Old French epic poem La Chanson de Roland" and connotes "a person who is comparable to the legendary Roland in respect of courage or warlike deeds" (*OED*, 2013). But Roland Michell is an unlikely hero as the novel begins, an unmotivated and unpromising graduate assistant whose discovery of a letter tucked into a book launches his quest to discover the hidden romance between poets Ash and LaMotte. On his journey, Roland develops insight as well, realizing his calling to be a poet, in the tradition of an Ash, and not a scholar, despite his success in helping to solve the literary mystery. Additionally, his name alludes to Browning's titular hero in "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." Thus, his name complements the name of his love interest, Maud Bailey. He is the knight, Roland; she is the Dark — albeit ivory given her occupation and complexion — Tower towards which he rides.

Byatt creates a cadre of appropriately named scholars to complicate the investigations of Maude Bailey and Roland Michell. The personality of American scholar and collector of Ash artifacts, Mortimer Cropper, is marked by avarice. Certain collections of objects titillate him to the point of fetishism and his interest in Ash memorabilia is motivated by possession more than preservation. In terms of etymology, *Cropper* designates "a breed of pigeons" that "puff up their crops"; a *cropper* also refers to a person who operates "a shearing machine" (*OED*, 2013). Cropper's inflated self importance and his intent to harvest British artifacts for display at Robert Dale Owen University in New Mexico reveal his name to be particularly apropos. British scholar Blackadder, head of the Ash Factory in London, is intent on keeping Ash artifacts on British soil, but he lacks the deep pockets of his American

competitor. Blackadder's name denotes a "snake" and connotes a "treacherous, deceitful, malicious, or pernicious person" (*OED*, 2013), imagery that connects him, ironically, to both his American rival and to LaMotte, a woman poet for whom he holds little respect. The domesticity implied in scholar Beatrice Nest's name belies her early interest in Randolph Henry Ash. As a mid-twentieth-century female graduate student, Nest was disallowed from pursuing Ash studies and assigned the less important task of collecting the writings of the wives of eminent Victorian men. Decades later, she guards the journals and reputation of Ellen Ash with the ferocity of a nesting bird of prey. Finally, Byatt provides LaMotte scholar Leonora Stern with her own etymological and ideological identity:

> Her maiden name had been Champion, which she said was French Creole. Stern was the name of her first husband, Nathaniel Stern, who was an assistant professor at Princeton who had been a happily meticulous New Critic, and had totally failed to survive Leonora and the cut-throat ideological battles of structuralism, post-structuralism, Marxism, deconstruction and feminism. (1990: 337)

For Stern, verification of an Ash/LaMotte liaison will invalidate her stringently lesbian interpretations of LaMotte's gushing water imagery. For team Bailey and Michell, their scholarly pursuit engenders an urgency to locate artifacts — those that will validate their theory about an Ash/LaMotte affair — before these other scholars join the chase. But Bailey and Michell also race to secure their intellectual property, to be the first scholars to publish a new interpretation of the oeuvres of these unveiled Victorian lovers.

The preeminence of names in the faux poems is intentional. After an exhaustive study of Ash's work, Michell concludes that "the lists were the important thing, the words that name things, the language of poetry" (1990: 513). If "words that name things" are "the language of poetry," Byatt's created verse for Ash and LaMotte is full of such language. A chief poem in Ash's collection is "The Garden of Proserpina," essentially a retelling of Eve in the Garden with Eve as the serpent. In a single stanza, Ash offers a simulacrum of the naming story in Genesis while simultaneously alluding to LaMotte's *The Fairy Melusine* in his references to *dragon*, *snake*, and *woman*:

> The first men named this place and named the world.
> They made the words for it: garden and tree
> Dragon or snake and woman, grass and gold
> And apples. They made names and poetry.
> The things were what they named and made of them. Next
> They mixed the names and made a metaphor
> Of truth, or visible truth, apples of gold. (1990: 504)

Ash's verse depicts male poets as the original namers of objects and concepts in the world, and defends poetry as the source of language. Rereading the poem in light of his discovery of Ash and LaMotte's connection, Roland Michell decides to abandon scholarship as a profession and to become a namer of the world. Though not a literal blood relation to Ash, as Bailey is to LaMotte, Michell is nonetheless the figurative son of Ash. Michell stirs the remnants of the poetic fire that consumed Ash to rekindle the flames of poesy.

In Christabel LaMotte's *The Fairy Melusine*, the poet's titular mermaid character serves as her alter-ego, another form of replication. Prior to writing the poem, LaMotte adopts *Melusine* as her nickname. In a correspondence to Ash, she refers to herself as "the Fairy Melusine." During her confinement, she explains to her French cousin, Sabine, "I am like the Fairy Melusine, half-French, half-English [. . .]. Everything shifts shape, my thoughts included" (1990: 377). Christabel, whose body is literally reshaping itself as a consequence of her pregnancy, appears as a shape-shifting Melusine in an entry in Sabine's journal:

> And *she* changes in my sight. I hate her smooth pale head and her green eyes and her shiny green feet beneath her skirts, as though she was some sort of serpent, hissing quietly like the pot on the hearth, but ready to strike when warmed by generosity. (1990: 396)

That young Sabine loathes what she perceives to be the serpentine qualities of her impregnated cousin evokes replication through metaphor. Christabel will pen *The Fairy Melusine* as a testament to self-knowledge. While Ash implies a negative link between "dragon or serpent and woman" in "The Garden of Proserpina," Christabel embraces the monstrous hybrid in *The Fairy Melusine*. She seeks to discover what singular — or multiple — creature a woman might become once free of man's gaze: "All men saw women as double. Who knows what Melusina was in her freedom with no eyes on her?" (1990: 404). What Christabel's serpent self protects is her independence as a writer. Marital domesticity and maternal cares are to be avoided as an impediment to a life of the mind for a woman in the nineteenth century. This belief was shared by LaMotte's historical contemporaries, Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson, both of whom avoided the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood in order to devote their energies to writing.

Clearly, Byatt does not merely recreate a Victorian world of letters through her onomastic creations, she invents it anew. Her Victorian characters are more Victorian than the Victorians! In the oeuvres she creates for her fictional poets, Byatt makes "names and poetry" (1990: 504) so believably Victorian that her imitations vie with their models for authenticity, begging the question, is Victorian poetry necessarily only a product of the Victorian era or can it still be composed in Byatt's time or a future time or perhaps in a time before? The novelist's faux Victorian verse attributed to Ash and LaMotte complement actual published works by Rossetti and Browning and fellow Victorian era poets. But why are readers so susceptible to accept as authentic Byatt's simulations? Baudrillard suggests that "when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning" (1981: 6). A nostalgic drive to retrieve an irretrievable past leads readers to embrace as real the artificial as a compensation for that loss. As Byatt observes through Ash, "We have all . . . an infinite capacity to be deceived by desire, to hear what we long to hear, to see what we incessantly form to our own eye or ear as gone or lost — this is a universal feeling — easy to play upon, as it is most highly-strung and unstable" (1990: 421–422). Through her creation of onomastic simulacra, Byatt is herself a "*Great Ventriloquist*" (1990: 421), a title her fictional critic, Cropper, bestows upon her fictional poet, Ash. Not by chance does Baudrillard declare level three simulation "the order of sorcery" (1981: 6). In words attributed to poet Ash, Byatt alludes to Baudrillard's third phase as she debates the ethical implications of her own enchantment:

*So if I construct a fictive eyewitness account — a credible plausible account — am I lend-
ing life to truth with my fiction — or verisimilitude to a colossal Lie with my feverish
imagination? [...] Or do I do as false prophets do and puff air into simulacra? Am I a
Sorcerer [...] mixing truth and lies in incandescent shapes?* (1990: 185)

Byatt enchants readers to embrace as real the artificial, to accept fictional names
masquerading as literary-historical monikers. The novelist's exquisitely believable
names conjure into existence poets that did not exist, but might have, and place the
works of LaMotte and Ash alongside those of Rossetti and Browning on an actual
fictional bookshelf.

In a similar manner, Byatt creates "word-obsessed" (1990: 161) fictional scholars
whose names resonate with the names of actual 1980s scholars and whose publica-
tions echo, in their perspectives and voices, critical approaches popularized during
that decade. Thus faux and real scholarly names and publications become virtually
indistinguishable. Roland Michell possesses "an inner ear full of verbal ghosts" (1990:
161) and Maud Bailey likens her professional identity to a "matrix for a susurration
of texts and codes" (1990: 273). Together they typify legions of scholars, both artifi-
cial (like Cropper, Blackadder, Nest, and Stern) and actual — including Byatt and her
colleagues in the 1980s — that listen for and resurrect whisperings from dead poets.
The novelist thus plays upon readers' desires to see and hear as present and actual
what only appears to be lost in an unrecoverable past. Arguably, Byatt's simulations
of Victorian era poets and poetry, and late twentieth century literary critics and
criticism, produce a reality that surpasses their original models.

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