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## A Review of Legal Institutions and Family Values in “Morpho Eugenia”

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### Abstract

Family law refers to the set of rules and regulations that regulate family relationships. Investigating the role of moral values as one of the shaping elements of family law rules is the main topic of this article. This research aims to address moral values as one of the foundations of law, especially family law, by expressing the concept of moral values, the foundations of law, and the ways to discover the causes and foundations of family law. The paper deals with Antonia Susan Byatt's fiction and its contemplation. Particularly we dwell on the author's devices for constructing a gender-marked text. The novelty of the research undertaken is justified by the methods used. We predominantly focus on the genre and narrative strategies appealed to by A.S. Byatt, especially on how they influence on the family values' representation in *Morpho Eugenia*. The analysis of structural and semantic as well as ideological and thematic levels of the text through the prism of the narrative strategies allows revealing the writer's ambiguous opinion on family issues and their viewing. Our study has demonstrated that the ethical side of the issue in the story of a family couple and their interrelationship is eliminated. In the way how Byatt portrays the story of incest the emphasis is transferred to the readers' level of perception in the communicative chain interconnecting the reader with the author and her text.

**Key words:** Family law, legal system, Antonia Susan Byatt, author's strategies, dialogue with the reader, narrative structure, Neo-Victorian novel, women's fiction

### Introduction

Anthonia Susan Byatt (1936) is definitely one of the most prominent representatives of 20<sup>th</sup> century British fiction, whose creativity is traditionally considered through the prism of Neo-Victorian novel genre and its peculiarities [1, 2, 3, 4]. The critics stand in solidarity concerning the viewing of Byatt's style and its specificity in representation of the historical context within the space of the author's fiction, what is generally characteristic to the variety of contemporary English writers [5, 6, 7, 8, 9]. The absence of stereotypical way of thinking features the realization of Byatt's conception, as well as the ignoring of clichés on semantic, structural and thematic levels of her creativity – these are the factors that define the unique place of the author paid attention to in our research within contemporary women's fiction.

*Morpho Eugenia* is the first part of Anthonia Byatt's dilogy *Angels and Insects* [10], where the story of Victorian family and their interrelationship is in the focus of the author's attention. The peculiar dual structure of the work mentioned above becomes its highlight that is further elucidated due to the narrative organization as well as the themes and ideas referred to by the author.

### Methods

The methods we apply in our research are based on the ones appealed to in women's writing studies. What concerns the genre peculiarity of A. Byatt's text we address to, it could be mentioned that *Morpho Eugenia* perfectly fits into the theory of historiographic metafiction, having been intensively developed at the end of the

1990-s – the beginning of the 2000-s. Suchlike works, as a rule, treat Victorian issues and view them through the prism of postmodernist traditions and mass literature tendencies [11]. The crucial component of any Neo-Victorian novel's narrative strategy is the presence of an intrigue. Chronologically the demand for such a novel genre comes back the past century.

Beginning from the 1970-s, the issue of national identity and specifics has been actively developed in English literary studies. Such terms as "Britishness" and "Englishness" have come in common parlance within the world scholarly society. Adding to the aforesaid, we could mention that this interest has been stirred up by the changes in the international environment.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the role and place of Great Britain on the world stage was being reevaluated. By this time due to certain geopolitical and social and economic reasons the UK had already lost its bygone authority of a powerful colonial empire. Further this factor, in its own turn, also found the reflection in cultural and national and ethnic spheres – the notion of national identity has experienced a definite shift, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The progressive, forward-looking ideas, which already became passé after WW II, have been replaced by the long for "golden" Victorian age. The reconsideration of British historical past has started. One of the outcomes of such a retrospective might be defined as a renaissance of demand for traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural realities. In fiction it has led to a rise of interest in Victorian writers, in whose works the unique image of Victorian epoch as a rule emerges.

So, as a result, in the 1990-s "Victorian Renaissance" has resulted in the new novel genre where the national roots of alluring 19<sup>th</sup> century are being reconstructed. Suchlike works of fiction have the determined set of structural elements and ideological lexemes – a retrospective narrative, an interweaving of time layers, and etc. Typically, the story unfolds in a recent past, and the evaluation of the environment displayed is represented through the prism of a character considering these all from 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural perspective [12]. This genre peculiarity of the literature described above has managed to find a strong feedback among the readers and has been later named as Neo-Victorian novel [13].

According to Valery Tyupa's definition, the intrigue is the "interest" of the narration, appealing to a potential reader. In other words, in Tyupa's opinion, the intrigue serves as such a construction of the chain of events which stirs up the receptive readers' expectations; this is the plot addressed not to the story but to the reader, taken in the aspect of storytelling [14].

## Results and Discussion

The profession of the main character in Byatt's literary work under study grounds the presence of naturalistic observations and research of biological species in the text. The story of matchmaking and further short family life of William Adamson, a talented and experienced naturalist, and Eugenia Alabaster, a girl from a well-off family, unfolds in parallel with the narration on the scientific interests of William. Suchlike interweaving of the two themes developed by the writer also finds its reflection in the text structure. Besides the main storyline concentrated on the emergence of love between the characters and the depiction of the subsequent Adamsons' family life, some other pieces of fiction are interspersed in the narrative: the excerpts from the main character's diary; the description of the treatise written by William and the household tutor Matty Crompton in close collaboration; the fairytale made up by Matty; philosophical and theological discussions. The genre diversity of these parentheses is determined by the peculiarities of author's viewpoint on the ambiguity of gender relations. Anthonia Byatt manages to combine the subjective story of the decent and honest protagonist's marital bliss with the objective and realistic demonstration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century high society laws and their functioning. This verisimilitude neighbors with the extreme precision, which is even intensified when the so-called "notes of a naturalist" are introduced into the text. In such passages we deal with a scrupulous reporting on the ant colonies and their vital functions' particularities or a written fixation of the butterflies' biological stages of development.

On the one hand, the borders of Neo-Victorian novel allow the writer to speculate on the problem of family values and their appreciation basing on the historical context implied. On the other, Byatt's adherence to the traditions of metanovel makes it possible to represent the issues of family interrelations as a truly universal question. The geographical and literary markers of the text also work for the recreation of a timeless continuum, what, in its own turn, admits the construction of a parallel discourse within the artistic whole. The historical and literary context is rendered through the allusions to the Biblical plot of Adam and Eve. The history of the first family in humanity is refracted due to the canonic for English literary tradition text as presented by John Milton, a member of the bourgeois revolution headed by Oliver Cromwell in the rebellious 17<sup>th</sup> century. The history of family formation as a rule obtains an additional semantic marker: the relationship between a man and a woman is the story which goes against the tide, destroying all canons and traditions. Suchlike interpretation is either possible due to the fact that Milton's version of Adam and Eve's story had been unfolding in the period of the collapse of monarchy, whereas the strict hierarchy of Victorian epoch structured family relations to some extent. Thereby in A. Byatt's *Morpho Eugenia* the two semantic markers are clashed: Victorian system of values stands against the destructive power of a social explosion. Such a collision, having been recreated intertextually, is also supported on the narrative level.

Women's style of Anthonia Byatt's writing serves as an instrument of influence on the readers' expectations. The introduction of the story on the main character's staying in Amazonian jungles, where the spirit of freedom and primeval passions reigns, into the main text alludes to Rousseau's notion of "state of nature" and echoes the Garden of Eden from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The theme of natural desires of the body in primeval society is being continued in the narration on the anthill. There is usually only one female species in ant colonies, which aim is to take care of the offspring gestation for the whole group of ants. This idea of community represented through the description of biological features in reproduction of insects unfolds simultaneously with the motive of incest related to the story of Eugenia Alabaster, William Adamson's spouse. This line is highlighted through the prism of the laws of existence for biological species. Such a controversial regard to the theme speculated on gains a symbolic meaning by the play with the paronymic word pair "insect-incest" on the textual level. This appealing to the linguistic means of expressiveness helps the author to create the contrasting set of values, what allows addressing to the category of paradox in terms of the readers' reception.

The aforesaid paradoxical dominant is as well observed in the title. In this case we imply the connection between the meaning of the main heroine's first name and the relativity of truth. Actually there are two Eugenias in the text: the one who is the wife of Adamson; and another, which is the rare genera of butterfly – Morpho Eugenia. In the context of Byatt's piece of fiction the short life cycle of a butterfly is associated with the impermanent family life of William and Eugenia. The comparison of the butterfly and the woman lets grasp the category of mystery, which is a part and parcel of any Neo-Victorian novel. Hence the element of the butterfly's metamorphosis is projected to the image of Eugenia Adamson, who is guided only by her instincts in sexual sphere. The moral side of the issue is left without any attention to it.

The main accent in A. Byatt's narrative is not reduced to moralizing only. The writer's prior aim is to help the readers to find out the mystery in her story. Herewith the ethical component in the conflict resolution is excluded. Any incest could not be understood – only emotionally overcome.

## Summary

The reflection on the theme of family values in Antonia Susan Byatt's *Morpho Eugenia* is directly connected with the genre peculiarity of the text. The problem of fake, phony truths is shown through the story of Eugenia and William's relationship as the sample of a high-class Victorian family couple. The motive of mystery foregrounds the whole perversity of the morality issues and their understanding within the context depicted. The author also highlights the dominance of physiology and instincts in gender relations. Such a disregard of the content aspects is reflected in the presence of the second plot level – the history of the scientific research in entomology and reproduction of some insects' classes.

## Conclusions

Thus, we might conclude that A. Byatt's gender-marked writing allows her to include the row of specific author's devices in the text of fiction. Particularly, the use of the male narrator helps Byatt to pay the utmost attention to the artistic details, as well as to make the language of *Morpho Eugenia* extremely precise as the one in works of science. Most of all it could be observed in the portrayal of social mores and the presentment of entomological issues. At the same time, the women's manner of writing makes it possible to introduce some additional artistic means characteristic to a subjective female narrative into the masculine-marked text created by the writer. Due to this *Morpho Eugenia* obtains a chance of a greater influence on the readers. The accent in contemplating the text and grasping its message is transferred to its communicative level. The reader implicitly constructs the dialogue with the writer's "feminine" level of the text to realize the ethical component of the family values' problem. The emotional side and its dominance in comprehending the family issues touched upon by the author provide an opportunity to avoid a lopsided interpretation of the story of incest depicted.

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