CHAPTER-III
CHAPTER III

EMANCIPATION THROUGH LANGUAGE

The feminists believe that in order to understand woman's position in the world one has to understand the system of patriarchy. Men all over the world looked at women from their point of view, and not only that they have also taught and even forced women to look at themselves from a male point of view. The invariable association of socially established gender characteristics of masculine and feminine, these biological sex distinctions is what feminists challenge together with the sexual division of labour. The social roles of wife, mother housewife assigned to women go hand in hand with a division into the public and private domains, the first being the sphere considered proper to men, the second to women. Women become 'the second sex' in Simon de Beauvoir's telling phrase. Milton's line, "He for God only, she for God in him," could well be cited as an example of the almost universally held assumption that man's purpose in life is to serve God, the state, society, not least his own self-advancement, while woman's purpose is to serve man is seen as the norm, woman as the 'other' not merely different but inferior, lacking. Personality traits are distinguished in terms of polar opposites of masculine and feminine. Men one considered to be bold, strong, assertive, independent, aspiring, rational, and logical. Woman, on
the contrary, are considered to be timid, yielding, gentle, dependent, self-sacrificing, emotional, interactive. Though all cultures claim to praise and value the ‘womanly’ quality, one can cite an equal number of passages denigrating women while the verbal praise marks the actual relegation to a secondary position. Literature of course amply reflects these stereotypes. Language is a strong enforcer of social reality because it bestows an objective and apparently permanent status on humanly produced institutions making them resistant to change. One of the themes which runs through this chapter is language, the shifting relation between language and reality, language and social life and how emancipation can be brought about through the medium of language.

Babel Tower is a novel which was planned more or less in the 1960s, and not written until the 1990s. The result is that it is both a novel about Byatt’s own time and a historical novel, it combines observation and research. It is the third in a series of four novels which Byatt started thinking out in the early 1960s, when she was obsessed with Proust and the idea of a novel which ran alongside life, making sense of life, giving meaning to it. The first two novels are The Virgin In The Garden and Still life, the fourth is called A whistling Woman. All these novels stand alone and can be read separately. One of the themes which runs through all of them is the shifting relation between language and reality - language and social life, language and ideas. One of Byatt’s
original ideas for the series was that the first and the last should be realist novels – like George Eliot or Proust- and that the two central ones should be subtly, not ostentatiously "experimental" – should take apart the fabric of language and feeling and thought. The Virgin In The Garden is about the nostalgia for the richness and immediacy of Elizabethan English in the post-war world of the coronation of the second Elizabeth. Still life was meant to be what Byatt called her, "biological novel", - she wanted to write plainly and exactly about birth, marriage and death in language like that desired by William Carlos Williams – "no ideas but in things". She had the wild idea of writing a novel without metaphor, and she found she couldn’t do it – her imagination is inexorably metaphoric. The best she could do was a kind of regretful commentary on the impossibility of refraining form metaphor.
Now these are the generations of the sons of No'ah, Shem, Ham, and Ja'pheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood. And Cush beg at Nim’rod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the lord: wherefore it is said, ever as Nim’rod the mighty hunter before the Lord. And the beginning of his kingdom was Ba’bel, and Erech, and Ac’cad, and Cal’neh in the land of shi’nar. And the whole earth was the one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shi’nar, and they dwelt there. And they said to one another, Go to, let us make brick and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, go to let build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a home, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded, And the Lord said, “Behold, the people is one and they have all one language, and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth and they left off to build
the city. Therefore is the name of it called Ba’bel: because the Lord did
there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the
Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth. Thus Babel
Tower was planned to be a novel about language, a novel about the ways
in which language distorted, created, changed life and the social world.
Byatt’s immediate experience of the 1960s was that “closed” languages
were proliferating, sociological and political languages, the riddles of
death of God theology and Laingian psychiatry, the closed group worlds
of the hip and the cool, the interest in silence and the impossibility of
speech—Zen Buddhism, Waiting for Godot and Endgame. One of the
great novels of the time Doris Lessing’s. ‘The Golden Notebook’, is
about the fragmentation of language and so of thought. Iris Murdoch’s,
‘The Time of the Angels’ is about the fragmentation of the cosmos after
the death of God, and was the book which lead her to read Nietzsche.

Babel Tower continues the story of Frederica, begun in The Virgin
In The Garden and continued in Still Life. It readily stands on its own
and does not offer itself as easily to the reader as Possession did. The
setting is the 1960s and it is a novel about that decade—though from a
very intellectual point of view. Intertwined are the stories of Frederica,
and her messy divorce from her completely unsuitable husband and
BabbleTower, book from which we are presented extensive excerpts.
BabbleTower is written by the obscure Jude, a man who lives at the
fringes of society and whom Frederica befriends. Frederica is to some extent responsible for getting the book published. It is soon banned on grounds of indecency, and a sizeable portion of the novel is devoted to the court proceedings [Another court case, over the custody of her son is also a prominent part of the novel] The novel begins as the fiercely bookish Frederica Reiver realizes she’s made a terrible and irrevocable mistake. Stricken by the accidental death of her sister and dazzled by sex, she married Niegel, a rich, wolfish squire with whom she produced one beloved son, Leo. The marriage has degenerated into captivity and violence, and she flees for the city, Leo in tow, to resume her life as an intellectual surrounded by her Cambridge educated friends “I must work” Frederica avers, landing a job with a publisher who on her recommendation puts out a book ‘BabbelTower: A tale for the children of out Time’ about an anything goes utopian community where everything goes very, very bad. The hair- raising Sadean —hijinks depicted by the book’s author, Jude Mason land both author and publisher into court. If Byatt never successfully captures the fizzy, fragmented sensibility of the pop maddened 60s, she does some thing more rare; frame the usually simplified “social issues” of the era with the agonized moral complexity of her Victorian forebearers. There are no easy self- righteous answers here. As for sheer fun Byatt flaunts her gift for literacy mimickry to excellent effect from Jude Mason’s creepily over ripe fairy tale prose, to a
scientific treatise on snail sexuality, to the minutes of a committee charged with reporting on ‘language and children’, to tantalizing shivers from an engaging fantasy adventure yarn. This novel, like all of Byatt’s, teams with voices of a dozen imaginary books. Byatt has described her love of the novel as something “you can put the whole world into”. Often enough, however, she and her characters have made a world of books. “They are her books”, thinks Frederica of her collection and not only her books, “ But part of herself”. Byatt writes like a novelist who believes that her work really can matter that deeply and more often than not, she’s right.

The plot came to her when she was thinking about the way in which the writing of a divorce petition was the exact opposite of trying to write an exact novel- it was distorted, one-sided account of a marriage and a human relationship designed to be adversarial and to fit into the straitjacket of the legal language created by the courts to define men and women and what they could and couldn’t do and be. She was talking about this to a friend who was an “expert” witness in the trial of Last Exit to Brooklyn for obscenity and he said his experience was similar – none of the exact critical language he wanted to use none of his opinions were admissible. She thought of a public and private trial running concurrently, both concerned with private, hidden life in its public aspect, both language laid on language, in rising degrees of artificiality, descriptions.
of descriptions of the indescribable. In the 1960s, she had a confused and wild first—hand experience of law-courts and the new narratives they make in people’s lives. In the 1990s she realised how much the sensibility of our British 1960s had been changed by trials—the scandalous trials of pimps and call-girls that brought down the Macmillan government, the obscenity trials, testing now found sexual freedom, the terrible trial of the Moors Murderers, who killed children for pleasure.

At first her projected novel was called ‘Evidence’—when she found the title, Babel Tower, she also found her central metaphor, and her novel took off and took shape she found rather to her surprise, when she began to think about the “sixties’ coolly and at a distance, that there were two equal powers ruling the landscape of our imaginations, the Hobbit and Marquis de Sade. She knew about the Hobbit at the time, one of the seminal experiences of her own which appears in this novel is the night at the Middle Earth nightclub; with its gyrating Elvis dancers and its lights. Everyone wore pins saying “Frodo Lives”. She understood then, though not as she understands it now that there was something sad about our desire to be perpetual children [what are hobbits, but perpetual children, untormented by sex, enjoying adventures in unpolluted landscapes] Our image of perpetual childhood was more that of Norman O Brown, who extolled the polymorphously perverse sexuality of children, which he
strangely believed conferred immortality as opposed to grown-up sex, which brought about fathers, the family and death. They quoted Blake on the infinity of perception and desirability of innocence and child likeness. They also quoted, "sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires", and as she said, they loved Sade too. She was disturbed by the wave of brilliant Theatre of Cruelty Productions in the London of the 1960s, by the genius of Peter Brook in the Marat/ Sade, and later by Genet she didn't look too close, then. But when she came to think about Babel Tower, she read the agonised thoughts of journalists reporting the Moors Murders who wondered if Ian Brady's passion for Sade, which he put into bloody action, had anything to do with their own perception of Sade as liberating. She admired and enjoyed Jeff Nuttall's Bomb culture as she hadn't done at the time.

The tower in Babel Tower, the book, within – a – book, that is tried in Babble Tower derives therefore from Tolkien – the company retreating from danger across a rocky landscape to a safe place, and from Sade's 120 days of Sodom, where the company of libertines retreat to a tower and cut the bridge so that they can more freely and do as they please. There are other towers – The Post Office Tower with blinking red lights like Tolkien's Minas Morgul, sending language over the air the Language Tower and the Evolution Tower in the fictive new university
which is in the form of the rising spiral of the Double Helix. For this was the time of the exploration of the true universal language, the language of the genes. And she found another metaphor, in the snail, a helical shape, with a Latin name Helix. So the novel begins with towers, characters written on stones, and snails, and moves through married violence, the lives of children and adults, a utopian fantasy which turns into terror, to parallel court room dramas. It all feels simultaneously distant and still very close. She believes in story telling, and this novel weaves many fragmented stories into one.

Byatt is at her best when she devotes herself to questions of literature and art. Her arguments, interjected forcefully into the novel as a record of the court proceedings, are well – reasoned and interesting, though not all readers enjoy such debate in the pages of their novels. Her characters, though rich, also have some unsatisfactory voids. Worse is that Byatt spends considerable amounts of space on certain characters and they then just fade away, without our knowing what comes of them. The book is well- written, and it is a thoughtful book. It is an important contribution as a picture of the 60s. It is also a book that is very well constructed – she is a clever writer – and it lends itself to a second reading, to enjoy the pleasure of uncovering all the connections she has artfully built in.
Characters as readers are an immediately noticeable feature in Byatt’s fiction – a characteristic that has been commented on by critics, e.g. Juliet Dusinberre[1995 :58] who writes :“[Byatt’s characters] measure their acquaintance with life in terms of what they have read, and they are stunningly better read than most people,” which becomes apparent in the number of references to various authors and texts. The majority of the central characters Frederica, Stephanie, -are involved in writing, reading and teaching literature, thus being closely related to the world of books through their work and their passion for the written work and written worlds.

The novels offer a myriad of examples of inter textual references. Indeed, as Byatt has noted [ in Wachtel 1994:77 –78 ]“ My books are thick with the presence of other books, but I feel that out there in the world must be other people who read as passionately as I do and actually know that books constantly interweave themselves with other books and the world”. The selection of authors that her characters frequently refer to – Wordsworth, Coleridge, Marvell, Shakespeare, Milton and Donne, to name just a few- echoes Byatt’s own literary preferences. Byatt [2001 : 93] has commented on her admiration for the authors belonging to the past, noting, “My sense of my own identity is bound up with the past, with what I read and with the way my ancestors, genetic and literary , read, in the worlds in which they lived.
Various authors and works referred to also seem to signify some of the cultural icons, influential writes of the times in which the novels are set. For example Byatt [15 3] has pointed out that many of the authors and books that Frederica and the other characters of Babel Tower refer to represent the influential figures, writers and books of the era depicted in the novel. She notes that the Hobbit, the Marquis de Sade, Norman O Brown, Brook, Genet are some of the powers ruling the landscape of our imaginations in the sixties.

The majority of intertextual references are made by the central character Frederica Potter, an avid reader whose thinking and ways of seeing the world and people are to a great extent based on literature. The variety of literary references reflects the extent to which authors and books are a presence in Frederica’s thinking and in her conversations with others.

Most of such references are made in connections with Frederica pondering the books she has read, the texts and authors she is dissecting in her duties, the discussions she has with her family, friends, students and Cambridge dons, and her job as a teacher and book reviewer. Federica makes a number of references to Shakespeare, Milton, Kingsley Amis, Proust, Lawrence, Forster, Racine, Blake, Waugh, and Tolkien, among others. Among the novels she is preoccupied with it is Lawrence’s Women In Love and Forster’s Howards End, both of which
become crucial in Frederica’s thoughts on love and marriage, that stand out as most prominent. Frederica responds especially strongly, and ambivalently, to Lawrence, noting,

"I Love Lawrence and I hate him. I believe in him and I reject him totally, all at the same time" [VG:348]. ‘Women in Love’ is a book about which Frederica feels a fierce ambivalence, it is powerful, it is ridiculous, it is profound, it is wilfully fantastic - Its existence is part of the way she sees the world. It matters to her that these students should see it” [BT: 212], a comment illustrating the power with which Frederica feels, thinks and talks about literature. Frederica finds books of utmost importance in identifying herself and the world and feels a hunger for thinking about books [eg, in “Oh, but the bliss of talking about books – and not about houses, and things, and possessions“ [BT: 149]

Thematizing reading activities and the reader’s response includes the depiction of characters reading stories and poems to each other. Babel Tower recounts the reading process by describing Agatha Mond, a housemate and friend of Frederica’s, reading her fairy tales to a group of listeners. Portraying characters engrossed in the acts of reading and listening to poems and stories, at times forgetting about the world that surrounds them outside these texts, points to the ways in which the characters of a fictional world can become engaged in the fictional world of other fictional works, and by extension, shows how the real life reader
might find himself / herself in similar situation. The idea that fiction can be closely linked to reality is hinted at in the ways literary figures and books have influenced several of the characters lives and in the ways literature and literary characters have intruded into the real life of the characters of the novel. The idea that literary characters from other books enter the lives of the characters of Byatt’s novels is manifested in the ways in which Byatt’s characters compare themselves and other to literary personages, how they relate situations in their lives to the ones they have encountered in books: and how they contemplate the realness of imaginary characters. Frederica frequently compares the people surrounding her to various literary characters, for example, she compares Nigel to Don Juan and Byron [BT 98] Leo to the Old Man of the sea [BT 128], Jude Mason is compared to the Ancient Mariner [BT 440], to Jean – Paul Sartre’s Saint Genet and Do stoevski’s Idiot [BT 555]. The fact that real life fictional characters, existing outside the realm of the novels, step into the thoughts of Byatt’s fictional characters. Frederica turns to books and literary characters in search for instructions on how to lead her life and interpret people for example pondering complex connections between literature and life, Frederica realizes that her decision to marry Nigel was greatly influenced by the power of Forster’s Howards End and Lawrence’s Women in Love, their ideas, oneness and correctedness, and characters such as Mr. Wilcox, whose traits Frederica seemed to have
found in Nigel [BT 308] Frederica is fascinated by the fact that ‘real’ people can speak of fictional characters with such passion as if the latter truly existed. Frederica notes that her extra-mural Students ‘ talk about characters in books as though they were people whose fates were real important and interesting’ [BT 223]. She adds, “These grown-up human beings speak wisely and foolishly of other human beings: Margaret and Ursula, Forster and Lawrence, Birkin and Mr Wilcox as though they were [as they are] people they know [and don’t know]. They know perfectly well, if reminded, that four of these six beings are actually made of words, are capering word – puppets not flesh and blood [BT 329]. By making her fictional characters talk about other fictional characters who are real in the world outside the novel but in essence are still fictional, Byatt introduces an interesting metafictional level which blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. Byatt shows how her imaginary characters- like the ‘real’ existing reader outside the text – talk and think about literary characters, both Byatt’s and other authors, as if they were real people they know and at the same time do not know. Frederica’s students make a relevant point that for them, Forster and Lawrence are similarly made only of words; just like the literary characters the novelists “cannot be touched or tasted, the evidence for their thoughts is considerably more suspect and partial than the evidence for those of Margaret and Ursula [BT 329]. The author’s although ‘existing’ and
‘real’ are necessarily not more accessible or more easily understandable than their literary characters. Byatt’s literary characters then, speak of both literary characters of other books and their authors from a similar stand point, making guesses about the reasons behind both the characters’ and the authors’ actions. Byatt’s characters share views on what Margaret from Howards End and Ursula from Women in Love” really wanted “or” should have done”, which Frederica thinks is what Forster and Lawrence might have wanted their readers to discuss [BT: 328]. This, Frederica concludes, is how people learn to understand the world and books, as by “connecting the prose and the passion in linguistic and imagining eddies of speculation and comment, understanding and bafflement [BT: 329], Frederica’s students and readers and literature lovers in general, “bring themselves to the text” [BT: 329].

In the Babel Tower, the reader may get confused and start to wonder whether the texts or authors referred to actually exist, as they are often discussed side by side with real life works and writers. For example. Frederica, looking at a pile of poetry books at home, mentions that there is Yeats, there is Mallarme, there is Raphael Faber, there is Shakespeare,” [BT: 90]. Here the fictional character Raphael Faber is listed together with real –life authors. An example of treating another layer which mingles the boundaries between fact and fiction occurs when Byatt makes real – life authors step into her fiction as characters. For
example, Byatt includes the writer and literary journalist Anthony Burgess as one of the characters in Babel Tower. Burgess writes a review of Jude Mason's Babble Tower and later acts as a witness in a trial which prosecutes the book for obscenity. As the literary critic John Stinson has noted, "Byatt's impersonation of Burgess's voice, first, his writerly voice as a reviewer, and then his public speaking voice as a witness at a celebrated trial, is deft and highly accomplished" [IS 10]. Also, real-life profession, literary critics, and novelists are referred to when the literary characters discuss who should be asked to come and speak for the literary benefit found in Babbletower -- Prof. Frank Karmode, Prof. Barbara Hardy, Prof. Christopher Ricks, Dr. Leavis, William Golding, and Angus Wilson [BT: 473].

The concern with the relationship between fiction and reality, the thought of fiction blurring with and becoming reality, is prominent in the case of Jude, who, talking about his Babbletower in court, says that the events occurring the Babbletower formed his real life: "I lived that story, I lived through all these things" [BT: 566]. Jude discusses the relationship between books and reality, stressing the quality of reality that can be found in books:

A book is a passionate thing, it is made of experience it is lived as it is written it is more immediate than reality: I think if most people were honest, they would admit that imaginary experiences are more real
than actual ones. It is like the smell of coffee- the thing itself is never so good, it is always a bit musty I began to write to avoid life as it is lived, and found I had found it more abundantly [BT: 574].

The way literary characters, situations, and thoughts encountered in books influence Byatt’s characters and the facts that the characters - writers such as Jude, perceive their own fiction as their own reality, as well as the idea that real - life authors can appear in the lives of fictional characters and step into the events of the literary work, point to the blurring boundaries between fictionality and reality in the lives of Byatt’s characters and, by extension, in the lives of people in general. By making her characters mirror or reenact works of art, either those produced by real - life authors and historical figures, or those produced by herself, Byatt appears to” reverse the classical precept that art holds the mirror upto nature demonstrating instead how reality may imitate art. Indeed, Byatt makes the reader ponder how difficult it is to define the boundaries between fiction and reality. As Frederica and other characters realize, fiction can become reality and reality can become fiction. Like Lawrence, who wants to talk about everything all life, not books” [BT 216], Frederica and Byatt show how reality can be perceived through fiction – both wish to talk about all life, all reality, with the help of books.
The novel Babel Tower manifests the metafictional preoccupation with stories. It includes the character Agatha Mond, who actually writes stories, and other characters who think that telling stories might have a healing power. The healing power of telling stories is advocated by the organizers of a weekend course of the Center for field studies who encourage the members of the center to tell a true story about themselves, as this would make them understand one another [BT: 188] Calvert, a character from Babble tower, values the importance of story – telling, saying to his followers, “There maybe those among you who suppose story telling to be primitive and childish, but I say that story telling is a primal human converse, since we are the only animals who look before and after referring to past events and wisdom and envisaging the future in the light of these things “ [BT: 65]; he thinks telling and understanding narratives gives people better understanding of the passions and desires that rule their lives. Babel Tower describes story telling sessions where Frederica’s son Leo, Agatha’s daughter Saskia, and Frederica herself listen to the stories written and narrated by Agatha which in the last novel of the quartet are published as Flight North. By providing pages of these tales, Byatt invites the reader into a world different form the diegesis of the novel. The characters themselves feel the world of the story to be another world captivating and real. Babel Tower shows how the characters like to live in that other world and in that other story by
describing the effect that listening to the story has on them. Frederica.
gets a frisson of ancient pleasure from watching Leo and Saskia lost in
another world; from time to time she is lost herself, for the story to
intricate, and Agatha tells it with conviction, inhabits it herself” [BT
:316]. Byatt’s characters express the thought that people can learn
something essential about human existence by reading books and
following the life of literary characters and figures from fairy tales and
myself like you. For children despised because they read. To say you
can learn to live from books. Not didactically” [BT: 316].
In one of her articles, Byatt [IS : 2] has commented upon the importance
of myths and fairy tales in people’s lives, saying that” fairy stories rely
most simply and most powerfully on the imaginations of readers and
hearers, who create and recreate worlds, old and known in part, new and
unknown in part”. As Agatha notes, “Prince and Princesses are what we
all are in our minds” [BT: 316]; pointing to the idea that patterns from
stories are inherent in readers. It can be claimed that figures and
situations known from stories help readers think about their own histories
and their own life – stories. The novel’s preoccupation with stories and
writing also points to the fiction–reality relationship. Byatt suggests that
the characters’ lives can be seen as stories both by the character
themselves and by the reader. For example, Frederica’s talk with her
solicitor about Frederica’s divorce process is described as her first legal narrative. It is an official tale, told to a partial, official listener. Frederica selected its narrative elements. Arnold Begbie [the solicitor] sorted, assessed, rearranged and added to them “[BT 280]. The idea that life can be seen as a story manifests itself also in the way Frederica thinks about a court session on the divorce: she realizes that the story of her life has been changed by the way it was told that day:” both the true bits and the velleities, and the flat lies, one part of a new fiction, a new story, in which she who is she, does she exist? – is entangled as in a fine voluminous net” [BT: 519–520].

The metaphor of the characters connecting their lives to narratives, by extension pointing to how the readers can see their lives and their reality as stories because of people’s “essentially narrative way of understanding the world” [Nunning 1997: 229], seems to echo Byatt’s reflections on life, stories and life-stories. In one of her essays, Byatt [2001:132] has suggested,” We are narrative beings because we live in biological time. Whether we like it or not, our lives have beginnings, middles and ends. We narrate ourselves to each other in bars and beds.” Byatt’s characters appears to manifest her belief that” we are all, like Sheherazade, under sentence of death, and we all think of our lives as narratives, with beginnings, middles and ends” Byatt 2001: 166] The novel is abound in references to word etymologies and their dictionary
definition. Frederica and her friends Hugh and Allan discuss words for twilight: dusk, gloaming, crepuscle, [BT 109]. Frederica reading Blake, thinks of the word’ Golgonooza’ and the fact that she has always been annoyed by that word, since it is “infant – babble, not truly language-forging. It is unintentionally comic “[BT 161]. The notions of denotation and connotation are tackled also at the trial of Babble Tower where, in the quest for objectivity, it becomes highly important to face the dictionary meanings of words such as ‘deprave’, ‘corrupt’, ‘obscene’ and ‘pornography’ [BT 529]. Similarly words associated with Frederica’s court case acquire special significance. Frederica feels like a caged beast in a net of words belonging to legal discourse: The net is made by words which do not describe what she feels is happening: adultery, connivance, pre-nuptial incontinence, petitioner, respondent’ [BT :324] She thinks about the words and their connotations: “These legal words carry with them the whole history of a society in which a woman was a man’s property, and also a part of his flesh, not to be contaminated” [BT: 324]. Frederica’s thoughts point to the ways in which legal discourse constructs her world and the society surrounding her, also showing how a dominant discourse can construct reality outside fiction.

In Babel Tower, already the title of the novel and some of the titles of the books by the characters of Babel Tower, for example
‘Babble tower, Language our straitjacket’, The Oppressor’s Tongue.’ 

‘The Tongues of Men and Angels’, suggest that Byatt and her characters are interested in various aspects of language, in the mixed blessings of language, its power to obscure as well as reveal, to enslave as well as liberate” [Gray 1996 : 72]. This interest manifests itself in the characters thoughts on language – the power of language, the teaching of language the artful manipulation of language, and its efficacy at representing or altering reality. Indeed, Byatt [IS : 3] has noted that “Babel Tower was planned to be a novel about language a novel about the ways in which language distorted, created changed life and the social world”, which can be observed in the ways in which Frederica’s divorce trial constructs and distorts her reality. The pre occupation with language is mirrored in Jude’s Babbletower in which the characters want to reinvent language in order to reflect more accurately without previous word associations, the relations between themselves and those between themselves and the world. Also, the thoughts about language are expressed in the work of the Steerforth Committee, the members of which visit schools, analyze the work of teachers, and listen to and participate in debates on how English should be taught and studied. Byatt presents a thorough debate on how language is, should, and could be taught and learned at contemporary schools. Byatt proceeds from talking about the Tower of Babel and the Ursprache to discussing the theories of the philosopher
Wittgenstein and the linguists Sassure, Jakobson and Chomsky. When debating on whether rules, forms and norms should be taught, Byatt stresses their importance in the words of Prof. Wijnnoel, who believes in the teaching of the forms of language because.” If we have no words to describe the structure of our thoughts, we are unable to analyze their nature and their limitation, what we can think in a function of our linguistic competence. If we do not teach words to describe the structure of language, we have no means to consider the structure of thought “ [BT : 186]. The Committee claims that even young children should be familiarized with and alerted to language’s manipulative potentialities “[BT: 479]. The Committee’s concern with the proper and increasing interest in language as an instrument of power, of subjection and manipulation” [BT: 479] is something that also Frederica has to face, mainly in connection with legal discourse which makes her feels trapped in a net” made by words which do not describe what she feels is happening “ [BT: 324] seems that her Divorce and child custody hearings give legalese two more opportunities to [Mis] interpret the language of the human spirit “[Brichetto IS: 5] and point to the ways in which discourse can construct reality. Byatt’s characters frequently comment on their writings, writing styles, and authors who have influenced their writing techniques. Frederica, is the author or Laminations, her friend Agatha Mond, and Jude Mason, who authors
'Babbletower: A story for the children of Our Time', presented in full in Babel Tower, Jude speaks about his being a writer, saying, "There was never a time when I was not writing, I was writing when I was a little boy, and before that I was telling stories to myself" [BT :565]. He also comments on the question of plots, claiming that he was always writing the same story, about a group of friends who run away to a better place to make a better life.[BT: 565]. Frederica becomes more involved in writing in Babel Tower. The novel investigates writing processes by mirroring Frederica creating different types of texts. The passages focusing on Frederica's job as a critic describe the techniques she uses and the words, analogies, and cliché's she chooses when writing the reviews [BT :305] Babel Tower recounts Frederica's feelings and thoughts after she has written the reviews, her pleasure and energy acquired from thinking and writing: "She has enjoyed the act of writing, of watching language run black out of the end of her pen: this has in turn made her feel that she is herself again, and has made her body real to her, because her mind is alive "[BT: 155]. Babel Tower observes the difficulties met while writing by showing how Frederica tries to write a report on her marriage and finds out that she cannot do it. The novel presents Frederica's attempts in different fonts: the text she is writing appears in one font type: interwoven with her comments in another. The reader can see how Frederica complies the text, rereads it, records it,
crosses out words and lines [eg “she writes : shit, Fuck. She crossess them out BT 308], replaces words [eg, “she has changed the word ‘struck’ to the word ‘hit’ ‘Struck’ carries a stronger emotional charge”[BT: 306], constantly thinking about the associations the words evoke and the images and values they seem to carry. Frederica’s attempts to write the account of her experience in the marriage and with her having to admit, “I can’t write this stuff. Every ink-blob destroys a bit more of the truthful balanced memory I am trying to hand on to – I could write if it was a parody of this sort of document, a work of art or fiction pretending to be one of these” [BT: 308]. Frederica’s comment shows how providing a truthful account of one’s thoughts and experience can make them seem less real on paper, whereas a fictionalized or parodied rendering – turning facts into fiction – may appear more accurate. Another example of depicting a writer during writing process occurs in connection with Frederica’s writing diary notes. As was the case with legal documents, Frederica confronts challenges when writing. Babel Tower shows the steps Frederica goes through in her attempts. Her first sentence in her diary, “Much of the problem appears to be one of vocabulary”, is followed by a sentence, a week later, “There is no vocabulary to provide the next sentence” [BT :380] Returning to her diary a month later, Frederica advises herself to try simplicity and start with describing a day; however, when writing about her day, she remarks
that she does not enjoy writing in this style, as it makes everything in her life slightly worse. This makes her conclude, "writing is compulsive and useless. Stop writing" [BT: 381] When writing her diary notes, Frederica finds herself tackling the notion of whether she and her voice become imaginary and fictional or remain essentially 'real', which offers insights into people's textual identities and gives a chance to explore the relationship between fiction and reality. Her diary notes make Frederica reflect on the possible implications of the 'I' in the sentences 'Do I love him?' and I hate I'. She hypothesizes the following:

I hate "I" because when I write, "I love him" or "I am afraid of being confined by him," the "I" is a character I am inventing who / which in some sense drains life from Me into artifice and enclosed ness. The "I" of "I love him" written down is nauseating. The real "I" is the first I of "I hate I" – the watcher – though only until I write that, once I have noticed that, that, I who hates "I" is a real I, it becomes in its turn an artificial I, and the one who notices that that "I" was artificial too becomes "real" and so ad infinitum. Is the lesson, don't write? It is certainly, don't write "I" [BT: 382]

Frederica's notes examine an interesting paradox: writing something down can make it less tangible. It seems that writing about her life makes
Frederica feel that her life is less real to her, which suggests that it is hard, if not almost impossible, to write without artificiality and without fictionalizing oneself and one’s life. The idea of fragmentation and different layers of knowledge is crucial to how Frederica sees herself. She thinks of herself as “a woman whose life appears to be flying apart into unrelated fragments’ [BT: 379], as “a woman who sits at her desk and rearranges unrelated scraps of languages, from apparently wholly discrete vocabularies: legal letters, letters about the Initial Teaching Alphabet from Leo’s school the literary text and the quite other texts that dissect these texts, her reviews, her reader’s reports” [BT: 380].

The idea of keeping things separate: separate objects of knowledge, systems of work, or discovery forms an underlying thought behind Laminations, representing “an art form of fragments, juxtaposed not interwoven, not organically’ spiraling up like a tree or a shell, but constructed brick by brick, layer by layer like the Post Office Tower’ [BT: 359]. In mirroring Frederica as she is putting together the book, Byatt seems to particularly emphasize the idea of the constructed nature of texts. Indeed, laminations serves as a prime example of the book constructed of cut-ups, extracts, and full versions from and of different texts, both by the fictional character Frederica and by real-life authors other than Byatt. Frederica’s heavy reliance on using cut-ups or collage in her book is influenced by William Burroughs’s technique of cut-ups.
She ponders Burroughs’s words: “All writing is in fact cut-ups. A collage of words read overheard. Clear classical prose can be composed entirely of re-arranged cut-ups cutting and re-arranging a page of written words introduces a new dimension into writing enabling the writer to turn images into cinematic variation” [BT: 379] She describes Laminations as a form that is made partly by cutting up, breaking up rearranging things that already exist” [BT: 384]. While writing, she discovers that in order to create new text, one has to rearrange and reuse words that have made previous texts: “the point of words is that they have to have already been used, they have not to be new, they have to be only re-arrangements in order to have meaning [BT: 384] Frederica comments on her use of quotations in Laminations: according to her, quotation is another form of cut-up: “It gives a kind of papery vitality and independence to, precisely cultural cliche’s cut free from the web of language that gives them precise meaning” [BT: 385]. She realizes that there are many texts she might quote and that several authors have used this technique before, she discovers that she could quote newspapers, her own life, her lawyer’s letters, her lectures on Mann and Kafka and thereby create a text where “raw materials worked motifs” [BT: 385] stand side by side. The concept of quotations as one way to achieve laminated knowledge significantly contributes to the number of different textual types and genres, both by
Frederica, the other characters inhabiting Frederica's world, and the real-life authors.

In Babel Tower, the presence of the organizing and commenting narrator is manifested in one of the hypodiegetic worlds of the novel — in Jude's, Babbletower. In the excerpts of Babble tower interwoven with the diegetic world of Babel Tower, one can notice the organizing presence and references to the reader in the following instances:

The details I will leave you to imagine for yourselves, for I know your imaginations will prove more fertile of quick breaths and jissom than my pen and ink shadows of desire [BT: 72].

So I will somewhat brutally summarize his sayings, in order to speed my narration [BT: 202].

The heaving surface which was now more like chamois leather, or ripe peaches or whatever other delicate simile excites my reader [BT: 409]

The constructed nature of texts is manifested in the plot organization of Babel Tower showing that next to the level of words, characters, and tropes, the text can be aware of itself on the level of plot.
The idea of an author behind the novel who constructs the book by arranging fragments of texts in certain order and who has the power to deride what happens in the novel, as “fictional materials – however life like, however absorbing have been assembled in the imagination of the writer” [Alter 1975 : 17] can be noted in the way Byatt has chosen to begin Babel Tower. Namely, she offers several possible beginnings:

It might begin : The thrush has his anvil or alter on one fallen stone in a heap, gold and grey, roughly squared and shaped hot in the sun and mossy in the shade [BT: 1].

.....

Or it might begin with Hugh Pink, walking in Laidley words in Herefordshive in the autumn of 1964 [BT: 2].

.....

Or 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 [BT: 4]

.....

Or it might begin with the beginning of the book that was to cause so much trouble, but was then the only scribbled heaps of notes, and the swarm of scenes, imagined and re-imagined [BT: 10]
By using this technique of offering multiple beginnings the author points to the main story lines that she is about to develop in the novel and draws attention to the "arbitrary nature of beginnings" [Waugh 1990:29]

The ending especially clearly indicates that there is an author behind the text, manipulating the characters Babel Tower draws attention is the conventional endings found in fairy tales: the novel ends with Jude’s Babble tower which ends with the motif similar to “they lived happily ever after”: "And they went on walking, and if the krebs did not catch up with them, they are walking still" [BT: 617] Indeed in one of her essays, Byatt [2001:166] has called attention to the importance of stories and the belief in “happy ever after” endings in people’s lives by suggesting that story-telling “consoles us for endings with endless new beginning stories are like genes, they keep part of us alive after the end of the story”.

The Shadow of the Sun originally published as ‘Shadow of a Sun’ was A.S. Byatt’s first novel, published in 1964, - but as she explains in an introduction to the new edition of the book written while she was an undergraduate at Cambridge [1954 to 1957]. The two part tale sends its young heroine, Anna Severell, to Cambridge too though with considerably less success than Byatt had. Anna is the daughter of the renowned novelist Henry: he’s her “distant and largely unknown father”,
and she does suffer some from being in his shadow. She got herself kicked out of school – for running away without telling anyone – but over the course of the novel gets her act together a bit and does finally win a place at Cambridge. One of the people to give her a push in that direction is Oliver Canning, a summer guest who comes to stay with the Severells with his wife, Margaret. Oliver tutors Anna and helps her along: over the summer it remains a fairly uneasy relationship of sulky girl and well-meaning know-it-all. Matters are complicated by the relationship between the adults: Henry the artist and Oliver as friend and critic, Oliver and his wife who has to hide the glossy women’s magazines she enjoys from her husband because he “believed the reading of such papers to be positively morally wrong”, and even Henry and his wife Caroline.

The first part of the book focuses on the summer this group spends largely together. Oliver and Anna work together much of the time, and eventually it is even suggested that Anna return with him and Margaret to London, as a sort of substitute daughter. That comes to nothing, but much of the book is about Anna’s attempt to escape from under her father’s shadow – and from the late – adolescent listless and aimlessness that’s taken hold of her at home. Oliver warns that she must get away: she’ll just be “a ghost a shadow” if she remains breathing her “father’s rarefied air”. The second part sees Anna at Cambridge, where she still can’t find her way. Here matters are complicated when Oliver again
appears, and this time their relationship turns into a sexual [and not – quite- romantic] one. Margaret’s worries as her marriage collapses without her understanding much of what is going on and the Severell’s concerns about their daughter add to the tension – which culminate in Anna suffering the not too surprising consequences of a sexual relationship and then accepting a marriage proposal. The strengths of the novel lie in numerous penetrating, strong scenes. Byatt goes on at some length in analyzing characters and their actions, and much of this she does well. There are also several nicely framed scenes – a dark and rainy encounter between Anna and Oliver, lost Henry found again, a Cambridge party that doesn’t go as hoped for – though many of these are too obviously staged to fully convince. The Shadow Of The Sun displays intricate language, rich in allusion, metaphor and colour as Byatt exercises her linguistic skills while adeptly weaving together the story of a young woman’s bildungsroman. Anna Severell struggles to find her own creative vision and voice under the influence of her renowned father, Henry Severell, genius and Coleridge scholar. Critics have suggested that through Anna and her father, Byatt was simply writing an account of her relationship with her own father. There are other autobiographical elements in the novel which crop up in places like the landscape, the English countryside which mirrors Sheffield, Lincolnshire where Byatt grew up and in Henry’s fascination with Coleridge, whom Byatt as critic
and scholar, has also written intensively about. If Henry is not a portrait of Byatt’s father, his wife Caroline is a refraction, rather than a reflection, of Byatt’s mother, who continually resented having to forego a career to be a housewife and mother. In The Shadow Of The Sun, Byatt depicts Caroline as her own mother’s negative, as a wife who not only accepts but also relishes playing Henry’s protectress, shielding him from family including Anna, friends and any social obligations that might intrude upon his work. Caroline never articulates any desire to indulge in her own pursuits outside of the domestic sphere she manages. Anna is most like her father with her intense visions and her solitary sojourns, yet she struggles to forge her own identity not only against his insurmountable reputation but also against the female models available to her. In addition to her acquiescent mother, Anna observes, often with distaste Margaret Canning, the wife of the young critic Oliver Canning. The Cannings spend a summer vacation with the Severells. Margaret pines over and is submissive to Oliver sensing, in part, Margaret’s desperateness, Anna shirks away from her and from Margaret’s overtures, to “help” Anna by buying her clothing more “appropriate” for a young woman than her slouchy jeans and shirts Anna prefers. Indeed Margaret’s own clothing bespeaks the Barbie Doll image she projects of herself. On an outing to the beach, where rough terrain must be climbed over to reach the beach, Margaret is ridiculously outfitted in “a cotton sundress, rose and white
striped with a full skirt and petticoats” [SS: 102] Anna values neither the domesticity of her mother’s realm nor the plastic surface of Margaret’s.

The Shadow of the Sun was published in 1964., when Byatt’s two elder children were three and four years old, but it was written at least the first draft, when she was an undergraduate at Cambridge between 1954 and 1957. It is a novel of a very young woman, a novel written by someone, who had to write but was very unsure whether she should admit to wanting to write, unsure even whether she ought, being a woman, to want to write. It was written in libraries and lectures, between essays and love affairs. She remembers getting an idea for it during one of John Holloway’s lectures on D.H. Lawrence, and scribbling busily, so busily that the lecturer looked fixedly at what must have seemed to him an earnest female acolyte, remarked sharply, “You don’t need to take all that down. It’s not that interesting”, Byatt had no idea what he was talking about, but the novel does have its ideas about what was and wasn’t interesting about Lawrence in Leavis’s Cambridge. Byatt had the eternal first novelist’s problem. She didn’t know anything – about life, at least. She remembers thinking out the primitive first idea of it, which was that of someone who had the weight of a future life, amorphously dragging in front of her, which was that of someone whose major decisions were all to come, and who found that they had got made whilst she wasn’t looking, by casual acts she thought didn’t impair her freedom. That, the
battle fought itself out between sexuality, literary criticism, and writing, was inevitable. Byatt’s problems were both human and literary. The human problems were to do with being an ambitions woman, in the English version of the world of Betty Friedan’s feminine mystique. Byatt’s own mother had herself studied English at Cambridge, and she might, in the 1960s, have felt she should have written about the generations of women who faced the same problems. As it was, she avoided approaching her perpetual rage, depression, and frustration, which were, in fact, the driving force that made sure none of her daughters became housebound. The siblings wanted “not to be like her” and Byatt some years after her death, began to dare to imagine what went on in her inner mind. She thus wrote “The Shadow of The Sun” about a girl with an ideal and unapproachable father, who, being male, could have what she and Byatt felt, they perhaps ought not to want, single-mindedness, art, vision. Henry Severell had little or nothing to do with Byatt’s father, what they have in common is an incapacity, usual enough in the hard working man, to notice what is going on inside others. Henry Severell is partly Byatt’s secret self, someone she was in love with someone who saw everything too bright, too fierce, too much like Van Gogh’s cornfields, or Samuel Palmer’s overloaded magic apples, or the Coleridge of the flashing eyes and floating hair or the Blake who saw infinity in a grain of sand.
Oliver Canning was someone with a chip, who could think, who is thinking, who makes too much of literature in one way, and doesn't understand its too — bright aspect. He represents a kind of public vision, a scholar, a critic, a user of literature, not a maker, a natural judge. In all of Byatt's novels there are characters whose thoughts the reader shares and those whose thoughts are opaque, who are seen from outside. Oliver is one of the latter, the other. He would have been the hero of any male version of this story L’ homme moyen sensuel suspicious of Henry’s wilder edges, guilty about his wife and the girl, but essentially "decent." Byatt had awful problems with the form of the novel, she had no model she found at all satisfactory. The available models Elizabeth Bowen, Rosamund Lehmann, Forster, Woolf, were all too suffused with "sensibility" but that she disliked the jokey social comedy of Amis and Wain. Between the first Cambridge draft and the final one, made in Durham in 1962-63, Byatt had read Proust and discovered Iris Murdoch, both of whom combine a kind of toughness of thought with a sensuous awareness that is part of their thought. But the underlying shape of The Shadow Of The Sun is dictated by Elizabeth Bowen and Rosamond Lehmann. Byatt did not know when she chose her title, just how powerful a metaphor, or myth personal and universal, she was tapping. She loved the poem by Ralegh, False Love, and thought the verse she chose as an epigraph was a very comment on the female belief in or illusion of, the
need to be “in love” which was the danger which most threatened the autonomy of her heroine. All those desiderata of the femínine mystique, the lover, the house, the nursery, the kitchen, were indeed a “goal of grief for which the wisest run” and her mother was there to prove it. Saying frequently “What I hope for you is that you will be as happy as your father and I have been” A substance like The Shadow Of The Sun was a good phrase, and more than that, Coleridge saw the human intellect as a light like the moon, reflecting the light of the primary consciousness, the sun. Byatt’s Anna Severell was not even a reflected light, she was a shadow of a light only, who had partial visions in clouds [like the Dejection Ode] or stormy moonlight, or the glare of Cambridge’s blood - coloured street-lighting. Byatt likes the title as “The Shadow of the Sun’ to ‘Shadow of a Sun’ as she prefers its grittiness and the point is that the sun has no shadow. You have to be the sun or nothing. Byatt’s unfinished Ph.D. thesis was partly about the neoplatonic creation myths, where the sun was the male Logos, or Nous or Mind, that penetrated inert Hyle, or matter, or female Earth, and brought it to life and form. This is both exciting, because, in a way physically true — life does depend absolutely on light — and depressing because false in its analogies — there is nothing intrinsically male about the sun, or female about the earth. There is a Lawrentian version of this in sun, where a city woman bathes naked in the Mediterranean sunlight and feels power pouring into her,
removing her from the scope of her grey, timid, city husband. And then there is the question of the moon, the silver, cold, savage moon, a purely reflected light, usually female in Western mythologies.

The visual image that always went with the idea of “The Shadow of the sun” was that of Samuel Palmer’s cornfield with the evening star – an image she now associates with Van Gogh’s Reaper, working his way through a seething furnace of light and white-gold corn. The Palmer is nocturnal, warm but bright lit by a reflected moonlight which nevertheless contains the partial sickle within the possibility of a complete circle of light. Byatt sees suddenly that images of harvest are also an intricate part of her private – universal imagery. When Byatt was writing the shadow of the sun, she read a wonderful article in the Manchester Guardian about the turbulences in ripe corn, and incorporated it into Henry Severell’s vision of harvest fields, including several words she’d only learned from there. Such as the “awn” of the barley. Byatt was also partially remembering the magical scene in The Rainbow where Will and Anna meet in moonlight cornfields, which are a kind of creative paradox. For the ripeness and the growth of the corn, the harvest, are brought about by the heat and the light of the sun. Byatt wanted her harvest, both in her life and in her work, and she was afraid that her light was a lesser one, a cold one, that could only mildly illuminate. But she
did go on from there, to Queen Elizabeth as Corn Goddess, to Van
Gogh’s Death the Reaper working happily, to a poem in Possession by
Randolph Henry Ash about Norse Creation myth, in which the light that
gives life to the first man and woman, Ask and Embla is a female sun.