

Agrégation interne 2012

Epreuve de Restitution – script de documents mp3 travaillés en classe

EXTRAIT 1 : THE VICTORIAN APPEAL (2'36")

INTERVIEWER [*Mariella Frostup**]: But why does the Victorian age seem to persist so much more strongly in our imaginations than other periods of history? Well, to try & answer that Q, we've brought together the author of *Jamrach's Menagerie*** [JM], Carol Birch, & the int'lly renowned writer A.S. Byatt, who set *several* of her works of fiction in this period, incl. Booker Prize-winning novel *Possession****.

Carol, if I can start w/ U, as I just mentioned, JM = partially based on 2 true stories. So what came 1st? The desire to set your novels in the Vn period, or your interest in the 2 particular stories?

CAROL BIRCH/ The 1st thing that came = the 2 stories, & then the Vn era, b/c it had to be set @ that time. The character of J really jumped out @ me, & then this little story of the boy w/ the tiger... stuck in my mind for some reason. There was a real story behind this, a real little boy – I have to stress that *my* little boy is not *that* little boy, he is a completely fictional character, like my J is completely fictional – but the place in itself was just fascinating for that time. It was a place apart w/i Vn London, it was a whole other world.

INTERVIEWER: But it is quite well-worn territory [Fr. *rebatu*] – not your story, I hasten to add – but the period. Were you concerned by that? Did it force you to confront it as a writer in ≠ ways?

CB/ Yes, I suppose so, but we all feel we know the Vn era very well, I think, particularly from lit – particularly Dickens, of course - & so we have an image of Vn London, in particular, I think. It is a fascinating place to be & wander about. I just found it riveting, but my own research has just involved lots & lots of reading, as much as possible, & then using my imagination.

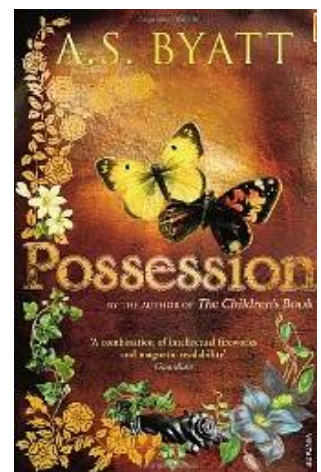
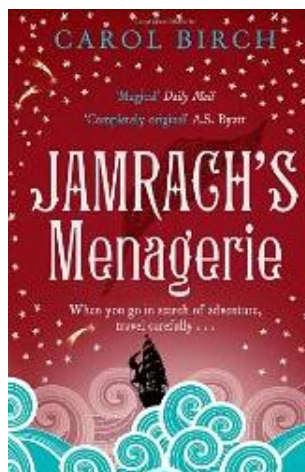
INTERVIEWER/ Antonia, you set several novels in the Vn era, & I wondered, as a writer, what the benefits are, setting your fiction ag/ a historical background like that?

A[ntonia] S[usan] BYATT/ I once did a broadcast w/ Chris Paling, & he said he'd asked various people – like John Fowles & Wm Golding – why they wrote in the past, & he got what he thought was a really odd answer: he said “b/c if U write in the past, you're allowed to use complex sentences.” & in fact, I find it an immense relief to be able to use a sort of dashing vocabulary, sentences w/ dependent clauses [Fr. *subordonnées*] instead... Most modern writing is very clear & very plain, & I wanted to write extravagant. & so, in a way, it was linguistic when I started on it, & *Possession* was about Vn poets who were (?) in my mind b/c I knew them all as a very small child – I mean, they were what grew up w/, as were the novels of Dickens. So in a way, I *am* a Vn.

INTERVIEWER (?)/ (Laughs.)



* *Mariella Frostup*
(BBC Radio 4 host of "Open Book")



EXTRAIT 2 : THE VICTORIAN VIEW OF CHILDREN (2'24")

PRESENTER [BBC Radio 4 *Woman's Hour* Jenni Murray*]: It's generally assumed that Vns did not think much of children, or of childhood. They sd be seen, & not heard, & if they needed to go out to work, well, tough luck! But then U think of Charles Kingsley's *Water-Babies*** , & how it rails ag/ childhood employment & dirty jobs, or any # of characters from Dickens whose misery he catalogs, or even Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre who refuses to put up w/ any humiliation wh/ is heaped upon her.

So how much were the Vns as concerned about childhood as we seem to be? Well Prof. Sally Shuttleworth heads the department of Humanities at Oxford University & is the author of *The Mind of the Child*.

Sally, why do the Vns have the reputation of expecting children to be seen, not heard?

Sally Shuttleworth: Well, it was obviously part of the pic. There was a very repressive regime; we find it in elements of *Jane Eyre*, for ex. with Mr. B[r]ocklehurst***, & a very stern attitude. But studying the lit. & also medical texts of the time, I started finding a far more sympathetic vision of children. I started to realize that, although we think of child psychology / psychiatry had started w/ the beg. of the 20th century, in fact from the ½ er... 19th c. – the late 1850s – one can see all sorts of interesting concerns about whether children were “overpressed,” er... overstretched at school, why they were committing suicide – indeed, why they murdered... all sorts of issues that we find today were there in the Vn period.

PRESENTER: Why did it happen at that moment, in the 1850s?

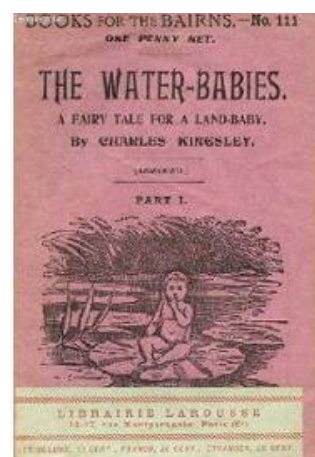
SS: I think, in part, b/c U had those wonderful novels based on childhood – *Jane Eyre*, *Dombey & Son*, for inst. + *David Copperfield*. They started to think what it was like to be in the mind of a child. That was very ≠ from the notion of children just being shoved away in the nursery if they were ½ class. It was also part of the big growth of the ½ classes, where the badge of ½ class was having a child who didn't work. So, somehow, childhood as a field, an area that had to be inhabited was thought about.

PRESENTER: What are the most interesting and revealing characters in lit. from Ur perspective?

SS: Well, I think, JE, the child who answers back to the aunt, & tells her the thought of her makes her sick! – quite wonderful !! – and that it is the aunt who is lying & mistreating her, not the other way round.



* *Woman's Hour* Host Jenni Murray made a dame by the Queen in June 2011.



** Charles Kingsley's moral fable, written in 1862-3.

*** **Mr. Brocklehurst**: “The ultimate hypocrite, Mr. Brocklehurst is the supervisor of a boarding school for orphaned girls, Lowood Institute, which was founded by one of his relatives. Mr. Brocklehurst gets his kicks in life from going around intimidating little girls, keeping them half-starved and cold, and telling them that they're going to hell for their sins, all while feeling self-righteous about doing it and thinking that God's giving him a big thumbs-up. Of course, Mr. Brocklehurst's own children wear silk and fur and we're sure they've never missed a meal in their life, but apparently (in their opinion), God's chill with that.” Source: <http://www.shmoop.com/jane-eyre/mr-brocklehurst.html>

EXTRAIT 3 : THE BRITISH GHOST TRADITION (2'38")

PRESENTER: And we are standing in the very place where this story is said to have occurred.

PETER [ACKROYD*]: Yes, the door is just there.

PRESENTER: & we're just in the middle of the Twr of LDN; there is some ghostly banging – I sd say – actually coming from a building... site, but apart from that, we are quite alone.

PETER: That's right.

PRESENTER: & if we were to be "surprised," then this wd be very much the kind of setting that U'd expect it to happen.

PETER: Yes, it wd. And of course the English are preoccupied w/ their past, as the Twr demonstrates. It's almost as if Engl. itself is haunted by time / the past. That's one of the explanations why ghosts are so popular in English culture.

PRESENTER: Peter, let's walk thru the center of the Twr, now, & as we walk I want to ask U this: What is the enduring appeal of a story like the one U've just read?

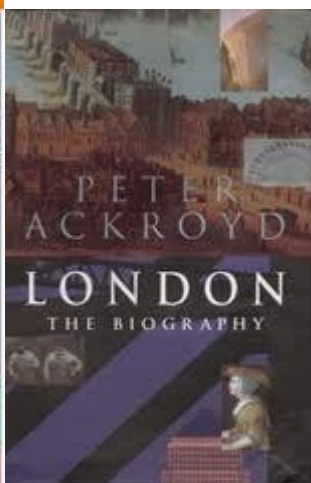
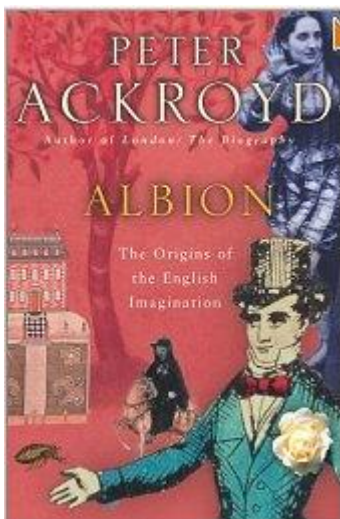
PETER: It's a mixture of various elements. U have to remember that the Eng. in particular have alw. been at the forefront of the ghost tradition. It's reported that some 70% of all ghost stories are written by Eng. men & women.

PRESENTER: 70% of the whole world's ghost stories!! ... As the ravens send us on our way – U probably heard that in the bkgnd – what U say in a sense surprises me, b/c in so many other areas the Eng. are so phlegmatic & not that interested in the supernatural & not that impressed by things they can't see & feel. I mean, take philosophy – we're not famous for being R^{ic}, & then suddenly there's 1 area where... Why is that?

PETER: It's the most extraordinary thing. It's stg I've tried to explore once in a book I wrote about the origins of the Eng. imagination. There's – as U say – a practicality in the... understatement, but it's combined w/ a kind of fierce attention to what we wd consider to be the abnormal, or the spiritual.

PRESENTER: But that doesn't explain to me what it is about ghosts that has impressed the Eng. when in so many other areas they are so unimpressed. We are unimpressed by the supernatural & by things we can't explain.

PETER: But it has also stg to do w/ a certain residual guilt about the Reformation. Many ghosts are commonly supposed to be monks or nuns. And the rip or the tear in the spiritual life of the nation left a vacancy, a void, that cd easily be filled by spiritual phenomena of a ≠ kind. And I think that's 1 of the explanations.



** Peter Ackroyd and some of his numerous books*