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Apocalypse and the resurgence of the creative imagination in *Not the end of the world* by Kate Atkinson

Helen E. Mundler

- 1 Kate Atkinson is a contemporary writer who, whether at the level of hermeneutics or text, habitually draws in her early novels on what could aptly be called various mechanisms of resurgence to structure her work, typically by a process of constant telling, untelling and retelling. She has recently ventured into the genre of detective fiction, a natural forum for teasing the reader with games of burial and rediscovery as tiny details laid down in narrative mutate into plot-drivers. *Not the End of the World*, Atkinson's only volume of short stories to date, falls between the two periods and marks a transition in her work: the affiliation to postmodernism and to metafiction is worked out with much greater subtlety, making the commentary on narrative fiction the more complex and interesting. I would contend that this work poses fundamental questions about the nature of creativity today, most essentially, what sort of writing is now possible, and to what extent can the processes of creativity, compromised by the postmodern ethic and aesthetic, continue to survive in our times?
- 2 In a review of the collection, Rachel Cooke writes, "*Not the End of the World* kicks off with its weakest entrant – a tale of two women window-shopping while Rome (or Edinburgh) burns".¹ To read the stories as "entrants" in a line-up is to refuse to see their cohesion, or to acknowledge the intricate ways in which they work together intratextually. I should like to argue that the first and last stories, "Charlene and Trudi go Shopping" and "Pleasureland", on which I have chosen to focus in this study, frame the collection and make its textual concerns coherent. I will seek to demonstrate that these two stories are the primary locus of the self-referentiality of the volume, and of its commentary on creativity. They constitute a textual space in which the deconstruction of discourse is pitted against the poetic force of the imagination, which, in my reading, will ultimately prevail, albeit in a compromised form.

- 3 The two outer stories can be read as prologue and epilogue to the collection, or like a doxology sung in church, with different words for the beginning and end of the service, as appropriate. In order to support this contention, I will first show how the volume as a whole fits together by giving some examples of the overlap of one story into another in the inner stories, of which there are ten. The process of overlapping can in itself be read as a sort of textual resurgence: for what seems at first glance to be a collection of self-contained narratives in fact turns out to be a continuum – albeit of an uneven and chaotic sort – and there is a great deal of intratextual tying-together, at the level of story, of character, and also of cultural reference, with a dense intertextual web being thrown over the knots of intratextuality.
- 4 While heterogeneous at face value, and with no clear unity of subject matter,² the inner stories in this collection pull together tightly in a number of ways. They are linked by, indeed riddled with, self-reference. Most obviously, the same characters come up more than once. Pam features as the mother of two teenage children in “Dissonance” and “Wedding Favours”, and also plays a cameo role as a child in another story, “Sheer Big Waste of Love”, in which she is mentioned only in passing as an unknowing witness to the events unfolding around her. The Zane sisters, American beauties in Scotland, feature twice, in “Transparent Fiction” and “The Bodies Vest”, and Heidi, the protagonist of “The Cat Lover”, turns out to be a friend of Missy’s, the governess in “Unseen translation”. Moreover, with a few departures – for example, Missy takes her charge to Germany – most of the action takes place in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling. Given such a restricted geographical frame of reference, it is natural that the characters and their circumstances are to some extent interrelated – thus it is, for example, that Missy’s employer sings in a band, Boak, which Simon, Pam’s son, admires in “Dissonance”.
- 5 On occasions the utterance of one character becomes central to another story: the title “Sheer big waste of love” begins as a scathing comment on Romeo and Juliet, delivered by the matter-of-fact Rebecca, Pam’s daughter, in “Dissonance” hinting at a blurring of diegetic levels, in that the utterance of a character appears to direct the narrative with a similar power to that of the omniscient narrator – although this device is never made explicit within the inner stories. In the final story, however, it becomes clear that there has indeed been a certain amount of trans-diegesis, when one of the main characters, Charlene, turns out to be the narrator of one of the stories, “Temporal Anomaly”, and possibly of several or all of the other stories: she proves, for example, to be familiar with the details of the lives of the Zane sisters (331), and Charlene’s wish in “Charlene and Trudi go Shopping” for “a cat as big as a man” has given birth to the plot of “The Cat Lover”. Moreover, Charlene is also revealed as the mistress of a heterotopia of myth,³ presiding over the shared references on which the inner stories turn, whether from classical mythology or folklore (NEW: 331). Trudi, meanwhile, assumes less narrative control, but for her part puts together a small postmodern patchwork, creating a nonsense-chant made up of the Bible, Shakespeare, poetry (Keats and Edward Lear), and folk tales: “(...) oh what can ail thee knight-at-arms they went to see in a sieve (...) beauty is truth truth beauty full fathom five” (NEW: 330), thus showing herself to be a repository of shared cultural reference. In these various ways a repertoire of reference to the outside world, fact and artefact, myth, popular culture, and so on is created.

- 6 While the inner stories contain radical departures from realism, or simply a delight in the forms made possible by postmodernism and the liberation from the constraints of *vraisemblance* – a boy is fathered by a monster on the seabed in “Tunnel of Fish”, a cat grows “as big as a man” in “The Cat Lover”, a dead woman haunts her own home in “Temporal Anomaly” – it is notable, and central to my argument, that the inner stories do no bring into doubt the continued existence of narrative itself. In the inner stories, fictional narratives whose purpose is to reflect, and reflect on, the truths of real, human existence, can exist, and do exist: moreover, the overlaps in character and plot mean that each small world seems to offer the illusion of a guarantee of the existence of the last, and the next.
- 7 The outer stories, however, differ markedly in this respect, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to isolate them for the purposes of this study. I would argue that their function is to undermine completely the illusions of realism created in the inner stories, and thus to subvert the hermeneutic underpinnings of the collection as a whole. A first clue to the nature of the outer stories comes in reading them alongside the inner stories: there is an ontological destabilising of the text, which can be seen at certain points of intersection between the outer and inner stories. For example, in “Wedding Favours”, Pam, a middle-aged teacher who finds herself unexpectedly made redundant, reluctantly turns to cottage industry with a former colleague, inexpertly hand-crafting table-decorations in the form of trugs of heather, bonbonnières, and so on, and selling them at wedding fairs. Charlene, meanwhile, in the first of the outer stories, “Charlene and Trudi go Shopping”, also frequents such fairs and reads the same articles as Pam – and, it is implied, perhaps writes some of them, since she contributes to the magazines Pam reads. However, in “Wedding Favours”, there is no indication that Pam and her family live in anything but a realistically-portrayed contemporary Edinburgh, whereas in “Charlene and Trudi go Shopping” the narrative is futuristic speculative, altogether divorced from realism and from the assumptions about narrative, which the realist text traditionally allows the reader to share, by allowing him or her to “believe in” the story and the characters as a reflection, in the sense of an imitation, of the world in which we live. I would thus like to show how the outer stories invite the reader to reflect on the nature of illusion in fiction, bringing into question the relation between word and world, and how these stories comment on the cyclical nature of the possibilities of creation, and the inevitability of destruction.
- 8 The apocalyptic aspect of the outer stories is very marked, in that the trope is that of the *eschaton*, defined by James Berger as the “actual imagined end of the world”.⁴ The first story of the volume takes place in a city which could be Edinburgh, but also Glasgow, London, or a universal “unreal city”, to use T.S. Eliot’s term – that is, a fictional place.⁵ Given the title, “Charlene and Trudi go Shopping”, the story presents itself as a banal, chick-lit, women’s-magazine-type story. The opening line runs thus: “I want,” Charlene said to Trudi, “to buy my mother a birthday present”. Notwithstanding the slightly unusual syntax of the sentence, the reader might anticipate that this will develop into a “women’s experience” story of the kind which is mass-marketed today, and generally dismissed by critics as being of little textual interest, a continuation of the sort of female fiction popular during the first wave of feminism, in which women’s daily experience had to be validated by being described, published and disseminated – and which today is often considered outdated. However, the list of possible birthday presents for Charlene’s mother, drawn up by Trudi in answer to her friend’s

stipulations, (“Something I can put in the post. Something that won’t break”), makes it clear that the story is about to enter a realm slightly more unstable, more surprising, than chick-lit⁶ or purely realist fiction:

A crystal decanter.

A fingernail.

An egg.

A heart.

A Crown Derby teapot.

A promise.

A mirrored-glass globe in which nothing but the sky is reflected. (NEW: 21)

- 9 The earth-shattering, almost world-ending event which has occurred is not described in the stories, but is evoked only through small, apparently throwaway details. There are a number of indications that something has changed radically in the world in which the women live, although they share quasi-universal concerns such as the procuring of staples, the buying of gifts, and so on. As the story unfolds, guns of various kinds, carefully named and differentiated, become common currency (“The receptionist appeared to have a Heckler and Koch MP5A3 9mm sub-machine gun under her desk” (NEW: 28), “Charlene (...) fell asleep with her hand on the Sig Sauer semi-automatic she kept under her pillow” (NEW: 31)), and the narrative is peppered with brief, deadpan intimations of disaster, which are neither elucidated nor developed, and which, apparently, have come to seem commonplace: for example, “Somewhere in the distance a bomb exploded softly” (24). Similarly, a few pages later, as the women drink in a bar, “One of the boisterous men in suits fell off his bar stool. The barman pronounced the time of his death as 9.42 pm” (30-31). The situation is a source of comedy and a bleak irony, for the women’s hopes and aspirations for the future sit with a grim incongruity with the state of the world around them: “In the hours between curfew and dawn Charlene listened to the sirens wailing through the night and planned an article on ‘Great Tips for Spring Weddings’” (NEW: 30-31).
- 10 Apocalypse seems to have taken place as some sort of ecological catastrophe, coupled with a population explosion: ⁷ the details of precisely what has happened are unclear, although there is a reference to an earthquake (32), and to climate disaster, in that it has “been raining for weeks” (24). As the story goes on, the illusion of normality become more and more compromised, and it becomes clear that something has gone irreparably awry with the country’s economy and distribution systems. However, in ironic contrast with this, the story builds up a gargantuan, Pantagruelian bounty, taking great narrative pleasure in evocation, in description, as an end in itself, as an almost poetic, incantatory force. The women get lost in the tea aisle, because there are so many different kinds to be had: “Chrysanthemum, White Peony, Jade Peak, Oriental Beauty Oolong, Green Gunpowder, Golden Needle, Hubei Silver Tip, Drum Mountain White Cloud, Dragon’s Breath tea” (23). This appears to be a classical cornucopia translated into the modern age (the food hall of Fortnum and Mason’s comes to mind). However, despite this plenty, “[m]ost of the food was too expensive to buy and some of it didn’t look real” (22).
- 11 It is possible to read this evocation of the state of the country as a comment on the entropy of postmodernity, ⁸ in which literary and political criticism momentarily fuse: in a post-capitalist world, the consumer society has reached the limits of its vision, and, simultaneously, art and representation reached a nadir of “apocalyptic emptiness”. ⁹ I would argue that the text uses this critical background in order to establish its

commentary on the relation between signifier and signified in postmodern fiction. The relation of the words to the reality they are supposed to describe is thus problematised: the almost endlessly-generated, thesaurus-like lists of goods and objects point up a closed system in which meaning is no longer possible, but only a parody of meaning; in which imagination can function merely as an arid self-ironic process. The women's tendency to generate long, incantatory lists – for example, of breeds of dog – thus imparts a disturbing and destabilising quality to the text:

Trudi and Charlene swooned with delight at the idea of dogs (...)

"Oh God", Trudi said, overcome by all the breeds of dog in the world, "a German Shepherd, a Golden Retriever, a Great Dane, a Borzoi – what a great word – a St Bernard, A Scottie, a Westie, a Yorkie." (27)

- 12 Types of fabric are similarly treated ("Broadcloth and butter muslin, brocade, brocatelle," 33), and the presence of these lists can be read as an attempt to tie down words to meanings, to fuse the two, to prevent entropy and alienation, and thus to turn around the movement by which language and things have become divorced, and which, for some contemporary writers, signals the end of imagination. Barrages of words are used as an attempt to revive a generative, creative force, and also to act as a series of incantations to lament the passing of creative possibility. Richard Kearney puts it thus:

Language, as an open-ended play of signifiers, is no longer thought to refer to some 'real' meaning *external* to language (ie, some 'transcendental truth' or human subjectivity). Deprived of the concept of *origin*, the concept of imagination itself collapses (...) "Truth is replaced by parody". (Kearney, 1988, 253)

- 13 It is thus eminently appropriate that the women should be trapped in an entropic system they cannot leave,¹⁰ as energy leaches from all its systems and words become stand-ins for things. While the women are attracted to words and greedy for the pleasure they bring ("I love that word". *Dévoré*", (21-22)), the words they cling to hang empty and impotent. "Word" is a poor substitute for "world", as the women's punning, as Charlene mishears a remark, points up:

"What a wonderful word", Trudi said.

"What a wonderful world?" Charlene said doubtfully. (33)

- 14 At the end of "Charlene and Trudi go Shopping", the women go underground, as seen above, and it is not until the last story of the volume, "Pleasureland", that they return and take up where they left off – only one step closer to the end of the, or at least their, world. The idea of "Pleasureland" as an alternative, fantasy universe, or, to use the terminology of Krishan Kumar, as a utopian vision¹¹ – compensation for the destruction brought about by the apocalypse – has already been invoked by a frightened, sleepless and solitary Charlene in "Charlene and Trudi go Shopping". As an escape from the city, which has entered a further phase of destruction, with wild animals from the zoo wandering about the outskirts, museums looted and the streets patrolled by militia: in an attempt to bolster her flagging spirits in the apocalyptic city, she sends herself in imagination to "shady walks through cool gardens (...) where the air is perfumed with attar of roses" (23). As "Charlene and Trudi go Shopping" draws to a close, Trudi's fantasy is completed by Charlene: "We could call it Pleasureland. And we would be gods. We would be the gods of Pleasureland. And live there forever" (*NEW*: 40). While in the first story the women wander among the illusion of the bounty of all the world, in the final story, "Pleasureland", far from finding splendours to match their imaginings, they find themselves barricaded into Trudi's flat: because plague is

suspected in their building and all along the street, and although the women do not believe they have contracted the disease, the militia has no plans to allow them outdoors. There is no escape.

- 15 If in the first story the challenge was to choose among material things, or at least to have the illusion of such a choice, here, the women can only invent what is missing. In “Pleasureland”, the point is no longer to identify and procure the exotic, the unusual, the rare: rather, all scenarii are as imagined and as unimaginable as each other. Nothing is to be procured at all, and the idea of drinking coffee of any kind at all is as far-fetched as that of jetting off to the Monkey Bar in New York for cocktails. The women occupy the time with an extended game of “Let’s pretend”, notably recreating the layout of the shops familiar from the first story in the collection. Only the barest semblance of normality can be maintained, and the entire value-system maintained by the possibility of exchanging money for commodities has broken down: the women eat the meagre scrapings of Trudi’s kitchen cupboards from a Sèvres bowl, casually looted from a latterly-unguarded museum, or use the bowl to collect rainwater. Comedy of a dark kind is maintained by the narrator’s insistence on keeping up the standards of the time before: among the apocalyptic rumblings, with no soap, or even water, the women do not cease to be concerned with fashion and beauty. Style details lodge tenaciously, and bathetically, as the narrative of catastrophe unfolds: “Trudi had taken to wearing a scarf around her head, turban-style, but Charlene didn’t think it was a good look for her”.
- 16 By refusing to give in to silence, and by keeping up a flow of word games and story-telling – the latter activity of course recalling *The Arabian Nights* – the women try to put off the inevitable: silence, starvation and a slow death. Running out, momentarily, of word games and narratives, Charlene makes the suggestion “Or we could just be quiet”, to which Trudi replies “No, (...) no, we mustn’t do that” (329). As they await the end, the only comfort they can offer each other is that of narrative: “Tell me a story”, [Trudi] said to Charlene” (330). Death comes when the women no longer have the strength to move and Charlene cannot remember any more stories, although they still hope for renewal, refusing to admit that the end is nigh. Even as death approaches, the women are still struggling for extraordinary items of vocabulary and lighting on particularly felicitous speech rhythms. There is, however, a brake on the rhythm whereas the listing of items begins to peter out, marking the winding-down of the story and of the collection as a whole:

“Nothing dies,” Charlene whispered into Trudi’s ear. “All matter is transformed into other matter.”

“Or metempsychosis”, Trudi said weakly, ‘the transmigration of the soul. Into an insect, a tadpole, a bean. A lion, a vine, a baby.”

“A star would be nice,” Charlene said. “Or a constellation in the night sky where we could shine like precious diamonds. Are you still there?”

“I’m still here,” said Trudi. “It’s grown very dark, don’t you think? Keep talking. Tell me another story.”

“I can’t remember any more,” Charlene said.

“Don’t worry, it’s not the end of the world.” (332)
- 17 The women are aware that they themselves will one day be turned into discourse, and that being talked about will be their only survival – they will be turned into discourse. As Charlene says, “One day archaeologists will find us and wonder about our lives” (330). While the system in which Charlene and Trudi find themselves is undeniably entropic and as such doomed, the text nonetheless offers the possibility of a sort of

afterlife: the recycling of myths through the ages finds its echo at intratextual level, and the very stories in this collection will not die but will be recycled and “transformed” in the world to come. The various narratives at all levels of the diegesis – myths, the stories the women tell, the very stories of their own lives – constitute “matter to be transformed” into the narratives of the future. However, the movement is not only circular, for the act of restitution of the women’s lives – in itself and act of creation, but without the constraints and limitations either of realism or postmodernism – will be placed in the hands not of writers, or of critics, or of aestheticians of any sort, but of the archaeologists of the future.

- 18 It may be expected that the archaeologists will find objects and bones and historical artefacts, and will allow scope for “invention” currently disallowed by the aridity of the postmodern rules, in which a character is not the reflection of a woman who lived and breathed but merely an endlessly deconstructible manifestation in words of something whose essence can never be identified. To do so would be to traduce the very tenets of metafictional narrative, and in which language has, through an excess of the meta-discourses of deconstruction, lost all power to connote, to create, and to generate meaning. It is not unremarkable that Kate Atkinson entitles the last story in the collection “Pleasureland”, recalling the “pleasure dome” in Coleridge’s pure and irreducible vision of the Imagination,¹² “Kubla Khan”. By entrusting the spiritual resurrection of Charlene and Trudi, and of the stories, myths and texts of all sorts which nourished them, to the care of academics from another field and another geographical zone, Kate Atkinson places the debate on literature outside the sphere of current critical influence, thereby allowing the deconstructive to be replaced by the constructive – inviting, in other words, a reversal of the recent and current trends in literary theory by which, inexorably, literature has, in Barth’s terms, “exhausted” itself,¹³ and, perhaps, its readers. As Christopher Norris puts it, writing of the deconstruction and ultimately the disappearance of the unified, humanist subject, “This is seen as the upshot of a widespread cultural mutation whereby the human sciences have come to recognise that ‘man’ is nothing more than a figure composed by certain (mainly nineteenth-century) discourses of knowledge”.¹⁴ Kate Atkinson’s apocalypse is a textual one, and her eschatological anxiety involves the end of representation itself, and the death of subjectivity. As Richard Kearney expresses it, “The postmodern paradigm is (...) that of a labyrinth of mirrors which extend indefinitely in all directions – a labyrinth where the image of the self (as a presence to itself) dissolves into self-parody”.¹⁵
- 19 The unsustainability of fiction as it stands in the first decade of the twenty-first century could be said to carry with it the expectation of a new dawn, thus affiliating this work to the kind of apocalyptic fiction which carries with it hope for a new age. However, since this renewal will nonetheless be worked out through the cyclical regeneration of material, Atkinson’s work brings together two contrasted ideas of apocalypse, the Christian, in which the world tends towards destruction and replacement by a new order, established by God rather than man, and the classical, in which, indeed, “Nothing dies (...) All matter is transformed into other matter” (NEW: 332).¹⁶ Thus in Kate Atkinson’s collection, it both is and is not the end of the world. Ultimately I would contend that in this volume she takes narrative fiction to the brink of extinction and leaves it teetering there, and that this is how Kate Atkinson contributes to the struggle for, and against, postmodernism by writers of fiction today.

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NOTES

1. Rachel Cooke: "Nanny takes Arthur to a Parallel Universe", *The Guardian*, 10th Nov. 2002.
2. In her review of the collection, Sara Pfannkuche, for example, hazards that "the main theme is longing", without substantiating her remark.
3. The multiplicity of references creates what Brian McHale, drawing on Michel Foucault, terms "a heterotopia" of discordant cultural references. "A heterotopia. The concept comes from Michel Foucault. 'There is a worse kind of disorder than that of the *incongruous*, the linking together of things that are inappropriate; I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the *heteroclite*'" (McHale, 1984, 44).
4. James Berger, 1999, 5.
5. T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land", 1936.
6. Although Chris Mazza and Jeffrey DeShell's use of this term in the title of an anthology was intended to be post-feminist and ironic, the term is now widely understood to refer to reductive realist narrative, sold as entertainment only. The Bridget Jones books, by Helen Fielding, are perhaps the best-known example of the genre.

7. Krishan Kumar predicts just such a vision: "I suppose it is inevitable that our apocalypses should be low-keyed – especially once the idea of nuclear apocalypse has moved to the background (...) The end will come as a result of a steady increase in population, or a slow poisoning of the planet. Catastrophe will be expressed in lines on a graph rather than in the imagery of the Book of Revelation" (Kumar, 1995, 211).
8. I use the term "postmodernity" as opposed to "postmodernism". Martina Viktoria Herman recalls a distinction which can be usefully drawn between the two: "In order to limit the term postmodernism in its scope, it is, moreover, important to differentiate between the concepts of postmodernity and postmodernism. [...]Whereas postmodernity is, for instance, characterised by the rise and revolution caused by electronic technologies of communication as well as by an increasingly post-industrial economy and a society dependent in information, postmodernism as a term, for example, refers to a novel which raises awareness of itself as a linguistic construct". "As if by magic': postmodernist aspects in Kate Atkinson's fiction" (Herman, 2004, 11).
9. Kearney, 1988, 365. "Language, as an open-ended play of signifiers, is no longer thought to refer to some 'real' meaning *external* to language (i.e., some 'transcendental truth' or human subjectivity) (...) The deconstruction of the category of 'origin' is heralded by the famous *textual revolution*. The humanist concept of 'man' gives way to the anti-humanist concept of intertextual play" (Kearney, 1988, 253).
10. Zbigniew Lewicki points out that "For entropy to occur at all, there must exist a closed system; otherwise, an outside supply of energy could balance its losses and stop the process" (Lewicki, 72).
11. "If the millennium supplies the means or the movement towards the end, utopia is concerned with the ends themselves" (...) Utopia is certainly about presenting pictures of the ideal society. Unlike millennialism, it is relatively indifferent to the means of achieving that ideal (...) The means are downplayed; all the concentration is on the nature of the end, on what happens when you arrive in the good society"(Kumar, 1995, 213).
12. "The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria XIII*).
13. "John Barth defines the literature of exhaustion as "the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities" (Barth, 1984, 64).
14. "Thus Foucault has a much-quoted passage in *Les Mots et les Choses*, describing 'man' – or the imagined autonomous subject of humanist discourse – as a figure drawn in sand at the ocean's edge, soon to be erased by the incoming tide" (Norris, 1995, 229).
15. Kearney, 1988, 253.
16. The concept of apocalypse presented in this work corresponds both to the stages of linear, Biblical conceptions of apocalypse, many of which are contradictory regarding aspects such as length of each phase and order of execution, but all of which involve the replacement of the old order by the new, and to the "cyclical" vision of the apocalypse of antiquity, cited by Krishan Kumar, "which saw only return to the eternal starting-point" (Kumar, 1995, 212).

ABSTRACTS

Ce recueil de nouvelles liées entre elles par des thèmes communs, est encadré par deux récits qui se répondent, "Charlene and Trudi go Shopping" et "Pleasureland". Dans les deux nouvelles, deux

jeunes femmes tentent de vaquer à leurs occupations dans une ville qui se trouve au bord de l'apocalypse. Affrontant avec courage le désastre à l'occasion d'un tour des magasins dans le premier récit, les protagonistes se préparent, dans le dernier, à mourir. Ces deux nouvelles peuvent se lire comme un commentaire de l'"apocalypse" postmoderne : selon cette idée, la mimesis n'est plus possible, et le sujet doit lutter pour sa survie. Cet article se propose d'analyser les limites et les contradictions inhérents au concept d'"imagination postmoderne" et de démontrer que le processus créateur, même dans un monde qui se trouve au bord de l'autodestruction, n'est que subverti, jamais détruit.

AUTHORS

HELEN E. MUNDLER

Helen E. Mundler studied in the UK at the Universities of Durham and Strathclyde before moving to France to prepare her doctoral thesis on A. S. Byatt, which she defended in Strasbourg in 1998 and published in Paris in 2003 (*Intertextualité dans l'œuvre d'A. S. Byatt*, L'Harmattan). She has been a tenured lecturer in English Studies at the University of Paris XII-Val de Marne since 2000, and has worked in recent years on the fiction of Anita Brookner, Sarah Waters, Margaret Atwood, Lucy Ellmann and other contemporary women writers. She is currently writing on the novels of Liz Jensen. She has also published short stories, and a novel (*Homesickness*, Dewi Lewis, 2003), which was nominated for the Booker.