

## “White” Masters and “Dark” Servants in A. S. Byatt’s “Morpho Eugenia”\*

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### *Abstract*

The aim of this paper is to read A. S. Byatt’s novella, “Morpho Eugenia,” from the perspective provided by the postcolonial paradigm shift regarding definitions of the “domestic.” In the light of the postcolonial contestation of conceptualizations of the domestic as an insular site exclusive of the “foreign,” this paper is built on the premise that domestic has always been informed by what it has left outside its boundaries. I will argue that the country house, Bredely Hall, where the story is set in “Morpho Eugenia,” is a site deeply informed by Britain’s imperial position in that the domestic hierarchies in the house are entangled with colonial/global hierarchies. Therefore, explicit references to “whiteness” and “darkness” in Byatt’s text in relation to the masters/mistresses and servants in Bredely Hall should be read bearing in mind this entanglement of the domestic and the global. In “Morpho Eugenia” Byatt re-defines “whiteness” and “darkness” to contest, from a global perspective, their hierarchical associations with “masters” and “servants,” respectively. Interestingly, in “Morpho Eugenia,” the parties associated with hierarchical categories of “whiteness” and “darkness” do not change: both masters/mistresses and servants in Bredely Hall continue to be characterized by being “white” and “dark,” respectively. Yet, “whiteness” is emptied of its association with “moral superiority” and luminosity emerges as a quality that could obstruct clear vision whereas “darkness” is foregrounded as a quality that can contribute to visibility. Furthermore, Byatt’s text problematizes the hierarchical dichotomy between “culture”/ “cultivation” and “nature”/ “savagery” used in connection with the European (colonizer) and the non-European (colonized). One textual strategy contributing to this is the deconstruction of domesticity embodied in the figure of the “pure” domestic woman: Eugenia Alabaster, an upper-class white woman, is portrayed as sexually-desiring and in an incestuous relationship, which she attempts to “justify” by its “naturalness.” What is more, domestic life in an English country house is represented in terms of its glaring similarities to practices carried out in “nature.” As pointed out in many critical readings of “Morpho Eugenia,” there is an explicit analogy between society in Bredely Hall and ant communities. The mistress of the house, Lady Alabaster, for example, is

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likened to a queen ant, which is constantly taken care of by her “servants.” The Mother/Queen and daughter/servant relationship was a dominant analogy used over the colonial period to describe Empire. Interestingly, the analogy established in “Morpho Eugenia” between the Queen and the queen ant de-naturalizes the ideologies that served to legitimize imperialism through such notions as mutual, familial love and responsibility by foregrounding the discrepancies between the elevated ideological representations of imperialism and the colonizing and predatory practices that can be observed in wild nature, particularly among ant communities.

**Keywords:** “Morpho Eugenia,” domestic, colonial, “whiteness,” master-servant relationship

## **Öz**

Bu makalenin amacı A. S. Byatt’ın “Morpho Eugenia” adlı kısa romanındaki “ev-içi”ni postkolonyal bir çerçeveden okumaktır. “Ev-içi”nin eve ait olmayanla karşıtlığı üzerine kurulu tanımlamalarını sorunsallaştıran postkolonyal bakış açısı ışığında, bu makale “ev-içi”nin kendi sınırları dışında bırakılan “el” tarafından daima şekillendirilegelmiş bir alan olduğu önermesi üzerine kurulmuştur. Öykünün geçmekte olduğu Bredely Hall, on dokuzuncu yüzyıl İngiltere’sinin emperyal konununun biçimlendirdiği bir mekandır: “ev”deki hiyerarşik ilişkiler kolonyal/global hiyerarşik ilişkilerle içiçe geçmiştir. Bu nedenle, Byatt’ın metnindeki, ev sahipleri ve hizmetçilere ilişkin “beyazlık” ve “karalık” şeklindeki betimlemeler, ev “içi” ve “dış”ının bu içiçe geçmişliği göz önünde bulundurularak okunmalıdır. “Morpho Eugenia”da, Byatt “beyazlık” ve “karalık”ı, global bir çerçeve içerisinde yeniden tanımlar ve böylece “efendiler” ve “hizmetçiler”i tanımlayagelmiş bu sıfatları hegemonik içeriklerinden arındırır. Belki de metnin en çarpıcı özelliklerinden bir tanesi, “beyazlık” ve “karalık”ın onlarla hiyerarşik bir şekilde eşleştirilen grupların betimlemelerinde kullanılmasına devam edilmesidir: “Morpho Eugenia”da “beyazlık” efendileri, “karalık” da hizmetçileri nitelendirmeyi sürdürür. Ancak, kolonyal söylemlerin “aklık” ve “ahlâklılık” arasında kurduğu ilişkinin içi boşaltılır; “aydınlık” olanın her zaman görülebilirliği beraberinde getirmediği, aksine “matlık”ın bazen daha net görebilmeyi sağladığı vurgulanır. Bunların yanısıra, Byatt’ın metni “kültür”/“doğa” arasında kurulmuş ve sömüren/sömürülen halklarla eşleştirilegelmiş olan hiyerarşik ikiliği de bozar. Bu amaca hizmet eden stratejilerden bir tanesi, domestik ideolojinin vücut bulduğu domestik kadın figürünün çözülmesidir: Eugenia Alabaster, üst sınıf ve beyaz bir kadın, arzu eden (edilenden ziyade) bir özne olarak ve kendisinin son derece “doğal” kabul ettiği enest bir ilişki içerisinde resmedilir. Ayrıca, metinde üst sınıf bir İngiliz ev hayatı “doğal” hayattan pek de farkı olmayan bir şekilde temsil edilir. “Morpho Eugenia” üzerine yazılmış makalelerin birçoğunda işaret edildiği üzere, metinde Bredely Hall ve karınca kolonileri arasında çok açık bir ilişkilendirme vardır. Söz gelimi, evin “hanımı” Lady Alabaster, “hizmetçileri” tarafından sürekli ilgilenilen bir kraliçe karıncaya benzetilir. Kolonyal dönemde, Ana/Kraliçe ve Kız (evlat)/Hizmetçi ilişkisi imparatorluğu temsil etmede kullanılan belli başlı benzetmelerden bir tanesiydi. Sömüren/sömürülen ilişkisinin, karşılıklı sevgi ve sorumluluklara dayanan bir anne-kız ilişkisi çerçevesi içinden resmedildiği emperyalist ideolojilerin aksine, “Morpho Eugenia”da Kraliçe ve kraliçe karınca arasında kurulan ilişkilendirme, sömürgeciliğin böylesi domestik temsilleriyle “vahşi” doğadaki (karıncalar arasındaki, örneğin) kolonileştirme eylemleri arasındaki uyumsuzluğu açık bir şekilde gözler önüne serer. Böylece, birbirine sıkıca eklenmiş olan domestik ve emperyalist ideolojilerin “oyununu” bozar.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** “Morpho Eugenia,” ev-içi, kolonyal, “beyazlık,” efendi-hizmetçi ilişkisi

In A. S. Byatt's "Morpho Eugenia" the inhabitants of Bredely Hall living "above stairs" are characterized by their translucent whiteness as their last name, "Alabaster," suggests. Byatt re-defines, however, "whiteness"/"visibility" and "darkness"/"invisibility" to contest, from a global perspective, their hierarchical associations with "masters" and "servants," respectively. In "Morpho Eugenia" domestic service and its entanglement with global hierarchies is rendered visible. Furthermore, Byatt problematizes the hierarchical dichotomy between "culture" and "nature." One textual strategy contributing to this is the deconstruction of domesticity embodied in the figure of the "pure" domestic woman: Eugenia Alabaster, an upper-class white woman, is portrayed as sexually-desiring and in an incestuous relationship, which she attempts to "justify" by its "naturalness." In addition, domestic life in an English country house is represented in terms of its glaring similarities to practices carried out in "nature."

In "*Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be*," Melissa Steyn holds that the emergence of the narrative of "whiteness" predates Europe's colonial conquests. She points out that conceptions about the centrality of Europe in the world can be observed in medieval cartography, which gave way "in the sixteenth century to images that unequivocally centered Europe . . . celebrating not only its Christianity, but also its commerce, and, in time, its empire" (2001, p. 3). The decentralization of other continents was accompanied by the marginalization of the peoples living in them based on their skin color. Yet, it was not until the eighteenth century that the "discourses of blackness . . . set into images of condescension and denigration" (2001, p. 5). Until then "blackness" had been somewhat "fluid and varied"; as Nederveen Pieterse notes in *White on Black*, instances of "a love for black Africans and a preoccupation with a fabulous prince somewhere in Africa" were present in Europe even in the seventeenth century (1992, p. 28). According to Steyn, it was basically the institution of slavery which contributed to the emergence of "blackness" as an inferior category so that the enslavement of Africans could be legitimized (2001, p. 5). From the eighteenth century on, the hierarchical binary between "whiteness" and "blackness" was reproduced incessantly and articulated with some other binaries such as "cultured"/"savage;" "Christian"/"heathen;" "good"/ "evil;" "clean"/ "dirty;" "normal"/ "abnormal" (2001, p. 7-16). One function of this narrative was to create some sort of an "equality" in Étienne Balibar's words, among the colonizers: "the European, or Euro-American, nations fiercely competing for the world's economic spoils recognized an identity and an 'equality' in this very competition, which they baptized 'white'" (1990, p. 286). In that sense, "whiteness" emerged as a common denominator – an identity cutting across national boundaries – in Europe; or as Steyn puts it, "while not particularly unifying across troublesome ethnic boundaries within Europe, the invention of whiteness provided people from Europe with a supranationalism" (2001, p. 5). The category of "whiteness" enabled all its participants, regardless of their national identities, with the right to colonize "blacks" and thus served to legitimize the European expansion. "Europeans whitened as they expanded and conquered, developing a common identity by using Africans as the main foil against which they defined themselves" (Steyn, 2001, p. 5).

The three Alabaster daughters, Enid, Rowena and Eugenia, are "pale-gold and ivory creatures, with large blue eyes and long pale silky lashes" (Byatt, 1992, p. 4). William Adamson, an entomologist, who meets the Alabasters at the end of his ten-year long research in the Amazon, is moved by the whiteness of the Alabaster girls, whom he immediately compares to "olive-skinned and velvet-brown ladies of doubtful virtue and no virtue" he met during his expedition. As opposed to these colored women, Enid, for instance, appears to him "at once so milky-wholesome and so airily untouchable" (1992, p. 5). Similarly, he thinks of Eugenia as "wholly untouchable," too (1992, p. 7) and believes that she leads a "sweetly innocent" daily life in Bredely Hall (1992, p. 7). Adamson's reading of the Alabaster girls as embodiments of "virtue," is in keeping with the ideal woman as is defined according to the Victorian cult of domesticity. In *Family Fortunes*, Davidoff and Hall indicate that in contrast to seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century writing on women, which emphasizes "rampant and voracious female sexuality, the insatiable desires of womanhood," there was a consensus from the late eighteenth century onward on the assumption that "women were not sexually active in themselves;" and, "modesty" was stressed as "the most valued female characteristic" (2002, p. 170).

As the narrative unfolds, however, Adamson finds out that Eugenia Alabaster, whom he marries quite early in the story, is as sexually desiring as some women of color he has met in the Amazon. He realizes that Eugenia is not as "pure" as he has assumed at the beginning. His marriage-night fears of "smutching her, as the soil smutche[s] the snow" soon vanish because his wife

was darting her hot face, the cold white Eugenia, into his neck, and kissing him repeatedly where his vein pulsed. Her fingers were wound in his hair, her legs were wound in his . . . And when they slept . . . he woke in the dark dawn to see her huge eyes fixed on his face, and found her hands touching his private places . . . asking for more, and more, and still more (Byatt, 1992, p. 79-80).

By the end of the story, Adamson finds out, with the help of servants in Bredely Hall, that Eugenia has been having an affair with her step-brother, Edgar, and married Adamson to be able give birth to children out of this incestuous relationship.

"Morpho Eugenia" takes apart the ideological connection between the white woman and sexual modesty/virtue by problematizing the hierarchical dichotomy between "culture" and "nature." Eugenia confesses to Adamson that her sexual relationship with her step-brother, Edgar, "didn't *feel* bad – it grew little by little, out of perfectly innocent, natural, *playful* things – which no one thought wrong . . . he made me believe it was all perfectly *natural* and so it was, it was *natural*, nothing in us rose up and said – it was – *unnatural*" (Byatt, 1992, original emphasis p. 181). Eugenia's emphasis on the naturalness of their incestuous relationship is a part of the overall emphasis in the novella on the parallelism between "nature" and life in Bredely Hall. As pointed out in many critical readings of "Morpho Eugenia," there is an explicit analogy between society in Bredely Hall and ant communities. Adamson, Matty Crompton, who is "in some way employed in the care of the younger members of the [Alabaster] family," (1992, p. 26)

and Miss Mead, the teacher of the little Alabaster children, observe, for instance, that “the Queen of the Wood Ants was . . . half as large . . . as her daughter-workers/servants. She was swollen and glossy, unlike the matt workers, and appeared to be striped red and white” (1992, p. 45). The ant-queens were “egg-laying machines, gross and glistening, endlessly licked, caressed, soothed and smoothed” by the servants (1992, p. 102). Lady Alabaster and Eugenia, especially during her pregnancy, are described in similar terms: the old woman, Adamson observes, “appeared to be immobilized” and “under her skirts her knees and ankles were hugely . . . swollen” (1992, p. 30). She spends most of her time eating “large quantities of sweet biscuits, macarons, butterfly cakes” and so on “which were endlessly moving along the corridors, borne by parlourmaids, on silver trays” (1992, p. 30). Eugenia gives birth to five children with very short intervals and during each pregnancy, she “disappeared into a world of women. She slept a great deal . . . Her ankles swelled; she lay upon sofas . . . staring into vacancy” (1992, p. 81). Jane Sturrock, in “A. S. Byatt’s ‘Morpho Eugenia,’” writes that “Bredely Hall, like the anthills, is centred on the reproductive females . . . Swollen through idleness or pregnancy, cosseted and waited on by their servants as the ant-queens are by the workers, they become much like the ant-queens” (2002, p. 99). Remarkably, as Heidi Hansson points out in “The Double Voice of Metaphor,” Eugenia’s giving birth to babies out of an incestuous relationship, too, is in keeping with the ant-community analogy, in that “in an ant or bee society, incest is the rule, of course, because there are no other insects in the nests than those produced by the queen” (1999, p. 458).

“Nature,” following the expansion of European commerce, emerged as a realm inhabited not only by animals and plants but also by non-white peoples. It was particularly the African who was described as “natural man in all his wild and untamed nature” (Qtd in Pieterse, 1992, p. 34). The African emerged as a foil against the “cultivated”/“tamed” European who inhabited the realm of “culture.” As opposed to Europe, that “saw itself as the cultivated center of the world” (Steyn, 2001, p. 7), “what Africa did have and in abundance . . . was nature. The iconography of Africans as savages was determined by the association with nature and flora – often the kind of wild and overwhelming landscape which makes human beings appear small” (Pieterse, 1992, p. 35). The hierarchical binary between “culture”/“cultivation” and “nature”/“savagery” used in connection with the European (colonizer) and the non-European (colonized) is unraveled in Byatt’s novella in which the domestic life in an English county house is represented in terms of its glaring similarities to practices carried out in “nature.” Through the similarities foregrounded between Mrs. Alabaster and her servants and a queen ant and her “daughter-workers/servants” (1992, p. 45), the text, in addition to undermining the elevated notion of the domestic space as the “holy of holies” (New, 1998, p. 114), which was espoused particularly over the Victorian period, dismantles the ideological construction of the colonizer as “civilized.” The Mother/Queen and daughter/servant relationship was a dominant analogy used over the colonial period to describe Empire: “the term ‘Mother Country’ sanctified the centre of Empire as ‘Home’; the term ‘daughter country’ perpetuated an image of dependency, especially when it is made clear that domestic

convention regarded daughters as possessions, whose filial duty would take precedence over any 'unladylike' desire for independence" (New, 1998, p. 114). Interestingly, the analogy between the Queen and the queen ant de-naturalizes the ideologies that served to legitimize imperialism through such notions as mutual, familial love and responsibility by foregrounding the discrepancies between the elevated ideological representations of imperialism and the colonizing and predatory practices that can be observed in wild nature, particularly among ant communities. It is emphasized in the novella that ants are "slave-making" creatures in that "Formica sanguinea," for example, "invade the nests of the Wood Ants, and steal their cocoons, which they rear with their own, so that they become sanguinea workers" (Byatt, 1992, p. 44). Hearing this explanation from Adamson, Matty immediately responds that "they [ants] resemble human societies in that, as in many things" (1992, p. 44). Exploitation of the labor of the other seems to be a common denominator between ant and human societies which motivates them both to "colonize." Through the queen ant and daughter/servant ants analogy, British imperialism is displaced from the realm of ideological constructions and located instead in "nature."

The emphasis on the pleasure Eugenia takes out of sexual intercourse is also in keeping with Byatt's attempt to dismantle the hierarchies between the so-called "cultivated" and the "savage," who was "eroticized" by Europeans since as early as the second century A.D. (McClintock, 1995, p. 22). In *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock uses the term "porno-tropics" in connection with the "long tradition of male travel as an erotics of ravishment" (1995, p. 22). She holds that "for centuries, the uncertain continents – Africa, the Americas, Asia – were figured in European lore as libidiously erotized. Travelers' tales abounded with visions of monstrous sexuality of far-off lands, where as legend had it, men sported gigantic penises and women consorted with apes" (1995, p. 22). According to McClintock, "porno-tropics" was a means for Europe's projection of "its forbidden sexual desires and fears" onto the peoples of these far-off continents (1995, p. 22). She adds that it was particularly women of color who were represented more prominently than men in connection with their closeness to "nature": "Within this porno-tropic tradition, women figured as the epitome of sexual aberration and excess. Folklore saw them . . . as given to lascivious venery so promiscuous as to border on the bestial" (1995, p. 22). In "Morpho Eugenia," the distinction Adamson immediately makes between the "white" and thereby "virtuous" Alabaster girls and the women he met in the Amazon, who were sexually desiring and hence "unvirtuous," is informed by this tradition of "porno-tropics" as well as British domestic ideology. The novella undermines them both through its representation of Eugenia Alabaster as a sexually-desiring upper-class white woman.

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong holds that the ideal of the domestic woman, whose "value" lay in her "femininity" rather than her "birth . . . [or] the accoutrements of title and status" (1987, p. 4) enabled the empowerment of the middle-classes by establishing and sanctifying the belief that an individual's value stems from her/his "personal qualities" (1987, p. 4) rather than social status. According to Armstrong,



the figure of the domestic woman emerged in the eighteenth century and was disseminated first through conduct books and then novels. By the year 1859, when the story begins in “Morpho Eugenia,” domestic ideology had held sway not only among the middle-classes but also in upper-class households of the gentry such as Bredely Hall; and, the working-class woman had emerged as an Other against whom the domestic/virtuous woman came to be defined (Armstrong, 1987, p. 20). In that sense, an assumption such as Adamson’s about the Alabaster girls regarding their sexual “innocence” entails not only the women he met in the Amazon as foils to the Alabasters but also working-class women such as the female servants in Bredely Hall. One remarkable example of the eroticization of female servants appears in Daniel Defoe’s pamphlet, *Everybody’s Business is Nobody’s Business* (1725), which is one of the early texts contributing to the creation and circulation in society of the ideal of “gentlewomen” who are represented as distinct from lower-class “pert sluts.” Defoe distinguishes between maids and mistresses in terms of their sexuality:

[M]any good families are impoverished and disgraced by these pert sluts, who, taking the advantage of a young man’s simplicity and unruly desires, draw many heedless youths, nay, some of good estates, into their snares; and of this we have but too many instances. Some more artful shall conceal their condition, and palm themselves off on young fellows for gentlewomen and great fortunes. How many families have been ruined by these ladies? When the father or master of the family, preferring the flirting airs of a young prinked up strumpet, to the artless sincerity of a plain, grave, and good wife, has given his desires a loose, and destroyed soul, body, family, and estate (1725, p. 6).

The representation of young female servants such as Defoe’s drastically refracts the extreme vulnerability of maids to sexual abuse in the households they worked in. Particularly in relation to female domestic servants in eighteenth-century Britain, Hill holds that “it seemed very natural that masters – and their sons – should regard their servants as sexually available. Female servants existed, it was held by many, for their masters’ convenience” (1996, p. 49). Upon the discovery of pregnancy, however, maids were immediately dismissed and driven to prostitution (Hill, 1999, p. 100).<sup>1</sup> Adamson runs into a rape scene in Bredely Hall: he sees Edgar raping a very young maid, Amy.

Inside the scullery was Edgar, bending over the sink, his back to William. In Edgar’s grasp, William saw slowly, was . . . Amy, whose curls had become brighter and thicker over the Summer, though her face remained white and pointed. Edgar had bent her backwards, and had one hand over her mouth and one thrust into her bodice. His buttocks swelled behind him: his genitals were pushed up against Amy’s skirts.

1 Bridget Hill holds that “forced to leave their places, ex-domestic servants comprised the largest group of prostitutes. In the 1850s [William] Acton wrote [in *Prostitution Considered in the Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects*] of domestic servants who became pregnant and who were ‘generally driven headlong to the streets for support of themselves and their babies.’ Domestic service seems to have been one of the main sources of women who moved into prostitution during the mid-Victorian period” (1999, p. 100).

....

Edgar withdrew his arm from her clothing with the deliberation of a trout-tickler leaving a trout stream. His fingermarks could be seen on Amy's skin, round her mouth and chin. She gasped.

....

Edgar said, 'The servants in this house are no concern of yours, Adamson. You do not pay their wages, and I'll thank you to not interfere with them.'

'That little creature is no more than a child,' said William (Byatt, 1992, p. 123-4).

Defoe's remarks in *Everybody's Business is Nobody's Business* indicate that what seems to contribute tremendously to the naturalization (and thereby legitimization) of a maid's sexual abuse by the master is the "artless sincerity of a plain, grave, and good wife." Afraid to "smutch" (in Adamson's words) the "pure" wife, the master can set "his desires alooose" upon a young maid. The figure of a "pert" mistress, such as Eugenia, however, undermines the male "excuse" in this narrative that was in circulation from the eighteenth century onward. The scene Adamson runs into in the scullery, therefore, appears fully and clearly as the rape of a female child-servant.

In *OED* "alabaster" is defined as "a compact, fine-textured usually white and translucent gypsum." The same dictionary defines "translucent" by stressing its difference from the quality of being "transparent" and I think this distinction matters in the way in which the (translucent) Alabasters in "Morpho Eugenia" are portrayed. According to *OED*, "translucent" is an object "allowing the passage of light, yet diffusing it so as not to render bodies lying beyond clearly visible; semi-transparent." By the end of the novella, Matty and other servants in the house resolve to make Adamson see in plain daylight the "bodies lying beyond clearly visible." One of the servants, "a Bredely stable lad," finds Adamson in a neighboring village and tells him "'You are asked to come back to Miss Eugenia, please.'" When he inquires if his wife is ill, the stable boy responds "'I don't think it can be anything bad or them as they gave me the message'd've said, but that was all. You are asked to come back to Miss Eugenia'" (Byatt, 1992, p. 169). Arriving in Bredely Hall soon, Adamson runs into Eugenia's maid first:

'Is my wife well?'

I think so, Sir.'

'Where is she?'

'In her room, Sir, I think,' said the young woman, unsmiling. 'I brushed her hair, took away her breakfast, and she told me she was not to be disturbed until after dinner. But that is where she is, I believe.'

There was something odd about the girl's manner. Something furtive, apprehensive, and also excited. She lowered her eyes demurely and went on down the stairs (1992, p. 169).



The maid's "odd" behavior stems from her being a part of the plan designed and carried out by the servants in the Bredely Hall, or rather "the invisible people," as Matty explains to Adamson later on, who "know everything that goes on," to make him see the truth about his wife's relationship with her step brother (1992, p. 177). Entering his wife's room in Bredely Hall, Adamson finds Eugenia "lying back in her bed, largely naked" and "standing next to bed, clothed in a shirt and nothing else" is Edgar (1992, p. 170).

Interestingly, in "Morpho Eugenia," the parties associated with hierarchical categories of "whiteness" and "darkness" do not change: both masters/mistresses and servants in Bredely Hall continue to be characterized by being "white" and "dark," respectively. The Alabasters' servants emerge from "the dark depths behind the servants' door" (1992, p. 26); Matty, at the outset of her acquaintance with Adamson, is described through his eyes in stark contrast to luminous Alabaster girls. "She stood in the shadows in the doorway, a tall, thin dark figure, in a musty black gown . . . Her face was thin and unsmiling, her hair dark under a plain cap, her skin dusky too" (1992, p. 31). Yet, "whiteness" is emptied of its association with "moral superiority" and luminosity emerges as a quality that could obstruct clear vision whereas "darkness" is foregrounded as a quality that can contribute to visibility. In *OED* "matt" is defined as "without luster, dull; unpolished." In that sense, it is precisely what "alabaster" is not as it can be observed through the contrasting ways in which Eugenia Alabaster and Matty appear. "Matty" also suggests the word "matte," which means, among other things, "a mask used to obscure or shade an image, or part of an image." Matty and other servants in Bredely Hall are impervious to the luster of the Alabasters; their eyes are not dazzled and this makes them omniscient.

If read from within the framework provided by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* regarding the relationship between "knowledge" and "power," servants' empowerment in Byatt's text appears to enter into a remarkable dialogue with "power" constituted by numerous conduct books written for servants particularly over the late colonial period. According to Foucault, "Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (1977, p. 27). "Morpho Eugenia," therefore, points to the master/servant relationship as a site constitutive not only of the power/knowledge that is used to "regulate" servants' conduct but also as a site where servants' labor entails knowledge of and thereby power over masters. Matty tells Adamson "now and then *the house* simply decides that something must happen" (Byatt, 1992, 177). Matty's use of "the house" in place of "servants" emphasizes the centrality of servants' position in the household in that their labor provides them with an agency to manipulate the goings-on of the house.

Throughout the narrative, the reader is frequently reminded of the role of servants' labor in the running of Bredely Hall. At the end of his first day in the Alabaster household, for instance, Adamson runs into a servant girl in his room: "Although it was well after midnight when he returned to his room, there was a thin, silent housemaid waiting to

bring him hot water, and to warm his sheets, whisking past him with downturned eyes on noiseless feet" (1992, p. 9). Getting up earlier than usual one day, Adamson comes across "a very different population from the daylight one": servants, who are required to be "invisible" during the day, rush around the house very early in the morning to finish their tasks before the Alabasters wake up. Adamson notices that "some were no more than children, hardly different from the little girls in the nursery, except that the latter were delicately swathed in petticoats, and frills, and soft festoons of muslin, and these were for the most part skinny, with close-fitting, unornamental bodices and whisking dark skirts, wearing formidably starched white caps over their hair" (1992, p. 57). Byatt's novella foregrounds the exploitation of child domestic labor in another instance as well. Getting up at five-thirty, Adamson sees a housemaid, who "was no more than a child," with two large buckets full of beetles she collected and "boiled, and fast, before the gentry gets out of bed" (1992, p. 87).

"Morpho Eugenia" renders visible the labor of domestic workers in the making of a country house such as Bredely Hall. Unlike its nineteenth-century counterparts, Byatt's novella, which "ostensibly reads as a Victorian romance" (Weinroth, 2005, p. 188), provides the reader with a view of the country house as seen from "below." We are made to see what the servants see: buckets, for example, containing "a seething mass of black beetles, several inches deep, stumbling and waving legs and feelers, slimed with something glutinous," which turns out to be the molasses the housemaid puts in buckets as a trap. Beetles "fall in and can't right themselves. And then I have to take them out and pour boiling water on them . . . I hate the smell," the servant girl tells Adamson (Byatt, 1992, p.87). I think, what is also rendered visible in this passage, besides the domestic servant's labor, is the unsettling imperial history crystallized in a household commodity, molasses/sugar, which became "a staple article of diet" across all social classes in Britain as early as the mid eighteenth century (Sheridan, 1974, p. 21). Consonant with Byatt's overall concern in "Morpho Eugenia" to represent the domestic sphere as a site deeply informed by imperialism, the image of black beetles trapped in buckets containing molasses seems to be a metonymy for slave ships that operated for three hundred years to trade African slaves with commodities such as sugar, molasses, coffee, tea, and cocoa *and* to make them work on colonial plantations. It was through the slave's labor that the British were able to consume sugar. Yet, as in the case of the domestic servant's labor that is rendered invisible, the violent history of slave trade and labor, too, are condemned to invisibility. In Byatt's novella, however, both forms of labor are brought to the fore.

In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams encourages the reader to "think it [the British country house] through as labour and see how long and systematic the exploitation and seizure must have been, to rear that many [country] houses, on that scale" (1975, p. 105). Williams emphasizes that these "great" houses were not just built for the "effect from the inside out" but also for "the other effect, from the outside looking in," in that to create the effect on the part of the onlookers of "a visible stamping of power: a social disproportion which was meant to impress and overawe . . . a mutually competitive but still uniform exposition, at every turn, of an established and commanding class

power” (1975, p. 106). In *Out of Place*, Ian Baucom finds Williams’s otherwise incisive reading, characterized by his “fine sense of moral outrage,” lacking particularly in its attention to the role of empire in the order these houses “at once assert and represent:” “Williams is of course right to insist on our seeing the national relations of domination and dispossession that these country houses so self-consciously represent. But, as Edward Said has demonstrated in *Culture and Imperialism*,<sup>2</sup> it is also necessary to consider their locations within a vaster imperial cartography” (1999, p. 170). Following Baucom, it can be held that Byatt’s novella locates Bredely Hall “within a vaster imperial cartography” by drawing attention to its building blocks cemented by hierarchical power relations within “domestic” as well as global spheres. Offering the reader a vision of the country house as seen through labor in its entanglement with global hierarchies, “Morpho Eugenia” disrupts the “consolidated vision”<sup>3</sup> of empire and servants that inform its nineteenth-century counterparts: the imperial scope of the domestic ideology is rendered visible through parallelisms drawn between the role of the labor of domestic servant figures and that of the colonized in the sustenance of an English country house. Furthermore, representing an upper-class English domestic life in terms of its remarkable similarities to practices that can be observed in “wild” nature, “Morpho Eugenia” reveals and disrupts the workings of hegemonic ideologies that contributed over the colonial period to the hegemonic representation of the domestic sphere and Empire as sites shaped by mutual familial love and responsibility.

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2 In his analysis of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* in *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said demonstrates the novel’s implication in “the rationale for imperialist expansion” by drawing parallels between Sir Thomas’s maintaining control over his colonial domain, Antigua plantations, and his ruling Mansfield Park. According to Said, Austen “synchronizes domestic with international authority” in that “to hold and rule Mansfield Park is to hold and rule an imperial estate in close, not to say inevitable association with it” (87). He also emphasizes that, despite Austen’s “incidental,” “only in passing” references to Antigua, it is the family’s colonial possessions that sustain their life in Mansfield Park: “According to Austen we are to conclude that no matter how isolated and insulated the English place (e.g., Mansfield Park), it requires overseas sustenance” (89). The country house in the novel then emerges as a “domestic” place deriving not only capital from the empire but also principles of governance.

3 In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said holds: “As a reference, as a point of definition, as an easily assumed place of travel, wealth, and service, the empire functions for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction, very much like the servants in grand households and in novels, whose work is taken for granted but scarcely ever more than named” (63).

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