A GENERAL BACKGROUND OF KATE MORTON'S THE CLOCKMAKER'S DAUGHTER

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Abstract: History. Mystery. Memory. Secrets. The interweaving of the present and the past. The knots and tangles of the family. All these fascinating aspects have a great power to guide the reader to that literary desire to immerse in Kate Morton's books. Generally speaking, Morton is such a beloved and appreciated author because she has the power to take her readers out of the comfort zone, a quality that is not easily found in many other writers. The Clockmaker's Daughter presents a story hidden in a labyrinth where the characters' secrets are kept until the very end. The novel should be read at a certain time, when the reader's soul is thirsty, or perhaps when he needs a book that does not let him be discovered so easily.
The study of literature is considered a wide-ranging field which encompasses a vast knowledge of both texts and contexts. In other words, there are plenty of aspects that should be taken into consideration to understand not only the text, but also the author who wrote it. It is also essential to know what kind of person composed the text and what had driven him or her to write. In other words, personality plays an essential role in the process of comprehending Morton's story.

Keywords: literature, fiction, secrets, flashbacks, mystery

Kate Morton is a prominent figure in Australian literature and she belongs to the 21st century fiction literary movement. She is the author of six remarkable novels, which have been translated into thirty-four languages and published in forty-two countries.

The writer's most appreciated work is perhaps *The Clockmaker's Daughter*. It can be easily likened to an old chamber, where boxes of different sizes and shapes can be found. Time has left a few tracks on them in its passing. Consequently, in the entire box covered with dust there lie memories and thoughts of all the people who have been there at a certain point in their life. Each box must be taken one by one, cleaned of the remaining dust and put in order. Only after all these stages, the reader is assigned the task to discover who they belonged to. *The Clockmaker's Daughter* is put together in a layered form, its elements are measured, time alternated in an authentic and intelligent manner, and the Australian author provides the reader the opportunity to be the one who uncovers the key to the mystery.

Published in 2018, *The Clockmaker's Daughter* is an ambitious, complex novel with a remarkable cast of characters, a rich and enchanting historical fiction that gently takes its author to her very best. Up to this moment, it is her latest novel, which has been acknowledged by many critics and readers as a captivating and mysterious work that expresses deep emotion. Kate Morton decided to depict the story as a multi-layered literary novel. Therefore, it is untangled gradually and, differently from most stories, in *The Clockmaker's Daughter* the reader has the uncommon opportunity to find out what truly happened without reaching the final pages of the book. Morton is one of the very few gifted writers who tell secrets that are exposed and developed upon other secrets. She chooses a narrative that unfolds back and forth in time, many layered stories that, although dissimilar, they are all vital to the whole narrative.

Set in England over a vast span of years, more exactly 157, the action takes place from 1862 to 2017. In the summer of 1862, the talented and passionate painter Edward Radcliffe took a group of young artists upon Birchwood Manor, an isolated house located on the banks

of the Upper Thames. Their plan was to spend a whole summer month, being kept apart from the company of others, but focusing on their artistic works, in an atmosphere of inspiration and creativity. But, many bizarre things took place during those fateful days. Radcliffe's life completely turned for the worse quickly, as a woman was killed, another one disappeared and, on top of everything else, a beautiful heirloom of inestimable worth was missing.

A century and half later, more precisely in 2017, the writer shifts her focus to Elodie Winslow, a historian, archivist and the daughter of a remarkable musician who passed away many years ago. While working in Joseph Stratton's archive, the young woman finds a leather satchel, which she thought at first that it might be empty. However, it contained two captivating objects. The first one "was a delicate silver frame, small enough to fit within her hand, containing a photograph of a woman. She was young, with long hair, light but not blonde, half of which was wound into a loose knot on the top of her hear; her gaze was direct, her chin slightly lifted, her cheekbones light Her lips were set in an attitude of intelligent engagement, perhaps even defiance" (**Morton, 2019: 13**). Elodie was truly fascinated by that antique photograph of the woman in Victorian clothes.

But, to her surprise, the second object was not a journal, but a sketchbook. It contained "a fragment of paper, torn from elsewhere, slipped from between two pages. A single line raced across it: *I love her, I love her, I love her, and if I cannot have her I shall surely go mad, for when I am not with her I fear –*" (**14**). Another discovery was a drawing of a great, old house located along a river. The sketch was highly elaborated and depicted "a river scene, with a tree in the foreground and a distant wood visible across a broad field" (**15**). Thus, "behind a copse on the right-hand side, the twin-gabled roofline of a house could be seen, with eight chimneys and an ornate weathervane featuring the sun and moon and other celestial emblems" (**15**).

Elodie felt a strong connection to the sketch and the photograph, "she felt a pang of déjà vu so strong it exerted a physical pressure around her chest" (**15**), as the house reminded her of an identical one from a story her mother used to tell her many times when she was just a small girl, citing a weather vane. She was aware of the fact that it was a place she had visited only in her mind, but "the words came to her then as clear as birdsong at dawn: *Down the winding lane and across the meadow board, to the river they went with their secrets and their sword*" (**15**).

Apparently, the children's tale was reason enough for the archivist to launch an investigation, who manifested an unusual curiosity to explain the unknown. She wanted to find out who the woman in the photograph is, which are the deepest secrets of the manor, and, if any of these mysteries has something in common with her mother. At this stage of the novel, Elodie is engaged to be married to Alastair, a manipulative man who lacks sympathy, and who is beholden to his mother. However, instead of preparing for her wedding, she finds the solution to travel and visit the mansion, and only when some of the house's secrets are uncovered, she truly understands that she cannot marry Alastair, because she does not love him. In the first place, Elodie is quite unfamiliar with her own bond with Birchwood Manor but, as the investigations continue, they will soon have an extraordinary impact on both her life and future.

The weekend spent by Radcliffe and his friends at Birchwood Manor one hundred years ago was not presented incidentally in the introduction. The consequences of those days can be better understood and felt in the present, and the reader can easily notice that the events which drew later generations and even changed their lives are the ones that took place in the summer of 1862.

In the following pages, Morton utilizes flashbacks to distinct years in order to illustrate the history of the people who lived in the house at some time in their lifetime, and to illuminate the mystery of the ghost who still exists in that place. In *The Clockmaker's Daughter*, the primary narrator is the spirit of Birdie, who depicts in words all her earliest recollection of events up to the moment when she finally became a ghost. But, in addition to this principal

narrator, there are other voices present in the story, distinct personalities who belong to different spans. However, the context is understood through the spirit's memories. As it was previously mentioned, the summer of 1862 is the first and one of the most important time settings in the story. As the narrative moves further, the author chooses the late 1850's, 1860's, both post World War I and World War II, and also 2017 as other significant time periods in her novel.

Birdie, who calls herself the clockmaker's daughter, starts her narrative journey explaining that they "came to Birchwood Manor because Edward said that it was haunted" (**Morton, 2019: 4**). Then she describes her quiet, solitary existence experienced at Birchwood. After many summers spent there, "I've become a creature of habit, following the same gentle rhythms from one day into the next. I haven't a lot of choice. I rarely have visitors and those that do come these days don't stay long. I am not a good host. This is not an easy place to live" (**32**).

Later in the story, the author explains that Birdie's father chose to call her like this because, even if her real name was beautiful, "it was the name of a grown-up lady, the sort of name that wore long skirts and fine silks, but had not the wings to fly" (**79**). She was named after her mother's father, because they thought it would be essential to her to carry something of her family. Birdie calls herself the clockmaker's daughter, and there is a whole story behind its significance. Yet, in brief, she got this nickname because of her father, who was a clockmaker by trade and who brilliantly explained her what time meant. For him, "time was an idea: it had no end and no beginning; it could not be seen or heard or smelled. It could be measured, sure enough, but no words had been found to explain precisely what it was" (**80**). Although her mother died, Birdie led a simple and peaceful life alongside his father.

But, one day, he decided to leave her under some unfortunate circumstances, in the case of Mrs Mack. It was one of the numerous moments when she experienced helplessness. She even felt that she was born twice: "once, to my mother and father, in a small room in our family home in Fulham, on a fresh summer's night when the moon was full and the stars were bright and the river was a shimmery-skinned snake beneath the window (**Morton, 2019: 87**), and later on, "once again, to Mrs Mack, when I was seven years old, in her house tucked above the shop selling birds and cages, in the area of Covent Garden referred to as the Seven Dials" (**87**). Back then, the woman obliged Birdie, an innocent, inexperienced seven-year-old girl, to pick pockets in order to earn a living. She was a thief and a pickpocket under the name of Lily Millington.

All the time that she was picking pockets in London, she had the belief that her father abandoned her. It was only the day she died, when Birdie discovered she was mistaken, and the real truth was that her father had been actually killed by a horse. Later on, Birdie made an acquaintance of Edward Radcliffe, during the days she was working for Mrs Mack. She did not introduce herself as Birdie, but she chose the name of a girl who was also working for Mrs Mack, but who unfortunately died shortly after they got acquainted. Birdie followed the girl's advice not to use her real name and, from that moment on, everyone would know her as Lily Millington.

Back then, Edward belonged to a widely known group of artists, having the name of Magenta Brotherhood. Edward liked Lily so much that he provided Mrs Mack an exorbitant amount of money in return for letting the woman in the springtime of life working as his model. The offer was finally accepted, during the days spent together, "there was no clock inside the studio. There was no time. Working together, day after day, the world beyond its walls dissolved" (**326**). Later on, accompanied by some close friends of Edward, the two young people spent one last and unforgettable summer at Birchwood Manor, which, in a flash, unfortunately guided Lily to a speedy end.

As the reader delves further into the story, he will meet Ada Lovegrove and Lucy

Radcliffe, other two emblematic characters. In 1899, Ada was studying at Birchwood Manor, which functioned as a school during those times, a school constituted by Lucy Radcliffe. She belonged to the particular category of visitors with whom Birdie had contact the most. All along those years spent in the manor, she was treated in an overbearing manner, suffering which was finally brought to an end when a girl died of suffocation under water.

In this passage of the book, Morton beautifully explains the context in which Ada eventually felt a real connection with Birdie. One day, Ada was nearly drowned in the middle of a boat accident. She could not swim, and then the most unusual thing happened, "as her brain was burning, she saw something ahead of her, a bright blue shining light, a jewel, a moon, and she knew, somehow, that is she just reached out and grabbed it, the bright blue light would show her the way" (**222**). Another visitor at Birchwood Manor was Leonard Gilbert, a man who made an appearance there in 1928, while he was writing a book about Edward Radcliffe and Lily Millington. During his stay at Birchwood Manor, Leonard expressed his deepest emotions as regards the love affair with his brother's fiancée. Because of that problematic relationship, Leonard felt completely responsible for the fact that his brother, Tom, got killed during the war. But, except this, the manor had other plans for Leonard. It linked him with Juliet.

Then, the story jumps several years later, in 1940. Accompanied by her three children, Juliet sought refuge and safety at Birchwood Manor, simply because their home had been completely destroyed by a bomb blast. The writer does not stop here, and she decided to create a darker and more dramatic atmosphere, by informing the reader that Juliet's husband was killed during the cruel war. Similar to the connection between Ada and Birdie, another one establishes forty years later, between Juliet's youngest son, Tip, and Birdie. At the very beginning, Juliet did not believe in the existence of her son's friend, until she met Ada at The Swan, who confessed to her and admitted that Tip was in fact, right. And then, shortly thereafter, Tip and Ada were found involved and absorbed in deep conversation.

However, the most interesting part of the novel is narrated through the eyes of Lucy Radcliffe. In order to present Edward's sister version of the story, the author decides to jump back to the summer of 1862. Back then, Lucy was only thirteen years old, and she was so innocent and naive that she really thought that a true friendship between her and Edward would last forever. She could not imagine living without her brother but, unfortunately, things changed a bit after he had met Lily Millington. But, even if she hated with all her heart the way Edward looked at the model, under no circumstances she could hate Lily.

One day, Lucy and Lily were alone at the manor, when they saw a man standing in front of Edward's painting. It was Mrs Mack's son, Martin and, coincidence or not, Lucy took part in their conversation about the heirloom diamond and an escape to America. The thirteen- year-old boy saw uncertainty and fear in Lily's eyes, but in a moment of despair, both girls managed to hide in two secret compartments in the house. Martin shot Edward's fiancée, Fanny Brown. Everyone supposed that Lily Millington had been involved in the robbery, and, besides that, they truly thought she was the one who had stolen an heirloom diamond, the Radcliffe Blue. The regrettable story of Birdie is interwoven with other characters' lives, which are wedged together at the broken ends anywhere else but at Birchwood Manor.

In the meantime, it was fate that made Lucy suffer a head injury and not remember what had actually happened that day at Birchwood Manor. The police supposed that the two people, Lily and Martin had been planning to steal the diamond Radcliffe Blue. That was a fair assumption, simply because three key elements could not be found in any place: the diamond, the tickets to America, which were bought by Radcliffe for him and the model, and, most importantly, Lily. Because of her lack of memory and, despite several failed attempts, Lucy could not demonstrate what happened in fact, and she had no other option than to believe the police version.

It took Lucy many years until she finally found the suitcase that she had previously brought with her to Birchwood Manor. That summer and the terrible event that took place that day, made its strong mark on Lucy, and, for the purpose of forgetting all that had happened, she had never unpacked the suitcase. But, in the end, the inevitable happened, "a hard, round item at the bottom of a pocket. Even as she told herself that it was one of the river stones she'd collected at Birchwood Manor, Lucy knew better" (**Morton, 2019: 550**). She was immediately transported in the past, and "her stomach knotted and an instant wave of fear flooded her system. She didn't need to look. It was as if by touching it a rope had been puller and a curtain lifted, and now light shone onto the dusty stage of her memory" (**550**).

The Radcliffe Blue was finally found by her inside that significant travelling case. And, in one second, the entire episode with the diamond came into her mind. She remembered that she "had been still looking at herself in the mirror when Lily Millington appeared behind her" (**551**). In a fraction of a second, "she'd slipped the necklace from her throat and been about to put it back inside the box when the man, Martin, arrived and tried to take Lily with him. Lucy had dropped the Blue into her pocket instead. And there it was still, exactly where she'd put it" (**551**).

Twenty years later, Lucy returned to Birchwood Manor, threw the Radcliffe Blue pendant into the river and, "as soon as she had looked inside the secret chamber, Lucy closed the panel again. Emotions, supressed for so long, overwhelmed her and she let out a single great hiccupping gulp of grief" (**Morton, 2019: 554**). She was suffering "for all those years since finding the diamond, in which she'd carried alone the secret knowledge of what she'd done; for Lily Millington, who had been kind to her and who had loved her brother; and most of all, for Edward, with whom she had broken faith, leaving him alone in the world by believing the inspector's story" (**554**).

Thus, after so many years, Lucy was finally able to confirm her greatest fear. The only thing of value she could do at that very moment was to burry Lily's remains. She ordered a coffin, and filled it with Lily's mortal remains, together with the woman's white dress and a letter that detailed several facts about her life. Then, she planted a Japanese maple tree on top, one of Edward's favourite trees, and, being engrossed in immeasurable sorrow, she whispered her real name, "your name was Albertine Bell. Birdie, to those who loved her" (**560**).

A hundred and fifty-five years had passed since Lucy had buried Lily's remains. Jack Rolands, the man hired to find the Radcliffe Blue, and Elodie, were at Birchwood Manor when a severe storm uprooted the maple tree. At first, when they saw the ancient tree pointing its roots towards the sky, they started joking, without even thinking about what they would discover.

The final chapters of the novel reveal another crucial secret. After considerably delay, the reader finds out that the Radcliffe Blue had come into the hands of Tip when he was only five, and "he could still remember the night the woman, Ada, told him about it. They'd been sitting out the front of the pub in Birchwood; it was summer and dusk, so there hadn't been a lot of light, but enough for him to show her some of the rocks and sticks he'd been collecting" (**572**). After decades, Tip decided that it was time to pass the valuable pendant to Elodie. Morton's ending is emotional and satisfying, as it brings together many characters and facets of the story. When Elodie and Tip finally link the remaining puzzle pieces, the reader can highly experiences a sense of contentment.

Personality traits can be defines as "those *general, internal and comparative dispositions* that we attribute to people in our initial efforts to sort individuals into meaningful behavioral categories to *account for consistencies we perceive or expect in behavior from one situation to the next over time*" (**McAdams, 2009: 5**). In order to accomplish their efforts to outline an all-embracing set of characteristics of a person's individuality, personality psychologists take advantage of the concept of trait. George Kelly's Personal Construct Theory

(PCT) is mainly based upon the importance of thinking. In this context, after a close investigation, behaviour is established according to the way in which distinct events and situations are interpreted, predicted, and finally, evaluated. His theory belongs to the distinguished category named cognitive theories, which emphasizes the original idea that behaviour is not produced by the mind, but it is rather learnt through experience.

Therefore, George Kelly's theory of personality can be easily applied on Kate Morton's last novel, as she focuses on the characters' inner thoughts, feelings and their personal experiences. She even allows them to observe, understand and interpret various events of their life in their own way without establishing any boundaries. The book has several different protagonists and this is the main reason why the story jumps back and forth. Although the reader is continuously aware that the characters are in some way linked, they have different personalities. Each character who steps foot in Birchwood Manor inevitably becomes part of the story. Older and newer generations are tangled to each other, in order to get home accompanied by a message of timelessness.

Birchwood Manor itself is a character in the novel, a place of safety and protection, and why not, a light in the characters' inner darkness depicted in the novel. The rural house is at the heart of all connections and it is filled with lyrical physical descriptions: "It is a strange house, built to be purposely confusing. Staircases that turn at unusual angles, all knees and elbows and uneven treads; windows that do not line up no matter how one squints at them; floorboards and wall panels with clever concealments" (**Morton, 2019: 4**). The landscape from the attic windows is breathtaking, as, on a clear day, "one can see over the River Thames and all the way to the distant mountains. Ribbons of mauve and green, crags of chalk that stagger towards the clouds, and warm air that lends the whole an iridescence" (**5**). Several hundred pages later, in a letter sent by Radcliffe in January 1861, he wrote: "I have bought a house. A rather charming house, which although not grand is of elegant proportions. It sits like a humble, dignified bird, within its own bend of the river, on the edge of a woods by a small but perfectly formed village" (**255**).

The narrator is a ghost, a reliable voice that guides the reader through the centuries and, not only once, she assures them that she remembers everything. Her spirit resides at Birchwood Manor and she makes her presence noticed in the 1860s. The ghost does not reveal her real identity and the reader can identify her by a fake name, Lily Millington. Moreover, she explains that her father always named her Birdie Bell. In Chapter Thirty-One, Edward's sister is the one who mentions her real name, which is Albertine Bell.

Before she became a ghost, she had been an orphan, and this unfortunate experience is also reflected in her personality. At the beginning of the story, Birdie Bell is an innocent, trusting and respectful young girl. Because her mother died and her father entrusted her to Mrs Mack to look after her, she has no other choice than to manage the situation by herself. A change in Birdie's personality is visible during the days spent in Mrs Mack's house, a time when she was a pickpocket and when she learnt three valuable things. Firstly, "privilege makes a person, especially a woman, trusting. Nothing in her experience prepares her for the possibility that anyone might mean her harm" (**169**); secondly, "there is nothing so sure as that a gentleman likes to be seen to help" (**169**); and finally, "the act of illusion is knowing precisely what people expect to see and then ensuring that they see it" (**Morton, 2019: 169**).

However, her major personality change comes on a warm evening in 1861, when she is only a month from turning seventeen years old. That day, as she confesses, she was born again. She finally meets Edward at the Theatre Royal in Durry Lane, and he expresses his wish to paint her portrait. Although Birdie decides not to reveal her real name, but to hide under the false name, Lily Millington, her personal identity hardly changes at all. Identity represents "an individual's sense of self defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations

(e.g., ethnicity) and social roles" (**APA Dictionary of Psychology: 519**). Additionally, "identity involves a sense of continuity, or the feeling that one is the same person today that one was yesterday or last year" (**519**). In terms of personal identity, by the time Birdie enters Edward's circle of friends, she does not try to change anything of what she truly is.

As a ghost, she is quiet, solitary, melancholic and pessimistic: "It has been a quiet existence, here at Birchwood. Many summers have passed since ours, and I've become a creature of habit, following the same gentle rhythms from one day into next. I haven't a lot of choice" (**Morton, 2019: 32**); she does not have so many visitors "and those that do come these days don't stay long. I am not a good host. This is not an easy place to live" (**32**). She has an episodic memory, and therefore, she possesses a remarkable ability to recollect personally experienced events related to a particular time and place. The spirit is observant, self-aware and somehow she has abandoned hope without feeling any remorse:

"I do not wish to set free. I am of this house, this house that Edward loved; I am this house.

I am each whorl in each piece of timber.

I am every nail.

I am the wick in the lamp, the hook for a coat.

I am the tricky lock on the front door.

I am the tap that drips, the red rust circle of the porcelain sink.

I am the crack in the bathroom tile.

I am the chimney pot and the black snaking drainpipe.

I am the air within each room.

I am the hands of the clock and the space in between.

I am the noise you hear when you think you're hearing nothing at all.

I am the light in the window that you know cannot be there.

I am the stars in the dark when you feel yourself alone" (**582**).

As already mentioned, Kelly's theory is largely based on thinking, and without a doubt, the character who best fits his theory is Birdie's spirit. The author chooses her to play the role of the contemplative woman, and, moreover, she is the character who channels all her attention on the people who live at Birchwood Manor.

The owner of Birchwood Manor, Edward Radcliffe, is a distinguished member of the Magenta Brotherhood. He is an exceptionally talented artist, whose character is combined with his fellow artists, who are known for their obsession with truth, beauty, memory and nature. Edward is deeply in love with that antique house and without any doubts there is a special connection between them: "there is something else within the house that draws me, something old and essential and not entirely of this world. It has called to me for a long time, you see, for my new house and I are not strangers" (**Morton, 2019: 255**).

If the reader closely analyzes his personality, he should find out that apart from being a handsome and educated man, he is also caring and attentive when it comes to Lily Millington: "He did not want me to get cold, he said; I was to tell him if I became uncomfortable. He helped me to remove the cloak, and when his fingers brushed my neck I felt my skin heat" (**325**). Besides, he has that special gift of storytelling, and when people are nearby, it is completely impossible not to listen to him: "Edward was like no one I had met before. When he spoke, it was impossible not to listen. He was wholly committed to whatever it was that he was doing or feeling or expressing at the time" (**326**).

Chapter One introduces Elodie Winslow, a thirty-year-old archivist who pieces together the past. In terms of personality traits, she is an intelligent, thoughtful, quiet woman who gets involved in a family-related investigation. Elodie discovers a sketchbook of a house that reminds her of a similar one from a story that her mother used to tell her when she was a child. By seeing it, she feels a strong, personal need to investigate the past and therefore, she decides

to visit Birchwood Manor.

Lucy Radcliffe, Ada Lovegrove, Lauren Adler, Jack Rolands, Leonard Gilbert, Juliet or Tip are other characters who visited the house or even lived there at some point in their life. The old house accumulates the experiences of each generation, and the reader can solve the mystery and complete the puzzle only if they place together everyone's stories.

Kate Morton proves to be a skilful writer in blending not only the narrative, but also the complicated plans that are chosen with such alacrity every single time. Everyone who decides to get closer to her book, turns out to be constantly fond of her natural style, which encourages the reader to turn page after page.

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