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INTRODUCTION 1

Summarizes Byatt's life and career, outlines this Guide's approach and the main areas of critical debate it discusses.

CHAPTER ONE 7

Autobiography, Art and Gender: *Shadow of a Sun* (1964) and *The Game* (1967)

Starts with review responses to Byatt's first two novels, *Shadow of a Sun* and *The Game*. Examines the autobiographical approaches of Joanne V. Creighton's and Guiliana Giobbi's essays, which both connect the sisters in *The Game* to Byatt and her own sister, Margaret Drabble. Considers critical accounts of Byatt's portrayal of the artist figure and the nature of artistic vision, including Christien Franken's feminist argument that Byatt's engagement with the figure of the artist imagines alternative models for female creativity.

CHAPTER TWO 22

The Past, Language and Reality: *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978)

Considers the review response to *Virgin*, which highlighted its position within a broader project of historical fiction and established the terms for the 'characters versus intellect' debate that recurs in responses to later Byatt works. D. J. Taylor draws out the novel's status as a historical fiction, positioning Byatt as a chronicler of post-World-War-II British life. Moves on to consider critical treatments of Byatt's engagement with realism. Alexa Alfer connects the historical project of *Virgin* to its engagement with realism while Elisabeth Anne Leonard argues that *Virgin* transgresses the boundaries of realism, most obviously in Marcus's experiences. The figure of Marcus raises the issue of artistic vision and the struggle of the artist to represent reality. Juliet Dusinberre suggests that the characters' concern with the possibilities of depicting reality in art mirror Byatt's own concerns as a writer. Chapter concludes by examining Judith Plotz's view of Marcus as a challenge to the Romantic ideal of the visionary child.

CHAPTER THREE 34

Verbal and Visual Art: *Still Life* (1985)

Opens with the review response to *Still Life*, paying particular attention to Michael Westlake's examination of the novel's engagement with post-structuralist theory.

Continues with critical accounts of the position of painting in *Still Life*; both Michael Worton and Sue Sorensen explore the tension between verbal and visual art in Byatt's novel by analysing its connections to Vincent van Gogh. Moves on to consider responses to Stephanie's death, most of which find no meaning or comfort in it. Sue Sorensen's essay presents a more sustained engagement with the issue of death, arguing that Byatt deliberately tries to capture this meaninglessness. This focus on death is balanced by Tess Cosslett's feminist account of the depiction of childbirth in *Still Life*. Chapter concludes with a brief consideration of Byatt's article 'Still Life/Nature morte' where she discusses the stylistic approach of *Still Life*.

CHAPTER FOUR

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Postmodernism vs. Realism: *Possession: A Romance* (1990)

Examines key review responses to Byatt's most successful novel, *Possession*, drawing out the recurrent concern with its position in relation to realism and postmodernism which continues to dominate critical accounts of the novel. Jackie Buxton and Bo Lundén both distance *Possession* from postmodern discourses, claiming that it contains elements that remain unaccounted for by postmodernism. By contrast, Chris Walsh designates *Possession* a postmodern text because of its self-conscious concern with reading. Elisabeth Bronfen similarly prioritizes the postmodern elements of *Possession* although she sees the romance genre as giving Byatt a way to incorporate a moral view into postmodernism. For Susanne Becker, however, *Possession* suggests a movement beyond postmodernism in its incorporation of the gothic genre. Chapter concludes with a discussion of the Postscript; again critics who see it as a Victorian element of the novel (Buxton, Frederick M. Holmes) are juxtaposed with those who see it as postmodern (Shiller, Walsh).

CHAPTER FIVE

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The Presence of the Past: *Possession: A Romance* (1990)

Focuses on *Possession*'s position as a historical novel. Traces the accounts of Delvan Janik and Frederick M. Holmes who find it combines a self-reflexive awareness about history with a commitment to depicting the past. For Dana Shiller, however, Byatt's novel more properly belongs to the subgenre of neo-Victorian fiction, which is distanced from accounts of postmodern historical fiction. Moves on to critical accounts of the method of connecting with the past in *Possession*, its incorporation of textual remains. Suzanne Keen's account of 'romances of the archive' posits *Possession* as the exemplar of the subgenre and hints at the political uses of the past. Similarly, John J. Su suggests that the past can be used for political purposes, to reimagine social identities, as long as this begins from an engagement with the textual remains of the past. Both Louise Yelin and Richard Todd examine the politics of Byatt's representation of the Victorian era, suggesting that, despite some criticism of its gender politics, the Victorian era is prioritized over the twentieth century. Chapter concludes with Sue Sorensen's account of the 2000 film version of *Possession*, which she views as simplifying many of the concerns of the novel, particularly its feminist politics and its engagement with postmodernism.

Neo-Victorian Fiction: *Angels and Insects* (1992) and
The Biographer's Tale (2000)

Opens with the review response to *Angels and Insects*, which often judged it superior to *Possession*, then moves on to more sustained analyses of the novellas. Sally Shuttleworth positions 'Morpho Eugenia' as part of a subgenre of 'retro-Victorian fiction' nostalgically concerned with the Darwinian moment. Hilary M. Schor considers both novellas in terms of their strategy of 'ghost-writing', which incorporates the intertextual echoes of Victorian texts as well as Byatt's concern with 'reanimating' realism. Susan Poznar and Louisa Hadley focus on 'The Conjugal Angel's' engagement with spiritualism. For Poznar, the séances are a metaphor for Byatt's engagement with metaphoric language. Hadley draws out the connections between spiritualism and reading, suggesting that 'The Conjugal Angel' provides a model of the relationship to the past. Discussion then turns to Byatt's third neo-Victorian text, *The Biographer's Tale* which was also often judged against *Possession*, and generally found wanting. Chapter closes with Celia Wallhead's examination of the relationship between writing and self-identity in *The Biographer's Tale*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

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Language and Memory: *Babel Tower* (1996)

Begins with the review response to *Babel Tower*, which often saw it as marking a departure from the previous two novels in the quartet. The intellectualism that was felt to mar the first two novels is generally thought to dominate *Babel Tower*. Criticism of *Babel Tower* focuses on similar issues to accounts of *Virgin* and *Still Life*. Celia Wallhead examines *Babel Tower's* treatment of language, especially the relationship between language and truth, concluding that Byatt's work maintains a commitment to truth despite her awareness of postmodern scepticism. Wallhead's analysis of the multiple openings in *Babel Tower* provides a transition to Michael Noble on the nature of memory in the novel. Noble interprets the various openings as sites of memory, connecting them to the prologues in *Virgin* and *Still Life*.

CHAPTER EIGHT

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The Conclusion of the Quartet: *A Whistling Woman* (2002)

Opens with the reviews of *A Whistling Woman*, which generally judged it less successful than the first two novels. Some reviewers comment on the feminist concerns of the quartet, but most find the novel oddly lacking in its engagement with feminist issues. Chapter then turns to responses to the quartet as a whole. It begins with Byatt's article on the relationship between science and literature in the quartet; she suggests a shift from a focus on literature and language in the first two novels to a more overt concern with science in the latter two. Peter Preston draws out the connections, problematic for a female author, between the quartet and D. H. Lawrence. Ultimately, he claims that Lawrence provides a means for Byatt to connect with a tradition of Victorian women writers. Chapter concludes

by discussing various approaches to the quartet as a whole and drawing out the recurring view that there is a split, both thematic and stylistic, between its first two and last two novels.

CHAPTER NINE

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Fiction-Making, Fairy-Tales and Feminism: Short Stories

Examines criticism of Byatt's five short-story collections, starting with *Sugar and Other Stories* (1987), which was often seen in autobiographical terms. Explores three critical responses to the collection: Claude Maisonnat on the issue of mourning in 'The July Ghost'; Charlotte Sturgess on the nature of story-telling in the collection; and Jane Campbell on the relationship between art and life in 'Precipice-Encurled'. Reviews of Byatt's second collection, *The Matisse Stories* (1993), often considered its engagement with art. Sarah Fishwick analyses the relationship between art, space and feminist concerns in the stories. Byatt's third collection, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* (1994), was generally reviewed in terms of its relationship to fairytales. Annegret Maack explores the functions of story-telling in the title story, seeing it as both a story and a metafictional comment on story-telling. Jane Campbell is similarly concerned with story-telling, although she presents an explicitly feminist account of the collection's engagement with the fairytale genre. Since *Elementals: Stories of Fire and Ice* (1999) and *The Little Black Book of Stories* (2003) have received little critical attention, the focus is on the review response to these collections. Reviews of *Elementals* often suggest that the short-story form gives Byatt more freedom which permits a wit and vivacity absent from the densely intellectual novels. Similarly, *Little Black Book* is seen to mark a departure from Byatt's novelistic style in the transition to darker territories. Chapter concludes by summarizing the response to the short stories, suggesting that they share the thematic concerns of Byatt's novels but are marked by a difference in style.

CONCLUSION

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Draws out the main areas of criticism with which the Guide has been concerned: the role of the artist; the postmodernism versus realism debate; and Byatt's position in relation to feminism. Proposes that Byatt's novelistic output can be divided into three broad phases: her early fiction, the quartet and her neo-Victorian texts. It indicates some possible future directions for Byatt criticism.

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