



STUTTGART BOOK CLUB READING GUIDE

13. What relevance do the four reader's reports Frederica writes for Rupert Parrott's firm [pp. 151-56] have to Frederica's own life, and to the themes addressed in the novel itself?

14. The latter portion of *Babel Tower* contains large verbatim quotations from the two trials, Frederica's and Jude's. Reflecting on the way the legal experts distorted the truths of their lives, Frederica "sees herself as a caged or netted beast.... The net is made by words which do not describe what she feels is happening" [p. 326]. Is language by its very nature inadequate, or is its inadequacy the fault of people who manipulate it to achieve their own ends? What is the myth of the Tower of Babel, and why has Byatt chosen it as a metaphor--and a title--for her novel?

15. "I feel I'm on trial for reading books," Frederica says [p. 502]. Why are so many people in Frederica's world--Nigel, his family, even the lawyers and jury members during her trial--apparently threatened by intellectuals, particularly intellectual women? What separate aspects of British culture and society do the two principal families, the Reivers and the Potters, represent?

16. Frederica finds herself questioning "the Romantic desire for everything to be One--lovers, body and mind, life and work" [p. 361]. Does she conclude that the ideal of oneness is realizable or even desirable? How do the identical twins, John and Paul Ottokar, illustrate the ideas of oneness and separateness? What other images of oneness does Byatt invoke?

17. "The Church has always been about sex," says Canon Holly [p. 26], and later, "The Christian religion is an expression of the perception that what we now call sado-masochism is a central truth of our existence" [p. 555]. What does he mean by these statements? Do you find them credible?

Author Biography

A S. Byatt is a native of Yorkshire, England, born Antonia Susan Drabble in 1936. She has had a distinguished career as a literary critic and an academic, teaching English and American literature at University College, London, and she has published a book on the nineteenth century, *Unruly Times: Wordsworth and Coleridge in Their Time*; a collection of essays and book reviews, *Passions of the Mind*; and two books on the novelist Iris Murdoch. Although her interests are manifold, she has made Romantic and Victorian poetry her specialty. *Babel Tower* is the third of a planned tetralogy about the Potter family; the two earlier volumes were *The Virgin in the Garden* and *Still Life*. Byatt is the author of two collections of stories, *Sugar and Other Stories* and *The Matisse Stories*, two other novels, *Shadow of a Sun* and *Possession*, a spectacularly successful work that won the 1990 Booker Prize and the Irish Times/Aer Lingus International Fiction Prize and reached a large international readership. The *Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, two novellas, will be published in November 1997.