

Discussion Questions for *Possession* by A.S. Byatt

(Page references are to the hardback version published by Random House, copyright 1990, 555 pp. Some questions are adapted from Continuum Contemporaries Reader's Guide by Catherine Burgass.)

1. Did you like the book? If so, what was your favorite part of the book?
2. If not, why not?
3. Who was the most likeable character in the book? The least likeable? The most interesting?
4. Byatt's American publishers were worried that Roland's characters was not sufficiently attractive or heroic for American readers, and Byatt was asked to insert additional lines to make it clear that women found him attractive. Was this necessary?
5. There are parallels between Christabel and Maude. How are they alike? How are they not alike? How do the obstacles in their lives compare?
6. Did you skip parts of the novel? Which parts? Did you feel frustrated that the poetry and letters halted the narrative action?
7. Byatt makes many references to other works of literature. Did the author make you feel inferior? (Or did you get them all?)
8. Did anything happen or was anything said in the book that stuck with you?
9. Why do you think the author chose the title *Possession*?
10. *Possession* is subtitled "a romance". Why?
11. What did you think of the behavior of the two main characters in regards to fellow researchers? Were they justified?
12. I enjoyed this passage (p. 150):

When Maud drove home that first evening, the weather was already changing for the worse. Clouds were darkly gathering; she could see through the trees a full moon, which, because of some trick of the thickening air, seemed both far away and somehow condensed, an object round and small and dull. She drove through the park, much of which had been planted by that earlier Sir George who had married Christabel's sister Sophie, and had had a passion for trees, trees from all parts of the distant earth, Persian plum, Turkey oak, Himalayan pine, Caucasian walnut and the Judas tree. He had had his generation's expansive sense of time – he had inherited hundred-year-old oaks and beeches and had planted spread of woodland, rides and coppices he would never see. Huge rugged trunks came silently past the little green car in the encroaching dark, rearing themselves suddenly monstrous in the changing white beam of the headlight. There was a kind of cracking of cold in the woods all round, a tightening of texture, a clamping together that Maud had experienced in her own warm limbs as she went out into the courtyard and cold ran into her constricted throat and pulled tight something she thought of poetically as heartstrings.

I think the author does this sort of passage well. She captures this moment very clearly for me. Are there things you felt the author did well, or did not do well?

13. Any comments about the way the book ended?
14. Are there any questions you would like to ask?