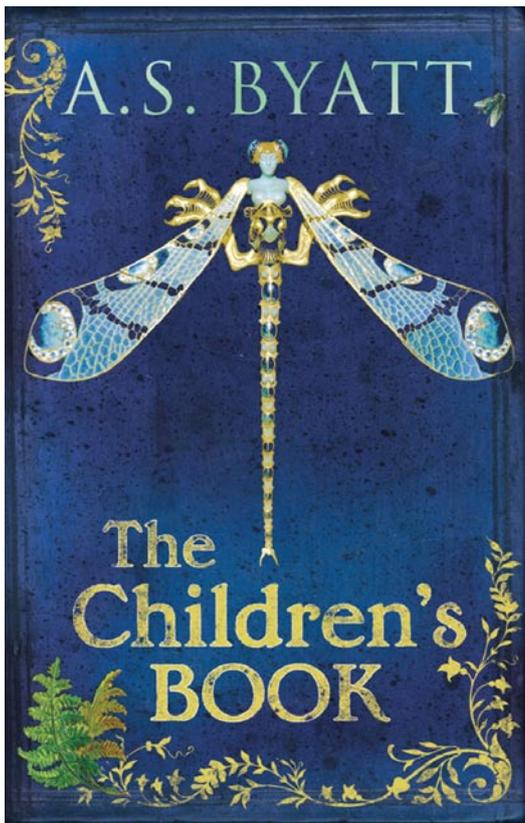


Reader's Guide



Other books by A.S. Byatt

- The Shadow of the Sun* (1964)
- The Game* (1967)
- The Virgin in the Garden* (1978)
- Still Life* (1985)
- Possession: A Romance* (1990)
- Angels & Insects* (1992)
- Babel Tower* (1996)
- A Whistling Woman* (2002)
- Little Black Book of Stories* (2003)

The Children's Book

A.S. Byatt

Published by Chatto & Windus
Price £18.99

www.themanbookerprize.com

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About the author

A.S. Byatt was born in Yorkshire in 1936. She attended a Quaker school in York, and went on to study at Cambridge. She taught at the Central School of Art & Design, and was Senior Lecturer in English at University College, London, before returning to full-time writing in 1983. In 1990 her novel *Possession: A Romance* won the Booker Prize and the *Irish Times/Aer Lingus* International Fiction Prize. A.S. Byatt was appointed CBE in 1990 and DBE in 1999.

The Children's Book

Olive Wellwood is a famous writer, interviewed with her children gathered at her knee. For each of them she writes a separate private book, bound in different colours and placed on a shelf. In their rambling house near Romney Marsh they play in a storybook world – but their lives, and those of their rich cousins and their friends, are already inscribed with mystery. Each family carries their own secrets.

This vivid, rich and moving saga is played out against the great, rippling tides of the day, taking us from the Kent marshes to Paris and Munich and the trenches of the Somme. Born at the end of the Victorian era, growing up in the golden summers of Edwardian times, a whole generation grew up unaware of the darkness ahead. In their innocence, they were betrayed unintentionally by the adults who loved them. In a profound sense, this novel is indeed the children's book.

Discussion points

How do you think Olive Wellwood's fairy tales add to the novel and what purpose do you think they serve?

The Children's Book contains portraits of very different women. How do you think the novel approaches the changing lives of women in English society at this time?

How do you think the parents' work and their art affect their children?

A.S. Byatt includes detailed descriptions of many activities and intellectual movements, from the Suffragettes and Fabians to the details of firing kilns and making puppets. How does this detail work with the drama of the characters' stories and relationships?

The novel is full of people trying to define their responsibilities: whether it's how to meet them or how to avoid them. Which characters do you feel are most interesting in this context?

Themed reading

Peter Pan JM Barrie
The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry
Matthew George Walter
Grimm's Fairy Tales Jacob Grimm
Regeneration Trilogy Pat Barker

Useful links

www.themanbookerprize.com
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