

## Quest for Literary Past: A Study of Byatt's Possession

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**Abstract :** Antonia Susan Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* has been misread as a postmodern pastiche novel since its publication because there are epics, epigraphs, lyrics, fairy tales, epistles, and even critical articles swollen in this work. The word 'pastiche' suggests messy, disorganized, and chaotic, which buries its artistic excellence while overlooking its subtitle, *A Romance*. The center of romance is the quest that the hero sets forth to conquer the adversity, hardship, and danger to accomplish a task to prove his identity or social worth. This paper argues that *Possession* is not a postmodern pastiche novel but rather a postmodern romance in which the characters in the academic world set forth their quest into the Victorian literary past that is nostalgically identified by Byatt as the Golden Age of English literature. In doing so, these five following issues are addressed: first, the origin of the protagonist Roland, and consequently, the nature of his quest; second, the central image of the dragon created by the fictional Victorian poet Henry Ash; third, Melusine as an image of female serpent created by the fictional Victorian poet Christabel LaMotte; fourth, the images of the two ladies; last, the image of water that links the dragon and the serpent. In *Possession*, the past is reinvented not as an unfortunate fall but as a Golden Age presented in the imaginative academic adventure. The dragon, a stereotypical symbol of evil, becomes the symbol of life in Byatt's work, which parallels with the image of the mythical phoenix that can resurrect from its own ash. At the same time, the phoenix symbolizes Byatt's efforts to revive the Victorian poetic art that is supposed to be dead in the post-capitalism society when the novel is the dominating literary genre and poetry becomes the minority. The fictional Victorian poet Ash is in fact Byatt's own poetic mask through which she breathes life into the lost poetic artistry in the postmodern era.

**Keywords :** Byatt, possession, postmodern romance, literary past

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