This is a repository copy of Review: Margaret Atwood: Crime Fiction Writer. The Reworking of a Popular Genre by Jackie Shead.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/121081/

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.112.2.0504

© 2017, Modern Humanities Research Association. This is an author produced version of a paper published in Modern Language Review. Uploaded in accordance with the publisher's self-archiving policy.

Reuse
Unless indicated otherwise, fulltext items are protected by copyright with all rights reserved. The copyright exception in section 29 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 allows the making of a single copy solely for the purpose of non-commercial research or private study within the limits of fair dealing. The publisher or other rights-holder may allow further reproduction and re-use of this version - refer to the White Rose Research Online record for this item. Where records identify the publisher as the copyright holder, users can verify any specific terms of use on the publisher's website.

Takedown
If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.
In her book, Shead explores Atwood's under-researched, and broadly defined genre of, crime fiction, wanting to explore ‘how, and why, Atwood expands and departs from the crime fiction tradition’ (p.6), firstly by outlining ‘critical parameters and tools’ (p.2). Here she notes, among others, Atwood’s tendency to reveal ‘broader evils, embedded in social structures and practices’ (p.17) through crime fiction which features such elements as ‘reluctant detectives’ (p. 19). Such fiction also features ‘romantic red herrings’ (p.27) since protagonists only ‘experience their breakthroughs when disengaged from [romantic] relationships’ (p.94). Having outlined such themes, Shead then engages in textual analysis of two early (Surfacing, Bodily Harm), and two late (Alias Grace, The Blind Assassin) Atwood crime novels where, among others, Shead highlights the ways in which the novels subvert the expectations readers have in relation to the crime fiction genre. One such expectation is the need to have closure, such as that the crime will eventually be solved in Alias Grace. There follows a chapter on Atwood stories ‘about’ and ‘as’ payback (as in the motive of ‘getting even’, p.2), and one on self-reflexivity, where the reader is treated as detective, victim and accomplice, and the text as bodily evidence. Shead ends by drawing on the commonalities Atwood shares with post-colonial genre practitioners, and a conclusion that highlights the genre’s didactic purpose.

Even though Shead’s analysis of the author’s crime fiction is engaging and insightful, it may have benefitted from the stylistic insight that Emmott’s\(^1\) (1997) frame theory and Fowler’s\(^2\) (1977) mind style concept offer. The former could explain the precise ways in which information gets buried in such narratives, while the latter could offer insights as to the

---

ways in which language helps construct world views, ideology and attitudes. Mind style analysis would entail thoroughly investigating grammatical agency patterns, but also the sorts of metaphors Shead points to (p.93), and underlexicalisation she hints at (p.72). Though ‘framing’ (p.50, differently defined), mind style itself (p.26), and language (i.e. p.45, p.83 but also elsewhere) are all mentioned in Shead’s analysis, such concepts could have been engaged with systematically across the whole of each respective text, to illuminate, for instance, how exactly the amnesiac narrative strategy Atwood employs works linguistically. Close engagement with cohesion, as grammatically defined by Halliday\(^3\) (1976), could also have proved useful in substantiating the ways in which referring devices work textually in relation to Atwood’s crime fiction genre, and how these link to misdirection and ambiguity. Alias Grace (p. 103) and The Blind Assassin (p. 113) also bring to light questions surrounding the ‘naming and describing’ of potential offenders and victims, which Jeffries\(^4\) model could assist in close analysis of. Such mechanisms signal the power language has when it comes to their respective framing as (non-)guilty and (un)deserving (see discussion in Gregoriou\(^5\)).

In engaging with themes and story structure closely, Shead’s is a valuable contribution to crime fiction, and also Atwood, scholarship. She importantly draws on the importance of language too though, a close analysis of which is needed to more fully appreciate the experience of reading such novels.

Dr Christiana Gregoriou

School of English, University of Leeds, LS2 9JT, Leeds UK, c.gregoriou@leeds.ac.uk