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Margaret Atwood: Crime Fiction Writer; The Reworking of a Popular Genre. By JACKIE SHEAD. Aldershot: Ashgate. 2015. vii+219 pp. £54. ISBN 978-1-4724-5063-0.

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's¹ (1997) frame theory and Fowler's² (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

¹ Cathy Emmott. *Narrative Comprehension: A Discourse Perspective*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

² Roger Fowler. *Linguistics and the Novel*. (London: Methuen, 1977).

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 Halliday³ (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 Gregoriou⁵).

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.

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³ Michael Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan. *Cohesion in English*. (London: Longman, 1976).

⁴ Lesley Jeffries. *Critical Stylistics: The Power of English*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010).

⁵ Christiana Gregoriou. *Language, Ideology and Identity in Serial Killer Narratives*. (London: Routledge, 2011).