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Reingard M. Nischik. *Engendering Genre: The Works of Margaret Atwood*. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 2010. 328 p. ISBN (paper): 9780776607245. CA\$ 34.95. ISBN (PDF ebook): 9780776618913. CA\$ 16.99. ISBN (ePub ebook): 9780776618906. CA\$ 16.99

- 1 Reingard M. Nischik's *Engendering Genre: The Works of Margaret Atwood* examines, as the title suggests, the links between gender and genre in the literary production of the most well-known and most prolific of Canadian authors. It is quite a feat to say anything new about Atwood's work, which has been the focus of scholarly criticism all over the world for decades now. Nischik herself is one of the two outstanding European critics of Atwood's poetry and prose (the other being Coral Ann Howells) and it is therefore always a pleasure to read a fresh publication on her subject of predilection.
- 2 The volume is organised according to genre, not only literary but non-literary as well; specific chapters are devoted to poetry, short fictions, prose poems and novels. Chapters follow on filmic adaptations of Atwood's work and on her literary criticism and visual production (cartoons). The volume is completed by a twenty-four-page interview with Atwood herself displaying her legendary wit and refusal to be classified within feminist or literary categories. One of the strengths of *Engendering Genre* is precisely its all-inclusiveness in terms of the creative areas covered. As Nischik points out Atwood's extensive body of literary criticism has raised very little interest and inspired no recent commentary. Another is the attention to detail and the density of references which on the one hand attest to the author's in-depth knowledge of all things pertaining to Atwood, and on the other to her expertise in bringing together in a disciplined fashion the multiple threads of the "gendered" genres under scrutiny.

- 3 The most interesting parts of the book dealing with Atwood's fiction are, in this reader's view, the chapters on her poetry and short works. The author convincingly argues that *Power Politics* is "a collection of love poems, not antilove poems" (18), that what is at stake is the politics at the heart of intimacy: an anxious politics stifled by the generic constraints of traditional, romantic forms that polarise gender relations. Convincing also is the author's claim for Atwood's originality in her prose poetry. Exploring the intertextual complexity and generic hybridity of this traditionally un-Canadian literary form Nischik exposes the shifting negotiations and overlaps of gender and genre in all their poetic and social complexity.
- 4 However, less interesting is the chapter on characters' forms of address in the novels. The rather laboured stylistic analysis adds little of real import to the existing scholarship on genre in Atwood's novels, of which Coral Ann Howells's article in a volume edited by the author herself is an outstanding example, examining as it does how Atwood manipulates and stretches the limits of canonical literary forms such as gothic romance, dystopia and autobiography. One also sometimes has the impression that Atwood stands outside and above Canadian literature in her own private solar space, as if the author were doubling Atwood's own, one could surmise strategic, unwillingness to acknowledge her debts. For apart from a reference to the (American) women poets of the 1960s who doubtless forged Atwood's political consciousness, there is very little contextualisation of Atwood's fiction and influences, in particular within the field of Canadian literature. Atwood's novel *Surfacing* and her (self-avowedly) lightweight, and doubtless partial, book of criticism *Survival* forged her reputation through a canny re-imagining of pioneer encounter with the land in a feminist, nationalist mode. Canada has of course since been envisioned otherwise through decades of writings from non-European sources and inspirations. This excellent and thorough study of Atwood would have been even better if it had occasionally brought her down to earth and confronted her work with that of her peers and predecessors.

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Charlotte STURGESS is Professor of North American literature at the University of Strasbourg. Her research is centred on Canadian women's writing in English and concentrates on the overlapping and intersecting of postcolonial and gender discourses and meanings in such writings. She has published a monograph and articles in the field and edited a number of volumes on Canadian women's literature.