



Margaret Atwood: A Critical Companion (Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers)

Nathalie Cooke

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This book offers readers a concise introduction to Atwood's published novels and the central themes motivating her writing. The volume starts with an overview of the author's biography and the relationship of her writing to relevant literary traditions. Because Atwood is internationally renowned, many commentaries ignore the Canadian roots of her work. Cooke corrects this oversight by sketching the ways in which her work is shaped by, and has shaped, the Canadian literary scene. As the author of a full-length Atwood biography, Cooke is able to summarize feminist, Canadian nationalist, and postmodern influences on Atwood's work and on her development as a writer. The book offers close scrutiny of three illustrative works: *Cat's Eye* as the artist novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* as a dystopian novel, and *The Blind Assassin* as a villainess novel.

This book extends the dialogue surrounding Atwood's work in several important ways. As a book written by a Canadian about a Canadian writer, it illustrates how readings of Atwood's work can be significantly enriched through attention to the Canadian literary and cultural context. Noting that Atwood's work not only entertains but also challenges and disturbs, it argues that all of Atwood's novels can be read as satires that expose society's double standards. By locating the beginnings of satire as far back as Atwood's first published novel, and tracing it in Atwood's later novels as the impulse behind challenges to character (in the artist novels), setting (in the dystopic fiction), and plot (in the villainess novels), this study provides a startlingly original interpretation of *The Blind Assassin* and new insights into the earlier novels.

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