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Barfoot, Nicole. *Frauenkrimi/Polar féminin. Generic Expectations and the Reception of Recent French and German Crime Novels by Women*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, Coll. "MeLiS: Medien-Literaturen-Sprachen in Anglistik/Amerikanistik, Germanistik und Romanistik", 2007, 228 p., – ISBN-10: 3-631-55992-5; ISBN-13: 978-3-631-55992-5.

Nicola Barfoot clearly outlines her objectives in the introductory chapter (pp. 9-25): female-authored crime novels featuring female protagonists are recent inventions and merit attention from the academic world.

The early 1980s saw a first wave of crime novels authored by female writers in Germany and the 1990s a similar rise in France. Up to date, numerous Anglo-Saxon studies have been undertaken with regard to the woman detective in Anglophone novels as well as the relationship between this type of writing and feminism.

In an effort to broaden the analysis of feminine crime novels, Barfoot sets out to respond to the question of national and international readership of crime fiction. She further wants to establish the kinds of discourses available for discussing crime writing and to examine the reception of women writers collectively and individually. Barfoot does not wish to trace the responses of 'ordinary' readers or of the reading public as a whole to crime fiction, she concentrates her research on press reviews, academic analyses in theses and internet opinion pieces to verify the assumption of an identificatory relationship between reader and hero, or, in the case of female-authored crime writing, between female reader and heroine.

The introductory chapter further focuses on feminism and the crime novel, the protagonists, politics, purpose, audience and criticism of female crime writing. Chapter 2 deals with France and the 'polar féminin' while chapter 3 looks at Germany and the 'Frauenkrimi'. In both these chapters, Barfoot gives detailed accounts of the terminology used by literary critics when reviewing crime writing by women while proposing an historical overview of the genre's reception in both countries. Generalizing opinions such as "the element of contemporary social reality is often lacking" (p. 36), "the key feature of women's crime novels in France, then, is variety" (p. 37), male critics insist that "woman writers do not have political intentions" and that criticism "remains a male preserve" (p. 54) are carefully debated and researched. In a similar vein, contentions about the German Frauenkrimi, such as the fact that the genre acts as "a forum for commenting on such unwelcome developments in West German society as the rise of neo-Nazism, the abuse of asylum-seekers, the destruction of the environment, and the insidious

influence of big business on politics and culture" (p. 62), are subjected to analysis. What seems to differentiate French and German female-authored crime fiction mainly are the "frequent and positive references to feminism" (p. 89) within the German crime discourses.

Chapters 4, Noëlle Lorient, *L'inculpé* (1991), 5, Pieke Biermann, *Violetta* (1990), 6, Virginie Despentes, *Les Chiennes savantes* (1996) and 7, Maria Gronau, *Weiberwirtschaft* (1996) have a single author and her criminal masterpiece as its focal points. These four novels can be read as part of an international phenomenon of feminist revisions of the crime genre. Barfoot concludes that a major role in the reception of these texts is played by "knowledge of the author's public persona and previous work (and in the case of a new writer any biographical information supplied by the publisher)" (p. 197). Barfoot documents how, in each country, the genre descriptors 'roman policier' and 'Krimi' as well as the presentation of the work such as its title, cover illustration, blurb and name of series in which the novel is published, influence readers' understanding, assumptions, interpretative strategies, perceptions, expectations about how, why and for whom women write, and interpretations.

Regrettably, all quotations from French and German crime fiction were left in their original language. That may be acceptable to many academics fluent in French, German and English, but it remains difficult to follow the logic of the reasoning if the reader is not fluent in one of those languages.

A detailed and quite comprehensive reference list can be found at the end of the book (pp. 205-227): first primary texts and general works on crime writing are proposed, each following section deals with bibliographical references related to each chapter.

A few, rather minor, spelling and/or grammar mistakes can be identified (e.g. a punctuation error on page 55, 'it' instead of 'is' on page 77, 'threw' instead of 'throw' on page 119), but they never make legibility an issue.

The present study is highly appreciated. It fills an 'academic gap' with regard to feminist and female scholarship on crime fiction authored by women and having as its main protagonist a woman (criminal or detective). Barfoot has extensively researched both primary and secondary literature to give an overview of the "complex ways in which gender and genre intersect within discourses on female-authored crime fiction in France and Germany and within the reception of a selection of individual texts" (p. 197).