

Re Jo Mcmillan's first novel: Motherland

'A bittersweet debut novel about mother-daughter relationships and socialism. I really loved the opening chapter and nothing else really came up to par with it; it would be a brilliant short story on its own.' (Goodreads)

'Motherland combines a teenager's cold-eyed view of adult absurdities and a wistfulness for lost certainties; a compelling blend.' (Historical novels society on Goodreads page)

'The final pages are heart-breaking as we see what her dreams have been reduced to and even more distressing is the understated way that the cord has been cut between mother and daughter as Jess quietly turns her back on her faith in the Motherland - both genetic and political.' There is a wistfulness to this novel ...
<http://girlwithherheadinabook.co.uk/2015/09/review-motherland-jo-mcmillan.html>

'It's not a novel bathed in sadness though.... so it's **bathed in humanity** and every emotion emanating from that. There are not only moments of **uplifting hope**, there are some wonderful **injections of humour**. I guffawed aloud over the goose step comment and loved the bizarre election night fancy dress party. In with the smiles and giggles are some sharp, tongue in cheek comments that still carry current day relevance.' (<http://www.thebookbag.co.uk/reviews/index.php?>)

Jo McMillan ... **'From the start my mum and I would do everything together, including change the world'** (August 1st 2015 Guardian)

NB In reality Jo was a realist once the GDR had disappeared. She even became quite a spender and consumer. (August 1st 2015 Guardian) How are we meant to interpret the end of the novel?

What I like:

- Naive point of view allows us to laugh. p. 58 'I couldn't work out how they ended up putting WESTBERLIN in the middle of the GDR. Perhaps it was just a mistake. Or they were exhausted and had given up caring about details at the end of six years war.'
- p. 57 The Wall 'looked more like the edge of a swimming baths than the edge of the Cold War'.
- **unusual choice of vocabulary (playing naive)** - UPKEEP OF MARTINA; She never stopped broadcasting....her voice simply went fuzzy and crackled, as if losing reception, then settled back into a stable frequency and went on transmitting as if I'd never spoken.' p. 209
- **sadness** cf 'Oranges': 'There was nowhere you could go when you were a daughter' p. 94

Which other works does it remind us of:

- Anita and Me by Meera Syal (quite a lot in common)
- Oranges are not the Only Fruit by Jannette Winterston
- Goodbye Lenin (Wolfgang Becker)
- all coming-of age tragi-comedies such as.....

wistful - sad and thinking about something that is impossible or in the past

NB I was on a course for foreign *Germanisten* in Weimar twice. Cf. Potsdam Any of you?

Plans:

What else? We will spend summer talking about Berlin:

Jo MacMillan, Motherland - today

6) Gail Jones: A Guide to Berlin - July 25th;

7) Joseph Kanon, Leaving Berlin - August 29th.

8) Before moving on to Shakespeare re-worked I suggest inserting

'Reader, I married him' on September 26th

It is a volume of short stories edited by Tracy Chevalier him' - referring to Jane Eyre. I enjoyed it. There are over twenty very varied stories!

There is the BBC Book Club discussion of 'Jane Eyre' but also with references to this volume and with Tracy Chevalier (WorldBookClub-20160507-CharlotteBrontJaneEyre)

9) We could spend the autumn talking about re-worked Shakespeare:

Jeanette Winterston, The Gap of Time (The Winter's Tale); Howard Jacobson, Shylock is my name; Ann Tyler, Vinegar Girl (The Taming of the Shrew, just published and an easy read 2016) and later still Margaret Atwood (as yet untitled) The Tempest, and later Ann Tyler

I enjoyed the Howard Jacobson, find the Jeanette Winterston very tough going (i.e. I haven't finished) and quite enjoyed the Anne Tyler. I have to admit I haven't read anything else of hers.

I was wondering about having one session comparing whatever you have have read of these - but will test the water at the end of June!

10) What other suggestions do you have?

A shepherd's life. A Tale of the Lake District. - definitely not a novel
Anna and the Swallowman - Gavriel Savit

Meetings: 31st October 2016 , 28th November 2016, not December. We're hoping Jo MacMillan will visit us in January 2017