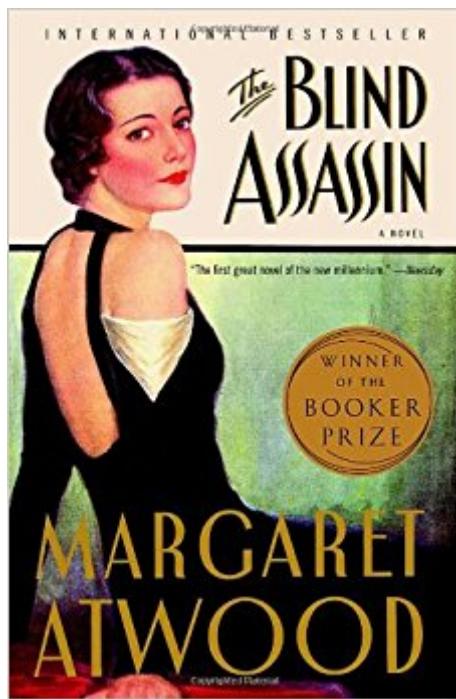


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The Blind Assassin: A Novel



Synopsis

The Blind Assassin opens with these simple, resonant words: "Ten days after the war ended, my sister Laura drove a car off a bridge." They are spoken by Iris, whose terse account of her sister's death in 1945 is followed by an inquest report proclaiming the death accidental. But just as the reader expects to settle into Laura's story, Atwood introduces a novel-within-a-novel. Entitled The Blind Assassin, it is a science fiction story told by two unnamed lovers who meet in dingy backstreet rooms. When we return to Iris, it is through a 1947 newspaper article announcing the discovery of a sailboat carrying the dead body of her husband, a distinguished industrialist. Brilliantly weaving together such seemingly disparate elements, Atwood creates a world of astonishing vision and unforgettable impact.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (626 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

I admit to being an Atwoodaholic--I wrote my master's thesis on Surfacing and paid double the price to have Alias Grace shipped to me from Canada in advance of its US publication date. As such, I devoured her newest novel in two sittings, despite its 500+ page length. It has left me feeling bleak and, in the words of the book's narrator "scraped clean inside." This is a beautifully structured book, involving three (perhaps even four) narrative layers that play off of each other to build a terrifying commentary on love, passion, sisterhood (both the biological and, by extension, emotional kinds), and betrayal. The book contains the closest thing to a love story Atwood has ever written, and it's a harrowing one that will sneak up on you and devastate you in the end. With the primary action being set between WW I and WWII, the novel also offers a final comment on the twentieth century:

humanity's culpability in creating, destroying, and creating again, and on the quiet moments of beauty that are possible (temporarily) among the rubble. This is a great book, a worthy successor to the wonderful Alias Grace. Read it at your own emotional risk, but READ IT.

I wish I could give this one more than five stars. The Blind Assassin is a fantastic, fabulous novel and I cannot recommend it highly enough. Margaret Atwood has written a terrific story told in such a way that the reader will always be kept guessing as to what the true "truth" is. It is a mystery, with a death, but it is not a "mystery novel" as we come to expect. The Blind Assassin is the story of two sisters: Laura and Iris Chase. Laura died in what may or may not have been a suicidal car crash in 1945. Iris tells the story of her family and the events leading up to Laura's death, reflecting in the present on the events of the past. What is so fascinating about The Blind Assassin is that things are not always what they seem, but there are layers upon layers of story, of truth. Atwood reveals the story to us in many ways. We see newspaper accounts of what happened to the Chase family. These accounts are told with the confidence that they convey the whole, true story, but do they? Then we hear Iris' story, but something is not right with her story, something is missing. Iris admits that she has omitted crucial details and bit by bit, the reader is able to piece together what did happen. Interspersed in Iris' narrative are excerpts from Laura's posthumously published novel, The Blind Assassin, which also give us insight into what happened. Atwood tells this story marvelously. Iris' observations about the present day are witty and sharp. Atwood kept me guessing right up until the end. The mystery of this novel makes it just that much more fun to read. The Blind Assassin is a wonderful addition to the body of work of one of the most talented living authors. I highly, highly recommend it.

Not having read the other nominees, I can't compare, but the announcement that "The Blind Assassin" by Margaret Atwood has won this year's Booker Prize, I am not surprised. Atwood, having already written over a dozen novels, poetry, children's books, and some non-fiction, comes through with her latest in grand manner. A prolific writer she is indeed. That said, "The Blind Assassin" is an adventure--not to mention quite an ambitious undertaking--to read. Included in her convoluted plot line is a "novel within a novel" (see Reginald Hill's "Arms and the Women"!!--so be prepared to pay attention. Atwood's style of writing, however, is anything but convoluted; it is straight forward, but complicated, with expertly created characters. The book is told by Iris who recounts her sister's death in Toronto in 1945, when she drives her car off a bridge. The inquest indicates that the death is accidental. Then Atwood introduces us to her "novel within a novel"

entitled "The Blind Assassin." Told by a pair of anonymous lovers, the book stretches into science fiction--absorbing on its own as an intriguing story! What seems amazing about this work is the expert craftsmanship that Atwood possesses (and presents), although, given her reputation, that is not surprising. She also captures the 1930s-40s atmosphere quite well, too! The novel is layered, and the author explores each level, one by one, until the final pages. With her themes of greed, love, and (inevitably) revenge, the story is right out of the Greek tragedies (well, actually, not, as "tragic" is not really exploited!). Be prepared to spend some time with this work--but it will be time well spent. What an intriguing novel! (Billyjhobbs@tyler.net)

If this book doesn't win the Booker Prize, then Margaret Atwood will never get to give Thomas Mallon his much-deserved comeuppance for the snide review he wrote of it for the New York Times Book Review. Because I respect Mallon and have enjoyed more than one of his books, I took this review to heart (fool that I am), wasting several weeks before discovering for myself how much fun I've been missing out on! Perhaps, however, Mallon was just playing the role of "The Blind Assassin" when he wrote it. Because of the number of excellent plot summaries already posted here, I'll save the space and not repeat them. Atwood's female characters here are as complex and intriguing as they are in *Cat's Eye*. Her descriptions are so specific that every aspect of the setting comes vibrantly to life, and it is easy to imagine every detail (yes, even the much maligned simile of a loaf of bread as bland-tasting "as an angel's buttock"). The plot evolves on three distinct, but parallel, planes, giving a triple whammy to Atwood's themes, while several different time frames keep the story full of mystery and excitement. Best of all, Atwood brings all the threads of the story together for a truly thrilling, rock 'em, sock 'em grand finale. If you've been wondering why the odds are so good that Atwood will win the Booker, read the book. This will certainly NOT be a consolation prize! Mary Whipple

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