

Martin John

Anakana Schofield

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This dark novel enters the realm of the forbidden and feared with humor and empathy.

Anakana Schofield takes readers into the strange world of Martin John, flasher, public masturbator, and mentally ill security guard. Like Francine Prose's exploration of neo-Nazism in *A Changed Man*, Schofield enters the realm of the forbidden and feared, and does so with humor and empathy. Postmodern in its aesthetic, this novel is daring both with its subject matter and its characterizations.

The eponymous character of Schofield's second novel appeared as a minor character in her first novel, *Malarky*. The Martin John of this novel is younger, and not as seemingly innocuous; rather, he is exiled from his home in Ireland after assaulting a twelve-year-old girl in a dentist's office. Martin's mother, overbearing and eager to protect and dismiss him, sends him away with sets of rules to follow—"Get a job at night or else I'll come for ya....don't go near the buses, they might see you on the buses and don't go down on the Tube for you could go into a tunnel and never come out."

Beyond her rules, Martin establishes rules for himself, including no words that begin with p—p-words are too upsetting. He creates circuits to quiet the mind. He works nights to avoid temptation and the possibility that 'they' will come for him for doing 'it.'

The narration comes in fits and spurts, no innuendo implied, though with a novelist like Schofield, one can't wholly avoid the implication. Darkly funny, saddening, and compassionate, the story incorporates a solipsistic assemblage of mantras and circuits. The writing mirrors and reflects confusion, helping readers to experience some of Martin's own confusion and paranoia. Schofield also reveals the damage he does to his victims, to his mother, and to himself. This novel, though it involves difficult subjects, shows readers how postmodern writing techniques can make some small sort of sense out of the seemingly insensible.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (Spring 2016)

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