euses are new motifs, but they have formerly been the tender of the French novelist, not the British. The motif of the wife-in-distress, in turn, has variants. The most complex and certainly the most interesting of these removes it from the direct arena of sexual and gender politics and places it within the context of mother-daughter relationship, a prominent concern throughout Ty's study and a focus of several of the novels she examines. In Smith's *Young Philosopher* the beseiged woman, Laura Glenmorris, pregnant with the potential heir to the family estate but deprived of her husband's protection, is held literal captive by his greedy, menacing, and deadly great-aunt, who hopes to preserve the estate in her own sons' interest. In Ty's reading of this gothic problematizing (and literalization) of a latent mother-daughter plot, the persecutory and witch-like maternal gaoler is a screen for the heroine's personal mother, the scenario itself is a scripting of female identity issues, and the terror, rage, and dread experienced by the pregnant woman as her lying-in approaches are a vehicle for channelling "common female fears about sexuality and maternity" (149). Also, Ty suggests, the classic virgin's anxieties about violation and assault give way in this novel to those of the child-bearing woman facing her own mortality and re-experiencing "what Kristeva would classify as one's earliest pre-verbal or semiotic fears of death and pain . . ." (149). Ty's readings of three of Smith's novels are among the high points of her book.

As to why the novels she explores have not been easily accepted into the canon, Ty points out that they are what Barthes terms "writerly" rather than "readerly" texts: "the writerly text draws attention to the cultural voices or codes responsible for its enunciation, reveals multiplicity instead of consistency, and signifies flux instead of stable meaning." And because such works "incessantly question social and narrative conventions," they "necessitate a different way of reading and interpretation" (156). Ty's *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790's* is an important contribution to this project and a thoughtful model for what one hopes will be more studies like it.

JEAN COATES CLEARY

Anne K. Mellor. *Romanticism and Gender.* New York: Routledge, 1993. pp. ix, 275. $45.00; $14.95 pb.

Mellor bills *Romanticism and Gender* as "the first attempt to give a broad view of British Romantic literature from a feminist perspective." As such, it is a long overdue project, since too many "current cultural and scholarly descriptions of . . . Romanticism are unwittingly gender-biased" and continue to focus "almost exclusively upon the writings and thought of six male poets (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Byron, Shelley, and Keats)." In an attempt to shake the continued perception

of poetry "as *the* canonical Romantic genre," Mellor studies "the numerous women writers who produced at least half of the literature published in England between 1780 and 1830" (1). This broader sweep allows the "cultural power" of "alternative poetic genres" to be acknowledged (11).

The reader is immediately informed of "significant differences between the thematic concerns, formal practices, and ideological positioning of male and female Romantic writers" (2). The four distinct concerns of "feminine Romanticism" are presented as a desire for the "workings of the rational mind" over "achievements of the imagination"; as an "ethic of care"; as "Nature troped as a female friend or sister"; and as "politics of gradual rather than violent change that extends the values of domesticity into the public realm" (3). The exploration of these concerns introduces readers to many less well-known writers and encourages them to re-read many better-known writers. Each chapter also provides a useful summary of traditional and contemporary critical thought on different aspects of Romanticism.

While Mellor's comments are never earth-shattering, she does suggest interesting lines of investigation. One difference between masculine and feminine Romanticism, as discussed in "Family Politics," lies in attitude to political process: masculine is rapid and public, feminine is steady and private. Feminine Romanticism supports a nation state that evolves rationally and gradually around the traditional patriarchal family unit since the "basic social tenets of feminine Romanticism are a commitment to the domestic virtues, to home, to the equality of men and women, to the living of a good and happy life at modest expense" (76). Differences are also evident in representations of motherhood. Male writers "focus on biological maternity, on the body of the mother," while female writers "concern themselves with the various ways the role of motherhood can be *performed*." In the social construction of "mothering as a learned rather than an instinctual practise lies a powerful challenge to the domestic ideology itself" (83). This interest in the family is surely a direct consequence of women's limited sphere, since politicizing the domestic allows them the suggestion of power and authority that society actually denies them.

Mellor suggests that all women writers, despite political differences, "sustained the same ideological commitment to the egalitarian family as the model of good government" (77). Her desire, however, to show that women aimed to "create and sustain community" (11) suggests a common ground that is contradicted by the writers themselves, who jealously guarded their differences along political, economic, or religious lines. Forcing Romantic women into one camp, ignoring individual political differences, downplays the vigorous debate among them on these very issues of motherhood, reform, and government.

In "Writing the Self/Self Writing," Mellor discusses the "complexity and range of human subjectivity" and the role of gender in its construction (168). We learn that Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals* presents "a very different concept of self from the egotistical sublime" (168) of her brother William's *Prelude.* While William searches for a "unified, agential, coherent self," Dorothy affirms "a self that is interactive, absorptive, constantly changing, and domestic" (157). Rather than "construct a permanent, even transcendental ego," she searches for a "linguistic representation" of a "self that is not only relational . . . but also physically embodied." Mellor encourages a wider reading of Romantic writings, including journals and diaries, to make the critic aware "of the complexity and range of human subjectivity, of the role of gender in constructing subjectivity (both masculine and feminine), and of the bodily or somatic dimension of identity." The benefit is enormous since it expands the accepted canon of literature and broadens the representations of subjectivity so that there no longer exists "*the* Romantic self" but "differing modes of subjectivity" (168).

In partial recognition of the problems of any binary opposition, "Cross Dressing" argues that the relationship between masculine and feminine Romanticism is "not one of structural opposition but rather of intersection along a fluid continuum" (4). For these reasons John Keats can be read as a feminine Romantic and Emily Brontë as a masculine Romantic. The eclectic nature of Mellor's study is evident in "Ideological Cross-Dressing," in which she draws upon studies by Walter Jackson Bates, Susan Wolfson, Marjorie Levinson, Ludmilla Jordanova, Barbara Gelpi, Adrienne Rich, Mary Hawkesworth, and Margaret Homans to establish Keats's feminized nature and chosen literary genre. Keats resists a masculinist construction of the "self as bounded, unitary, complete and instrumental" in favour of a more feminine concept of individuality as "continually forming and filling some other body" (175). However, "occupying the position of a woman in the poetic discourse of the early nineteenth-century was . . . a source of anxiety" (179). While Keats adopts a feminine genre and voice, he simultaneously attacks and reshapes each ("he both appropriates and silences the female" [184]). Although Keats "succeeds in 'cross-dressing,' in occupying the subject position of the female . . . he is not a 'transsexual': he cannot *become* the female" (183).

Mellor concludes with a plea that we, as critics and scholars, read feminine Romanticism alongside masculine Romanticism. While this request should be heeded, it ignores larger concerns about quality, power, and canon formation. Merely enlarging the canon avoids altering the existing hierarchy. Perhaps we should examine why women have been ignored consistently and rethink our acceptance of the male writer as the best or only example of the Romantic poet.

Mellor's suggestion that she is offering "exploratory, merely suggestive remarks" (81) perhaps best indicates how we should approach

her book. The broad sweep of *Romanticism and Gender* provides a useful introduction to traditional and contemporary criticism on Romantic writers while also suggesting many interesting possibilities for further discussion and research. It fails, however, to acknowledge the many differences within feminine Romanticism. As a consequence, poetry emerges unscathed as "*the* canonical Romantic genre."

CLAIRE GROGAN

J. Brooks Bouson. *Brutal Choreographies: Oppositional Strategies and Narrative Design in the Novels of Margaret Atwood.* Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1993. pp. 204. $27.50.

Brooks Bouson has chosen an apt title for her study of Margaret Atwood's seven novels (from *The Edible Woman* to *Cat's Eye*). By linking the unexpected modifier "brutal" to the metaphor of "choreographies" she encourages her readers to approach these novels in the context of a form of dance more like Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" than Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake." The book's inclusive subtitle goes on to announce its large ambitions to explore significant themes as well as formal elements in Atwood's longer fiction. As it soon becomes clear, the "oppositional strategies and narrative design" are closely linked in this major contribution to Atwood studies.

As Bouson explains in her preface, she intends to

> consider the oppositional strategies used in Atwood's novels: their punitive plotting and their enactments of female revenge fantasies; their dialogic resistance to romantic discourse; and their self-conscious manipulation and sabotage of the romance plot and other traditional narrative forms and formulas. (ix)

Bouson continues:

> Because . . . the stories she tells are often brutal, portraying female victimization at the hands of the male lover or husband, the mother, or the best girlfriend . . . her novels have the power to disturb, compel, and at times even brutalize her readers, [yet] they are also carefully choreographed, and, indeed, call attention to their preoccupation with form and design. (ix-x)

This statement of Bouson's intent seems a tall order for this study; happily, however, she fills this order with a book that demonstrates that readable criticism and scholarship are alive and well.

In her two-page preface and an introduction of a dozen pages, Bouson sets up the context within which she reads Atwood's work. I mention the number of pages in both cases because they are the earliest and clearest evidence of Bouson's finesse and control in approaching her task. She expeditiously introduces Atwood, the "irrepressible storyteller and literary code breaker," as we have come to know her, not only through her art but also through her many provoc-