

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-

ative statements in essays and interviews. She offers a sound and perceptive discussion of Atwood's complex relationship with contemporary feminism and her insistence upon retaining artistic integrity against any efforts of her readers to enlist her support for their political agendas. Having established respect for Atwood's independence as an artist, Bouson proceeds to emphasize in the introduction and in the chapters that follow that Atwood is indeed a "feminist," despite any distrust of the label she may have often voiced. Drawing upon a range of feminist critics and theorists, including Alice Jardine, Rita Felski, Nancy Miller, Patricia Yaeger, Laura Mulvey, and Teresa de Lauretis, to name only a few, Bouson constructs a useful framework within which to view Atwood's "brutal choreographies." She argues in support of a range of feminist expression in Atwood's work, from what she terms the "protofeminism" of *The Edible Woman* and the "cultural feminism" of *Surfacing* to the "postfeminist and antifeminist backlash terrors of *Bodily Harm* (1981) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and the analysis of the potential power politics of female relationships in *Cat's Eye* (1988)" (5-6). Bouson is especially concerned with the ways in which Atwood's feminism expresses itself in the "oppositional strategies" of, for example, a novel such as *Lady Oracle* (1976), in which Atwood self-consciously undermines the conventions of the romance plot by replacing the Harlequin-romance fantasy of "Mr. Wonderful" with the Gothic horror of "my husband is trying to kill me."

In the seven chapters that follow, Bouson offers the reader a dazzling display of exhaustive scholarship and perceptive readings of individual works. As she has announced in her brief preface, she intends to "read [Atwood's] work with [her] feet planted firmly on the ground" (x). Bouson writes clearly and succinctly, avoiding the jargon-laden "discourse" to which many contemporary writers have fallen prey. She is particularly helpful in her discussions of what are, for now at least, Atwood's "middle novels"—*Bodily Harm* and *Life Before Man*—both of which have been less frequently read than the novels by which she is better known—*The Handmaid's Tale*, *Cat's Eye*, and soon, one suspects, *The Robber Bride*.

Bouson's discussion of *Cat's Eye* provides her with a "natural" conclusion to her useful study—although *The Robber Bride's* Zenia certainly makes Cordelia's sadistic abuse of Elaine Risley seem like "child's play" indeed. Her closing remarks on *Cat's Eye* allow her to stress that Atwood is a "feminist," whether or not she accepts the label. Furthermore, as Bouson remarks, "[t]hat Atwood has the courage 'to turn the tables on her own kind' in *Cat's Eye* does not make her antifeminist" (183). It is the "power politics" inherent in any human relationship that causes Atwood to despair. In this way, by implication at least, Bouson reminds all of Atwood's readers—male as well as female—of why we look forward to each new novel with excited antici-

pation: each novel is a genuinely new departure, often devastatingly sharp in its critique of men and women, yet always, in the final analysis, *fair*.

EARL G. INGERSOLL

Saros Cowasjee. *Studies in Indian and Anglo-Indian Fiction*. New Delhi: Indus-Harper Collins, 1993. pp. 178.

Saros Cowasjee's fiction and scholarly research record his perspectives on Indian and Anglo-Indian literature from his location as a member of the Indian diaspora. This most recent collection includes conference papers, articles, and essays written between 1975 and 1990. In the brief author's note, Cowasjee explains that his goal is to preserve attention to works that are significant, for various reasons, to the literary record of Indian independence. Many passages in the collection demonstrate Cowasjee's long-standing interest in the fiction of his friend Mulk Raj Anand; Cowasjee's insight into the man and his work is particularly evident in the essays on Anand's *Coolie* and *Private Life of an Indian Prince*. Some of the other texts examined are *The Hill of Devi* by E. M. Forster, *The Princes* by Manohar Malgonkar, *The Rape* by Raj Gill, *Twice Born Twice Dead* by Kartar Singh Duggal, *There and Then* by Christine Weston, and Cowasjee's own *Goodbye to Elsa*. Without Cowasjee's focussed attention, a number of the earlier texts stand in danger of slipping from view.

The opening essay on the princes in Indian fiction provides a roster of British and Indian accounts of an occasionally opulent way of life now almost vanished from Indian society. Critical of the often-romantic presentation of Indian princes in British literature, whose colonial agenda reads this apparently monarchal residue more favourably than he feels it deserves, Cowasjee reviews the texts in and out of print and identifies those he deems to be the most historically accurate and artistically successful. This desire for a marriage of artistry and historical veracity reverberates throughout the collection as its primary critical focus.

One of the results of this approach is that current postcolonial and feminist interrogations of the political freight of literary works and their criticisms are sometimes sidestepped, producing commentaries that occasionally will draw fire. For example, Cowasjee seems to assume in the second essay that all exiled writers are men, despite his discussion in a subsequent chapter of women writers of the Raj. Although he mentions the Indian writer's affinity for exile, often due to an English education, he does not necessarily offer a politicized problematization of this linguistic residue of the colonial experience. Sometimes this perspective works to provide a counter-interrogation of postcolonial critical and teaching practices. For example, he recalls being able to elicit from students a more powerful attraction to Mulk