



The Handmaid's Tale (Critical Insights)

J. Brooks Bouson

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This title includes in-depth discussions of Margaret Atwood's *"The Handmaid's Tale"*. *"The Handmaid's Tale"* won international acclaim when it was first published in 1985; with it, Margaret Atwood won Canada's Governor General's Award as well as the Arthur C. Clarke Award and was nominated for the Booker Prize. Written in the midst of the anti-feminist backlash and the culture wars of the 1980s, readers recognized it as a timely and chilling dystopian novel depicting a future in which the American government has been overthrown by religious fundamentalists who have, in turn, erected a patriarchal theocracy. Though Atwood had doubts about the novel when she was writing it, and though both conservative and liberal critics have found fault with it, the years following *"The Handmaid's Tale"*'s publication have been rich with critical discussion. Edited and with an introduction by J. Brooks Bouson, a widely recognized Atwood scholar, this volume in the *"Critical Insights"* series collects some of the novel's best critics to introduce high school students and undergraduates to one of Atwood's most widely read novels. Original essays by Lisa Jadwin and Dominick Grace lend context to the novel by surveying the political and cultural events out of which the novel grew as well as how Atwood's critics have responded to the novel. Two other original essays by Matthew Bolton and Jennifer E. Dunn explore the novel in light of the dystopian literary tradition and feminist literary theory. This collection of republished essays continues the conversation as Coral Ann Howells considers the novel's narrative structure and Madonne Miner and Shirley Neuman examine the role of love in the novel. Chinmoy Banerjee addresses the topic of criticism as commodity in the novel, Elisabeth Hansot and Hilde Staels investigate hegemonic and subversive discourses, and Danita J. Dodson reads the story in light of America's Puritanistic past. Finally, Eleonora Rao offers a psychoanalytic reading that focuses on narrative gaps and ambiguities, and Karen F. Stein and Joseph Andriano consider the novel's metafictional elements. Each essay is 5,000 words in length, and all essays conclude with a list of 'Works Cited', along with endnotes. Finally, the volume's appendixes offer a section of useful reference resources: a chronology of the author's life; a complete list of the author's works and their original dates of publication; a general bibliography; a detailed paragraph on the volume's editor; notes on the individual chapter authors; and, a subject index.

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