

Some essays concentrate on the means Pynchon uses to evoke the impression of an ungraspable past. Hybridization emerges as a central characteristic of an era that attempts to create order in reality through the legendary Mason-Dixon line. Attempting to draw the exact border between Maryland and Pennsylvania is as easy as it is difficult to actually do it (an essay focusing on mapmaking and representation demonstrates that it can never be an easy task) and to comprehend the world in which this enterprise takes place. The either/or of Mason and Dixon's project is counteracted by the hybridity that several authors identify as underlying the whole narrative. Be it the curious mechanical creatures that combine mechanical bodies and human character traits or the multi-layered humor Pynchon applies, nothing is ever as clearly defined as the characters pretend or as traditional historiography suggests.

The contributors agree that the novelist combines in his works the central concerns that postmodern thought has raised. Ian D. Copestake summarizes Pynchon's place in American intellectual development by suggesting that the author makes a contribution to the ongoing intellectual debate about "the repeated need to find an answer to the question of whether a conception of America is necessary for it to exist, or whether a society is possible outside the delusions of ideals which historically have determined its identity" (204).

The essays in *American Postmodernity* vary considerably in both concern and quality, but all ask pointed questions in an attempt to highlight Thomas Pynchon's position as one of the most insightful and intellectually gifted postmodern American novelists.

Peter Kafer

Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution and the Birth of American Gothic
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. Pp. 272 \$39.95

Reviewed by Eric Daffron

Peter Kafer's *Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution and the Birth of American Gothic* seeks to answer one central question: What forces conspired to give rise to Brown's gothic novel *Wieland* in the new American Republic, a world that promoted democracy over arbitrary rule and enlightened debate over dark irrationality? Kafer begins to answer this question in his introduction. Instead of making the customary link between Brown's novel and the so-called Godwinian novel, Kafer points to Thomas Jefferson, to whom Brown sent a copy of *Wieland*, provocatively suggesting that the author of the Declaration of Independence had a dark side and that this division within the Republican leader provides a clue to the birth of the American gothic on otherwise ungothic soil. Kafer unravels part of the mystery behind the first American gothic novel in his prologue, which records the history of the apparently false arrest and brief exile of several Philadelphia men, most of whom were Quakers, by the Continental Congress's

Committee on Spies in 1777. The prologue implies that this dramatic episode, which implicated Brown's father, among others, made a strong impression on young Charles that the enlightenment narrative of Revolutionary America had a dark underside.

Part One of the book, "Facts and Fictions, 1650–1798," begins with a chapter that backs up to retell the story of Brown's Quaker origins from England to Pennsylvania, returning once again to the mysterious reasons for the arrest and exile of Brown's father. The second chapter, "From Terror to Terror to Terror, 1777–93," turns to the post-Revolution period in an attempt to account for Charles's budding literary interest. From his father's interest in Wollstonecraft and Godwin to Charles's participation in a Belles Lettres Club and his quasi-fictional epistolary sequence in the manner of Rousseau's *The New Eloisa*, Brown developed a visionary imagination that, like that of his contemporaries Wordsworth and Coleridge, was fueled by the ideas and the realities of revolution. These "Revolutionary Reverberations" (the main title of Part One's closing chapter) included William Godwin, whose *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* became at once Brown's "Oracle" (66) for the virtues of sincerity and truth and an ironic springboard for Brown's developing romantic, even sensationalist, imagination.

After a short historical interlude, Part Two, "Fictions and Facts, 1798–1800," connects the historical material of the previous chapters to Brown's fiction. The first chapter in the part, "Sins of Fathers," convincingly places *Wieland* in the context of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania Quaker history and suggestively argues that the exile of Brown's father was the traumatic event that set into motion the issues explored imaginatively in *Wieland*. Perhaps the most successful chapter in the entire book, the second chapter on "The Anti-Godwin," demonstrates how, with *Arthur Mervyn*, Brown imitates Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and how, with "Memoirs of Carwin" and *Ormond*, he launches a critique of Godwinian rationalism. Part Two closes with "The Return of the Present ... and Past," which places *Edgar Huntly*, Brown's last gothic novel, in relation to the Pennsylvania Revolution of the 1750s and 1760s.

Kafer's book ends with a conclusion on Brown's post-1800 Federalist politics, which forsook his gothic vision, and with an epilogue on Brown's influence on Poe and Hawthorne. Perhaps the epilogue could have brought the book to a more satisfactory close if it had explored Brown's influence on the American gothic tradition in more depth. Instead, the epilogue returns to the points with which the book began: Jefferson and the events in Brown's early life that incited his gothic vision. Undoubtedly, Kafer makes an excellent case for examining the author's Quaker roots for clues to the meaning behind Brown's fiction. Yet the point of individual chapters in relation to the book's overall thesis often gets lost in a thicket of historical detail, causing the book to lose momentum, especially early on. Nevertheless, the book is worth careful attention

because, if nothing else, it reminds us of the importance of Charles Brockden Brown, the novelty of his literary production, and the power of the gothic vision to lay bare the dark corners of the past.

Neil Ten Kortenaar

Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children"

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004. Pp. 317. US\$ 60.00

Reviewed by R. S. Krishnan

Kortenaar's study is a powerfully intelligent scholarly work and demonstrates a richly nuanced engagement in the hermeneutic circle of reader-text-author. Equally significantly, Kortenaar locates his reading of *Midnight's Children* by dislocating the very many possible avenues of postcolonial theorizing on the novel, most having to do with reading the novel in light of postcolonialism's preoccupation with issues of nation, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and the like. Kortenaar's success lies in the adroitness with which he carves out his stance on the novel by acknowledging, co-opting, and at times subverting the various possible readings of the work.

In acknowledging that "*Midnight's Children* is the object of critical disagreement, but also provides the grounds where the disagreement is staged" (255), Kortenaar argues that "The novel's yoking of the conventions of allegory, centered outside the self on the nation and its history, and of memoir, focused on the self, its perceptions and memory, is best understood as a mediation on a more general condition. The nation-state itself is always a function of a double perspective, at once a projection of the self on the scale of the world and a means of locating the self within the world" (10). It is, however, in the interstices of the "self" and the "world" configuration that Kortenaar locates his own critique of the work.

Kortenaar explores this interconnectedness and interdependency by drawing on an impressive array of contemporary theories and offers a persuasive, lucid account of the way he reads Rushdie's shaping of attitudes toward the idea of "nation" and "nationalism." As the register of fiction's difference from referential and reproductive discourses, Rushdie for Kortenaar opens up a space of transformation. This does not mean that transformations effected by particular ideologies are always salutary or progressive (in the case of *Midnight's Children*, between nationalist and cosmopolitan outlooks), but that such distinctions mark an unpredictable dynamic power in fiction, which broaches questions of agency in a positive way. Kortenaar's argument thus implicitly contests containment models of literary fiction urged by postcolonial criticism, and it does so without disregarding what has gone before but carving out a niche for itself.