

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.

Kortenaar reads *Midnight's Children* in a number of ways: as allegorized history, as a study of nascent nationalism, and as a text of nationhood. Crucial to Kortenaar's thesis is the idea that in Rushdie's fictional portrait of an emerging nation, articulated in and by his eponymous protagonist Saleem, he more than merely posits the deployment of contraries (10).

For Kortenaar, merely characterizing Saleem's struggle as embodying (and symbolizing) the emergent nationalist sentiments, or viewing his perforated history as a bildungsroman is to miss the whole for the parts. The novel is both a romance and parody of it, and it both asserts and rejects categorical containment: "Romance expresses a truth: the anxieties it assuages and the desire it fulfils are real. The truth of romance is insufficient, however, because anxieties are never fully assuaged nor the desires entirely satisfied. The recognition of romance's insufficiency is expressed in realism, which makes it possible to imagine a world not centred on the self but shared with others" (196). As Kortenaar notes, "Romance provides Saleem with his meaning, but for his authority, he needs realism" (210).

In particular, Kortenaar takes aim at Timothy Brennan's interrogation of Rushdie and *Midnight's Children* through the conception of cosmopolitanism. For Brennan, *Midnight's Children* exemplifies the unique (even exoticized) non-Western experience that is nonetheless insistently Western in its formulation, what Brennan elsewhere has described as "the local self exported as the world." Kortenaar's take on Brennan (and others) is not that "Brennan's politics are false ... but that Brennan is unfair to Rushdie's novel. Rushdie's novel neither flatters its cosmopolitan audience nor confirms them in their sense of the world, but genuinely measures itself against the world and ... makes new discoveries about the world possible" (253).

In his reading, Kortenaar focuses on the hybrid nature of identity in the novel, which he asserts "is a matter of culture ... and not of race or blood, but culture appears every bit as ineluctable as race ever was" (203). And since identity and culture lie at the heart of issues of nationalism, Kortenaar views the novel from a perspective that takes into account Rushdie's narrative strategy that both straddles and subverts established fictional genres. Kortenaar adopts "a position that is itself best termed cosmopolitan in the sense that it stands outside and sees around nationalism" (255). As Kortenaar sums it up, "I am less concerned with the tenability of this position than with the world it implies. Rushdie the liberal imagines himself outside the whale, and outside the nation. He is the individual who stands apart. At the same time he denies that there is an outside; every point is in the same ocean. The combination of inside and outside produces both the cosmopolitan nationalist (Saleem) and the nationalist cosmopolitan (the author of *Midnight's Children*)" (251).

Literary discourses on postcolonial literature in recent years have located the meaning and significance of postcolonial texts within the spatial sites of "nation," whose culture is viewed as instrumental in forging identities. Kortenaar's scholarship goes beyond these sites in an argument that is both informed and refreshing, by suggesting how categories and distinctions (including formulations of "nationalism" and "cosmopolitanism") are capable of being reformulated to suggest new ways of reading a postcolonial text. Indeed, illustrated sparingly but splendidly with political cartoons and reproductions, Kortenaar's text displays not only a thorough understanding of Rushdie scholarship, particularly on *Midnight's Children*, but also his own impressive absorption of Indian political, social, and cultural history, evidence of which is obvious both in his text and in the meticulous glossary on the novel, which runs to forty pages.

Kortenaar's study has admirable sweep and vigor, is rich in detail, and suggestive in its larger conclusions. As a full-length study of *Midnight's Children*, Kortenaar's work surely belongs to the scholar's shelf.

Terry Eagleton

The English Novel: An Introduction

Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2005. Pp. 365. \$24.95

Reviewed by Sabah A. Salih

In 1983, Terry Eagleton gave us *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. The book quickly became the standard guide to the subject and helped bring about fundamental changes in the way English is taught and organized as a field of study. With some twenty other equally profound books behind him since that book, today Eagleton is recognized the world over as postmodernism's greatest living theorist and one of the keenest public intellectuals of our time.

Eagleton's study shows again his enormous powers of analysis, rigorous style, sharp wit, and deep learning. The book is as intellectually challenging as it is rewarding. Refusing to take anything for granted, Eagleton begins with devoting a substantial chapter to the seemingly mundane question "What is a novel?" Eagleton's point is that the novel is "an anarchic genre" (2); it not only "eludes definitions" but also "actively undermines them" (1). What is more, because "the novel's authority is ungrounded in anything outside itself" (7), readers need to always be aware of its fictionality and not to confuse it with reality. Being something like "a mighty melting pot" (1), the novel is also a site in which "values are at their most diverse and conflicting" (5)

Nowhere is this more evident than in the style commonly known as realism. Eagleton defines realism as "a matter of representation" (10) or an effort to model novels on life, and refuses, rightly, to accept any absolute distinctions