Terrorism
and Narrative Practice

edited by

Thomas Austenfeld, Dimiter Daphinoff
and Jens Herlth

LIT

Table of Contents

"Terror had exterminated all the sentiments of nature": American Terror, the French Revolution, and Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*

Philipp Schweighauser

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's reflections on racial tensions and racial violence in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) are much less often quoted than his celebrated descriptions of the melting pot.[1] For Crèvecoeur, some ethnic groups – especially African-Americans, Native Americans, and the Irish – are either highly unlikely to "mel[t] into a new race of men" (70) or less than desired ingredients in the American cauldron. Crèvecoeur, then, is by no means an unconditional proponent of ethnic and racial inclusiveness. But on his journey to South Carolina, his semi-autobiographical narrator James encounters the negation of this inclusiveness in ways that shock him:

The following scene will, I hope, account for these melancholy reflections and apologize for the gloomy thoughts with which I have filled this letter (...). I was leisurely travelling along, attentively examining some peculiar plants which I had collected, when (...) horrid to think and painful to repeat, I perceived a Negro, suspended in [a] cage and left there to expire! I shudder when I recollect that the birds had already picked out his eyes; his cheek-bones were bare; his arms had been attacked in several places; and his body seemed covered with a multitude of wounds. From the edges of the hollow sockets and from the lacerations with which he was disfigured, the blood slowly dropped and tinged the ground beneath. No sooner were the birds flown than swarms of insects covered the whole body of

this unfortunate wretch, eager to feed on his mangled flesh and to drink his blood. I found myself suddenly arrested by the power of affright and terror; my nerves were convulsed; I trembled; I stood motionless, involuntarily contemplating the fate of this Negro in all its dismal latitude. (177–78)

Marianne Noble's reading of this passage from Crèvecoeur's ninth letter as a Gothic scene is entirely appropriate (173–74). It is not only James's graphic description of the slave's evisceration that links this passage to Gothic tales but also the immobilizing "affright and terror" James experiences as well as the gloomy mood that lingers in his mind after the experience. All three elements – the scene of violence, the observer's terror, and the melancholic aftereffects – are also crucial to Gothic novels written by the late-eighteenth-century American master of the subgenre, Charles Brockden Brown. For the most part, in both Crèvecoeur and Brown, it is not the narrator who is the primary victim of violence. In a sense, this is necessarily so in first-person narratives such as Crèvecoeur's and many of Brown's novels, but it is worth noting that "terror" in both writers' texts characterizes less the victim's response than his or her observer's. This is not to accuse either Brown or Crèvecoeur of any lack of sympathy. Crèvecoeur, for one, anticipates Harriet Beecher Stowe by seventy years as he taps deep into sentimental discourse to impress upon his readers that slaves, who are presented with "nothing but terrors and punishments" (172), daily "moisten the ground they till" with "showers of sweat and of tears" while their daughters are "torn from [their] weeping parents, the wife from the loving husband; whole families swept away" (168).[2] What I mean to emphasize, though, is that the subject who experiences terror is often at a remove from the scene of violence and is terrorized as a *witness* of someone else's suffering. This is as true for Crèvecoeur's James as it is for Brown's Clara in *Wieland* when she is immobilized by fear as she finds her murdered sister-in-law lying in her own bed, and it is also true for the eponymous protagonist of Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*, who is shaken by terror as he

---

[2] Crèvecoeur's outrage at the injustices of the Southern slave system does not prevent him from making statements that are either racialist or racist and in either case deeply offensive: he calls the slave's sexual drive the "instinct of the brute" (170) and states that slavery keeps them in "their original and untutored state" (Crèvecoeur 172); and he defends the Northern slave system as affording slaves "as much liberty as their masters" (171). Clearly, Crèvecoeur is no abolitionist.

encounters the villain Welbeck's first victim or the yellow fever's toll. In all of these Gothic scenes, terror is experienced from a distance.

In eighteenth-century aesthetics, "terror" occupied a privileged place in discussions of the sublime – a notion that would itself come to play a central role in scholarly treatments of the Gothic. Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* was published in 1757, seven years before Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the novel that is generally considered the first full-length Gothic fiction. In 1759, a second edition appeared that also included a section on taste. In both editions, Burke insists on the intricate relatedness of power and the sublime:

[T]he ideas of pain, and, above all of death, are so very affecting, that whilst we remain in the presence of whatever is supposed to have the power of inflicting either, it is impossible to be perfectly free from terror. (. . .) Thus we are affected by strength, which is *natural* power. The power which arises from institution in kings and commanders, has the same connection with terror. Sovereigns are frequently addressed with the title of *dread majesty*. And it may be observed, that young persons little acquainted with the world, and who have not been used to approach men in power, are commonly struck with an awe which takes away the free use of their faculties. (*Philosophical Enquiry* 64–65, 67)

On the face of it, the kind of terror Burke writes about is very different from that which Crèvecoeur evokes. Burke's terror is an intense but mitigated fear that arises in the presence of forces that evoke the "idea of pain and danger" (51) – as opposed to its actual experience. It is that fear which sets in when we encounter overwhelming, great, or obscure natural phenomena; vast architectural structures; dangerous animals; or powerful human beings. For Burke, such terror is the "source" and "ruling principle of the sublime" (39, 58) *provided that we are not in actual danger*. Only then, from a safe distance, "when it does not press too close" can terror "produc[e] delight" (46) and thus give way to what Burke calls "a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror" (134). That "tranquillity tinged with terror" – a sensation Burke variously labels "astonishment" or "awe" – can be understood as either the effect that sublime objects produce in observers or the sublime itself. In Burke, then, the sublime names both a quality of certain objects and a specific sensation.

Of course, Burke's "delightful horror" is different from the terror Crèvecoeur's James experiences as he watches an African-American die. In Crèvecoeur, any mitigation of terror by delight would render James and, by implication, Crèvecoeur himself, a callous voyeur of human suffering. Yet as we take a closer look at the two passages, similarities emerge that allow us to describe more precisely what "terror" meant to these eighteenth-century writers. In Burke as in Crèvecoeur, terror is a feeling. More precisely, it is a feeling of fear that is triggered by external forces but ultimately results from the *idea* of pain or danger. Moreover, it is a fear that is so intense it paralyzes subjects. Thus, for both, terror is a cognitive and emotional as well as a somatic force.

Burke's choice of an example should make us pause. Yes, according to Burke, tigers, oceans, and gloomy buildings are sublime, but so are "kings and commanders." The kind of power Burke has in mind here is the absolutist power whose exercise Michel Foucault parades before our senses at the beginning of *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. And indeed, the spectacle of violence Foucault unfolds in horrifying detail there – the quartering of the regicide Robert François Damiens on March 1, 1757 – also serves Burke as an example of the greater force of ideas of pain over those of pleasure when he writes, in a passage that he added to the second edition of 1759, that he is "in great doubt whether any man could be found, who would earn a life of the most perfect satisfaction, at the price of ending it in the torments, which justice inflicted in a few hours on the late unfortunate regicide in France" (*Philosophical Enquiry* 39). For Burke, then, one form of power that is productive of both terror and the sublime is the monarch's power over the life and death of his subjects. Anthony Galluzzo is certainly correct when – in his discussion of Burke, Kant, and Brown – he identifies the "sublime terror" which that absolutist power instills in subjects' minds and hearts as an "essential instrument in the armory of the ancien regime" (265).[3]

In Crèvecoeur, that very same power is exercised not by a king but by the masters of another regime. Crèvecoeur's ninth letter describes the Southern slave system in terms that resonate with the political system that still ruled his home country: lawyers, whom he positions at the top of the social hierarchy, have managed to unite "the skill and dexterity of the scribe with the power and ambition of the prince" (168), and the plantation owners themselves, to whom the slaves "are obliged to devote their lives, their limbs, their will, and every vital exertion" look upon their bondsmen "not (…) with half the kindness and affection with which they consider their dogs and horses" (169). But there is a striking difference in these two writers' treatment of what one could call the *political* sublime. For Burke, the terror tyrants and monarchs spread does not detract from their greatness. In fact, it is a necessary prerequisite for their sublimity; subjects are and ought to stand in awe of the power wielded by kings and commanders. Burke is, of course, fully aware that "delightful horror" can be experienced only from a distance: the boy or girl who comes into the presence of a great personage for the first time can make that experience, and so can Burke himself; Robert-François Damiens could not. In fact, it is a central tenet of Burke's theory of the sublime – as well as of Kant's – that "when danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight" (*Philosophical Enquiry* 39–40) and thus incapable of triggering sublime sensations. In Burke's discussion of absolutist power, that distance is both spatial and social: the sovereign's power to spread terror is premised on the existence of rigid social hierarchies, and Burke has no intention whatsoever of closing those distances. Crèvecoeur, on the other hand, in his sympathetic depiction of the slave's ordeal, considerably narrows them. Though in that specific passage, the terror James speaks of is his own rather than the slave's, we can interpret the narrator's visceral response as an effect of sympathetic identification. That process of identification has, moreover, tangible cognitive and behavioral effects: James emerges from his stupor after a while to offer the slave a shell filled with water through the bars of the cage, guiding it "with trembling hands" to "the quivering lips of the wretched sufferer" (178).[4]

Still, the distance between James and the slave is never entirely closed. At the most basic level, the distance that remains is spatial and cognitive: between James and the victim of violence, there are the bars of the cage;

---

[3]   Galluzzo also makes the connection between Burke and Foucault (262).

---

[4]   I am indebted to Catherine Diederich for pointing out to me that, from the perspective of cognitive science, the sight of a human being caught in a cage is likely to trigger in observers' minds a "container image," a basic cognitive image that allows observers to link, in their minds, what they see to their own, prior experiences of entrapment.

and the "power of affright and terror" that paralyzes James and keeps him in his place is his own, not the slave's. The distance between Crèvecoeur himself and the slave is even greater, both in narrative and, as in Burke's case, also in social terms. There are at least three figures that intercede between the empirical author – a French-American aristocrat born in Northern France to the Comte and Comtesse de Crèvecoeur – and the abject figure of the dying slave: the implied author, a fictional narrator (the Pennsylvanian farmer named James), and a younger version of James, the book's protagonist. To a certain extent, James is Crèvecoeur's alter ego, but the author's self-stylization, in his dedicatory letter to the Abbé Raynal, as "an humble American planter, a simple cultivator of the earth," and a "man who possesses neither titles nor places" (37–38) of course bends the truth.[5] In 1769, Crèvecoeur did indeed buy a sizable farm in Orange County, N.Y., but unlike his fictional farmer-narrator, he served as the French consul for New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut in the years from 1783 to 1792, the last two of which he spent on medical leave in France, where he was to remain for the last 23 years of his life. It was upon his return to France in 1790 that he was reminded most forcefully of his modest but aristocratic origins. Partly to evade revolutionary violence, he retired to the countryside in 1792 and spent the rest of his days in provincial obscurity. There is, then, much that separates Crèvecoeur from James, and there is even more that separates James from the unnamed slave and distances him spatially, cognitively, narratively, and socially from the African-American victim of the Southern plantation system whose dying strikes *him* with terror. In admittedly different ways, then, terror in both Burke and Crèvecoeur is a feeling of intense and paralyzing fear that arises in the presence of forces that have the power to inflict pain or death but which remain at a distance.

Now both writers' texts were published well before a delegation of the Jacobin Club to the French National Convention demanded, on September 5, 1793, that "terror" be made "the order of the day" ("Proceedings" 350).

---

[5]   See Grantland S. Rice's *The Transformation of Authorship in America* for an innovative re-reading of the *Letters from an American Farmer* as a literary-philosophical engagement with and propagation of the Abbé Raynal's theory that "the ubiquity of civilizational decline in history was linked to an insidious distancing of the means and modes of agricultural production" (104) whose major American symptoms are mercantilism and slavery.

Terror in the sense of "the use of organized intimidation" (OED, sense 4) was part of neither Burke's vocabulary in 1757 nor of Crèvecoeur's in 1782. "Terror," for them, was not synonymous with "terrorism." Instead, both use "terror" in its oldest sense to refer to a specific feeling, namely "[t]he state of being terrified or greatly frightened; intense fear, fright, or dread" (OED, sense 1). Thus, when one prominent observer of the French Revolution writes, in 1791, that the French revolutionaries "boast that they operated their usurpation rather by terror than by force" (Burke, *Letter* 44), he still uses "terror" in that older sense. The author of these words is no other than Edmund Burke, who had published his fiercely anti-revolutionary *Reflections on the Revolution in France* the year before. In that foundational document of conservatism, Burke predicted that the French Revolution would lead to "nothing but the gallows" (64). Burke got the preferred instrument of *la Terreur* wrong, but his treatise has rightly been read as prophetic of revolutionary violence. Burke's predictions rest upon his conservative political philosophy according to which the breakdown of social distinctions by necessity ends in chaos and terror. For Burke, then, terror is the operating principle of both absolutist and revolutionary rule, but while the terror that reigns in monarchies depends on the rigidity of social distinctions, revolutionary terror emerges precisely when those very distinctions are effaced.

Burke's most poignant evocation of what happens when social distinctions are erased occurs in his account of the removal of the French royal family from Versailles to the Tuileries Palace:

History will record, that on the morning of the 6th of October, 1789, the king and queen of France, after a day of confusion, alarm, dismay, and slaughter, lay down, under the pledged security of public faith, to indulge nature in a few hours of respite, and troubled, melancholy repose. From this sleep the queen was first startled by the voice of the sentinel at her door, who cried out to her to save herself by flight – that this was the last proof of fidelity he could give – that they were upon him, and he was dead. Instantly he was cut down. A band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with his blood, rushed into the chamber of the queen and pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked, and, through ways unknown to the murderers, had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband not secure of his own life for a moment. (*Reflections* 60)

Burke's wildly exaggerated account of Marie-Antoinette's removal from Versailles makes rich use of generic elements of both the sentimental and the Gothic. As the author of the *Philosophical Enquiry*, he was, of course, particularly suited to give such an account. As Cathy N. Davidson has argued, Gothic fictions are the most political of early American novels in that they critique abuses of power and the concomitant undermining of the social order. Especially Charles Brockden Brown's novels were based on the reformist Gothic novels of William Godwin – works that were "also called Jacobin novels by their detractors" (Davidson 328). Burke's example shows that the Gothic can also be used for very different political ends: in this case for a fiercely anti-Jacobin attack on the moral foundations of the French Revolution.

As far as the reception of that revolution on the other side of the Atlantic is concerned, one of the central documents is a pamphlet published in Philadelphia in 1794. Its title is *Report Upon the Principles of Political Morality Which Are to Form the Basis of the Administration of the Interior Concerns of the Republic*, and its author is Maximilien-François-Marie-Isidore de Robespierre. The name of the printer is not mentioned, but we know that it was Benjamin Franklin Bache, grandson of Benjamin Franklin and founding editor of the fiercely Jeffersonian newspaper *The Philadelphia Aurora* (Cleves 77–78). The pamphlet Bache printed is the English translation of a report Robespierre had given to the National Convention on behalf of the Committee of Public Safety on February 5, 1794. Robespierre's report is a crucial document of the French Revolution since it explains the necessity of terror from the viewpoint of one of its most ardent proponents:

[T]he people are guided by reason, the enemies of the people driven by terror alone. If virtue be the spring of a popular government in times of peace, the spring of that government during a revolution is virtue combined with terror: virtue, without which terror is destructive; terror, without which virtue is impotent. Terror is only justice, prompt, severe and inflexible; it is then an emanation of virtue (...). (10)

Robespierre's reasoning is especially remarkable from an American Studies perspective, for his discourse on republican virtue replicates that of American revolutionaries harking back, over a decade earlier, to notions of the re-

public in ancient Greece and Rome (Kelleter 392). What Robespierre adds to the mix is the terror that has become intimately tied to his name ever since. In late-eighteenth-century America, it was not only the grandson of one of the country's founders who found that mix appealing.

With regard to Robespierre's use of the word "terror," what is particularly interesting is his slippage from one understanding of the word to another. In opposing terror to reason and in defining virtue and terror as the twin springs of revolutionary government, he seems to use terror in its older sense of a feeling of intense fear: during revolution, citizens behave as they should due to a combination of virtue – i.e., the selfless dedication to the general good – as well as fear. In fact, the French terrorists regularly used "terror" to refer to the feeling of intense fear their policies should instill in the nation's enemies rather than to the policies themselves and the political and legal apparatus that produced them. That sense of terror is also activated when, in the same speech, Robespierre lashes out against the counter-revolutionary use of terror: "Would you believe it, that (...) terror was spread among the people by giving currency to a report, that all children under 10 years of age and all persons above 70 were to be killed?" (19–20). Yet when Robespierre defines terror as "justice, prompt, severe and inflexible," he uses "terror" in its more recent sense as an institutionalized form of intimidation. In Robespierre's speech, then, we can witness a slippage from an older understanding of terror as an internal-psychological force to a more modern understanding of terror as an external force.

How did the French events and the discourse on terror that surrounded them impact American literature? In their focus on abuses of power, their deliberate evocation of terror in readers' minds and hearts, and their multiple challenges to rationality, early American Gothic fictions prove ideal testing grounds for the viability of an Enlightenment project that spawned both emancipatory drives to liberate humankind from what Kant called its *"self-incurred immaturity"* (58) and atrociously violent suppressions of dissent. In late-eighteenth-century America, it was Charles Brockden Brown who reinvented the Gothic for an American readership. Of particular interest in this context is *Arthur Mervyn, or Memoirs of the Year 1793*. Published in two volumes in 1799 and 1800, this novel was written by an author who had seen the French Revolution end in carnage and who was not only borrowing heavily from British writer and political philosopher

William Godwin's Gothic fictions – in *Arthur Mervyn* most heavily from *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) – but was also sympathetic to that author's as well as that author's wife's – Mary Wollstonecraft's – radical political ideas.[6] Moreover, the novel's subtitle – "Memoirs of the Year 1793" – places it squarely in the temporal context of the French revolutionary upheavals. For Brown, the French events persistently raise the specter that human beings whose "thoughts [are] familiar with enlightened and disinterested principles" may succumb to a life that is nothing but "[o]ne tissue of iniquity and folly" (*Arthur Mervyn* 85).

Arthur Mervyn is a Gothic *bildungsroman* that tells the tale of the eponymous protagonist's initiation into adult life. Arthur is an inexperienced country boy who grows up on a farm near Philadelphia and immediately falls into the hands of an evil mentor – Welbeck, who turns out to be a forger and a murderer – once he enters the city. During another visit to Philadelphia, Arthur falls prey to the yellow plague epidemic that has hit the city. Luckily, friendly Dr. Stevens chances upon Arthur and invites him into his home. Once he is recovered, Arthur gets into further trouble as he encounters Welbeck again and witnesses several deaths from yellow fever. As the story ends, Arthur is engaged to Achsa Fielding, a wealthy widow of somewhat dubious reputation. At least that is the story Arthur tells us. By his own account, he is a compulsive but trustworthy youth whose gullibility and will to do good get him into trouble. Stevens largely buys into that account. For others, though, Arthur is a con-man and seducer who barely manages to hide his selfish desires behind a façade of youthful naïveté. Brown does not resolve the question of Arthur's character and leaves us with two conflicting accounts of his protagonist as either "a kind of latter-day Franklin" and "American Adam" or a "rogue and reprobate" (Davidson 342–43).

In either case, the terrors Arthur is exposed to are not primarily political in nature. Instead, they are bound up with the machinations of Welbeck and the yellow plague epidemic of 1793 that killed nearly 2,500 people in Philadelphia, then the capital of the newly founded nation (Grabo 449–51). In the course of the novel, "terror" or its plural "terrors" occur 36 times.

---

6   While Brown's Gothic fictions are heavily influenced by Godwin's politics, his *Alcuin: A Dialogue* (1798) owes much to Wollstonecraft in its exploration conjugal equality, female education, marriage, and divorce.

None of these are used in the sense of "the use of organized intimidation" – the more recent usage that emerged out of the French Revolution. Instead, we find much that is familiar from Crèvecoeur and Burke. Witness, for instance, Arthur's reaction as he is faced with Welbeck's murder victim Amos Watson:

[Welbeck's] eyes were riveted to something that lay, at the distance of a few feet before him, on the floor. A second glance was sufficient to inform me of what nature this object was. It was the body of a man, bleeding, ghastly, and still exhibiting the marks of convulsion and agony! (...) I was nearly as panic-struck and powerless as Welbeck himself. (...) My thoughts wandered in confusion and terror. (84)

Arthur does not know yet that Welbeck is the author of the deed, which is why his terror does not arise from any direct fear of bodily harm to himself. Thus, Arthur is – not unlike Crèvecoeur's James – paralyzed by proxy at the sight of a victim of violence. Here as in *Letters from an American Farmer*, "terror" names not the victim's response to violence but his observer's. As in Burke, moreover, terror is an effect of the *idea* of pain that a frightful sight evokes. In all three writers, then, "terror" names a feeling.

However, in Brown, there are significant exceptions. When Brown describes the horrors of the yellow fever epidemic, "terror" can be taken to refer to either Philadelphians' fear of the disease or to the disease itself. In these passages, we read that "[t]error had exterminated all the sentiments of nature" (129), that "the terror of infection (...) made the inhabitants seclude themselves from the observation of each other" (156), that to "disarm" the dangers of pestilence "of their terrors, requires the longest familiarity" (165), and that "[t]he same terror of infection existed after [Mr. Hadwin's] death as before" (276). To be sure, these uses of "terror" need not necessarily be taken to signify an external as opposed to an internal-psychological force; they could mean either. But previous critics' discussions of the allegorical significance of the yellow fever in Brown's novel suggest that a reading of "terror" in these passages as an *external* force makes perfect sense.

In her survey essay on the medical imagination of early American literature, Stephanie Browner diagnoses financial crises, slavery, and dissimulation as some of the main ills that beset the new republic. Against that back-

ground, she argues, Brown uses the yellow fever epidemic in the nation's capital as the "ultimate emblem and irrefutable evidence of the nation's ill-health" (217–18). Yet perhaps, there is yet another disease that threatens to infect the body politic. In *Arthur Mervyn*, Brown alludes to that disease when he has Arthur admit that he has but "confused ideas of European governments and manners" but knew "that the present was a period of revolution and hostility" (56). Arthur's vague understanding of European events becomes more specific and personal when his newfound love Achsa Fielding tells him the story of her deceased husband, who became embroiled in the French events:

> At the opening of the Revolution (...) he became a champion of the people. By his zeal and his efforts he acquired such importance as to be deputed to the National Assembly. In this post he was the adherent of violent measures, till the subversion of monarchy; and then, when too late for his safety, he checked his career. (424–25)

At this point, Arthur interrupts to ask, "And what has since become of him?" Achsa "sigh[s] deeply" and replies, "You were yesterday reading a list of the proscribed under Robespierre. I checked you. I had good reason. But this subject grows too painful; let us change it" (426). In *Arthur Mervyn*, the yellow fever and the French Revolution are external forces that inspire fears so intense that they test characters' powers of sympathy and moral strength – their "fortitude and constancy" (3), as Brown puts it in his preface. *Arthur Mervyn* is not the first text in which Brown establishes links between the yellow fever and the French Revolution to explore questions of morality. Brown's first texts about the 1793 fever epidemic were published in the Philadelphia *Weekly Magazine* between February 23 and April 28, 1798. This series of thirteen fictional sketches and essays, collectively known as "The Man at Home," is narrated by an elderly man who shuts himself off in a Philadelphia house to hide from his creditors. He picks up the pen to record his ruminations on a variety of personal, historical, and moral issues. One of his personal episodes takes him back to a Neapolitan quarantine ward where, struck down by a disease, he had time to develop "all the notions that I now hold most dear, respecting the rights and duties of men and the principles of social institutions" (*The Rhapsodist* 45). The house the narrator lives in was deserted by its former occupants, a French

botanist named M. De Moivre and his daughter. Refugees from the French Revolution, the De Moivres themselves had used the house as a hiding place until the father contracted the yellow fever and died. It is the De Moivres' story that prompts the elderly man to reflect on a contemporaneous revolution in a former colony of "Magna Græcia," where "a secret tribunal" meets "for no other purpose than to form a catalogue of those who should be forthwith sacrificed" and fosters an atmosphere of "the utmost terror" (*The Rhapsodist* 81–83). To these reflections, Harrington, one of the old man's few remaining friends, adds that "the very city of which we are inhabitants, no longer ago than 1793, suffered evils, considerably parallel" (84) to these events. Harrington, of course, refers to the yellow fever epidemic, thus establishing links between infections of the body natural and those of the body politic, to use Ernst H. Kantorowicz's terms.

Peter Kafer argues that this episode should be read first and foremost as a fictionalized account of not the French but the American Revolution "*as the Brown family knew it*" (103), i.e., in its regional context of late 1770s Pennsylvania. At the same time, he detects in it "the intermixed themes of the Irish, the French Revolution and its detritus, and the yellow fever" (104). In the 1790s, both Republicans and anti-Jacobin Federalists interpreted national struggles of the past and present in the light of and with vocabulary derived from contemporaneous events in France. Moreover, for those who read Brown's tale in 1798, the author's use of the word "terror" connects the events in 1770s Pennsylvania unequivocally with the more recent events of the French reign of terror, which had come to an end three years before Brown began writing "The Man at Home."

In the late eighteenth century, Federalists and conservative northeastern elites deeply feared the outbreak of a second revolution on American soil. The French Revolution, *la Terreur*, the Citizen Genêt affair, and the Napoleonic wars fostered xenophobia and fears about Jacobin political agitation that culminated in the passage of the repressive Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798 – the year before the First Part of *Arthur Mervyn* was published. In historian Rachel Hope Cleves's words,

> The 1790s have famously been described as an age of passion: a time when paranoia and emotionalism fractured American politics. The American streets routinely boiled over with political conflict during the early 1790s, heightened by the connections between domestic affairs and international politics. Democratic

American supporters of the French Revolution demonstrated their continuing commitment to politics out of doors by gathering in the streets to celebrate French accomplishments and to protest the federal administration. Federalist opponents of the French Revolution sought to enforce a model of republicanism that limited political participation to voting and speech, by attacking the Democratic-Republicans rhetorically, legally, and with arms. (4)

Brown did have much sympathy for social reform movements and even political radicalism. But if my reading of his use of "terror" as it refers to the yellow fever epidemic in *Arthur Mervyn* and "The Man at Home" is correct, then his semantic slippage from "terror" as a feeling of intense fear to "terror" as an external force that produces that feeling suggests that he may have meant the yellow fever epidemic as an emblem of not only the early republic's internal ideological struggles but also far more violent upheavals that swept away Achsa Fielding's husband. It is well known that Brown at first supported the French Revolution but like many Americans turned away from it when it devolved into the reign of terror. To what extent that turning away bears witness to a more fundamental political conversion on Brown's part is a matter of debate. While Cleves reiterates what has for long been the standard view among critics ("Brown initially welcomed the French Revolution, but (...) became an anti-Jacobin and Federalist during the Reign of Terror" [101]), Bryan Waterman maintains that "Brown never quite became an unabashed Federalist propagandist, as yet another critical cliché holds" (187). Whatever the extent of Brown's political shift, in *Arthur Mervyn*, it can be traced down to the semantic nuances of "terror," the word that would become a shorthand for the final phase of the French Revolution.

What is striking about those traces is their generic and stylistic affinity with both an aristocratic French observer's censure of American slavery and one of the most fiercely anti-revolutionary political tracts. In Crèvecoeur's report from the South, in Burke's narrative of Marie-Antoinette's ordeal, and in Brown's rendition of Perrin's fate, the Gothic is not designed to evoke the "delightful horror" Burke speaks of in his discussion of the sublime. Instead, it is fused with the sentimental to makes us feel with and pity victims of eighteenth-century social and political terror. As Gothic *frisson* gives way to sympathy in their texts, their readers are called upon to abhor and condemn the acts of violence they experience vicariously, as witnesses at two removes. Thus, Crèvecoeur, Burke, and Brown enlist, not terror and

delight, but terror and pity in the service of political agendas whose different provenances testify to the depth of ideological chasms in the age of revolutions.

Works Cited

Andress, David. *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.

Brown, Charles Brockden. 1798. *Wieland; or, the Transformation: An American Tale and Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*. Ed. Jay Fliegelman. New York: Penguin, 1991.

—. *Alcuin: A Dialogue*. 1798. Ed. and introd. Cynthia A. Kierner. Albany: New College and UP, 1995.

—. *Arthur Mervyn, or, Memoirs of the Year 1793*. 1799–1800. Ed. Warner Berthoff. Rev. ed. Kent: Kent State UP, 2002.

—. *The Rhapsodist and Other Uncollected Writings*. Ed. Harry R. Warfel. New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1943.

Browner, Stephanie. "Doctors, Bodies, and Fiction." *A Companion to American Fiction, 1780–1865*. Ed. Shirley Samuels. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. 216–27.

Burke, Edmund. *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly in Answer to Some Objections to His Book on French Affairs*. 3rd ed. Paris: J. Dodsley, 1791.

—. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Ed. and introd. J. T. Boulton. New York: Routledge, 2008.

—. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Ed. Frank M. Turner. New Haven: Yale UP, 2003.

Cleves, Rachel Hope. *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.

Crèvecoeur, J. Hector St. John de. *Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America*. 1782. New York: Penguin, 1986.

Davidson, Cathy N. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. 2nd exp. ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. 2nd ed. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Galluzzo, Anthony. "Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland and the Aesthetics of Terror: Revolution, Reaction, and the Radical Enlightenment in Early American Letters." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42.2 (2009): 255–71.

Grabo, Norman S. "Historical Essay." *Arthur Mervyn, or Memoirs of the Year 1793*. Ed. Sydney J. Krause and S. W. Reid. By Charles Brockden Brown. Kent: Kent State UP, 2007. 449–77.

Kafer, Peter. *Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution and the Birth of American Gothic*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2004

Kant, Immanuel. "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" Trans. James Schmidt. *What Is Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*. Ed. James Schmidt. Berkeley: U of California P, 1996. 58–64.

Kantorowicz, Ernst Hartwig. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985.

Kelleter, Frank. *Amerikanische Aufklärung: Sprachen der Rationalität im Zeitalter der Revolution*. Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002.

Noble, Marianne. "The American Gothic." *A Companion to American Fiction, 1780–1865*. Ed. Shirley Samuels. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. 168–78.

"Proceedings of the National Convention (5 September 1793)." Trans. Caroline Ford and Keith Michael Baker. *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*. Ed. Keith Michael Baker. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987. 343–53.

Rice, Grantland S. *The Transformation of Authorship in America*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997.

Robespierre, Maximilien-François-Marie-Isidore de. *Report Upon the Principles of Political Morality Which Are to Form the Basis of the Administration of the Interior Concerns of the Republic*. Philadelphia, 1794.

Waterman, Bryan. "Charles Brockden Brown, Revised and Expanded." Rev. of *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality in the Early Republic*, ed. Philip Barnard, Mark L. Kamrath, and Stephen Shapiro; *Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution and the Birth of American Gothic*, by Peter Kafer; *Charles Brockden Brown and the Literary Magazine: Cultural Journalism in the Early American Republic*, by Michael Cody. *Early American Literature* 40.1 (2005): 173–91.

"A Contradiction in Terms": Patrick Neate's *City of Tiny Lights* as a Literary Intervention into post-9/11 Discourse

Michael C. Frank

I

In the mass of writing on terrorism, the study *Terror and Taboo* by social anthropologists Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass has proved particularly suggestive for the purposes of literary studies. Written under the immediate impression of the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings of 1993 and 1995, respectively, it puts forth the premise that public perception of terrorism relies heavily on myth and that it therefore requires a specific method of critical analysis, which the authors term "a mythography of Terror" (Zulaika and Douglass x). Most relevant in the present context is the observation that "regarding terrorism, the brandishing of stark facts goes hand in hand with great leaps into discursive fantasy" and that this raises the question as "to what extent all discourse on terrorism must conform to and borrow from some form of fictionalization" (4). It should be noted that Zulaika and Douglass apply a very broad definition of "fiction" as "the crafting of a narrative" (4). What they name "terrorism discourse" is said to encompass literary as well as non-literary "types of fictionalization – representation by the media, political manipulation, academic definitions, the imaginary archetype informing the thriller" (16).

In its emphasis on narrativization, the approach laid out by Zulaika and Douglass seems to call for the expertise of literary studies. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the two first book-length explorations of terrorism in late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature – Margaret Scanlan's