

*Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America.* By SUSAN M. STABILE. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004. xiii, 284p. Illustrations, notes, index. \$34.95.)

Histories of women in the early republic have focused on the birth of the new: romance and novels, egalitarianism and sensibility, reform and rights, organizations and opportunities. Susan M. Stabile's *Memory's Daughters* pays scant attention to these themes. This book looks backward as women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries remembered, reminisced, and preserved. Her primary subjects belong to a coterie of exceptionally well-educated women poets from wealthy and politically influential families—Susanna Wright, Hannah Griffitts, Elizabeth Fergusson, Annis Stockton, and, especially, Deborah Logan. The neoclassicism of their education connects their thoughts, writings, actions, and selected possessions to a tradition that Stabile locates in dazzling expositions of classical, renaissance, and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature, philosophy, and material culture. This is an erudite intellectual and cultural history of a feminine practice of the living memorializing “the local, the particular, the domestic.” It is particularly feminine because these women “aimed at accurately re-creating the historical record rather than invoking [as men did in historical archives] the past to fashion the future” (p. 4).

This analysis contains many surprises: there are extended discussions of seemingly disparate topics: women's shellwork; their memorializing of house plans and furnishings; the painstaking mechanics of writing; the multiple purposes of commonplace books; desks and posture; the formulas for ink and cosmetics and embalming; contemporary funerary customs; the representational purposes of mirrors, miniatures, and silhouettes; the significance of willow trees. Stabile finds connections, similarities, and parallelisms between these quite varied productions and practices through such overarching forms as geometry, genealogy, taste, and the urge to collect.

But what do these elaborately and occasionally tenuously linked customs reveal? Stabile hopes that the emphasis on houses will place “women at the center rather than the margins of early national history” (p. 9) in part by discovering that “the Philadelphia Georgian country house was—and remains—the true treasure house, sanctum, and keeper of women's memory. It is here, in the spaces prohibited to the general public, that the past survives” (p. 13). But accuracy and truth are elusive, especially when, as Stabile notes, nostalgia colors recollection. (Compare Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *The Age of Homespun* [2001] on nostalgia and the material culture of women.)

And whose past is this? The analysis constantly slips between the universal category of “women” and these five quite unusual women. Unexplored are the factors that make these women so different. Certainly most women did not inhabit Georgian country houses or write poetry. These five women, all Quaker

or Anglican, had seen their faiths fall from prominence and the mercantile elite of their parents' generation give way to a new elite of manufacturers and professional politicians. Is it their houses or their status that these women sought to preserve? And do these houses truly speak to us or is it the poems and journals of their former residents that bring these houses to life?

The book is a provocative, complex, and fascinating investigation of women and remembrance. It is filled with important insights on life and literature in early national America and makes the reader wish for more on women as writers, as educators of rising generations of women, as shapers of familial and national memories. Whether the many parts add up to the whole will be decided differently by each reader.

*Temple University*

SUSAN E. KLEPP

*Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution and the Birth of American Gothic.* By PETER KAHER. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. xxi, 249p. Illustrations, notes, index. \$39.95.)

Peter Kafer's study is a valuable addition to Charles Brockden Brown scholarship insofar as it brings to light a wealth of new biographical and historical information concerning Brown's family, the family's relations with the Philadelphia Quaker community, and Brown's relations with his closest cultural and intellectual fellow travelers. Some of Kafer's work was published in articles, but the more complete presentation in book form makes this necessary reading for anyone working on Brown. Kafer's accounts of Brown's family history, his father's banishment and vicissitudes as a businessman, and the identification of possible background for the "Henrietta" letters and aspects of Brown's novels all supplement and extend previous biographical scholarship in valuable ways that will undoubtedly inform future Brown scholarship.

The book's strength lies in this wealth of indispensable contextual information. Despite many insights (e.g., chapter 3's discussion of the dynamics behind the Brown-Smith-Bringinghurst correspondence), however, the study is not as successful when it comes to combining this rich biographical-historical material with persuasive theses and commentary about Brown's novels and larger career. The study is uncomfortable with contemporary (post-1985) Brown scholarship and with adequately theorized scholarship in general and consequently relies primarily on dated literary-critical work and undertheorized approaches to the period's literary and cultural transformations. There is much valuable work on Brown before 1985, of course, but relying on it in this manner leads the study to reproduce critical commonplaces and assumptions that have been largely abandoned or whose significance has changed dramatically in the last twenty years.