

# Reflecting 9/11



# Reflecting 9/11:

## *New Narratives in Literature, Television, Film and Theatre*

Edited by

Heather E. Pope and Victoria M. Bryan

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The idea for this collection arose from the 2012–14 South Atlantic Modern Language Association (SAML A) conference sessions, 9/11 and Literature. As both presenters and chairs of the conference, we wanted to gather some of the sessions' most promising essays, along with those inspired by the themes of the sessions, into a collection that might contribute to the interdisciplinary study of cultural representations of 9/11 and, indeed, to its historicising. We are extremely grateful to SAML A itself for providing such a wonderful opportunity for further scholarship and an atmosphere of collaboration that facilitated every stage of the editorial process.

We gratefully acknowledge the extraordinary work and diligence of the contributors to this volume as well, and appreciate their patience with the process of putting together an edited collection. We are indebted to our early co-editor, Arin Keeble, for his guidance and mentorship, which has significantly helped to shape this volume. We also thank Granville Ganter for all of his guidance and mentorship.



## INTRODUCTION

The cultural and artistic responses to 9/11<sup>1</sup> have been wide-ranging in form and function. As the turbulent post-9/11 years have unfolded—years shaped and characterised by the War on Terror, the Patriot Act, WikiLeaks, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Abu Ghraib, and the ongoing legacy of Guantánamo Bay—these narratives have been commemorative, heroic, and have attempted to work through collective and individual traumas and represent the terrorist Other. Early films by often political or progressive directors, such as Oliver Stone’s *World Trade Center* (2006) or Paul Greengrass’s *United 93* (2005), were judged to be apolitical; novels by some of the world’s most celebrated literary authors, such as Don DeLillo or Jay McInerney, were immediately criticised for focusing squarely on the domestic, for avoiding any wider contextual, historical, or political discussions of the attacks in favor of relationship dramas with 9/11 built in as a backdrop. Critical scrutiny of these texts and their limitations quickly proliferated, culminating in Richard Gray’s assessment that, in these texts, “the crisis is in every sense of the word domesticated” (133).

Literary critics in the first decade after 9/11 tended to emphasise the ways that 9/11 narratives—which include, but are not limited to, novels, poetry, television, film, and theatre—fetishise the domestic and perhaps narcissistically focus on personal wounding as a somewhat neurotic diversion from the global and political implications of 9/11. It is our hope that this volume begins to question the framework for success against which these narratives have been commonly read, and understand it as itself limited by cultural and paternalistic biases that reject domesticity. Much of the criticism of 9/11 narratives focuses on the way they respond to the psychic wound to a collectively traumatised nation. Michael Rothberg’s famous early criticism of 9/11 literature as a “failure of the imagination” narrowed the conversation about *why* we perceived that imagination had failed; perception itself was often framed by a local or domestic focus still entrenched in the immediate effects of trauma. Though

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<sup>1</sup> While we dislike the cultural arrogance inherent in the naming of “9/11” to refer to the vast complexity in the effects of the terrorist attacks on America on September 11, 2001, we make use of this category for consistency, despite the hegemonic assumption that 9/11 is *our* 9/11.

we needed trauma theory's insights in order to understand our losses and the trauma inflicted upon the nation, its wholesale application and privileging regarding the events of 9/11 has seemed to limit narrative possibility (Duvall and Marzec). Authors in this collection reflect upon the ways that this perspective has been politically and affectively shaped through aesthetics which make absent the voices of Others, and in doing so emphasise "us versus them" binaries in thinking and practice—both of which have served to support and perpetuate war.

The critique of 9/11 fiction as "a failure of the imagination" seems outdated in 2016, especially with the recent publications of several acclaimed novels which complicate this depiction (such as Amy Waldman's *The Submission* and Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*); and yet, it is a pivotal criticism, against or for which other critics have rallied, despite these novels' imaginative and insightful renderings of nuances of suffering and hope. In this collection, authors discuss the nature of the criticism of these literary works, examining some of the genre-specific "problems" identified by critics. A good deal of this criticism was based upon a masculinist dismissal of the domestic, and as such served to further limit the means of representation it sought to expand; the criticism itself seemed to suffer from the weight of 9/11, and in focussing so much upon the genre's limitations revealed a culture's limitations and biases, as well.

In this volume, we have sought to problematise the language of limitation and recontextualise some of the early criticisms of 9/11 narratives. By re-examining the insights this comprehensive discourse has provided, the authors featured in this collection revisit early narratives (2002–8) from alternate perspectives and consider new narratives (2009–15) of 9/11 as well. Many of the recent artistic responses to 9/11 tend toward the dialogic and more self-conscious, and attempt to respond simultaneously to the attacks and initial representations of the attacks, to their historicisation, and to the ever-shifting social and geopolitical continuities of post-9/11 America. Our hope is to widen the conversation about the lasting impacts of 9/11 and to incorporate strands of discussion on American exceptionalism and imperialism, torture, and Otherness, while remaining invested in honouring the personal and collective traumas of 9/11.

In some ways, we have been unable to completely divest this collection of the language of limitation, and yet, nonetheless, the included essays ask crucial questions about the way 9/11 is historicised, and several are fundamentally concerned with the early representation—or most often, lack of representation—of Otherness. Although this is changing, many 9/11 narratives have avoided discussion and acknowledgement of the

marginalised in anything but a limited capacity. These essays examine several texts that have been largely excluded from the 9/11 fictional canon. Such omissions and often limited renderings of Others have signalled to many of us our antecedents in domination, and as such have seemed to replicate racial, sexual, religious, and class hegemonies. While many early critics were concerned with the “retreat” to domesticity, this collection is invested less in critiquing these early critics and more in repoliticising them, in uncovering narrative strengths in identified deficiencies, and with refiguring and contextualising stories of the Other. It is in these omissions and limitations that we hope to have created a space for the emergence of new narratives, less invested in the hegemonic, and more representative of a wider variety of artistic responses to 9/11. We have sought out *new* narratives based upon the work that they do, for the ways they begin to shift the paradigm for understanding 9/11, and for the ways they operate outside of the 9/11 literary box which critics had imposed upon the genre early on. Narratives that perform important cultural work need not provide stark, *overtly* political commentary; instead, they tend to teach us about ourselves through personal relationships.

Even as we have sought to impose order on this genre which reflects so much pain and trauma, we have simultaneously enacted a kind of synecdoche of healing whose whole doesn’t yet exist—and perhaps will not exist for years to come, if ever. The ideation of healing and the trauma studies framework which foregrounds it assumes that America has entered into a prefigured process by which it may be healed. It is clear that America has been wounded, and yet both the cause of the wound and the nature of recovery from it have been determined *for us* through politics and media. America appears to have become attached to the possibility of health, without fully understanding the dangerous politics it implies. Lauren Berlant explains “cruel optimism” as “maintaining an attachment to a problematic object in *advance* of its loss” (21). The goal of healing is a “cruel optimism” which evokes the binary corollaries of sickness and health—trauma and recovery—without ever really understanding how health and recovery might manifest within a wounded nation. It is a cruel optimism which assumes that a nation carries with it indelible traces of a *healable* wound.

The synecodoches of healing embodied through 9/11 narratives trace a pattern of the hegemony of healing—a seemingly benign concept. While these novels do not always contain overtly political commentary, they nonetheless reveal the country’s history of domination and colonisation in complicated ways. This background is rooted in our cultural problem with difference—clearly not a new problem, but one that has been shrouded in

myths of colour blindness and political correctness—a problem whose effects have informed our interpretations of 9/11 narratives, and of 9/11 itself. Our purpose in identifying and engaging with the dominant tropes of 9/11 novels and their criticism is to situate 9/11 narratives within a broader perspective. Narratives of 9/11 have generally hinged on an understanding of America as the global centre of gravity, and often simply ignore even the existence of others, repressing the narratives of those who have been traditionally marginalised in American culture. Our goal is to contribute to the trend which is opening up previously foreclosed spaces within this body of work, invested in countering Western narcissism and hegemony, and concerned with issues of race and class that have underscored the nature of knowledge since 9/11.

Quite unintentionally, most of the essays in this collection share an understanding of 9/11 as on a trajectory with a past and a future, as part of a continuity paradigm which locates 9/11 less as an event that was “out of the blue,” as Kristiaan Versluys terms it, and more as the result of a traceable path of violence in American history. In their *Introduction to Literature after 9/11*, Ann Keniston and Jean Follansbee-Quinn map the history of narratives of 9/11 as a “*transition* [sic] from narratives of rupture to narratives of continuity” (3). Many of the essays included in this collection, though different in function and approach, all seem to understand a general historical blindness inherent in many 9/11 narratives, and several trace this back to the Cold War and earlier. While trauma studies provided the much-needed early framework for understanding the 9/11 crisis narratives which emerged immediately following the attacks, we also recognise the limitations of the ways our profound woundedness initially caused us to read this work—from the perspective of not knowing what had happened to us, underwritten by the trauma studies perspective that emphasised the need to protect the wound at all costs. As new narratives begin to move away from the trauma, offering some distance in their portrayals of 9/11, they reflect a cultural need. It is clear that America is outgrowing its victimised identity; the information that has emerged about Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay challenges our victimhood.

John Duvall and Robert P. Marzec suggest that the category of 9/11 literature needs to be troubled or read “catachrestically”; in this suggestion is the potential for uncovering new narratives, even within early narratives. In the Duvall-Marzec perspective, the appropriation of trauma theory as it is applied to 9/11 and its literature is a misapplication (396). The category of 9/11 literature is based upon theory grounded in psychological notions of trauma which somewhat problematically focus upon woundedness and health, yet reading stories that re-enact, report on, or invent trauma cannot

necessarily be read as trauma; while they are artifacts of an era—the representational value of which is crucial—reading them solely through this lens is myopic.

Like the Duvall-Marzec perspective, several of the essays in this collection suggest a catachrestic reading of 9/11 narratives that considers the trauma studies perspective against which we have read these novels as perhaps providing more information about us, as readers, than it does about 9/11. It seems that we have made the mistake of reading the attacks of 9/11 as a traumatic wound to each of us individually, and have applied trauma theory to try to understand ourselves better; yet, ultimately this has been a narcissistic endeavour. Narratives of 9/11 are recreations of imagined wounds; the stories themselves are not evidence that trauma has occurred—neither are the symptoms of trauma which emerge in them. They are simulations of trauma which are neither diagnosable nor treatable; they are not Real. Diagnosing the 9/11 novel perpetuates a focus on the self and privileges the wound itself. Instead, we might consider the role that technology has played in making us all *feel* victimised; many Americans tend to feel like 9/11 happened to *us*, and so we all *feel* traumatised.

Narrative possibility has been transformed by trauma theory, and consequently has affected the nature of narrative possibilities of national and personal identity—the two are intertwined. In *The Trauma Question*, Roger Luckhurst explains that trauma is an integral part of Western self-conceptions<sup>2</sup>; narratives of 9/11 provide both a basis for understanding an emergent traumatised cultural identity and its emotional aesthetic. In general, because people speak *around* traumatic events, and not *of* them specifically, figurative language and analogy are the language of trauma. The fictional accounts of 9/11 take part in constructing cultural history through collective memories that are by their traumatic nature revisionist. In this fiction, the pain caused by troubled relationships often displaces the pain of cultural trauma.

Trauma theory, however, helped us make sense of our shock, and to impose some kind of order out of chaotic emotions. It also helped us to understand 9/11 on a personal level, and so we began to domesticate the trauma of 9/11. Because we understand the domestic, we began to perceive of 9/11 in terms of our individual worlds, our home lives, and relationships. It was our way of negotiating what we do know with what we don't know; we needed a framework for understanding 9/11 because, for many of us, the day still remained lodged within the realm of

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), back cover.

hyperreality—a place marked by simulacra without any real referents. Most of us just weren't there, but daily we saw repeated images of destruction combined with stories of patriotism. For the most part, ours was a virtual experience of 9/11—one that was mediated, but that seemed Real; what Katalin Orbán calls “virtual but real” (qtd. in Tanner 59).

The work in this volume is generally sceptical of simple answers to questions surrounding 9/11 and the years that followed. They tend to question the traditionalist approach, and insist that there is a new way to talk about 9/11 and its results in America. Most suggest that our complicated relationship with post-9/11 time is nonlinear. They tend to be especially concerned with both the future, and the ways that technology is expanding our boundaries of time and space to the extent that we don't yet know how to understand our own context. These essays mark the narrative movement toward the political, and also toward greater self-reflexivity, self-consciously moving from the personal to the collective, offering a voice sounded from inside trauma's wound to one that emerges while backing away from the wound, subverting the tropes that characterised the first wave of 9/11 novels and, however subtly, challenging them.<sup>3</sup>

Arin Keeble frames the critics' qualitative disapproval with the category's early conventions as a dissatisfaction with the way authors: (1) domesticate the story of 9/11; (2) use mostly elite, white characters; (3) consider 9/11 as either an “out of the blue” occurrence, or, less often, as the result of American involvement in foreign affairs—in both cases, there is little room for more nuanced perspectives; and (4) merge personal with collective trauma (55–6). The genre, however, is transitioning away from these early conventions. While most of the essays in this collection are concerned with historicising 9/11 as part of a continuity paradigm consistent with American history or as performing a kind of cultural mimesis of the past, they also share a kind of preoccupation with time and its relationship with death and futurity. The means by which time is projected often questions earlier, perhaps more traditional responses to terrorism. This convention is primarily enmeshed with the general critical reception which portrayed 9/11 ahistorically, as what Kristiaan Versluys termed “a limit event” (1).

While a preoccupation with time might not seem especially significant, the way the authors in this collection define contemporary notions of time moves beyond human understanding and is wrapped up with the kinds of

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<sup>3</sup> Arin Keeble discusses *Netherland* as part of this trajectory of what he more regularly refers to as *new* narratives, and it is his observation of the novel's self-reflexivity that has provided a good deal of the theoretical foundation for this collection (66).



time and space that technology produces. Technology is heavily implicated in rupturing national boundaries, but also, as Laura Tanner writes, in drastically altering categories of feeling and perception in the postmodern world (74). Technological innovations in the intervening years since 9/11 have significantly changed the trajectory of the genre's developing tropes. It is not that the traditional, linear narrative is being toppled. Instead, this volume attempts to look at alternative narratives and how they represent an altered consciousness, suggesting a shift in the way we understand 9/11.

The essays in Part I: Literature are specifically concerned with the way that 9/11 has shifted temporality and unbounded linear notions of time. Several explore how the internet has breached time and space, and they interrogate assumptions of power inherent in the moment's propagandistic impulses. In this section's first chapter, Heather E. Pope examines Amy Waldman's *The Submission* and the way it subverts early tropes of 9/11 literature through displacing the tendency toward the domestic narrative. She understands that this novel does not simply register trauma's effects, but rather registers the effects of the effects; in doing so, it complicates "us versus them" ideologies and reconsiders this opposition internally. Victim and victimiser often trade places in the novel, vitally complicating the trauma studies framework with which we have tended to read early 9/11 literature. In this chapter, Pope focuses on the novel's internal antagonism or ambivalence over which groups in America have the greatest cultural capital. *The Submission* opens up a space within this body of literature for making legible race and class inequities in American culture. These issues amount to a focus on the novel's central questions of to whose ideology do we submit the principles of democracy, and at what cost? These questions become pronounced at the end of the novel, when main characters travel years into the future to reflect upon their actions in the first few years after a counterfactual 9/11. In this travelling forward to see backward, Waldman employs a tool used by several authors of 9/11 narratives; it seems that it is only through reframing Western notions of time and space that new insights emerge about the ideologies and political structures which led up to and succeeded 9/11.

Brian Chappell examines Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* (2010) and the ways it reveals the limitations of the traditional narrative form in adequately representing 9/11 and the following years, but also complicates simple readings of any narrative. While warning against blind obedience to the kind of empty rhetoric for which the Bush administration was famous, Chappell explains that the novel self-consciously performs this vacuity and the warnings inherent in its road to violence and terror.

DeLillo connects the past to the present, specifically countering the notion of 9/11 as a limit event, but also questioning the nature of time and its continuity. Many critics have complained of the novel's sense of stasis, and yet the stillness is performative of consciousness in general; among other points that Chappell makes, one of the most lingering is his suggestion of "consciousness in the post-9/11 era as fertile ground for terror"—a notion that aligns us, rather than separates us, from "those who want to destroy us."

James Gourley's and Jeffrey Severs's complementary works examine Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013) and its ultimate rejection of the conventions of early 9/11 novels, especially their ahistoricism. Both position the novel as somewhat marginalised among 9/11 narratives, but also as uniquely representative of the world after 9/11. They consider the ways Pynchon displaces time and space. Gourley specifically takes up 9/11's historicity, pushing back "against the atemporality of the modern world and its interpretation of 9/11 as exceptional and rupturous." In this perspective, 9/11 is not only part of the genre critique's continuity paradigm, but it is also part of a critique of current perceptions of time itself. In *Bleeding Edge*, the internet has completely transformed society; it has the power to force our thoughts backward, rather than forward. It does this by focusing on the way that Cold War ideals inscribe 9/11 in a nonlinear loop of "twisted time."

Severs, too, positions *Bleeding Edge* as "an originary example," as defying many of the tropes of 9/11 fiction, pushing readers to understand that gaining real insight within these novels is only possible when we move beyond official narratives and explore the margins. Severs considers the politics and covert foreign policy of the Bush years and traces the trajectory of America's victim status and the "terrible inertia" of its citizens, locating 9/11 and the days that followed as extensions of the Cold War. And yet, Severs, too, recognises that Pynchon remaps time itself. Time is no longer linear, and the past, present, and future are inextricably linked. Severs explains: "Pynchon sees 9/11 as an occasion to witness the survival of Cold War thinking as the American measure, focusing on the ways young people are recruited into war in the 1950s, the 2000s, and beyond." Severs's unique perspective focuses upon the indoctrination of children into war, and traces this tendency throughout American history.

Both Gourley and Severs reference the novel's virtual world, DeepArcher, in which Pynchon gives "full rein to the ontological slipperiness that has always marked his Zones." From DeepArcher to video games to the threat of an EMP pulse, Severs implies that technological advances have caused post-9/11 America to suffer from

ontological confusion over the nature of time, space, and life itself. Amidst this post-9/11 culture which has revolutionised the kind of technology that stretches our limits of understanding, both Gourley and Severs position *Bleeding Edge* as a 9/11 novel that *performs* its context, and in doing so emerges as a decidedly *new* narrative.

While Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) has seldom been positioned as a 9/11 novel, Noah Mass includes it in the genre. By emphasising its reference to a future point in history, he shows that the void left behind by the towers's fall is still felt as an absence. The novel's narrative is cohesive yet disjointed, and in it time hops in a way that assumes nonlinear temporality. Mass questions the possibility of any kind of authenticity in a technological world in which we are so removed from the Real as to be unable to access it at all. In the novel's year 2020, authenticity is clearly the result of lies and false boasting—and definitely a result of 9/11. Mass writes: "Although the sound and the vibration of 9/11 have receded into the distance, the disturbance that the tragedy engendered has become central to the world that the survivors built upon its wreckage." In this remaining sound and vibration of 9/11, a lasting disturbance remains that renders people unable to understand the Real, obfuscating the meaning of authenticity.

In the sixth and seventh chapters of this collection, Sandra Singer and Jenn Brandt reconsider two early 9/11 novels and read them as new narratives. Both authors consider novels that have been examined at length and attempt to impose upon them new structures of meaning. Sandra Singer considers and situates Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008) within the category of terrorist fiction. By situating the novel outside the category of 9/11 fiction, Singer self-consciously addresses the ahistoricity of not only the 9/11 novel, but of 9/11 itself. Her categorisation performs a historicity that predates 2001. She also explains that *Netherland* marks a shift in 9/11 literature toward greater "discursive complexity." Singer claims that *Netherland*, so often considered a domestic novel, hinges upon friendship, rather than family. She problematises earlier readings of *Netherland* and reframes it as a new narrative by showing that the novel's central friendship between two dramatically different people is transformative and reorients the main characters's relationships to others.

Jenn Brandt rereads *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), a novel heavily criticised for its sentimentalism and lack of politicisation, as a specifically political novel that de-privileges American exceptionalism and its paternalism through her interpretation of "the death of the father." Brandt makes a strong correlate between the "father-son narrative of the Schell men to call into question the legitimacy of Westernized

understandings of time and history, as well as the futility of the rhetoric surrounding 9/11.” In her analysis, 9/11 resulted in the kind of ontological slipperiness so many of this collection’s authors explore. As these authors look at the no-longer effectual Western understandings of time and history, they indicate the need for what Judith Butler considers “insurrection at the level of ontology”—a new narrative for understanding how we go about understanding ourselves in the twenty-first century (33).

Moving away from the traditional privileging of the American novel, in the final chapter of Part I, Kathleen Kent studies the poetry of Gjertrud Schnackenberg and Adrienne Rich, and their deployment of 9/11 imagery as expressions of grief. In utilising public trauma to explore the nature of private trauma, Kent reveals the way that 9/11 imagery surprisingly functions as both cultural anomaly and inevitability. Clearly positioning 9/11 on a trajectory that predates 9/11, Kent understands that these poets complicate and expand upon the blurring divide between public and private grief. While Rich’s stance is characteristically political, Schnackenberg uses 9/11 and epic poetry to describe her feelings about her husband’s death; in doing so, Schnackenberg links the past with the present in an uninterrupted loop that merges public with private grief and further disrupts our sense of time and space.

Part II: Television, Film and Theatre includes critiques of visual and performative narratives that have been perhaps less popularly associated with 9/11. While our scope is somewhat limited to the mainstream, several of the works in this section have been only marginally considered within the genre, yet each uniquely recontextualises and repoliticises 9/11. These essays are generally engaged with this volume’s overarching continuity paradigm of 9/11 and its Cold War origins. Several are also concerned with expanding the notions of appropriate civic responses to 9/11 and its ensuing War on Terror—concerns which are often tied up in the constructions of Otherness in American film and theatre.

While authors have been criticised for domesticating 9/11, scholars like David Holloway evaluate cinematic representations as responsible for *reducing* 9/11 to “disaster narratives,” and television as “allegory lite” (53). The call by critics like Pankaj Mishra, Richard Gray, and Michael Rothberg for politicised, transnational narratives has been countered by other critics like Bruce Marzec and Catherine Morley, who argue for the value of the domestic, and question the demand for politicisation. The first few chapters in this section reveal the political through the local, and, like so many of these 9/11 narratives, travel forward and backward in time to illuminate post-9/11 America.

The first two essays in this section consider television, and specifically the show *Mad Men*, in mapping 9/11's geopolitics on a course with Cold War containment culture in the twenty-first century. Victoria M. Bryan's essay opens this section by continuing this volume's thread, which especially points toward a continuity paradigm for understanding 9/11 with antecedents at least as far back as the Cold War era. She analyses the television show, insisting that despite *Mad Men*'s post-World War II setting, it is "as much a reaction to the September 11 terrorist attacks as it is to the Cold War period." Bryan explains that it is upon a patriarchal, nostalgic history of containment culture that the legacy of 9/11 has been built. She focuses on the show's century reproduction of outdated gender roles, redomesticated womanhood, and reinvigorated *manly* manhood as they are superimposed onto the twenty-first century. Rather than make this reinvigorated ideology completely nostalgic, the show's producer, Matthew Weiner, explains that he was "motivated by a desire to overturn our widespread understanding of the 50s and 60s as a time of domestic bliss, conservative family values, strong men, and protected women." Bryan explains these identity constructions as no more reliable in post-9/11 America than they were during the Cold War. In reframing the legacy of the *Mad Men* era less nostalgically, she recontextualises its legacy in 9/11.

Glen Donnar also traces this pattern of nostalgic repetition, though his emphasis is upon the way the JFK assassination is framed within *Mad Men*. Specifically, it is through the mediated accounts of the assassination that Donnar explores "*the consequences of* how TV coverage of national crises connects public and private spaces," and questions the "popular discursive assumptions about national solidarity" that emerged immediately after 9/11. In his interpretation, the over-mediation of public trauma provokes private disruption in individual lives "that precipitates division, disunity and the breakdown of relationships and patriarchal authority." In Donnar's perspective, the ruptures in American society which became more apparent after 9/11 *already* existed, implying that America was broken from the inside-out long ago, rather than from the outside-in in 2001. The events of 9/11 exposed and magnified private and professional crises that had been longstanding in American culture—reaching as far back as, and perhaps farther back than, the JFK assassination.

Bryan's and Donnar's essays complement each other, as both reify Alan Nadel's Cold War "containment narrative," in which the United States was the universal container, responsible for containing the spread of Communism and atomic secrets (14). Nadel writes: "If containment thus names a foreign and domestic policy, it also names the rhetorical strategy that functioned to foreclose dissent, preempt dialogue and preclude

contradiction” (14). Drawing upon Nadel’s language, foreign and domestic policy and their rhetorical strategies are indicative of current structures designed to contain not only opposition to the War on Terror, but also to contain women and men into rehabilitated traditionalist gender roles. In the twenty-first century, rather than containing Communism, we are now focused on containing terrorism. Part of the drive to *contain* is the threat of annihilation, and in 2016 the face of the terrorist is the face of the enemy—broadcast as brown-skinned, Muslim, and full of hate.

The next three essays in this collection engage with contemporary films and their representations of the terrorist Other. Lisa Holden and Fran Pheasant-Kelly explore depictions of the terrorist since 9/11 in the popular films *Casino Royale* (2006), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *Skyfall* (2012). Shifting from popular culture’s portrayal of terrorists as Middle Eastern Muslims, the construction of terrorists in popular cinema has shifted toward men with a “physiognomic deformity, together with suggestions of queerness/feminization and ‘foreignness’ in characters beset by physical or psychological vulnerability.” Engaging with topics of freakery, criminality, and terrorism, Holden and Pheasant-Kelly explore a new wave of representation and Othering that pathologises terrorism and its attendant disfigurement to create a new narrative of 9/11 that hinges on the cultural capital of health and wellness, sickness and depravity.

Dhanashree Thorat examines two Bollywood films, *New York* (2009) and *My Name is Khan* (2010), and considers the Othering and alienation of South Asian American Muslims after 9/11, a subaltern perspective that has been largely submerged in popular film. In these films, those who have been Othered face grave difficulties when they attempt activist work in law-abiding ways. They look to activism and/or radicalism “to stake a claim to the nation-state from which they have been [physically and metaphorically] evicted.” Thorat makes clear that civic activism and working within “the neo-liberal state can impact the system,” but she ultimately reveals a kind of devastating futility in such civic appeals, illustrating exiled Black Panther Assata Shakur’s assertion that no oppressed people have ever “gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them” (310). The narrative of the Other is erased within the narrative of the state; the pattern is clear—the advocate appeals to the state and the state quashes further narratives. Thorat’s conclusions introduce the perspective of minority resistance into the 9/11 narrative, and in doing so further reveal the normativity of state hegemony and the difficulty of countering it through civic activism.

While Holden and Pheasant-Kelly consider the reconstruction of the nature of villainy in popular film, Thorat subtly reconsiders normative state hegemony, which perhaps indirectly emerges as a kind of villainy. In the final essay on film in this collection, E. Deidre Pribram takes up the topic of American administrative villainy and the inextricable connection of public sentiments to politics in the Tony Scott films *Enemy of the State* (1998), *Man on Fire* (2004), and *Déjà Vu* (2006). Pribram positions collectively shared structures of feeling as inherently political, sociocultural *events* that perhaps indicate “a suspicion of big government and the ethics of contemporary politics.” It is through complicated, mixed public and ambiguous emotions that she positions the nature of American identity after 9/11 as a conflicted and continuously shifting narrative.

The final two essays in this volume consider theatrical responses to 9/11. George Potter explains that contemporary theatrical representations have largely conformed to the early domestic tropes of 9/11 literature. Potter understands Neil LaBute’s *The Mercy Seat* (2002) and Christopher Shinn’s *The Dying City* (2007) as traditional, domestic plays that uniquely involve issues of 9/11 and its politics. However, in Theresa Rebeck and Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros’s *Omnium Gatherum* (2003), Potter explains, post-9/11 theatre moves beyond familiar tropes. He explores the play’s reimagining of “sociality and political discourse in a post-9/11 context, rather than merely using 9/11 as a plot device that encourages audiences to ignore social-political relationships.” In this play, it is the break with realism—its dinner party which hovers somewhere between earth and hell—that functions as a kind of metaphorical realism for the conditions of sociality and politics in post-9/11 America. When the ideologies of dinner guests clash at the dinner table, it is the self-reflexive impotence of domestic, dinner-party conversation that, Potter explains, opens up a space for introducing new narratives of 9/11. The play communicates that America does not know what this new narrative will look like, “but it certainly knows that it is not to be found discussing rhubarb.” In this way, Potter implies that the new narrative of 9/11 is one that admits to not knowing. It is one that assumes complexity in the easy answers to unanswerable questions, denying the possibility of any final answer to the questions 9/11 has posed.

In this collection’s final chapter, Zackary Ross positions Meg Gibson and Keith Reddin’s play, *Too Much Memory* as a decidedly *new* narrative. The play is an adaptation of Jean Anouilh’s adaptation of Sophocles’s *Antigone*. Ross explains that *Too Much Memory* is a self-reflexive analysis of the cost of vengeance, allegorically aligning it with 9/11’s counterterrorism efforts. Like several characters explored in Thorat’s critique, Gibson and

Reddin's play takes up activism as a civic response to injustice. *Too Much Memory*, however, is always metatheatrically performing its drama and aligning it with the contemporary audience, implicitly accusing its complacency and in-activism in blindly supporting the George W. Bush administration and the war in Iraq. In reframing the nature of contemporary citizenship and emphasising its responsibilities, Ross explains the play's parallels with 9/11, which explore the history of American democracy's power shift away from the populace and toward the (masculinist) autocratic.

Like other 9/11 narratives, *Too Much Memory* offers no simple solution, and ultimately leaves its audience unsure of its future, reflecting America's complicated and ambiguous identity in the wake of 9/11. Yet, the essays in this collection reveal that new narratives of 9/11 do more than simply reflect American trauma and identity conflicts. While they are concerned with unpacking and critically discussing some of the earlier and perhaps more reductive representations, they also suggest a new paradigm for reading 9/11 narratives. In reading earlier domestic narratives of 9/11 catachrestically, we have hoped to reframe the nature of domesticity and its criticisms as part of a paternalistic framework that underscores much of the way we read 9/11. Similarly, racialised absences within the body of the artistic responses to 9/11 reflect a hegemony that has become normative in America to the extent that its interpellation<sup>4</sup> is almost illegible.

In this collection of essays, we attempt to reframe early narratives, and to understand some of the developing tropes of new narratives of 9/11. They harness the cultural capital in tropes of domesticity, but do so self-reflexively, acknowledging the paternalism inherent in early critiques which deems much of the genre a "failure of the imagination." New narratives of 9/11 tend toward framing the historicity of 9/11 as continuous, and in doing so reframe the contemporary nature of time itself. In suggesting time as nonlinear, American identity is not only fractured by 9/11, but also by a world order that began *before* the 2001 attacks on America; this world order reaches a moment closest to full exposure on 9/11, but does not begin on 9/11. While technology is heavily implicated in rupturing national and temporal boundaries, it is the main means by which time and geography can be transcended. This ontological shift ungrounds reality, and yet, in rupturing the boundaries which have served to validate binary corollaries of sickness and health, trauma and recovery,

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<sup>4</sup> Here, I rely on Louis Althusser's idea of interpellation as described in "Ideology and State Apparatuses" as essentially the manner in which subjects are "called into being" by ideologies of state institutions, which in turn create our subjectivity.



us and them, it also opens up a space for not only complicating 9/11 but also the nature of contemporary existence itself.

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**PART I:**  
**LITERATURE**



## CHAPTER ONE

# *THE SUBMISSION* TO INTERNAL EXCEPTIONALISM AND CULTURAL CAPITAL IN POST-9/11 AMERICA

HEATHER E. POPE

*Like the cypress tree, which holds its head high and is free within the confines of a garden, I, too, feel free in this world, and I am not bound by its attachments.*

(Unidentified Pashto poet, in *The Submission*)

In *The Submission* (2011), Amy Waldman subtly employs the many nuances of the title's submission in her rendering of a counterfactual post-9/11 America that challenges perceptions of Muslim homogeneity often depicted in early 9/11 literature (like John Updike's *The Terrorist* and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*). In her often satirical, yet realistic portrait of America after an event much like 9/11, she takes on the nature of prejudice, and is especially concerned with suspended civil liberties and the power and political influence of the media after 9/11. The novel is unique within the body of 9/11 literature at least partly because it widens the conversation about the lasting impacts of 9/11 and addresses American exceptionalism and Otherness while still honouring the trauma. *The Submission* challenges the ways that Others have been forced into submission, but also the ways that cultural memory and history are made and remade through submission to those in power. Victim and victimiser often trade places in *The Submission*, complicating the "us versus them" ideology so apparent in the early responses to 9/11. It is also a decidedly new narrative, not just because it artfully renders 9/11 as almost instantly codified by those in power, but also as it depicts the nature of our submission to that power.

Because so many early 9/11 novels focus on the domestic lives of the elite, Waldman helps to expand the genre of 9/11 literature by including and valuing the experiences of the marginalised. She subverts the kind of

Muslim stereotypes that appear in much of this literature in a way that mirrors Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin's perspective on the social construction of Muslims in *Framing Muslims*. The humility with which Waldman reads aftermath culture is marked among the genre, as it portrays a complicated American protagonist grappling with his identity, situated within a traumatised world. The novel moves beyond the immediate response to trauma and steps outside of it, however briefly.

*The Submission* is a story of post-9/11 Manhattan, and yet 9/11 is never mentioned; instead, the novel's subtext provides a metaphorical cultural parallel. Many of its main characters may be among the artistically and socioeconomically elite, yet some of the most pivotal are from varied backgrounds and speak with voices whose marginalisation makes them all the more powerful. As they fight to be heard, their silencing and its deadly ramifications become both more apparent and more tragic. The novel is self-reflexive and political, and yet, of all of the 9/11 novels, it seems to capture with the most humility the fragility of human and national identity and how they are, above all, forged through *submission* to their uniquely human and fallible, and so naturally defective, responses to circumstances.

It is not a mistake that Waldman begins her novel with an inscription focused on freedom, confinement, and a kind of submission—the narrator of the poem is free like a cypress tree *confined* in a garden, perhaps physically bound by the garden, but refusing to allow his or her spirit to be bound by it. A cypress tree bound within the confines of a garden is free in a way that questions the ontology of freedom—the cypress tree's freedom, like that of the narrator, is the result of a kind of submission. The cypress tree that is free and yet confined to a garden is a paradox; similarly, on the copyright page of the novel is a note regarding its origins: "The poem in the epigraph is from *The Afghans*, by Mohammed Ali, Kabul, 1969." Paradoxically, at the very start of this novel, Waldman tells her readers that she's specifically interested in the way identity is obscured in the few words denoting the authorship of the passage—"an unidentified Pashto poet"—and then re-established and complicated in another sentence on an adjacent page by establishing that the quote appears in Ali's work. She juxtaposes this malleable identity-making process with notions of worldly freedom and attachment, intentionally signifying to her readers that what will follow is a story of identity making and unmaking, of freedom like a cypress tree *confined* in a garden—a tree that has been violently uprooted from its original and natural home and transplanted to a manmade home. Since this excerpt is a translation, it is unclear whether the notion of confinement takes on the same meaning as it does in the English, yet