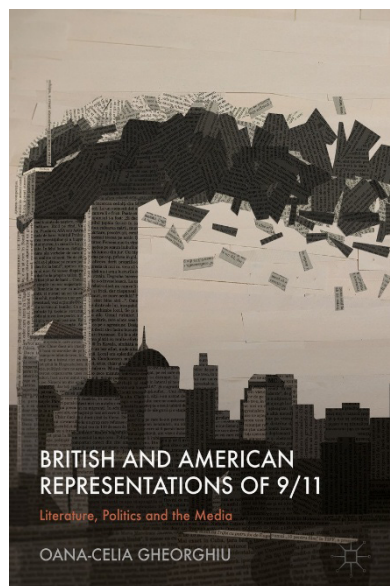


Book Review

Gheorghiu, Oana-Celia. *British and American Representations of 9/11: Literature, Politics and the Media*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, IX, 269, 96.29 €, ISBN 978-3-319-75249-5 (hardcover), 978-3-030-09182-8 (softcover)

This study catalogues 9/11 fiction produced by American and British writers with the purpose of revealing the untenability of keeping fiction and reality separate. By viewing its selected corpus as belonging to contemporary realism, it employs the framework of New Historicism/ Cultural Materialism, both of which are deemed necessary to account for the study's undertaking in establishing a continuity between literature and reality, using Stephen Greenblatt's writings as a guideline. Particularly, his concept of "cultural poetics" is mobilized to highlight the exchange occurring between the social space and the aesthetic practice in the wake of the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent War on Terror. It aims to showcase how the chosen literary representations mirror the turmoil that Western identity went through after the event. Moreover, it sheds light on how the authors and their social milieu apprehend the Muslim other.



By investigating the traces of political and media discourse within Iain Banks's novel *Dead Air* (2002), David Hare's play *Stuff Happens* (2004), Ian McEwan's novel *Saturday* (2005), Martin Amis's short story *The Last Days of Muhammad Atta* (2006), Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* (2007), Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), and Amy Waldman's novel *The Submission* (2013), the work emphasizes the imbrication of text and context. Using Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Louis Althusser, and Jean Baudrillard, Gheorghiu underscores the idea that fact, as an objective, external occurrence, is only accessible through mediation, which makes it perpetually entangled within the parameters set up by the power structures of a given context, and therefore, any political or media discourse pertaining to that occurrence acquires the same level of fictionality that literature occupies. For, not only do the literary representations at the heart of this study incorporate "real" facts circulating within their immediate historical context, they, too, have the capacity of shaping identity paradigms, bringing about real social effects. Chief among these effects is the exacerbation of the otherness of Muslims which sharpen the binary of East-West in the wake of the attacks, the reification of Anti-Americanist discourse among the British, and the (dis)location of the truth claims of media and political discourses.

In order to tackle this premise, the book is divided into two parts: "Encoding September 11 in the Media and the Literary Text", and "Ideological Reconfigurations of Identity in the Literary Representations of 9/11". The first part contains chapter two, "Making History: Politics, the Media and Literature in the Twenty-First Century", and chapter three, "Literary Rewritings of History and Politics After 9/11". The second part includes chapter four, "The Shattered Self of the West", and chapter five, "Extreme Otherness: the 'Muslim Menace'". The two parts are tied together in the conclusory sixth chapter. Each chapter is organized into sections, including its own endnotes and reference list. The book also contains an annex where a detailed, minute-by-minute timeline of the 9/11 events, accompanied by statistics of the fatalities, which are organized by location. The timeline also enumerates the dates when the preparations for the war on terror were publicly announced, and the four-phase plan of the war waged in Afghanistan. The annex is concluded with reference to the temporal and thematic arrangement of the study's literary corpus. The book also includes an index.

The first section of chapter two chronologically traces the unfolding of the attacks on the World Trade Center, relying on the 9/11 Commission Report made public in 2004. Additionally, it enumerates the major stages that mark the US offensive in Afghanistan and later on in Iraq. It also includes George Bush's congressional address that set the tone of the "Us vs Them" dichotomy. The discourse of his press conferences

is analyzed with particular attention to the generalizations and uncorroborated truth claims the former president makes. By resorting to these historical moments, the study aims to showcase how the media appropriated and represented them at various intervals: during the shock/denial stage, the fury stage, and the analytical stage. It argues that the events have been narrativized by American news networks, setting up a constructed discourse that verges on fiction. The crash in the towers is presented as a hypotext that media accounts hypertextually engage with. In other words, the media representation of the attack is seen to be formed into an intertextual grid. To sustain this argument a distinction is made between the information and the commentary and analysis of it. It is further illustrated by an analysis of the CCN broadcast of the event which is seen to begin first by relaying the scene of the event, then transforms into a narrative structure by virtue of the news anchor's commentary, and the subsequent eye-witness interviews. The news coverage is then paralleled with Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*'s opening lines to account for their hypertextual quality with its reference to the news networks' texts.

The second chapter analyzes the ensuing editorials reflecting on the events and the subsequent retaliation, with specific attention to the British press. Ian McEwan's article "Beyond Belief", and Martin Amis's "Fear and Loathing", published as opinion pieces in the *Guardian*, are analyzed by drawing parallels between them and the novel and short story the two novelists subsequently produce. By doing so, the study aims to illustrate that literature is not merely representational but participative by virtue of its embeddedness in the social space. The chapter ends with an overview of the literary representations produced around the attacks and meditates upon the merits of classifying them as either postmodernist or neorealist.

Chapter three analyzes Ian Bank's *Dead Air* with a special focus on how it evokes the media and its representation of the attacks. The study argues that the protagonist, a Scottish leftist journalist, engages in a critical analysis of political misinterpretations provided to the audience by various news outlets, making the neorealism of the novel resemble historiographic metafiction. The character evokes 9/11, American imperialism, the othering of Muslims, the Scots' relation to Britain, Euro-skepticism, and the American democratic process, all of which demonstrate the novel's active engagement with reality with a note of indifference toward the American plight. The study also observes that the novel's cultural references to American superheroes and movies casts a hyperreal light on the events. In addition, the chapter analyzes David Hare's play *Stuff Happens*, arguing that it exemplifies a form of verbatim theatre. The play engages with political discourses by intermingling verifiable statements with fictional ones, creating a hypertextual dramatic text that blurs the line between truth and fiction, contaminating fiction with the real. American

and British officials are included as characters whose dialogues are composed of real statements found in news outlets as well as fictitious ones, resulting in what Gheorghiu calls the theatricalization of the actual. The chapter also discusses McEwan's novel *Saturday*. The argument draws a parallel between the novel and Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), finding similarities in not only its depiction of a day in the life of a wealthy family of Londoners who experience the echoes of the anti-war demonstrations in their capital city, but also through the narrative techniques it uses, and the historical predicament in which the two novelists find themselves, sandwiched between two wars. It further argues that the novel forges a dual relationship with the external reality, one that is post-traumatic as a result of the attacks, and an anticipative trauma that will arise in the wake of the Iraq war. What comes to the fore in *Saturday*, then, is a sense of denial and indifference coupled with an effort to belittle the reality that made its way into its fictional realm.

Chapter four begins with an inquiry into alterity studies with the intention of accounting for the literary depiction of self and other in the study's selected corpus. It first argues that the Western self is fragmented into the US as the "self" and the rest of European countries as "other" as the outcome of the United States' emergence as a global superpower after WWII. US hegemony has instigated the rise of anti-American sentiment across Europe as a response to an unaccepted inferiority, creating a tension within the inner levels of the Western self. Moreover, by resorting to Simone de Beauvoir, Zygmunt Bauman, and Antonio Gramsci, the section points out that in the dichotomy of self/other, the positionalities within the dyad are interchangeable. Consequently, it argues that the perpetrators of the attacks have positioned the West, precisely the US, as Other. Evidence is drawn from Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* to support this claim, arguing that the incorporation of the disruptive presence of the perpetrator of the attacks within the structural flow of the novel evinces the irruption of terror into the natural order, shattering its coherence, symbolized by the various falls occurring throughout the narrative.

Furthermore, the Easterner's othering of the West is argued to be the product of social and cultural conditioning, expanded in chapter five by resorting to Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Louis Althusser. Occidentalism comes to the fore as the repository of the Easterners' caricatures of the West, providing the tools to reverse the dichotomy of self/other, garnering the Easterners the privileged position. This argument is used to illustrate that Muslim characters within the literary texts at hand articulate this type of Occidentalism. Evidence is drawn from Martin Amis's short story *The Last Days of Muhammad Atta*, which imaginatively depict the days leading up to the attack. It is argued that Amis puts anti-Western discourse in the mouths of these characters, bringing the reality of Occidentalism into fiction. Amy

Waldman's novel *The Submission*, however, is regarded to be framed by the political correctness of left-wing liberals. It is argued that even though Waldman is well versed in media discourse by virtue of her being a journalist, she favors the ideological stance of *The New York Times* in the construction of the characters.

While this study has thoroughly analyzed some of the 9/11 fiction, two points of contention can be raised. First is that the study relies, to a fault, on the authors of the works as the ultimate meaning-makers of the fictional realm they depict. Although their inclusion is intended to highlight how the authors' nonfictional works interfere within the fictional realm, it stands at odds with the implied assumption of this study in highlighting how authors themselves echo the discourses of their cultural milieu. While this premise is maintained in the discussion of the British and American novelists, it is suddenly dropped when the discussion shifts to analyze the Pakistani writer Muhsin Hamid's novel. It is particularly pronounced in the inclusion of his interviews, which were envisaged to showcase how he intends to bring about particular meanings or effects to his protagonist. What eludes this argument is the fact that Hamid himself is echoing a marginalized, unintelligible discourse that the study seemingly takes as Hamid's authorial view. A more sensitive approach to the positionalities of US minorities would have been possible had the study not dismissed the critical toolkit of postcolonialism, viewing it as outdated and therefore ineffective. This constitutes the second point of contention.

Despite it being no longer "trendy" among academic circles interested in creating a multicultural curriculum, and buying into the illusion that colonialism is over and done with, postcolonial theory nonetheless has developed tools with which to understand and account for the very discourses Hamid articulates. The study seems to uncritically echo the rise of the disdain for "poco" studies in US academia shortly after 9/11¹. It must be admitted that Homi Bhabha has made an appearance in the study to meditate on Waldman's protagonist's engagement in acts of mimicry. However, the historical constellation that produced mimicry is completely brushed aside; the act of assuming sameness while maintaining a hint of difference is a product of colonial power and its institutions². In other words, the production of difference as an outcome of the categorizations and hierarchical ordering instigated by colonialism and maintained by imperialism and global capitalism, and the way that that difference shapes the dichotomy of self/other as well as identity formation is completely absent from the discussion despite dedicating an entire section to the

¹ Ray, S., "Postscript: Popular Perceptions of Postcolonial Studies after 9/11". In Ed., *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, Blackwell Publishing, 2000, 574-583.

² Byne, E., "Said, Bhabha, and the Colonized Subject." In Ed., *Orientalism and Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 2019, 151-165.

concept of alterity. The gap has allowed for the essentialization of the “Muslim other” despite the study’s declaration that it does not intend to put all Muslims in the same “bad Muslim” basket.

Nonetheless, the study remains a worthwhile read for students and scholars interested in the interaction between news media and literary texts, as well as those interested in 9/11 fiction, because it provides a good example of how a critical analysis can potentially maintain stereotypical constructions while attempting to deconstruct them.

Aya CHELLOUL 

University of Szeged, Hungary