Cara Cilano, ed., *From Solidarity to Schisms: 9/11 and After in Fiction and Film from Outside the US* (Rodopi, 2009)

The shadow of the September 11 attacks permeates and has significantly impacted American cultural production over the past decade. American novelists like Paul Auster, John Updike, Philip Roth, William Gibson, and Don DeLillo have engaged with 9/11 in their fictional works both explicitly and metaphorically. Numerous American feature films have also explored this subject matter, ranging in scope from straight dramatic renditions of the tragedy like *World Trade Centre* and *United 93* to science-fiction allegories of 9/11 like *War of the Worlds* and *Cloverfield*. There are also numerous Iraq war movies, including Kathryn Bigelow’s Academy Award-winning *The Hurt Locker*. Acclaimed comic book scribes Brian K. Vaughan, Art Spiegelman, and Garth Ennis have also mined this territory.

Novels and films from outside the United States that deal with 9/11 and its aftermath also abound, though they have not generated the same level of attention. This new scholarly collection strives to remedy this issue, collecting essays from around the world which explore, in editor Cara Cilano’s words, ‘how select novels and films represent the purported rupture 9/11 enacts on the world outside the US’ (20).

Given 9/11’s impact on and implications for cultural production worldwide, it seems impossible for any single collection to adequately sketch the diversity of responses generated by 9/11 around the globe. This is an important caveat to take into this book: if you expect the text to be exhaustive or comprehensive, you will ultimately be left unsatisfied. Furthermore, the global reach of the text is somewhat limited: though the book considers several Eastern writers and directors, the bulk of the book is devoted to British, French, German, Canadian, and Australian practitioners, which reinforces – however unintentionally – a binary between Western and Eastern art and cultural production wherein Western responses to 9/11 are prioritized over Eastern responses. However, casting aside these issues, the material on offer is engaging and occasionally compelling.

The collection covers a range of theoretical and creative responses to 9/11 in fiction and film. While a number of these responses to 9/11 are experimental, postmodern, or transgressive, perhaps the most fascinating material in the book deals with literary works that explicitly retreat to and express longing for older, more traditional models of literature and, by intertextual extension, society. Magali Cornier Michael’s discussion of Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* is particularly illuminating. According to Michael, McEwan’s novel consciously harks back to the genre of the domestic novel, most notably *Mrs Dalloway*, another domestic work set amidst major societal changes emanating from a traumatic event (World War One). McEwan’s protagonist undertakes his weekend domestic rituals and obsesses over the minutiae of daily life, as a means of keeping at bay the devastating and potentially paralysing spectre of terrorism post-9/11. While the defence mechanisms McEwan has imbued his character with are certainly psychoanalytically sound, Michael reads into them a more dangerous prospect: in explicitly evoking the likes of *Mrs Dalloway*, McEwan is longing for the security and accoutrements of British imperialism. An essay by Brandon Kempner identifies a similar longing for earlier literary archetypes, and by
extension a melancholic desire for a bygone colonial era, in 9/11-related works by Seamus Heaney, Chris Cleave, and Martin Amis: Heaney appropriates Horace, Cleave harks back to the epistolary narrative, and Amis reverts to humanist interiority. Taken together, the essays by Michael and Kempner demonstrate a pronounced shift in contemporary British literature towards earlier storytelling models in the wake of 9/11.

Ana Cristina Mendes’s essay on British-Indian author Salman Rushdie throws light on a similar phenomenon. Like McEwan et al., there has been a marked shift in Rushdie’s priorities and style in the aftermath of 9/11. Rushdie’s display of empathy for and endorsement of the United States immediately following the 9/11 attacks surprised many commentators, especially in light of the semiotic, signifying baggage Rushdie carries as both public intellectual and provocateur. However, as Mendes argues, Rushdie’s empathetic response was not due to any major shift in the author’s ideological values, but was instead part of a larger, conscious retreat on Rushdie’s part away from the public persona of intellectual commentator and back towards the post of author. Having said that, one cannot help but draw correspondences between efforts by Rushdie to evade critiquing US imperialism at the time of 9/11 and the efforts of McEwan et al. to invest their work with the attributes of bygone literary forms.

In another illuminating essay, Sharon Sutherland and Sarah Swan interrogate Canadian author Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novel Oryx and Crake. According to Sutherland and Swan, Atwood’s novel – set in a future devastated by scientific experimentation and biological terrorism – reflects and mirrors broader shifts in the style and premises of dystopian fiction in the wake of 9/11. Furthermore, the subject position of Atwood’s protagonist Jimmy – both insider and outsider, participant and observer to this madness – approximates Canada’s position in relation to the United States. Given its close geographical proximity to the US, Canada is immediately affected by both attacks on US soil and counter-acts of military retaliation, and yet it remains both outsider and observer. Atwood’s Jimmy, Sutherland and Swan argue, serves to allegorize and embody Canada’s inherently contradictory position in relation to 9/11.

There is plenty of other worthwhile material on offer in Cilano’s collection. Readers of contemporary Australian literature will no doubt find the discussions of Peter Carey, Janette Turner Hospital, and Richard Flanagan engaging, while politically-minded cineastes will find the analyses of German, French, Israeli, Iranian and Canadian feature films, short films and documentaries illuminating. As indicated earlier in this review, these essays do not represent an exhaustive survey of international responses to 9/11 in contemporary cultural production. However, when read as a sample rather than a survey, the essays here have plenty to say and throw light on the diversity of international creative responses to 9/11 as well as pronounced trends among those responses, trends which future scholarship will undoubtedly elaborate on.

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