LITERATURE AND TERRORISM: INTRODUCTION

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I

Like other academic disciplines that contribute to the current research on terrorism, the field of literary studies is still strongly marked by the impact of “9/11”, an event that was immediately identified as constituting not only a historical and political, but also a cultural watershed. Before the fires at Ground Zero were extinguished, debates concerning the future of such diverse forms as action movies, satirical TV shows, and the novel appeared in the press.

More often than not, changes were demanded rather than foretold. Thus, on September 16, 2001, distinguished American writer and journalist Roger Rosenblatt triumphantly declared the “end of irony”. By “irony”, Rosenblatt understood a particular attitude to life according to which nothing “was to be believed in or taken seriously” because “Nothing was real”. While the author’s opposition to “irony” clearly went back further than 9/11, he apparently felt that the general grief and dismay following the tragedy were the right context for exposing the cynicism of “ironists”.¹ In the face of recent events, Rosenblatt exclaimed, even the most stubborn of ironists had to acknowledge the undeniable reality of the disaster – even though the reality of the event had never been called into question. Rosenblatt’s essay was a reaction against the perceived moral relativism of postmodernism with its constructivist epistemology. Because irony is one of the generally accepted characteristics of postmodern art, literature,

¹ Roger Rosenblatt, “The Age of Irony Comes to an End”, *Time Magazine*, 24 September 2001: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1000893,00.html> (accessed 16 November 2011).

and thinking, the debate on the end of irony – which proliferated in print and on the Internet – also pertained to the future of fiction: had the events of 9/11 heralded the demise of postmodern modes of storytelling and would they lead to the (re)emergence of “non-ironic” narratives?

Other prognostications and demands for the development of fiction had different concerns. In an essay written for *The Guardian* in early October 2001, influential literary critic James Wood called for a renewal of the American novel. The terrorist attacks, he hoped, would cause “casualties” among those types of fiction that he disliked on aesthetic grounds. Against the backdrop of the mass casualties of September 11, however, Wood’s critique acquired an additional ethical dimension, implying a moral obligation for change. Programmatically entitled “Tell Me How Does It Feel”, the article was aimed at three distinct targets: the “trivia and mediocrity” of New York writers Jay McInerney and Bret Easton Ellis; Don DeLillo’s “idea of the novelist as a kind of Frankfurt School entertainer” and the more general tendency among contemporary authors to use fiction for “displays of knowledge”; as well as the “hysterical realism” of Salman Rushdie, Thomas Pynchon, and others who pursue “vitality at all costs”. Underlying this multiple polemic was Wood’s discontent with the tradition of the sweeping “social novel”² and its panoramic, all-encompassing pretensions. After 9/11, he asserted, writers should put the individual character back at the center of their plots, focusing on his or her personal experience and emotion. Apart from a new sincerity, then, critics expected – or rather stipulated – a stronger emphasis on feelings.

After the first wave of New York-set novels about the attacks and their emotional aftermath had appeared (from the English translation of Frédéric Beigbeder’s 2003 novel *Windows on the World* in March 2005 to Don DeLillo’s much-anticipated *Falling Man* in May 2007), the debate on the future of fiction was no longer limited to the arts sections of daily newspapers, blogs, or periodicals; it was also carried on at scholarly conferences and in edited volumes. In the process, the speculative anticipation of the “novel to come” was superseded by a critical assessment of the novels that had actually been published since the September 11 attacks. Yet the principal focus of the discussion

² James Wood, “Tell Me How Does It Feel?”, *The Guardian*, 6 October 2001: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/oct/06/fiction> (accessed 30 August 2010).

remained the same. *9/11 as a Cultural Caesura* is the symptomatic title of a recent German collection of essays,³ which starts from the premise that the attacks have had a lasting impact on what is (somewhat vaguely) described as “modalities of thought”.⁴ Accordingly, the task laid out in the Introduction is not to critically reflect the general postulation of discontinuity, but to demonstrate in what ways the assumed “caesura” may be said to manifest itself in representations of 9/11.⁵ What is thereby ignored is the strong possibility that the very expectation of discontinuity may itself be an example of the said changes in critical thought: is it not a presupposition that we bring to the texts – under the possibly premature assumption that the current escalation of global terrorism and counterterrorism goes hand in hand with a cultural and intellectual paradigm shift?

The editors of the first English-language book on the subject come to a different conclusion. According to Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, the question of continuity or discontinuity is directly addressed by the literary representations of 9/11 themselves; as Keniston and Quinn emphasize, however, the event’s status as a “caesura” is still a matter of debate. In the Introduction to *Literature after 9/11*, they explain that the essays collected in their volume “refuse to interpret 9/11 *either* as a rupture with the past *or* as continuous with (and even anticipated by) earlier historical events”, because the literature analyzed does not allow such an unequivocal interpretation; rather, the literary negotiation of the question is itself marked by a shift: “while the initial experience of 9/11 seemed unprecedented and cataclysmic, the experience of incommensurability generated a culture-wide need for explanatory narratives, not simply as a means for coun-

³ *9/11 als kulturelle Zäsur: Repräsentationen des 11. September 2001 in kulturellen Diskursen, Literatur und visuellen Medien*, eds Sandra Poppe, Thorsten Schüller, and Sascha Seiler, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009.

⁴ The blurb describes the attacks of September 11 as constituting “not only a political and social caesura”, but also a “trauma of thought (*Trauma des Denkens*)”. Both here and in the editors’ Foreword, it is further stated that the events have changed “modalities of thinking (*Denkmodalitäten*)” (*ibid.*, 7).

⁵ See Sandra Poppe, “Einleitung”, in *9/11 als kulturelle Zäsur*, 9-17.

tering the trauma, but as a means for refusing incommensurability, prompting attempts to place 9/11 into an historical framework.”⁶

It is essential in this context to distinguish two vantage points or frames of reference from which the “cataclysmic” nature of the event is experienced, observed, or postulated. Keniston and Quinn’s statement moves within a trauma-theoretical framework. There can be no question that for surviving victims and immediate witnesses an event such as the September 11 bombings has the power to fracture life into a “before” and an “after”. In his 2009 monograph *Out of the Blue*, Kristiaan Versluys is interested precisely in this emotional impact of the September 11 attacks. He reads 9/11 novels as an attempt to deal with the dilemma that the traumatic experience cannot be represented while, at the same time, representation is unavoidable (since even the insistence on the event’s unrepresentability provides some kind of representation). There is also an ethical obligation to bear witness and – most importantly for Versluys – a therapeutic necessity to frame the trauma in narrative form. Accordingly, Versluys contends that narrativizations of 9/11 do not only offer a means of remembering the violence and its victims, but that they may also enable survivors and witnesses to engage with – and work through – the trauma in an imaginative mode: “in a gesture that is familiar to therapists and writers alike, the novels affirm and counteract the impact of trauma.”⁷

But who exactly are the patients in need of such a therapeutic effort? “In a time of globalized witnessing and shared vicarious experience”, Versluys asserts, “an event like 9/11 is a rupture for everybody. As a consequence, there is a globalized need to comprehend, to explain, and to restore.”⁸ Even though the author is careful not to use the concept of “trauma” too lightly (by indiscriminately applying it to everybody who followed the event on television), this statement is still remarkably sweeping. It unhesitatingly moves from New Yorkers and Americans to an international and even global audience, implying that the whole of humanity shared the same experience of 9/11 – namely

⁶ Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, “Introduction: Representing 9/11: Literature and Resistance”, in *Literature after 9/11*, eds Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, New York and London: Routledge, 2008, 3.

⁷ Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

one of “rupture”. Instead of generalizing the experience in such a way, we should perhaps distinguish more clearly between the level of individual life stories and that of world history, complementing the trauma-theoretical framework with a look at global politics. In doing so, we may acknowledge the traumatic rupture caused by 9/11 while at the same time leaving open the question as to whether the event has by itself initiated a whole new historical era – even outside the communities (the city of New York, the American nation) most immediately affected by it.

From the perspective of a history of international terrorism, there are strong reasons for considering the September 11, 2001 attacks not only as the starting point of a new war (which they soon became), but also as the culmination of a longer series of anti-US attacks, which were themselves rooted in earlier political conflicts. In the words of David Holloway, “9/11 was long in the making, and the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 worlds were broadly continuous not discontinuous”.⁹ This, however, is not how the event was officially perceived. Public discourse on 9/11 – both in American mainstream media and in statements by government officials – strongly stressed the singularity and, hence, unpredictability of the bombings. Instead of calling back to memory the February 1993 attempt at bringing down the twin towers of the World Trade Center, the September 2001 bombings were immediately placed under the category of “unprecedented”. Disregarding two calls for jihad against US citizens signed by Osama bin Laden (in August 1996 and February 1998 respectively), as well as the ensuing campaign against US embassies and military installations (with large-scale attacks in Kenya, Tanzania, and Yemen in 1998 and 2000), the discontinuity topos relies – at least to a certain extent – on historical forgetting. And this forgetting, we should add, has serious political implications. For, as Holloway notes, “the idea that 9/11 was a moment when ‘everything changed’ ... played directly to partisan political agendas in Washington”; after all, “historical rupture on 9/11 was precisely the case [the administration] argued in defence of the ‘Bush doctrine’ of pre-emptive war, unilateral policy-making and ‘regime change’ in ‘rogue states’”.¹⁰ If 9/11 does indeed institute a new histor-

⁹ David Holloway, *9/11 and the War on Terror*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

ical period, then it not only legitimizes, but also necessitates equally unprecedented counterterrorist measures. Before literary scholars proclaim new epochs, they should therefore carefully consider the political weight of this declaration.

Keniston and Quinn refrain from such strong claims, limiting themselves instead to a discussion of literary reflections of the question. As they note, “the history of literary representations of 9/11 can be characterized by the *transition* from narratives of rupture to narratives of continuity”.¹¹ This observation refers to the whole body of texts dedicated to the September 11 attacks, including the essays, personal reminiscences, and often anonymous poems that were published only days after the event. In the specific case of the novelistic genre, things seem to be slightly different, however. One of the earliest New York-set 9/11-novels, Jonathan Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (April 2005), juxtaposes the nine-year old narrator’s grief work over his father’s death in the World Trade Center with his grandparents’ traumatic experience of the firebombing of Dresden in 1945; and the novel also features a brief reference to Hiroshima.¹² The analogy here consists less in the respective events themselves than in the narratives of personal loss that Foer associates with them. For Kristiaan Versluys, Foer’s novel thus “universalizes grief”, “tak[ing] the side of the victims, irrespective of their national origin or allegiance”.¹³ This early example suggests that novels immediately combined “narratives of rupture” with “narratives of continuity”, emphasizing breaks in the life of the protagonist and society at large, while simultaneously establishing a wider historical framework – referring to earlier events that affected large urban populations, though noticeably avoiding the history of terrorism (and, more specifically, the political entanglements involved in the rise of anti-Western Islamist terrorism).

While several studies have shown that 9/11 fiction is concerned with the event’s place in global history, the question remains whether this fiction in turn constitutes a break within the novelistic tradition. Surprisingly, despite their emphasis on the question of continuity or

¹¹ Keniston and Quinn, “Introduction”, 3.

¹² Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Lanham, MD: Hamilton, 2005.

¹³ Versluys, *Out of the Blue*, 82.

discontinuity, all studies mentioned so far choose a purely synchronic focus. This, we think, is indicative of a more general tendency within the research on terrorism in contemporary literature. Before we can say anything definite about the specificities of current engagements with terrorism and its aftermath – and thus about cultural breaks or general shifts – we need to consider post-9/11 literature in a comparative, diachronic perspective. By this we do not only mean a discussion of the general questions raised in forecasts about the future of fiction (such as those cited at the outset of this Introduction), but also, more specifically, a comparison of contemporary novels about terrorism on or since September 11 with thematically related works of earlier decades and periods.

It is worth remembering that the literary history of terrorism (to say nothing of the literary history of “terror” *tout court*) goes back at least 140 years. Originating with authors such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Henry James, the narrativization of terror began in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, when the social revolutionary, the political assassin, and the dynamiter entered the stage of political and literary history. After a first vogue of “anarchist” and “dynamite novels” at the turn of the twentieth century, there followed a period of relative silence on terrorism during and after the two world wars. As Robert Appelbaum and Alexis Paknadel have recently reconstructed, however, terrorism has since become “a prominent subject for English language novels”, “increasing year by year, with notable booms in the late seventies and then again in the mid-nineties”.¹⁴ From their extensive article it can be deduced that we are currently witnessing an unprecedented peak in terrorism-related fiction, but that this trend already set in at the close of the twentieth century – that is, *before* September 11, 2001. The theme had just experienced a vogue in American literature (from the pens of authors like Don DeLillo, Ann Patchett, or Philip Roth) when the events of 2001 radically challenged previous – sometimes sympathetic – literary engagements with terrorism and its protagonists.

Appelbaum and Paknadel combine their encompassing quantitative with a loosely structuralist approach. They suggest a typology of fiction dealing with terrorism on the basis of the following criteria: the

¹⁴ Robert Appelbaum and Alexis Paknadel, “Terrorism and the Novel, 1970-2001”, *Poetics Today*, XXIX/3 (Fall 2008), 387, 395.

focalizer(s) of the story, the setting, the major incidents, the climactic action, as well as the terrorists, their tactics and their targets.¹⁵ While the authors' sample chart based on these criteria provides a valuable overview of how (and from which perspective) terrorism was fictionalized at different points in time, scholars working in the field cannot stop here. For the more subtle differences between individual works only become apparent on closer analyses, through a consideration of the question of genre as well as – most importantly – the changing political and discourse-historical contexts. Such an investigation is the goal of this volume, which deliberately chooses a broad focus to include not only pre-9/11, but also non-English literature from across periods, genres, and national literatures.

II

Before we can embark on this project, one fundamental question needs to be addressed: what exactly is our object of study when we investigate the relationship between literature and terrorism? And what insights can be gained from such an analysis? If we follow Anthony Kubiak's short 2004 essay "Narrative Typologies of Terror", there are three possible answers to this question. Emphasizing that "terrorist writing is not all equal",¹⁶ Kubiak distinguishes the following types of "terrorist narratives": first, "the writing of terrorist groups themselves", in which these groups formulate their political, religious, or ideological agendas, call for the use of violence, or prepare individual members for the execution of terrorist acts; second, "narratives *about* terrorism", including fictional explorations of terrorism, critical studies of such fiction, as well as all other academic literature related to the topic of terrorism; and third, "those forms of writing that we might, in the spirit of critical excess, describe as narrative terrorism: attempts to destabilize narrativity itself – disrupting linearity, temporality, plot, character or whatever conventions may be regarded as essential to the productions of stories, memories, dramas, or histories".¹⁷ Kubiak's examples for the latter type of "terrorist writing" are the American authors Robert Coover, Donald Barthelme, Hunter S.

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, Table 1, 412.

¹⁶ Anthony Kubiak, "Spelling It Out: Narrative Typologies of Terror", *Studies in the Novel*, XXXVI/3 (Fall 2004), 295.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 295-97.

Thompson, and William Burroughs, whose heterogeneous works do not thematically address terrorism.

According to Kubiak, then, the juxtaposition of literature and terrorism in the title of the present volume could theoretically refer to either terrorist literature (that is, literature by terrorists), terrorism in literature (that is, terrorism as a literary theme), or literary terrorism (that is, literature as a phenomenon analogous to terrorism in its challenge to established orders). Despite its brevity, Kubiak's essay is important in pointing out that the relationship between literature and terrorism can not only be described in terms of subject matter, but also in several other ways – with regard to such diverse aspects as author, narrative strategy, and mode. Not content with a “mere analysis of the thematics of terrorism in fiction”,¹⁸ Kubiak reinterprets the concept of “terrorist narrative” by extending the meanings of both “narrative”¹⁹ and “terrorist”. It is questionable, however, whether the category “terrorist” is really suited to describe a quality of fictional texts that are thematically unrelated to the phenomenon so described. What do we gain by choosing this adjective over, say, “deconstructive” or Kubiak's own “disruptive”?

In the short passage dedicated to “terrorist fiction”, Kubiak fails to convincingly demonstrate the specific heuristic value of the term “terrorist” for a description of “attempts to destabilize narrativity”, all the more because his extended concept of “narrativity” remains vague. “Terrorist” is itself notoriously difficult to define, not only because of the great variety of regimes and groups to which the attribute has been applied, but also because of the term's implicit delegitimization of the acts it describes. As a politically contentious, emotionally charged, and morally laden concept that cannot be abstracted from the various specific contexts of its use, it is difficult to metaphorize. Moreover, we

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 297.

¹⁹ Kubiak opens his essay by reversing the common notion according to which language precedes narrative. In lieu of this, he proposes “that language itself represents the outcome of a prior operation of narration: that mind is narration first, is ‘always already’ narration”. Referring to Roland Barthes' “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives”, he conceptualizes narrative as a cognitive process underlying all perception, “a first principle, the means by which thought and memory come into being”. From the perspective of this suggestive but ultimately speculative approach, even an extra-literary, physical act of terrorist violence may be described as “narrative” (*ibid.*, 295-96).

should be careful not to use it too carelessly: all things considered, experimental, disruptive storytelling is far removed from the extra-linguistic impact of an exploding bomb, even if we accept that our mind imposes (or, in such traumatic moments, fails to impose) a narrative structure on everything we perceive.

In the context of this volume we would like to reserve the adjective “terrorist” for politically, religiously, or ideologically motivated acts of violence or disruption that cannot be reduced to the level of discourse – and that happen outside of the literary text, even if our own field of interest as literary critics is the discursivization of terrorism in literature (as the fictionalization, simulation, or staging of such events). Although non-literary texts frequently make use of narrative modes and the rhetorical strategies available to them, we would also suggest to limit the word “narrative” to “literature” in a more narrow sense. If our principal aim in this volume is to investigate the specific role of literature in the cultural response to terror, then we need to focus on those aspects of literary discourse that distinguish it from other modes: what can literature do that other modes of discourse cannot do? And how does this affect the relationship between literary and non-literary (political, academic, journalistic) discursivization of terror?

A brief overview of the available literature on literary engagements with terrorism will allow us to outline more clearly the specific focus of our approach. In her pioneering 2001 study *Plotting Terror*, Margaret Scanlan (who is also among the contributors to the present volume) introduced the concept of the “terrorist novel”,²⁰ which has since been taken up by – amongst others – Anthony Kubiak, Benjamin Kunkel, Francis Blessington, as well as Robert Appelbaum and Alexis Paknadel.²¹ While the available definitions of the terrorist novel are all centered on questions of content, they offer different descriptions of the relationship between literary narrative and terrorism. Margaret

²⁰ Margaret Scanlan, *Plotting Terror: Novelists and Terrorists in Contemporary Fiction*, Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2001.

²¹ Kubiak, “Spelling It Out”; Benjamin Kunkel, “Dangerous Characters”, *The New York Times*, 11 September 2005: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/11/books/review/11kunkel.html> (accessed 28 July 2009); Francis Blessington, “Politics and the Terrorist Novel”, *Sewanee Review*, CXVI/1 (Winter 2007), 116-24; Appelbaum and Paknadel, “Terrorism and the Novel”.

Scanlan originally introduced the concept for an analysis of novels that confront – and compare – terrorists and novelists. Her paradigmatic example was Don DeLillo's 1991 novel *Mao II*, which contains the famous confession of fictional novelist Bill Gray:

“For some time now I’ve had the feeling that novelists and terrorists are playing a zero-sum game What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought. The danger they represent equals our own failure to be dangerous.”²²

According to Scanlan, texts such as *Mao II* or J.M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) both continue and subvert the romantic tradition of “the alliance between the writer and the revolutionary”.²³ They cast “the terrorist as the writer's rival, double, or secret sharer”,²⁴ but they also radically question the long-held view of the writer as a person endowed with the power to change human institutions. Although the bulk of Scanlan's study is dedicated to works from the end of the 1970s to the mid-90s, she begins with a short discussion of Dostoevsky, James, and Conrad. In her conclusion, she notes that “From James to Coetzee, novelists who imagine a bond between terrorist and writer assume that both are isolated and marginal, incapable of gaining a hearing in the ordinary language of civic life”.²⁵

Francis Blessington also traces the “terrorist novel” from Henry James to the present (which, in his case, is the post-9/11 present). His main focus lies on a different thematic aspect, however. Discussing recent novels such as Algerian writer Yasmina Khadra's *The Attack* (2005) and John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), he observes:

In these novels we are usually not focused on the victims but on the perpetrators, whose choices and acts we are asked to understand, even momentarily to sympathize with, though not necessarily to condone or forgive. The action hinges on three choices: the author's, a major character's, and the reader's. And each choice involves ... three parts

²² Don DeLillo, *Mao II* (1991), London: Vintage, 1992, 156-57.

²³ Scanlan, *Plotting Terror*, 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

...: identity with the flawed establishment, identity with the idealistic and often naïve cause, or escape.²⁶

Both Scanlan and Blessington develop their characterizations of terrorist fiction on the basis of a specific – and limited – corpus of exemplary texts. For that reason, their results are easily applicable to novels sharing the same thematic concerns, but less useful for an investigation of the full thematic range of terrorist fiction. The same applies to Anthony Kubiak's more general definition, according to which the main purpose of such fiction is "to explore the motives and ideas behind the sociopolitical and psychic act of terrorism".²⁷ This definition excludes large parts of post-9/11 literature, which is mostly not concerned with the perpetrators and their agenda, but with the impact of the September 11 incidents (or other, imaginary suicide attacks) on both individual characters and American or Western society at large. For the purpose of the present volume, the phrase "literature about terrorism" is therefore meant to apply to fictional explorations of both, the causes and motivations as well as the aftermath of terrorist attacks. To be sure, several other thematic aspects could be added to the list: the planning and execution of the terrorist act, the confrontation and interaction between the terrorists and their victims, as well as – not least – the political response.

In the great mass of academic writing on terrorism, the 1996 study *Terror and Taboo* by social anthropologists Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass has proved particularly suggestive for the purpose of literary studies. It sets forth the premise that insurgent "terrorism" – as it is publicly perceived and discussed – heavily relies on myth, making fact and fiction largely indistinguishable, and that it therefore calls for a specific method of critical analysis, which the authors term "a mythography of Terror".²⁸ The terrorist "myth", they argue, is produced collaboratively by the media, the academia, as well as the principal protagonists themselves: the violent activists on the one hand, the attacked government on the other. The latter employs the myth to legitimize counterterrorist measures and operations, exaggerating the

²⁶ Blessington, "Politics and the Terrorist Novel", 118.

²⁷ Kubiak, "Spelling It Out", 296.

²⁸ Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism*, New York and London: Routledge, 1996, x.

actual danger and creating over-generalized images of “the terrorists”. In this context Zulaika and Douglass observe 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”. It should be noted that the authors here apply a very broad definition of “fiction” as “the crafting of a narrative”,²⁹ so that their term “fictionalization” may be substituted by “narrativization”. What they call “terrorism discourse” is explicitly 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”.³⁰

In its emphasis on representation and 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 first two book-length explorations of terrorism in late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature – Margaret Scanlan’s *Plotting Terror* (2001) and Alex Houen’s *Terrorism and Modern Literature* (2002) – both cite the study in their introductions, where they incorporate aspects of it into their own theoretical and methodological frameworks.³¹ Zulaika and Douglass’ approach also plays an important role in one of the most recent contributions to the field. In their 2008 article “Terrorism and the Novel” mentioned earlier, Robert Appelbaum and Alexis Paknadel ask in what ways fiction responds and contributes to the process of “mythification”.

Their suggestion is that fiction

... add[s] its own coloration to the mythic identity of terrorism. Perhaps it challenges that mythic identity as well. Subjecting terrorism to its own conventions and aspirations, the novel makes terrorism into a phenomenon in the possible worlds it represents – an enabling phenomenon, lending itself to the construction of plot, character, and theme – and it makes terrorism at the same time into a symbolic function through which it pursues its various writerly and readerly ends,

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

³¹ See Scanlan, *Plotting Terror*; Alex Houen, *Terrorism and Modern Literature, from Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

generating suspense, sentiment, and even – yes – terror. What cultural work the novel thereby performs with regard to terrorism (or “terrorism”) is one of the main issues in which we have been interested.³²

We are particularly interested in what is here referred to as the “cultural work” of terrorist fiction. According to Appelbaum and Paknadel’s conclusion, this cultural work is mainly concentrated on the issue of legitimacy. They write:

[The] cultural work of the terrorism novel from 1970 to 2001 has been by and large to legitimate the position of innocence occupied by terrorism’s victims and the political society to which they belong These novels tell us that terrorism is the violence of an Other; it is illegitimate violence perpetrated from an illegitimate position.³³

This conclusion is especially interesting with regard to the novels that the authors do not discuss, because they were published after 2001: does the continuously growing body of post-9/11 fiction (possibly unintentionally) affirm the subject position assumed by the leaders responsible for the “war on terrorism” by clearly assigning the roles of victims and victimizers to “us” and “them”?

Although thought-provoking, Appelbaum and Paknadel’s conclusion is not entirely satisfactory. In its one-sided focus on literary negotiations of legitimacy, it neglects other functions and dimensions of terrorist fiction. This may be due, in part, to an important conceptual and methodological limitation of Zulaika and Douglass’ monograph itself, which fails to explain the specific contribution of “fiction” in the narrower meaning of the term. It is worth remembering that only fiction in the sense of “literary or cinematographic invention” has the discursive license to overtly fictionalize terrorism – independently of clearly defined didactic or tactical considerations. Whereas political, scholarly, and media representations are primarily concerned with actual terrorist and counterterrorist activities, the majority of narrative

³² Appelbaum and Paknadel, “Terrorism and the Novel”, 389. At this point, the authors misleadingly use the word “mythography” to describe the cultural production of the terrorist myth rather than its academic analysis. It is in this latter sense that the word was introduced by Zulaika and Douglass, who used it to describe their particular method or, rather, mode of writing, not the object of their analysis.

³³ *Ibid.*, 427.

texts that address the thematic complex of terrorism choose to depict imaginary perpetrators, conspiracies, attacks, and reactions thereto, even if the recent emergence of 9/11 as a subject and backdrop of fiction has slightly changed the picture. One of literature's specific potentials no doubt lies in its capacity to narrativize terrorism as fiction. Accordingly, one of our tasks in the following chapters will be to describe how (from what perspective and with which thematic priorities) literature fictionalizes terrorism – and what concrete forms of terrorism it takes into account.

III

Literature and Terrorism is divided into four parts. The chapters in the first section are united by their literary-historical perspective, exploring the emergence and development of terrorism narratives at various times and in different national literatures. With this comparative, diachronic framework in place, Part Two moves into the very recent past. Concerned with the continuities and breaks that have characterized fictional representations of terrorism since the late 1990s, it puts the postulation of 9/11 as a “cultural caesura” to the test. Part Three focuses on aspects of media, mode, plot, and form. The contributions in this section explore such questions as: how do literary representations of terrorism relate to other media? What strategies and techniques do authors employ while approaching the phenomenon in a fictional mode? And which aesthetic concerns play a role in the process? While this part is accordingly comprised of in-depth explorations of individual texts, the book's final section takes a step back to look at larger generic issues, comparing the forms of the novel and drama in terms of their respective capacities to create convincing portrayals of terrorism's impact on society and the individual.

The book opens with three chapters dedicated to the first appearances of the modern terrorist – then better known under such labels as “revolutionist”, “nihilist”, “anarchist”, or “dynamiter” – on the literary scene. As early as 1872, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Devils* explored the psychological dimension of radical, violent movements organized in clandestine networks. Gudrun Braunsperger is mainly concerned with the historical contexts of Dostoevsky's novel. Her essay takes us back to the intellectual and socio-political situation of 1860s and 1870s Russia, in which some sections of the revolutionary student movement

developed into anti-tsarist terrorism. Braunsperger traces several of Dostoevsky's historical references, laying particular emphasis on his fictionalization of the famous Nechaev case. Using this case as a basis for the plot of his novel, Dostoevsky demonstrated how political idealism can turn into fanaticism. In the words of Gudrun Braunsperger, *The Devils* portrays a "lost generation", some of whose members "develop monstrous imaginations of almightiness and omnipotence"; at the same time, Braunsperger adds, the novel's treatment of terrorism is timeless and prophetic, transcending its immediate historical context.

The two subsequent contributions both deal with the figure of the dynamite terrorist in British *fin-de-siècle* fiction. Michael Frank begins by calling to mind that the term "terrorist novel" was originally applied to Gothic fiction. Against this backdrop, he traces the semantic shift that the designation "terror" underwent from its usage in eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse through the French Revolution to the emergence of insurgent terrorism, showing how "Each new, historically determined understanding of 'terror' produced new types of terror narrative". Frank then goes on to discuss anarchist and dynamite novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (most closely Robert Louis Stevenson and Fanny Van de Grift's *The Dynamiter* and Edward Douglas Fawcett's *Hartmann, the Anarchist*), which, as he argues, translate the terror of Gothic fiction into the new context of the late-Victorian metropolis of London. By relating the literary narrativization of terror to the forms of sub-state terrorism extant at the time, he reveals how the authors both tap into and shape what he conceptualizes as "the cultural imaginary of terrorism".

Hendrik Blumentrath approaches literary representations of the late nineteenth-century terrorist from a different angle. Focusing on the ways in which the new technology of dynamiting affected concepts of enmity, Blumentrath points to the difficulties in identifying potential or actual perpetrators – difficulties closely mirrored in the aesthetics of turn-of-the-century terrorism fiction, which is populated by "indistinguishable figures [and] enemies losing their shape". For Blumentrath, the "invisible enemies" who first appear in the works of Arthur Conan Doyle, Joseph Conrad, or Mary Richardson Lesesne are indicative of a "crisis of visibility" that triggered a reorientation towards statistical modes of inquiry. Diachronically linking these obser-

uations on late Victorian developments in Britain to 1970s Germany, the author identifies several analogies in both contexts. As he reminds us, the terrorism of the Red Army Faction (RAF) is more or less contemporaneous with the emergence of standardized data collection and electronic data processing in police work. These purely symbolic signifying techniques in turn affected the fictional representations of terrorists in novels by Friedrich Christian Delius and Rainald Goetz.

The book's second section, which looks at the impact of 9/11 on the way terrorism is represented in literature, opens with an analysis of Ann Patchett's *Bel Canto*. Published in the summer of 2001 and thus shortly before the September 11 attacks, the novel provides a remarkable example of how terrorists and their tactics were depicted in US fiction before terrorism had been identified as the primary concern of American politics. Eva Gruber shows that terrorism in *Bel Canto* is imagined and fictionalized in a manner that would have been inconceivable in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, namely, sympathetically and by giving its perpetrators a human face. Gruber also points out that the novel self-reflexively comments on its own representation of terrorism in what might be called a metadiscourse on the terrorist novel in general – a fact overlooked in critical reviews of the book. The reception history of *Bel Canto* suggests that 9/11 did indeed have a significant influence on the ways in which this particular terrorist text, and possibly terrorist fiction at large, has been (mis)read.

Martina Wolff's comparative reading of novels by two of the most renowned contemporary American writers – Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* (1997) and John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) – bridges the periods before and after September 11, 2001. Her analysis suggests a thematic continuity rather than discontinuity: Wolff's focus is on the novels' adolescent protagonists, their search for identity, orientation, and stability in a superficial and ever-changing society; as she points out, both characters turn to (religious or, in Roth's case, quasi-religious) fundamentalism and terrorism in order to compensate for a perceived lack of transcendence in their secular, materialist society. Wolff consequently establishes a close link between religious fundamentalism, which in its rigorousness appears attractively reliable to the youths, and the disruptive force of terrorism, "the antithesis to our daily dream of an ordinary life, to an existence that is somehow whole, that makes sense".

In contrast, Roy Scranton's discussion of narcissism in American 9/11 novels seems to implicitly question the attacks' disruptive potential, at least in the way in which some of the texts look at them. Scranton diagnoses most novels with an inability to do justice to the event's impact "on individual lives, [to] seriously look at the political and economic forces at work, and still perform the aesthetic, personal, and psychological insights and satisfactions we traditionally expect". He ascribes this lack of apposite scope – as visible, for instance, in Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children*, Jay McInerney's *The Good Life*, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, or Paul West's *The Immensity of the Here and Now* – largely to America's culture of narcissism, a willful ignorance towards global political developments. Scranton then proceeds to contrast the above-mentioned group of novels with texts that satirize and thus explicitly problematize the narcissism characteristic of both US politics and some post-9/11 fiction. His examples for this latter type of novel are Ken Kalfus' *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, and especially William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*.

Interestingly, Scranton credits science fiction writer Gibson with the most successful attempt to (meaning)fully represent the impact of 9/11, despite the fact that the novel is not explicitly about the attacks. This assessment already points us toward Margaret Scanlan's approach to terrorist novels after 9/11. Scanlan reads Cormac McCarthy's dystopian novel *The Road* as a terrorist novel that transcends the literary realism characteristic of most fiction concerned with the attacks. Although set in mythic time, bare of direct political or historical references, and without recourse to post-9/11 rhetoric, *The Road*'s post-catastrophic scenario, Scanlan argues, clearly engages with the aftermath of 9/11, with American violence in general, and the Bush administration's war on terrorism in particular. Scanlan's reading contextualizes the novel with both popular and philosophical responses to 9/11. Building on the ideas of Slavoj Žižek and Jean Baudrillard, she observes that "*The Road* evokes the end times of an America where all the barbarians are native and where sending an army halfway around the world to extinguish terror is no longer feasible". Yet Scanlan also detects an undercurrent of idealism within McCarthy's text and considers this as a possible "model for how the novel can confront

terrorism without giving in to the all too plausible despair it often engenders”.

Turning from responses to 9/11 in American literature to recent German terrorism fiction, Michael König identifies these texts’ main thematic, structural, and narrative components. In an argument that shows parallels to Scranton’s comments on American narcissism, König finds that early German texts directly responding to 9/11 remain caught in the autobiographical. At best, such texts (for instance by Kathrin Röggla and Else Buschheuer) “highlight the tragic events as aesthetic and poetic caesura”, whereas more “recent texts ... open the door for broader discussions about the social and cultural implications of terrorist disruptions”. Early texts are marked by what König refers to as a “narrative crisis” to which the authors respond by composing highly self-reflexive and metafictional works. In contrast, later texts on terrorism, such as Ulrich Peltzer’s *Teil der Lösung* re-politicize the topic by fictionalizing the impact of terrorism on social systems: paranoia, increased surveillance, and insurgency against growing state control. König concludes that German literature in this respect reflects a political shift away from ideological questions to what he identifies as a “culture of fear”: a concern with counterterrorist security measures rather than with the roots of terrorism itself.

The third section of this book, with its focus on the formal and aesthetic dimensions of terrorism narratives, starts with Ulrich Meurer’s reflections on an intriguing case of “double mediation”. Meurer’s contribution is devoted to Don DeLillo’s short story “Baader-Meinhof”, which features references to Gerhard Richter’s *October 18, 1977* paintings, which are, in turn, based on iconic photographs (from wanted-posters to television stills) of RAF terrorists. Framing his analysis in theoretical discussions on the possibilities and limits of depicting terror, Meurer identifies a representational gap or “blind spot” in Richter’s images as well as in DeLillo’s text. Both refrain from any attempt at representing reality. Rather, Meurer contends, they “make something visible that was concealed by the mere technical reproduction” in the case of Richter’s paintings or by mere direct reference in the case of DeLillo’s text. The works, the author concludes, thus “create an interspace for the emergence of the unrepresentable”, an interspace providing room for “an artistic alternative, an unthought-of sphere beyond replication”.

The concepts of “unrepresentability”, “invisibility”, and “disappearance”, already at the center of Hendrik Blumentrath’s contribution, assume a different yet related meaning in Kirsten Mahlke’s reading of Argentinian author Julio Cortázar’s short story “Second Time Round”. Like Meurer, Mahlke focuses on aesthetic modes of representing terror – in this case state terrorism – and finds the fantastic, against all odds, to be most suitable for narrativizing the case of Argentina’s “Disappeared”. The existence of this group of people, who went missing in 1970s and 1980s Argentina but were neither declared dead nor alive, runs counter to rational conceptualizations of reality. Mahlke finds that the fantastic, transcending the border between fiction and the real, constitutes a highly befitting mode for addressing this issue at once located in historical reality and strangely unreal. She approaches the phenomenon through Freud’s ideas on the uncanny, Todorov’s model of the fantastic, and Alazraki’s definition of the neo-fantastic, and closely traces the linguistic, discursive, and structural strategies that mark Cortázar’s story as a case of the fantastic.

In her analysis of Andre Dubus III’s *The Garden of Last Days*, Georgiana Banita explores the relation between literature and terror with regard to “plotting”. She suggests that Dubus’ novel not only accomplishes what many other texts are accused of falling short of, namely to “elucidate the processes that allow terrorism to come into being”; it also critically reflects ideas of closure habitually imposed on 9/11, as Banita shows in her close scrutiny of the text’s narrative strategies. Dubus’ novel resists the sense-making functions and cohesiveness traditionally attributed to narrative, while all the same relying strongly on plot. This paradox, Banita explains, can be resolved by considering Dubus’ text as a sort of “narrative anamnesis” of the characters’ lives and their apparently random actions. In emphasizing the “middle” of the narrative – the minute details of its characters’ trajectories – the novel refuses to be “end-determined” in the way most 9/11 novels are, hurling towards the attacks as the final and simultaneously most significant moment.

In the book’s fourth and final section, the attention shifts to genre, with Marie-Luise Egbert and Herbert Grabes addressing the novel and drama as two alternative forms of representing terrorism. Asking “whether terrorism novels actually constitute a new paradigm within

the genre of the novel”, Egbert explores Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* and Patrick Neate’s *City of Tiny Lights* by way of Jean Baudrillard’s ideas of 9/11 as, simultaneously, a “resurgence of the real” and “fiction surpassing fiction”. It is this paradoxical relationship between the fictional and the real, between reality and its representations, which informs Egbert’s analysis, be it in her reading of the emotionally detached and therefore unreal protagonists of *Falling Man* or in the question of life imitating art in *City of Tiny Lights*. In a genre-theoretical approach that links the novel to the mode of realism, but also takes into consideration the crisis of this very link in postmodern fiction, Egbert critically scrutinizes potential analogies between the terrorist act and the creation of fiction in terms of their respective world-altering potential. Finding that the texts referred to as terrorism novels are marked by similar thematic concerns, but are usually rather conventional in terms of narrative form, Egbert concludes that “the question as to whether narratives of terror might constitute a new genre of fiction must be answered in the negative” – which is not, however, to devalue the important cultural work they perform in elucidating the phenomenon of terrorism.

Herbert Grabes also takes a brief excursion into narrative, offering a short look at *Falling Man*, the novel which incidentally has attracted most attention within this volume. Yet his main focus is on dramatic engagements with 9/11. Guided by the question of whether “9/11 literature” as *littérature engage*, burdened with all the ethical implications and complexities of writing about the attacks, can simultaneously fulfill the aesthetic demands posed to literary texts, he looks at a whole range of plays: Lavonne Mueller’s *Voices from September 11th*, Ann Nelson’s *The Guys*, Craig Wright’s *Recent Tragic Events*, and Neil LaBute’s *The Mercy Seat*. While Grabes attests a great qualitative heterogeneity to this field, he also observes shared tendencies in at least some of the plays, such as a leaning towards the patriotic, the centrality of the (auto)biographical, and a decline of the ironic or subversive that had marked postmodern literature. Comparing the genre-specific possibilities of drama and the novel for rendering the experiences of 9/11, he concludes that “the novel not only allows for a more comprehensive and detailed worldmaking but also leaves room for a broad unfolding of multiple plots and lengthy discussions of wider issues”. In contrast, “dramatists have to be much more selective ...

and their success depends more acutely on their ability to find ‘telling’ incidents and render them in a way that makes for an intense theater experience”.

While the articles collected in this volume are thus assigned to umbrella subjects, as this brief summary demonstrates, their inquiries are not restricted to each of the four parts’ main topics, but create several productive overlaps. For instance, Georgiana Banita’s analysis of Andree Dubus III’s *The Garden of Last Days* parallels Eva Gruber’s contribution on Ann Patchett’s *Bel Canto* in its exploration of the role of terrorism as a plot device. Moreover, it shares Roy Scranton’s and Herbert Grabes’ aesthetic concerns and Martina Wolff’s interest in terrorism’s social implications. Similarly, both Michael Frank and Marie-Luise Egbert look at the specificities of novelistic representations of terrorism before their (literary-)historical and generic backgrounds. And several other articles (such as those by Ulrich Meurer, Kirsten Mahlke, Marie-Luise Egbert, and Herbert Grabes, to name but the most obvious examples) devote their attention to the complex relationship between fiction and the real in representations of terror. Despite these correspondences, the volume testifies to the importance of approaching the relation between literature and terrorism from various angles and with differentiated analytical objectives. Roy Scranton’s and Marie Luise Egbert’s corpora of texts, for instance, overlap to a substantial degree, yet the conclusions the authors come to differ substantially. Furthermore, Egbert’s and Margaret Scanlan’s contributions show that diverging ideas on what a new paradigm for the novel might look like lead to differing answers to the question of continuity and discontinuity in post-9/11 literature.

In its entirety, the volume therefore attempts to approach and – at least partly – map the complex field of literature and terrorism without imposing preconceived notions or hypotheses, but rather by close observation and perceptive analysis. In combination, the individual perspectives brought together in this book, like the pieces of a mosaic, will help render a larger picture. As editors, we hope that this open, multifaceted approach adds to the understanding of the intricate and changing relation between literature and terrorism.

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