

French Fiction, Empathy, and the Utopian Potential of 9/11

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I. The Utopian Potential of 9/11

In *From Solidarity to Schisms*, Cara Cilano conceptualizes September 11 as a moment “characterized by unfathomable vulnerability and the possibility of a better future” (13). She argues that the event, while traumatic, might have served as impetus to reconfigure American self-perceptions. Instead, she contends, the US squandered the utopian potential of this moment. For while the country became the immediate beneficiary of world-wide sympathy and fellow-feeling, in the months that ensued, this goodwill was eroded by an administration that succumbed to fear and anxiety, and insisted on flexing its military might.¹ Cilano remains optimistic, however, because she reads European fictional discourse on 9/11 as emblematic of a desire for a melding of divergent positions. These narratives act as a productive counter-flow to American unilateralism, their critique intending to keep America’s sense of itself unbalanced, thus providing fuel for self-reflection, analysis, and renewal: “Unsettledness is necessary in this conceptual framework, for the work of democracy is always in process, always aware of the stultification brought about by reification” (19-20). She further identifies a sense of turning inward and a solidifying of boundaries, encapsulated in an emphasis placed on home that emerged in the aftermath, contending this drive “entails a tightening of identifications intended to align people ideologically based on appeals to a manufactured sense of cultural nativity” (19). She advocates for a disruption of this reifying of nationalist imperatives at the expense of cosmopolitan ones: “To be uncomfortable in one’s

home is, then, to take the time to acknowledge what is at stake in the construction of ‘home’ – both for oneself and, more urgently, for others – and to commit oneself to the endless reconstruction of ‘home’ so as to move toward greater inclusiveness and shared dignity” (Cilano 20). She posits these narratives of home as a principal obstacle in the quest to seize the utopian potential of the moment and, like others, calls for the dismantlement of the barriers standing between native and foreign, between us and them.

Of the European fiction written on the subject of 9/11 a substantial output has emanated from France; at least seven novels and two graphic narratives deal specifically with these cataclysmic events. Four of these texts—Christian Garcin’s *La jubilation des hasards* (2005) ‘The Jubilation of Chance,’ Didier Goupil’s *Le jour de mon retour sur terre* (2003) ‘The Day of my Return to Earth,’ Luc Lang’s *11 septembre mon amour* (2003), and Frédéric Beigbeder’s *Windows on the World* (2003)—provide fertile ground for testing the soundness and validity of Cilano’s hypothesis.² Each text demonstrates, in its own way, that the impulse to construct a counternarrative emanates from a range of desires not easily characterized: seeking to help the US recover from the tragedy, critiquing American flaws and failures, responding to perceived demonstrations of uncritical collegiality towards the United States, or trumpeting French superiority. So we might question the degree to which the French responses to 9/11 and its aftermath are reflective of a global reaction from solidarity to schisms, and in what ways they express uniquely French concerns.

These texts—with the exception of Beigbeder’s *Windows on the World*—have not been translated into English. This inaccessibility may point to the extensiveness of American insularity, but may designate the true audience for whom these texts are intended. If the latter then these novels do not become part of a larger, global dialogue (as Cilano suggests), but rather serve to assert that which differentiates France from the US. And if these texts appeal primarily to French readers, it is because they speak of contemporary France itself, of its self-proclaimed role as resister and regulator of the global ambitions of the US, but also of its anxiety concerning its own decline or growing inconsequentiality. This moment can be conceived as an opportunity for reconfiguring the geopolitical landscape, but the question remains: Is it being grasped with a

genuine desire to improve global conditions or merely one's own standing on the international stage? Do these texts express empathy for the American situation? Are they imaginative attempts to perceive the event from an American point of view? In *The French Way*, Richard Kuisel argues that the US has long acted as "the foil for [France's] national identity" (7). His text, which examines Franco-American relations during the last two decades of the twentieth century, is subtitled, *How France Embraced and Rejected American Values and Power*, and speaks to the tenuous relationship between countries.³ This ambivalence derives in no small part from an underlying sense they share more than either is willing to admit, so that, paradoxically, these commonalities lead to the strongest oppositions:

Rooted in history and lodged in the people's collective psychology was the conviction that the French, like the Americans, had a special global mission. For Americans it was the spread of democracy and free enterprise; for the French it was the *mission civilisatrice*. Such presuppositions were bound to clash. Or, put it another way, the Americans and the French are the only two people who believe everyone else in the world would like to be them. (Kuisel 353)

It stands to reason that two universalizing missions cannot peacefully coexist; each nation bears such similarity to the other that the only means of highlighting one's own brand is to accentuate differences. Stanley Hoffman similarly argues that while the two nations have had their disputes since 1945, it is "the rivalry of universalisms" that has given their opposition a "passionate inflection" (65).⁴ This position is also taken up by Pierre Rosanvallon who maintains that while there may be notable issues of style, method, and political consistency, the critical divide occurs between two versions of universalism, which he terms dogmatic and experimental. Rosanvallon suggests that around the mid-nineteenth century, the US reached a consensus about the notion of democracy, but this came "at the cost of sacralizing the democratic ideal, suddenly expunging it of its constitutive radical interrogations and its subversive potential" (Rosanvallon). He leaves no doubt as to which approach is truly universalist—the dogmatic universalism practiced

by the US curtails freedoms and individual expression. France, for its part, practices a more radical, open, and renewable approach: “Democracy as religion on one side, democracy as experience on the other, these two approaches lead to very different conceptions about the universalist perspective” (Rosanvallon). In the end, the American approach gives rise to an “insupportable arrogance,” in contrast to the truly experimental universalism practiced by France. Rosanvallon’s assessment captures French feeling, expressing dismay and bewilderment that their uncouth and imperious cousin (the US) should experience greater success in exporting its particular brand of universalism to the world.

American accomplishment is thus a two-edged sword. First, it highlights France’s secondary status and, second, exacerbates fears about its diminishing relevance. In response France has adopted strategies that oppose and counterbalance actions perceived as intrusions and self-serving behavior on the part of the Americans. This feeling is augmented when, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US becomes the sole, uncontested superpower. The antidote, proposed by Jacques Chirac and others, is multipolarity, a system wherein power and influence are exercised more equally by a number of players across the globe. But these oppositions, as noted, are rooted in the desire to maintain national identity in the face of an unrelenting juggernaut that appears to swallow all in its path. For there exists a far greater chance of preserving an identity in a multipolar (heterogeneous) world than in a unipolar (homogeneous) one. In fact, the adoption of the stance itself provides France with a measure of distinction. As Kuisel notes, “Responding to the hyperpower defined French foreign policy: constraining America and attaining self-reliance was the standard of measurement for the country’s success and identity” (270). There may have been more than one universalism, and France hotly contested the unipolar vision of the US, but it was clear which country was reaping the benefits. Franco-American relations in the final years of the twentieth century revealed an increasingly insecure France whose prospects for regaining international prominence and influence seemed to be dwindling rapidly. “The French were in a defensive crouch and this defensiveness had its roots in what was often described at the time as the ‘French malaise,’ referring to a loss

of confidence, a feeling of decline, a sense of waning independence, and a concern about vanishing national identity” (Kuisel 362). Taking these factors into account, one could speculate that the events of September 11, 2001, came at an opportune moment for France, bringing the world a little closer to Chirac’s vision of things, reducing American power by exposing its vulnerability and, in the process, leveling the international playing field.

II. Vulnerability and Wrestling with Empathy

One might thus expect to discover in these texts a continuum extending from empathy (best expressed by the editor of *Le Monde*, Jean-Marie Colombani: “Nous sommes tous Américains”) to antipathy for the US (anti-Americanism, Americanophobia). That 9/11 should elicit such rapid criticism and condemnation from French quarters, however, indicates some readiness to adopt an adversarial position. In this vein, Denis Lacorne argues that even before 2001, the French “were already of two minds, their empathy mingled with indifference, their admiration with doubts and distrust of the abnormalities of the American society” (Judt and Lacorne 38). The French reaction could also be explained as one which interprets Colombani’s statement as a national endorsement of the American imperialism. But Colombani certainly intended the phrase as an expression of shared vulnerability, highlighting the fact that these attacks could happen to anyone. Its intentions as an expression of solidarity are clear, as it alludes to the slogan used in support of Daniel Cohn-Bendit during the Paris student uprisings of 1968, “Nous sommes tous des juifs allemands” ‘We are all German Jews.’ Colombani’s essay is certainly critical of the US, pointing to the existence of a unipolar world as the primary reason for the hatred coming its way. In its growing insularity, and its newly-acquired hyperpower status, he asserts, the American nation failed to establish meaningful connections with the rest of the world, creating unstable conditions in which such barbarous events become an inevitability. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the phrase is frequently interpreted as unthinking and unabashed endorsement of American policies, attitudes and values. This reaction reveals an ingrained desire in some to not be connected to the US in any way (even in the course of a single phrase), and goes hand-in-hand with

an insistence that the event was the foreseeable result of American actions, and American actions only. Colombani's emphasis on a shared vulnerability, on the other hand, seeks to find common ground. In this way, it bears similarity to Cilano's call which, while referring specifically to fiction, conceptualizes 9/11 as a catalyst for positive change. Fissures can be mended, these advocates claim, through a renewed emphasis on the essential sameness of humanity, or "cosmopolitan sentiments" as James Brassett labels them. And the events of September 11 brought forth calls for greater displays of sympathy, compassion, and empathy, on the part of Americans, but also from other members of the international community.

Of these three feelings, sympathy—experiencing sorrow when confronted with the suffering of another—is the most easily elicited under these circumstances. Compassion, for its part, supplements sympathy with a desire or willingness to come to the aid of the sufferer. The line separating compassion from empathy is therefore harder to identify, and the terms are often used interchangeably. In "Compassion and Terror," for instance, Martha Nussbaum argues that compassion can only occur if we conclude that a person's "predicament is truly grave." This determination, she continues, "involves both trying to look out at the situation from the suffering person's own viewpoint and then assessing the person's own assessment" (235). In other words, to rely on our own determination of the gravity of the situation is insufficient; we must also consider the ways it might be considered grave by the other. Stressing repeatedly the challenges to compassion, Nussbaum contends that suffering can elicit this act of feeling, but "only insofar as we believe that the suffering person shares vulnerabilities and possibilities with us" (235). Or, conversely, that we share vulnerabilities and possibilities with them. In fact, Nussbaum seems to suggest that compassion is not possible without empathy, for the former does not ensure mutual recognition, since it implies a degree of inequality between observer and observed. By virtue of not being the one who suffers, the observer finds himself in a superior position. Empathy, while sharing this dispositional imbalance, comes closer to an understanding of the other's suffering through recognition that this pain could have been one's own. In this vein, Brassett suggests that while sympathy might be the most common response to an event

such as 9/11, “the existential nature of vulnerability ‘might’ allow for the identification and nurturing of empathy as a more appropriate/powerful ethical sentiment” (24). What finally distinguishes empathy from sympathy and compassion, at least the kind being considered here, is that it requires a conscious and willing effort on the part of the observer who must sublimate (if only momentarily) his own self to better perceive from the other’s perspective. In this regard, Karsten Stueber argues for a distinction between basic empathy and what he terms “reenactive empathy.” Basic empathy allows for recognition of another’s emotion, but not the reasons for his subsequent behavior, and is thus insufficient. Stueber insists that only reenactive empathy will allow us to form conclusions about the actions of others, since “only by using our cognitive and deliberative capacities in order to reenact or imitate in our own mind the thought processes of the other person – are we able to conceive of another person’s more complex social behavior as the behavior of a rational agent who acts for a reason” (21). It is relevant that empathy is not intended to replace direct interaction with the other though it may impact the quality of those interactions. And as hard as we may strive to see what the other sees, we have no guarantee that we really see as the other does. Consequently, we should remain aware of the dangers of presuming to know the other merely because we have attempted an empathetic engagement. As Julinna Oxley explains, there is always the possibility “that someone might merely project her own beliefs and thoughts onto others instead of correctly understanding the other’s emotion” (32). Exercising empathy requires a self-critical eye and an awareness of one’s own motivations for engaging in the activity. Despite these limitations, writers such as Oxley and Brassett nevertheless endorse empathy as a powerful ethical sentiment for navigating the current crisis. Through its emphasis on sameness and connection, it serves as a vehicle for diminishing misperceptions and erroneous conclusions, creating greater harmony between constituents:

Empathy enables people to understand how others see the world, helps them to appreciate others’ perspectives and connect with them emotionally, eliminates the perception of conflict between oneself and others, and makes possible the perception of similarity between oneself and others. (Oxley 5-6)

Along with other forms of discourse, we should thus expect to find expressions of empathy in works of fiction dealing specifically with the events of 9/11.

But these varied responses are not guided by such principles; instead, these French narratives create their own us-them scenarios, highlighting differences rather than similarities. They insist on emphasizing how unexceptional 9/11 was, pointing to other atrocities and man-made disasters throughout history. And compassion is forcefully withheld because these writers steadfastly maintain this occurrence was something Americans brought upon themselves. As a hyperpower, the US is criticized for its arrogance, its unrelenting pursuit of material wealth, and its misapplication of military might. And much space is devoted to George W. Bush and his administration as embodiments of that which Europeans fear most about the American nation: a frontier mentality combined with a thirst for violence, an apparent simplicity, a religious fervor, and a conviction that might makes right. That an American populace elected such an individual to office only corroborated that the citizenry had succumbed to their own worst natures. As such, the American people are often objects of ridicule in these texts, depicted as infantile, regressive, unsophisticated, blindly following the edicts of their newly-appointed sheriff. Expressions of empathy, when they do appear, are reserved for the dead. The dead have paid the ultimate price, whereas the living perpetuate the system that elicited these attacks.

That the US might be considered the victim in this instance, however, also poses some particular challenges. Specifically, it raises questions about the directionality of empathy. When empathy is invoked, the focus is usually on a disadvantaged, oppressed, or brutalized other. But what if the other inhabits a space perceived to be superior to one's own? Is it possible to empathize with a dominant force that suddenly finds itself victimized? It is easy to imagine that empathy will be attenuated when the other is conceived as having lived a privileged existence, or of not having been particularly empathetic itself in its dealings with others. An empathetic response is further complicated if one believes that one's status in the world is contingent upon comparative standing. In that case, any diminishment or loss suffered by that other will

likely be received with some degree of pleasure rather than empathy. So this is not *schadenfreude* as such, but rather the perception that one's position (in the eyes of others, on the international stage) is improved through the impoverishment of the other's. So while the distinctions are not always clear, these novels tend to use September 11, 2001 as an opportunity to raise some age-old griefs. As Tony Judt observes, many French books written on 9/11 are characterized by an initial "real or feigned regret" followed by an eventual "inventory of American shortcomings" (22). Nationalist agendas and histories act as obstacles to cosmopolitan possibilities. This raises questions about the utopian potential Cilano optimistically believes might be attained through the reception of outsider texts. As this article will show, the preconceptions of both the US and France end up preventing the possibility of an earnest expression of American vulnerability (not framed or interpreted as justifications for exercising power) and/or of a true empathetic French response (unclouded by feelings of difference, inferiority and/or superiority).

III. American Shortcomings: Christian Garcin's *La jubilation des hasards*

The plotline of Garcin's *La jubilation des hasards* is primarily concerned with reincarnation and ghostly presences in our lives. In the thirteenth chapter, however, the narrator-protagonist suddenly pronounces on the subject of 9/11. The reader is not surprised since the protagonist has flown to New York to resolve some business, and has agreed to write on the city's recovery. The commentary, coming as an intrusion, nevertheless reflects a seemingly irrepressible urge to opine upon the events, and a desire to shock the reader: "Comme tout le monde j'avais vu en boucle les spectaculaires images des avions percutant les deux tours de Babel, et je ne pouvais m'empêcher de penser que, finalement, c'était assez réussi" (91) 'Like everyone I had seen the endless televised loops of the planes smashing into the two towers of Babel, and I could not help thinking that, finally, the attacks were quite successful'. Although he professes to no interest in the subject, he holds forth, acknowledging his feelings differ considerably from those of the majority. Sounding like Karlheinz Stockhausen (the composer much maligned for his insensitivity), he admits that the execution of the attacks elicited in him "une sorte

de satisfaction presque esthétique que je n'osais avouer à personne" (92) 'a kind of almost aesthetic appreciation that I did not dare admit to anyone'. He continues:

Je n'osais l'avouer à personne car parmi les gens que je côtoyais, personne à chaud ne me semblait pouvoir entendre cela. On mettrait aussitôt ces propos sur le compte d'un aveuglement salement idéologique, d'une détestation globale du système américain, d'une grande défiance – que je ne songeais certes pas à nier, même si tout était infiniment plus complexe, qui mêlait dans un même mouvement attrait et répulsion – à l'égard de la volonté hégémonique de ce pays, son cynisme politique, son inculture dominatrice, son idéologie exclusivement marchande, sa violence constitutionnelle. L'heure était plutôt au consensus indigné, apitoyé, terrifié ou attristé, et mes propos n'eussent sans doute été considérés que comme des cyniques provocations, ce qu'ils n'étaient pas le moins du monde. (92)

I did not dare admit it to anyone, because among my acquaintances no one seemed willing to hear it. My point of view would be immediately shrugged off as blind malignant ideology, a globalized hatred of the American system, or simply distrust – remarks which I did not think to refute, even if everything was infinitely more complex, that mixed in the same dynamic was both attraction and repulsion – in regards to the hegemonic will of this country, its political cynicism, its dominant philistinism, its exclusively mercantile ideology, its constitutional violence. The mood of the hour was rather indignant, pitying, terrified or sad, and my observations would have been taken as nothing more than cynical provocations, which they were not in the least.

The narrator never explains why these comments are not provocations, nor does he ponder why others might view them as such. And though he gives cause for his repulsion, the purported reasons for his attraction are left unnamed. So while some of the critiques offered by Garcin's narrator may be legitimate—the attacks were a success and such attacks have occurred at other times in other places—they are undermined by his admiration for

the accomplishments of the terrorists, and his lack of concern for the suffering endured. An insouciance in the use of language feels (deliberately?) uncaring and insensitive. The comments and their style also reflect the narrator's impatience with what he perceives as preferential treatment or disproportionate sympathy. For instance, Garcin's narrator strongly objects to the fact that French schoolchildren were asked to observe a minute of silence for the victims of September 11.⁵ If such formalities are to be observed, then all countries must be afforded the same recognition: "Les écoliers de France sauront peut-être enfin qu'il y a des souffrances moins médiatisées et tout aussi respectables, cela ne leur fera pas de mal"(93) 'French schoolchildren will then perhaps become aware that there are less mediated but just as worthy sufferings. It will not hurt them to know'.

This level of outrage and bemusement characterizes the narrator's visit to New York. He berates himself for having feelings about the event, as though they might legitimize the plight of the victims. He arranges interviews for his piece, but holds little hope they will provide anything new. His suspicions are confirmed immediately:

Comme je m'y attendais sans trop savoir pourquoi, il n'avait que de consternantes banalités à me dire sur les attentats, l'indescriptible horreur des attentats, l'héroïsme des pompiers morts pendant et après les attentats, les conséquences des attentats, l'inévitable, mais finalement marginale, et presque excusable, défiance à l'égard des musulmans américains après les attentats, l'extraordinaire solidarité du peuple américain à la suite des attentats, et la croisade, sans doute maladroite parfois, mais indéniablement justifiée, de l'administration Bush contre les terroristes organisateurs d'attentats. (111)

As I expected, without really knowing why, he could offer only dumbfounding banalities on the attacks, the indescribable horror of the attacks, the heroic firemen killed during and after the attacks, the consequences of the attacks, the inevitable, though finally marginal, and almost excusable, mistreatment of American Muslims after the attacks, the solidarity of the American people

after the attacks, and the crusade, misguided at times, but undeniably justified, of the Bush administration against the organizers of the attacks.

The repetition of the words “les attentats” ‘the attacks,’ recalls the media bombardments to which the world was subjected. But the narrator’s tone also communicates his unwillingness to recognize how any of this is newsworthy; in fact, the repetition serves to empty the word of its traumatic significance. The passage conveys a palpable sense of boredom, and a conviction that Americans need to get over what happened. So instead of connecting with the interviewee’s struggle to communicate this harrowing experience, the narrator focuses on the “dumbfounding banalities” produced in the effort. This language betrays a host of other sentiments—Garcin’s narrator exhibits impatience, a caustic indifference, and a sense of superiority combined with an amazement at American naïveté. After all, did not everyone know that this day would eventually come? Were the Twin Towers not a deliberate provocation? This last sentiment is best emblemized in the frequent analogies made between the World Trade Center and the Tower of Babel. As demonstrated here, a correlation exists between the manner these writers describe the Towers (and their destruction) and the degree of empathy they exhibit towards the US.

Although known as a *provocateur*, Jean Baudrillard exhibits a representative attitude in his analysis of the events of September 11 and, specifically, the destruction of the Twin Towers. Much like Jacques Derrida, he argues that the implosion of the WTC was nothing less than a “symbolic suicide,” not caused by the terrorists (who did not imagine such an eventuality), but by a weakened system which, unable to support its “unnatural” position as the sole superpower, ends up “destroying itself, committing suicide in a blaze of glory” (4-5).⁶ When the dominant system finds itself enemyless, it turns on itself, seeking the weakest part of its own structure. In Baudrillard’s words, 9/11 is evidence of “*triumphant globalization battling against itself*” (11).⁷ This act of self-destruction symbolizes and reflects the unconscious will of all people (including Americans themselves) who desire nothing more than to see the hegemony of the US overturned. Utilizing the metaphor of illness, Baudrillard theorizes that the destruction of the Towers was due

to the people's innate resistance to expressions of hegemony: "Allergy to any definitive power, is – happily – universal, and the two towers of the World Trade Center were perfect embodiments, in their very twinning, of that definitive order" (6). He points to Hollywood disaster films as overt demonstrations of this aversion, and even implies that the people's disgust with the buildings—"their secret desire to see them disappear"—contributed to their implosion. Finally, he argues the national reaction to September 11 was disproportionate to the event, because American people refused to confront their "unavoidable complicity" (6). The use of the word "complicity" is telling, for it intimates conscious courting of an eventual backlash, rather than being ignorant of how actions engender repercussions. The imputation of complicity, agency, and desire can be read as provocation and/or calculated indifference. But it also reflects a failure of empathy—the text reflecting the glee ("happily") the writer supposes others experience in witnessing and enabling a superpower's end.⁸

These sentiments are echoed by French novelists who express their own insights about the meaning of the event. The Towers embody a hegemonic hold against which the world reacts. In effect, the WTC becomes the literal lightning rod for global dissatisfaction with the American (mis)management of worldly affairs. But in these texts, the Twin Towers come to symbolize a great deal more: world domination, excessive materialism, decadence, and a host of other sins. In *La jubilation des hasards*, for example, the narrator acknowledges his admiration for the manner in which the Muslim terrorists manipulated Biblical symbolism: "la Babylone moderne, ces deux impassibles tours de verre dressées fièrement à la face des humbles et des misérieux, tout cela abattu par le feu du ciel, c'était à la fois l'orgueil de Babel et la turpitude de Sodome et Gomorrhe qui étaient châtiés en direct" (Garcin 91) 'this modern Babylon, these two impassive glass towers rising proudly in the face of misery, all brought down by fire in the sky, it was at once both the pride of Babel and the turpitude of Sodom and Gomorrah that were castigated live'. The invocation of the Tower of Babel intimates the WTC invited its own destruction, and permits the creation of a morality play in which arrogance is punished, the emptiness of materialistic pursuits and human power is revealed, and hubris is

struck down. The naïveté of the builders of the WTC echoes that of those who constructed the Tower of Babel, men incapable of seeing that raising a structure to Heaven—an exhibition of both pride and decadence—might be perceived as an affront to God.⁹

IV. The Pitfalls of Consumerism: Didier Goupil's *Le jour de mon retour sur terre*

The danger in stretching the Tower of Babel analogy too far, as Lawrence Schehr notes, is in creating strong correlations between the actions of the terrorists and those of a vengeful God (137). However, that is precisely what Goupil accomplishes in *Le jour de mon retour sur terre* 'The Day of my Return to Earth.'¹⁰ The novel's overt symbolism presents a single tower from which the word "GOLD" is repeatedly beamed. When the Grand Tower is destroyed, the narrator observes "la ville venait non seulement de perdre le phare qui la guidait, mais son âme" (12) 'the city had lost not only the lighthouse that guided her, but her soul.' One can infer, then, that the edict which America follows, down to her very soul, is mercantile. Indeed, the indirect narration of the unnamed protagonist often blends with that of the implied author to present an ongoing critique of American consumerist and militaristic tendencies.¹¹ The protagonist's rejection of his former life, beginning with his refusal to answer his cell phone, his discarding of his briefcase, and his choice of homelessness, are meant to suggest the country has somehow lost its way. This is the novel's plot. A worker in the tower barely survives the attack, goes into a tailspin, rejects his former life (and all the capitalist trappings therein), and roams the streets around Ground Zero. Looking down at his ash-covered briefcase, he thinks: "il lui sembla tout droit sorti d'un sarcophage, et appartenir à un autre temps, à jamais révolu" (29) 'it seemed to have been taken from a sarcophagus, and belonged to another time, gone forever'. The trauma has wrenched him free from the chains binding him to a meaningless life. In this respect, Goupil's novel hints at the utopian, even Edenic, potential wrapped within the catastrophe. Later, the narrative explicitly connects the fate of the crumbling Tower and his disengagement with an earlier self: "Il n'éprouva pour sa part aucune haine. Ni même de colère, ou de peine. Il ressentait tout simplement un grand vide. Oui, un grand vide. Comme si quelque chose en lui

avait disparu, s'était littéralement effondré" (54) 'For his part, he did not feel any hate. Not even anger, or pain. He simply sensed an emptiness at his core. Yes, a great emptiness. It was as if something in him had vanished, had literally collapsed'. The protagonist, however, appears to be the only person (until he meets his equally homeless and liberated soulmate) who recognizes the folly of his previous pursuits. So while the narrative exhibits some empathy for the dead, it accords little to the living. The multitudes are depicted as blind followers whose devotion remains steadfast. The people not only want the Tower rebuilt, but feel "comme orphelins des lettres géantes qui avaient si longtemps brillé à son sommet: GOLD ... GOLD ... GOLD" (112) 'like orphans of the giant letters that had once shone at its summit: GOLD ... GOLD ... GOLD'. They remain complicit with a system that brought retribution down upon their heads. The novel resorts to biblical analogy as a means of communicating the level of American hubris; Goupil also alludes to the Tower of Babel, and includes a biblical flood to hammer home the displeasure of the gods.

Rather than a cause and effect argument, however, or an analysis of political motivations, what is presented is something akin to bad karma. Americans have acted so badly for so long it has come back to haunt them. The terrorists are not so much agents of an organization, but of much-needed change, controlled by an unseen force that seeks to right the balance of the world (the mastermind of the attacks is called the Unknown). The catastrophe fulfills this function for the protagonist, allowing him to finally see his nation clearly: "il était en train de comprendre que contrairement à ce qu'on lui avait appris, notre pouvoir ne reposait pas sur une simple affaire de sciences, d'industrie ou de finance, ni même sur une soi-disant supériorité nationale, mais tout bêtement au fait que de toute éternité, et en tout cas depuis l'antiquité, nos armées tuaient davantage et mieux que leurs rivales" (Goupil 48) 'he was beginning to understand, in contrast to what he had been taught, that our power was not simply a matter of the sciences, industry or finance, or even of a so-called national superiority, but more simply that for all eternity, and at least since antiquity, our armies knew how to kill and in greater numbers than did their rivals'.

The novel infers the citizenry have not been privy to a

similar awakening. In this regard, the President is depicted as the perpetuation of their desires, and as the embodiment of the nation's isolationist and domineering impulses. The attacks provide him with "une opportunité unique de nettoyer des contrées éloignées et hostiles, et d'étendre encore l'emprise de l'empire sur la planète" (Goupil 119) 'the unique opportunity not only to destroy distant and hostile lands, but to strengthen the grip of the empire on the planet.' The novel thus makes plain the ways in which the US has precluded the possibility for empathy through its aggressive military stance. Despite plagues of fire and rain, the President does not mend his ways, or contemplate what brought such misfortune down upon his people. The unwavering determination of the nation is seen here as a detriment, most ironically brought home in the ceremony surrounding the first anniversary of the attacks. After a minute of silence, the President uncovers a statue erected at Ground Zero, depicting a soldier grasping a gun in one raised hand and cradling a globe of the world in the other (158). With this startling image, the novel suggests little has changed. The nation, though slightly chastened, clings tightly to its flawed principles. In contrast, the nomadic lifestyle of the protagonist and his partner is celebrated—intimations to Adam and Eve are clear. The protagonist, as the title indicates, returns to earth, now cognizant of his earlier follies. He is prepared to begin anew. In this respect, the novels of Goupil and Lang resemble each other; both express a yearning for a return to a prelapsarian and Arcadian existence. The pursuit of the American Dream has led the people astray, and perhaps this cataclysm can awaken them to their misguided ways. Each novel suggests, however, that such hopes are probably in vain.

V. Blind Antipathy: Luc Lang's *11 septembre mon amour*

Although it quickly turns to listing and attacking American shortcomings, Lang's *11 septembre mon amour* begins with compassion, focusing on the voices of the victims and their loved ones on that fateful morning. Of these recorded voices, Lang himself observes that "a novelist could not have gone farther in the expression of cruelty and of empathy" (qtd. in Obajtek-Kirkwood 213). And yet here he conveys all the pain and pathos of the situation, illuminating the boundless love expressed in these

hopeless moments: “Un amour qui espère mais qui n’attend plus rien puisque c’est le néant qui vient, un amour sans désir assurément, qui voudrait vous transmettre une force, même si ce don vous inflige une douleur dont on ne guérit pas” (15) ‘A love that hopes but expects nothing more since nothingness looms, a love without desire surely, that wishes to convey strength, even if it inflicts a wound from which one never heals.’ These opening pages are moving as they capture the pain and desperation, but also love, of those moments. The narrator empathizes fully with the plight of the people, at both ends of the telephone line, trapped in an impossible situation. Like Goupil, however, Lang’s empathy is almost entirely reserved for the dead, who no longer have the capacity to offend. For the text outlines in a multitude of ways how the possibility for empathy is soon obliterated by the misdeeds of the American people in the days after 9/11. In this chapter, he imagines a library containing the lists of “les victimes civiles du XXe siècle jusqu’à l’aube à peine esquissée et déjà ténébreuse du XXIe” (26) ‘the civilian deaths during the twentieth century right up to the barely risen and already darkening dawn of the twenty first.’ This “universal library” would contain “toutes les dispersions, disparitions, exterminations ... tous les déchirements, de toutes les diasporas, de tous les génocides” (26) ‘all the dispersions, disappearances, exterminations ... all the rendings, all the diasporas, all the genocides’ and all the names of those who perished on September 11. Having elicited sympathy for those victims, however, Lang concludes by identifying a manuscript missing from the library: “une sorte d’immédiat corrélat de celui du 11 septembre, le livre des victimes civiles afghanes, disparues lors des bombardements ‘alliés’ qui s’ensuivirent au cours de l’hiver 2001-2002” (27) ‘a kind of correlate to that of September 11, the book listing Afghan civilian deaths, those who disappeared during the ‘allied’ bombings that ensued during the winter of 2001-2002’. In effect, Lang ends his elegy for the September 11 dead by reminding the reader that the US (the word allied in quotes implies the participation of the ambivalent and the coerced) is responsible for much death and destruction.

Having traveled to Montana to research the Blackfoot (his previous work is entitled *The Indians*), Lang is on American soil the morning of September 11. The text recounts his impressions

of the country, and its responses to the event, during the week that follows. He tells of hearing the reading of names on a radio station on September 13 and of being truly moved because this mourning was done “sans l'érection du drapeau national, sans l'aboïement d'un discours de guerre et de vengeance, sans le larmoiement de grands sentiments” (24) ‘without raising the flag, without the barked discourse of war and vengeance, without the bewailing of grandiose emotions.’ These same qualifications come to taint Lang’s experience; flags, war, and patriotic zeal are on the horizon. The text thus details a dangerous progression, as the citizenry moves from a natural response to the tragedy to a vengeful and bellicose one. As with *Le jour de mon retour sur terre*, the text does not distinguish between the people and its government, and identifies something endemic to the American character that made retribution inevitable. From Lang’s perspective, Americans are not only guilty of committing genocide, but of replacing an idyllic approach to life (embodied by the Native-American) with one more necessarily debased. He cites their adherence to Manifest Destiny and desire to remake the land in their image. In contrast, the Indians lived on the land for hundreds of years and were so at one with nature they left its appearance unchanged. But these natural beings had to be exterminated “de toute urgence si l'on a l'ambition de faire de ce continent une société d'hommes libres”(49) ‘as quickly as possible if our ambition is making this continent a society of free men.’ Sounding very Baudrillardian, Lang contends Americans have wished this tragedy upon themselves: “Est-ce pour arracher à cette culpabilité, à ce temps premier où des hommes fondèrent une nation sur le socle d'un génocide, le génocide indien, s'entend ... S'agirait de souffrir à son tour pour se débarrasser de ces cohortes de spectres emplumés qui hantent notre conscience d'hommes libres?” (111) ‘Is it to appease an original culpability, from a time when men founded a nation on the pedestal of a genocide, the Indian genocide of course ... to suffer in turn to rid ourselves of these cohorts of plumed specters who haunt our consciences as free men?’

A related sin is the country’s inability to atone for (or even recognize) past wrongdoings. On September 12, Lang briefly spies the front page of a local newspaper and the word “Japan.” The sight “me porte quelques dixièmes de secondes vers l'espoir d'une

Amérique plus ... plus quoi? N'ai pas les mots qui conviennent. Plus humaine? Plus miséricordieuse? Plus douée de mémoire? Plus humble?" (153) 'leads me to hope, for a few brief milliseconds, for an America more ... more what? I can't find the appropriate words. More humane? More merciful? More gifted with memory? More humble?'. The adjectives suggest Lang already believed the US was lacking in humanity, mercy, memory, and humility. His "hope" turns to disgust as he discovers the word refers to Pearl Harbor, and not Hiroshima, as he initially assumed. For Lang, 9/11 should automatically cause Americans to recall the Japanese civilian deaths for which they are responsible. Instead, the reference to Pearl Harbor confirms America's warlike tendencies and thirst for reprisal: "Parce que nous voilà partis, tête baissée, dans le commencement d'une propagande occidentale guerrière telle que Double V Bouche et sa bande de porte-flingues choisissent de l'orchestrer. Nous sommes, quelle bonne blague, tous américains, nous souvenant de Pearl Harbor!" (158) 'Because we are now implicated, head on, in the beginning of an occidental and warlike propaganda campaign, that *W (Double V Bush)* and his pistol-toting posse, can run any way they choose. We are all Americans in remembering Pearl Harbor. What a joke!'. Alluding to Colombani, Lang makes clear he shares little with his American counterparts.

9/11 did momentarily raise hope in some that having been victimized, the US would develop a greater bond with other victims (including, and perhaps especially, those they have victimized). But demanding this response from any victim in the immediate aftermath of a transgression seems exigent. Intent on seeing the US as the oppressor, Lang cannot abate his condemnation during a moment of obvious victimhood. In his recalling Hiroshima (in the title's allusion to Marguerite Duras's novel), he demands self-reflection and empathy from others. But he does not exhibit much himself. Attending a memorial held on a university campus for a professor killed at the Pentagon, he is taken aback by the naïveté of the attendees:

Why? On est d'une innocence hagarde, on ne comprend pas le drame, l'ignoble attaque dont on est l'objet, pourquoi, mon Dieu, pourquoi? C'est une réelle émotion, profonde et sincère, enfantine et régressive, tout animée d'une identification personnelle

au drapeau blessé at à la tragédie des victimes. Mon Dieu, ça pourrait être moi, moi, ma petite soeur, ma grand-mère, ma jolie fiancée, mon tendre père, quelle horreur! Mais quelle horreur! Une horreur personnelle, en rose larmoyant, pleine de bons sentiments aveugles et égocentriques, une émotion gluante et obscène, vu l'âge des participants. (188)

Why? They express a distraught innocence, not understanding the event, the vicious attack to which they have been subjected, why, God, why? It is a real emotion, profound and sincere, infantile and regressive, completely animated by a personal identification with the wounded flag and the plight of the victims. My God, that could be me, me, my little sister, my grandmother, my lovely fiancée, my dear father, what horror! A mawkish personal horror, full of blind, well-intentioned and self-centered sentiments, an obscene emotion, given the ages of the participants.

Even at such moments, Lang is incapable of resonating with the suffering others. He may place himself in their thoughts, but adjectives such as “blind,” “self-centered,” and “obscene,” reveal the commentator’s true feelings. Lang proclaims that *11 septembre mon amour* “is in no way anti-American, but it does attack the American administration” (Géniès). This is a stunning pronouncement for anyone who has read the novel, and raises questions as to the extent to which anti-Americanism, particularly on the Left, is ubiquitous among French thinkers.¹² Lang’s blindness to his disgust may be indicative of this propensity. In his own defense, he points to the conclusion of his novel and his acknowledgment of American writers as influences. But this comes too late and does too little to counteract the images throughout the book depicting American society as infantile, consumerist and, above all, violent.

VI. Measured Empathy: Frédéric Beigbeder’s *Windows on the World*

This knee-jerk reaction to everything American is the impetus for Beigbeder’s *Windows on the World*. He claims to have written the novel because he “was very annoyed by reactions like, ‘After all, they asked for it.’ I really didn’t like this Frenchy-French aspect of

anti-Americanism. I think you can absolutely criticize capitalism without criticizing the Americans. This is where I disagree with Luc Lang's book" (Géniès). The critique of Lang clarifies the novel's objectives, situating it at the other end of the empathetic continuum from *11 septembre mon amour*. In his novel, Beigbeder sets out to complete a twin act of literary empathy. First, he inhabits similar surroundings—the highest edifice in Paris, the Tour Montparnasse—in an attempt to reenact the experiences of the people in the WTC. He physically places himself in the shoes of the victims, at one point walking down the stairs of the Tour, replaying the exodus from the twin towers. Second, he extends this imaginative act of empathy by risking a fictional recreation of the events through the eyes of one of the victims, an American protagonist-narrator named Carthew Yorston. His ability to empathize will thus be tested as he presents events from a perspective that is both American and victimized. In fact, he is one of the only writers (of any nationality) to attempt such a reenactment. The experiences of 9/11 victims are typically presented through the double filter of another character imagining their final moments. Beigbeder risks being accused of presumption, insensitivity, and perhaps worse, by inhabiting the mind of an individual who has less than two hours to live. In the process, however, he creates a vision of what those unfortunate souls trapped in the blazing towers may have experienced.

Furthermore, Beigbeder stretches his empathic muscle by seeking links with his narrator and the American citizenry. And there is much overlap between the two narrators. So much so that Kristiaan Versluys faults the novel precisely because the reader has difficulty distinguishing between the Beigbeder-narrator and his American alter ego: "Since the feelings, ideas, and existential situations of each protagonist echo the other's, the binary expectations of the reader are frustrated. No dialectical tension develops, and the novel remains strangely monotonous or univocal" (135). While Beigbeder's approach has its limitations, it is intended to smooth over differences between Frenchman and American and create a stronger link between cultures, which Versluys recognizes: "this assertion of a fundamental cultural unity is also a taboo-breaking challenge to the assumptions of the left-leaning French intelligentsia, whose anti-Americanism is inbred, automatic, and

often hysterical” (137). Moreover, the text’s frequent references to the commonalities between the French and the American people, indicate that its objectives vary considerably from other novels.

Another characteristic setting Beigbeder apart from his compatriots is his willingness to skewer his nation’s pretensions: “As for the cultural exception that is France ... it is not dead: it consists in churning out exceptionally tedious movies, exceptionally slapdash books, and, all in all, works of art that are exceptionally pedantic and self-satisfied. It goes without saying that I include my own work in this sorry assessment” (19). That he adds himself to the list intensifies the contrast with Lang and the others. This self-criticism finds its most pronounced expression in a “Je m’accuse” section that stretches three pages and includes over forty items:

I accuse myself of aesthetics without ethics.

I accuse myself of having nothing in common with New York City except perhaps individualism and megalomania.

I accuse myself of trying to please even in this self-accusation intended to parry the blows to come. (204-206)

Again, acknowledgment of fallibility is strikingly absent from the other French fictional considerations of 9/11. Nevertheless, Beigbeder is not blindly pro-American; he recognizes the US’s propensity for arrogance and self-centeredness. References are made to the WTC as an economic symbol, but also to the fragility of a system—one which the events of September 11 highlighted. And the naming of the restaurant itself, *Windows on the World*, is seen as only “more proof of American condescension” (9). The repeated scenes between a couple of lustful stockbrokers trapped in the North Tower are meant to satirize materialist pursuits: “When I think you’ll never get to see my home cinema system ... plasma screen the size of Lake Superior,” says the guy in *Kenneth Cole*” (154). So while Beigbeder exhibits strong empathy for the American people, it is tempered by an awareness of their foibles and shortcomings.

One might thus expect the text’s many references to the Tower of Babel to be offered in the spirit of Garcin and Goupil. Beigbeder’s use of the Babel symbolism, however, is temperamentally different. After a mention of Genesis (82), Carthew Yorston wonders if he is in fact in the Tower of Babel and recalls an angry God who “does not

approve of [the builders'] decision: man must not be prideful, man must not take himself for God" (117). The strong disapprobation of American arrogance is clear. But the text stresses that the Bible's God does not actually destroy the Tower; he simply confounds the builders by conferring upon each a different language, leading them to abandon their project: "Divine punishment takes the form of preventing men from communicating with one another. The Tower of Babel was the first attempt at globalization. If, as millions of Americans do, we take Genesis absolutely literally, then God is opposed to globalization" (117). Significantly, this outcome is not presented as desired or inevitable. Instead, *Windows on the World* depicts the loss of the Tower of Babel, and by analogy the WTC, as a missed opportunity. The punishment—preventing global communication—has led to greater problems than had God simply allowed the tower's construction. And the global unity embodied in those Towers, with all its inherent flaws, is an ideal worth pursuing.

Beigbeder's text can thus be read as an effort to memorialize the Twin Towers (a true requiem), as evidenced in its emphasis of the Tour Montparnasse as *un endroit jumeau* 'twin site' one might say a twin of the twins, and a physical recall of the WTC. At one point he refers to the Tour as "the French equivalent of Ground Zero," but also admits it does not measure up to the World Trade Center, even noting that it will probably never be a target for terrorists (27). In the process, he concedes to the greater stature, in size and significance, of the American version. And in contrast to Baudrillard and Goupil who depict their destruction as an act of global necessity, Beigbeder makes clear that one of the objectives of the novel is to grieve for these buildings: "The moral of the story is: when buildings vanish, only books can remember them. This is why Hemingway wrote about Paris before he died. Because he knew that books are more durable than buildings" (132). At its conclusion the novel memorializes the buildings through its physical manipulation of the text. The words are laid out on the page so as to represent two columns side by side, in the chapter entitled 10:28, the moment of the second tower's collapse (301). In this way, *Windows on the World* mourns the absence of the towers.

And just as the WTC is juxtaposed with the Tour Montparnasse,

so too are American and French perspectives—most effectively communicated through the strategy of alternating the narratorial point of view between Beigbeder's alter ego and Carthew Yorston. The adoption of an American character in *Windows* is a sharp contrast with that of Goupil, who transforms his alienated protagonist into a mouthpiece for critiquing the nation. Instead, Yorston embodies qualities that set him apart from, but also connect him with, the Beidbeger-figure. He gains a degree of recognition making him an empathetic figure:

And so it happened: all those things I didn't understand, that I didn't want to understand, the foreign news stories I preferred to skirt, to keep out of my mind when they weren't on TV, all these tragedies were suddenly relevant to me; these wars came to hurt me that morning, not someone else; my children, not someone else's. (107-08)

Revealed is a newfound (American) awareness of cultivated ignorance, of real vulnerability, of the extent to which events happening on the other side of the globe impact one's own life.

Admittedly, the dual perspectives emanate from the same implied author, but they reveal a conscious attempt to perceive things as the other might see them, to engage in reenactive empathy. Through the novel's structure, Beigbeder creates a space in which the contrasted narratives play off each other. He even takes liberties with the fictional constructs of his text, so that, for instance, his narrator-persona and Yorston debate the significance of the falling people (148-49). The alternating narratives serve to blur the cultural and national boundaries separating the two narrators. And this is made literally true when Beigbeder admits that he and Yorston shared an ancestor, making the latter a cousin. Revealing this to a waiter in a Times Square restaurant, he declares: "We do not hate you. You scare us because you rule the world. But we're blood relations. France helped your country to be born. Later, you liberated us" (299). A link between the two narrators is thus strengthened, reflecting the text's own philosophy about Franco-American relations. Maintaining this nuanced perspective, Beigbeder presents his own variation on "Nous sommes tous Américains": "If you go back eight generations, all white Americans are Europeans. We are the same: even if we

are not all Americans, our problems are theirs, and theirs are ours” (296). Once again, we witness the need to wrestle with Colombani’s declaration. Even Beigbeder’s version, which accentuates a strong connection with the US, modifies its intent by suggesting that we should not get bogged down in semantics, but rather seek, particularly in this moment of strife, that which binds, rather than that which sunders.

VII. Conclusion

The compulsion to modify or reject Colombani’s remark is revealing on a number of fronts. First, it resists the implication that France shares commonalities with the US. Second, it seeks to avoid any suggestion of complicity with the American global enterprise. Third, it underlines the criticism that any notion of the West as a homogenous entity is misguided; there is more than one West. The conflation of the US with Western ideology seriously neglects the West as it may be represented by France. Fourth, it reads the statement as uncritical acceptance of all things American. That the comment elicited such responses suggests the varying degrees to which the French may or may not define themselves in respect to their American counterparts.

As the first occurrence of its kind to occur on American soil, September 11 immediately elicited cries for revenge and increased protection. In order to counter apparent signs of vulnerability, and instead of recognizing how the event brought it closer to others, the US chose to assert its exceptionalism. By the same token, however, other countries did not seek their strongest links with the US, nor did they exercise their empathetic muscle for long. The revelation of American vulnerability was seized as an opportunity to denigrate, critique, and emphasize dissimilarity. Ulrich Beck presents an image of the cosmopolitan world that illuminates the current dynamics of Franco-American relations:

The world of the cosmopolitan outlook is in a certain sense a glass world. Differences, contrasts and boundaries must be fixed and defined in an awareness of the sameness in principle of others. The boundaries separating us from others are no longer blocked and obscured by ontological differences but have become

transparent. This irreversible sameness opens up a space of both empathy and aggression which is difficult to contain. This is a consequence of both pity and of hatred – pity, because the (no longer heterogeneous) other becomes present in one's feelings and experience, and observing oneself and observing others are no longer mutually exclusive activities; hatred, because the walls of institutionalized ignorance and hostility that protected my world are collapsing. (8)

Beck's construction applies to all relations in this new geopolitical terrain, but the measures of sameness and difference will vary depending on which two nations are being contrasted and compared. In this configuration, sameness becomes harder to deny, so that one is obliged to work more strenuously to accentuate difference. And as Beck explains, this effort gives rise to a series of conflicting emotions, so that empathy and aggression now co-exist side by side. Faced with this "irreversible sameness," these French writers feel compelled to resist through aggression. Near the end of *Windows on the World*, the Beigbeder-narrator observes: "I truly don't know why I wrote this book . . . What else is there to write? The only interesting subjects are those that are taboo. We must write what is forbidden. French literature is a long history of disobedience" (295). What perspective does French literature with its "history of disobedience" add to what we already know? To what extent might we interpret defiance or resistance to American cultural hegemony, as "forbidden"?¹³ As counternarratives, these novels might be read as transgressive, as entering forbidden territory, though this is attenuated by the fact that such disobedience is meant to appeal to their French readership. (One might recall Chirac's dismal favorability ratings improving in the days following his opposition to the proposed invasion of Iraq in February of 2003). If these texts are written for a French audience, it is because they primarily address French concerns, proclaiming superiority and independence, while (un)consciously recognizing how deeply their national identity is now entwined with that of the United States.

In concluding it serves to recall the historically constrained period in which these novels were published. The alacrity with which some of these texts were written, and then published, suggests that these French writers were not assailed by the same reticence as their

American counterparts when addressing the topic of September 11. As I have noted, the moment also provided an opportunity to express opinions and sentiments lying just below the surface. As Franc Schuerewegen contends, “The drama of the World Trade Center has also, one must admit, served as a release valve (*défouloir*) for French intellectuals” (150). For though the moment also reflected a global vulnerability, more attention was paid to the US as victimizer than victimized. In these texts (theoretical and fictional), the critical focus remains firmly trained on the recipient of the attacks rather than the terrorists.¹⁴ They reflect an anxiety that empathizing might be misconstrued as condoning the American global agenda and that voicing such sentiments is tantamount to a violation of France’s imagined sense of self. Any hope of attaining the utopian potential to which Cilano aspires is dependent upon the existence of constructive critique paired with an empathic connection, otherwise any possibility of internationalist cooperation is undermined. As such, we might contemplate the extent to which self-interest and questions of identity—personal, political, national—interfere with empathy, posing a considerable challenge to the utopian dream of a cosmopolitan world.

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Notes

1 Tony Judt observes: “President George W. Bush and his advisers managed to make America seem to the overwhelming majority of humankind as the greatest threat to global stability. By staking a monopoly claim on Western values and their defense, the United States has prompted other Westerners to reflect on what divides them from America” (15).

2 Three other novels—Patrick Bouvet’s *Direct* (2002), Y. B.’s *Allah Superstar* (2003), and Yann Moix’s *Partouz* (2004)—certainly merit further study.

3 Recent titles reveal the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the two nations. Charles Cogan’s *Alliés éternels, amis ombrageux* or Jacquelyn Davis’s *Reluctant Allies and Competitive Partners* reflect the persistence of this

ambivalent friction.

4 All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

5 Similar sentiments appear in Emmanuel Goujon's *Depuis le 11 septembre* (57).

6 Derrida suggests these events are the result of the nation's "autoimmunity processes" which he defines as "that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion, 'itself' works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself against its 'own' immunity" (Borradori 94). The metaphor has its merits. The terrorists were indeed US supported, lived and trained on American soil, and finally used the country's own technological advancements against it.

7 Throughout Baudrillard's text globalization and Americanization are synonymous.

8 Another moment of projection occurs when Baudrillard expresses his own disdain for the edifice: "In terms of collective drama, we can say that the horror for the 4,000 victims dying in those towers was inseparable from the horror of living in them" (45).

9 This comparison is not new. As early as February 1966, *The Nation* called the proposed World Trade Center "Manhattan's Tower of Babel."

10 Although Goupil changes key details (the attack occurs on a Monday, and there is only one Tower), he remains faithful to others (the attack happens at 8:46, and the President echoes Bush's exact words, "I hear you ... The whole world hears you" [65]) creating a parallel world that is, and is not, Lower Manhattan in the final months of 2001.

11 The narrator's observations could well emanate from the latest terrorist missive; there are strong similarities between the text's criticism and that sent from the mastermind of the attacks.

12 "Luc Lang does not like the American people and he demonstrates this a little too often, but worst, or the most astonishing, is that the author himself seems hardly conscious of the phobia haunting him" (Schuerewegen 145).

13 Sophie Meunier suggests being "anti" is a fundamental part of Frenchness, and that resistance is an innate quality of the French people (156). And Beigbeder observes, "France has the same relationship with the United States nowadays as do the provinces with Paris: a combination of admiration and contempt, a longing to be a part of it and a pride at resisting" (18-19).

14 Aware they risk being accused of "blaming the victim," both Derrida and Baudrillard blur the lines between international terrorism (al-Qaeda) and state terrorism (US Government). Derrida reminds us that the US "was not always ... on the side of the victims" (92), and Baudrillard argues we must conceive of

the attacks of September 11 as an instance of “terror against terror” (9). Such constructions frame the event as a response to the terrorism visited upon the rest of the world by the US.

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