



9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness

Tim Gauthier

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9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness analyzes recent works of fiction whose principal subject is the attacks of September 11, 2001. The readings of the novels question and assess the validity and potential effectiveness of both the subsequent calls for a cosmopolitan outlook and the related, but no less significant, emphasis placed on empathy, and exhibited in such recent studies as Jeremy Rifkin's *The Empathic Civilization*, Karsten Stueber's *Rediscovering Empathy*, and Julinna Oxley's *The Moral Dimensions of Empathy*. As such, this study examines the extent to which "us" and "them" narratives proliferated after 9/11, and the degree to which calls for greater empathy and a renewed emphasis on cosmopolitan values served to counterbalance an apparent movement towards increased polarization, encapsulated in the oft-mentioned "clash of civilizations." A principal objective of the book is thus to examine the ethical and political implications revealed in the exercising or withholding of empathy. For though empathy, in and of itself, may not be sufficient, it is nevertheless a vital component in the generation of actions one might identify as cosmopolitan. In other words, this book examines the responses to 9/11 (in both Western and non-Western novels) in order to uncover what their dramatic renderings might tell us about the possibility of a truly globalized community. The attainability of any cosmopolitan engagement is contingent upon our abilities to understand the other, knowing always that otherness eludes our grasp, and the best we can do is imagine some version of it. It is primarily in this capacity that the novel has a role to play. Whether it is the challenge of connecting with the survivors of trauma and the inhabitants of a traumatized city, or with a hyperpower that has experienced its own vulnerability for the first time, or even with the terrorist who seeks to commit violent acts, these novels afford us the means of examining the complex dynamics involved in any exhibition of fellow-feeling for the other, and the ever-present potential failure of that engagement.

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