

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books
and Chapters

University of Nebraska Press

2012

Plotting Justice

Georgiana Banita

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Banita, Georgiana, "Plotting Justice" (2012). *University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters*. 116.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples/116>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Nebraska Press at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

PLOTTING JUSTICE
NARRATIVE **ETHICS &**
LITERARY CULTURE
AFTER 9/11
GEORGIANA BANITA

University of Nebraska Press | Lincoln and London

[Buy the Book](#)

© 2012 by the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska
Acknowledgments for previously published material appear on
pages xiii–xiv, which constitute an extension of the copyright
page. All rights reserved. Manufactured in the United States of
America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Banita, Georgiana.

Plotting justice : narrative ethics and literary culture after 9/11 /
Georgiana Banita.

p. cm. Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8032-4038-4 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. American fiction—21st century—History and criticism.

2. September 11 Terrorist Attacks, 2001, in literature.

3. September 11 Terrorist Attacks, 2001—Influence. 4. Ethics
in literature. 5. Psychoanalysis in literature. 6. Social change in
literature. 7. Literature and morals. 8. Literature and society—
United States. I. Title. II. Title: Narrative ethics and literary
culture after 9/11.

PS374.S445B36 2012 813'.6093587393—dc23 2012014470

Set in Garamond Premier Pro by Kim Essman.

Designed by A. Shahan.

For Nicoleta Croitoru, with gratitude

If one has to do things for the good, in practice one is always faced with the question: for the good of whom? From that point on, things are no longer obvious. Doing things in the name of the good, and even more in the name of the good of the other, is something that is far from protecting us not only from guilt but also from all kinds of inner catastrophes.

JACQUES LACAN

The only true ethical stance is to assume fully the impossible task of symbolizing the Real, inclusive of its necessary failure.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

Is it at all possible to read and interpret ambiguity *without reducing* it in the very process of interpretation? Are reading and ambiguity in any way *compatible*?

SHOSHANA FELMAN

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments xi

Introduction: New Ethics,
New Literatures, New Americas 1

1. Falling Man Fiction: DeLillo,
Spiegelman, Schulman, and the
Spectatorial Condition 59
2. Sex and Sense: McGrath, Tristram, and
Psychoanalysis from Ground Zero to
Abu Ghraib 109
3. Moral Crusades: Race, Risk, and
Walt Whitman's Afterlives 165
4. The Internationalization of Conscience:
Hemon, Barker, Balkanism 205
5. Reading for the Pattern: Narrative,
Data Mining, and the Transnational
Ethics of Surveillance 251

Conclusion: Postincendiary
Circumstances 289

Notes 301

Bibliography 321

Index 345

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project first took shape in my mind in the fall of 2006. I had newly arrived in the United States, after six years in Germany, to study as a doctoral fellow at Yale University. On that fateful day in October, I was watching workers at Ground Zero as they laid the foundations for what was then called the Freedom Tower, the edifice meant to replace the Twin Towers that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, had destroyed. The decision to embark on a book project about post-9/11 fiction seemed to me at the time as recklessly ambitious as the Freedom Tower itself. Only a handful of writers had responded to the attacks, and after a flurry of academic activity producing several books in 2003 (these were largely instant responses that had taken two years to be printed), little to nothing was going on in the field. Although I cannot entirely reconstruct the motives behind my decision (and the blurriness of the memory is significant in itself), my resolve was confirmed by 9/11 fictions that staged encounters resembling mine—resolutions and anxieties formed at Ground Zero—begging the question of what exactly I and other New York locals and pilgrims were responding to. And why did we feel impelled to take on life projects, as it were; what was the nature of this imperative, and what caused it? To what extent does the site elicit a personal reaction, and how do we, on an objective level, make sense of it as an ethical imperative? Part of my intention in this book has been to answer that question. In doing so I have attempted to put the ethical debates emerging from the attacks into conversation with transnational accounts of 9/11 as an event shaped and prefigured by global histories. In light of this international remapping of Ground Zero, the concept of post-9/11 ethics appeared even more

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

stringent and unresolved, occluded by the imperious morality of the rapidly escalating War on Terror.

In the process of writing, I have incurred intellectual debts that are as transnational and wide-ranging as the book itself. I have been fortunate to receive financial support from several institutions. I am grateful to the Council for Gender Equality at the University of Constance for a generous fellowship in early 2006 and a three-month grant in 2009; the Baden-Württemberg Foundation for a two-year doctoral scholarship (LGFG) at the University of Constance, as well as for a ten-month doctoral fellowship at Yale University (2006–07); the German Research Foundation (DFG) for travel grants to attend conferences at the University of British Columbia and Syracuse University, as well as for a research grant to support my archival work at Columbia University in the fall of 2008. The staff of the Columbia Oral History Archives offered valuable suggestions in consulting the vast 9/11 archive hosted by the department.

This book reflects conversations with colleagues and friends in the research colloquia of my dissertation supervisor at the University of Constance, Prof. Dr. Reingard M. Nischik, who unstintingly supported this project from gestation to completion. None of this would have materialized without her nurturing generosity. I would also like to thank the students in my 9/11-themed seminars at the Universities of Constance and Paderborn, who were quick to engage in dialogue about the ethics and aesthetics of representing 9/11 and wrote fascinating essays as well as some remarkable poems about their own experience of the attacks. I have found their verve and emotional investment quite stimulating. I also benefited from a visiting teaching position at the University of Paderborn in 2009, and I am indebted to Christoph Ribbat for his friendship and professional guidance at an important (and precarious) time. And in ways that continue to teach me the value of intellectual generosity and sheer enjoyment of our profession, Jörn Glasenapp has been the best chair and supervisor I could wish for at the University of Bamberg.

I negotiated the publication process during my postdoctoral fellowship at the U.S. Studies Centre, University of Sydney (2010–11), where I got

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

the opportunity to discuss both the book and the publishing world with Brendon O'Connor and Paul Giles. I will always remember this phase in my career as one in which I drew sustenance from Paul's unwavering support and encouragement. In the final stages of the project I learned from the comments of several anonymous reviewers on chapters published separately in journals. For permission to republish portions of this book, I gratefully acknowledge *ZAA, LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory, Textual Practice*, and *Critique*. The rigorous responses of the anonymous readers who reviewed the book manuscript were also invaluable. Like-minded audiences over the years at UBC, Syracuse, Amsterdam, FU Berlin, Konstanz, Bayreuth, Saarbrücken, and Frankfurt helped with challenging questions and excellent advice. I am indebted to my extraordinary editor, Merrin Lazyan, for her intelligence and meticulousness and the impeccable standards of her work. At the University of Nebraska Press, Kristen Elias Rowley has been an encouraging and accommodating guide, steering me through the publication process with confident, knowing, and always dependable hands. For her careful and perceptive reading of the manuscript, I thank my copyeditor, Judith Hoover. Much appreciation also goes to my project editor, Sara Springsteen, for her patience.

Rather quaintly, perhaps, I dedicate this first book to my high school English teacher Nicoleta Croitoru, who instilled in me a constant fear of inadequacy and a great hunger to excel. Though modulated by the intervening years, this imprint has remained an organic part of who I am. Finally, I am grateful to my family in Romania, and to Rudi, for being my closest, most generous interlocutor. Thank you.

Part of chapter 1 was previously published, in different form, as "9/11 Trauma and Visual Witnessing in Helen Schulman's *A Day at the Beach*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 53.1 (2012): 1–15.

Part of chapter 2 was previously published, in different form, as "Scapegoating in 'Ground Zero': Patrick McGrath's Allegory of World-Historical Trauma," *Textual Practice* 26.2 (2012): 293–317.

Part of chapter 3 was previously published, in different form, as "Race,

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Risk, and Fiction in the War on Terror: Laila Halaby, Gayle Brandeis, Michael Cunningham,” *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* 21.4 (2010): 242–68.

Part of chapter 4 was previously published, in different form, as “‘The Internationalization of Conscience’: Representing Ethics in Pat Barker’s *Double Vision*,” *ZAA: A Quarterly of Language, Literature and Culture* 58.1 (2010): 55–70. Used with permission.