Memorials of Absence in Post 9/11 Anglo-Expression

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Abstract. Depictions of 9/11 have often obscured narratives of individual suffering; while there was great loss of life, this loss of life is generally imagined not as individual narratives, but narratives en masse. My presentation will explore the proximity of individual narrative to the event, by exploring some well-known historical images alongside filmic depictions of the event as seen in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Doing so, I will argue that cultural depictions shift depending on the narrator’s proximity to the event. I argue that cultural narratives of 9/11 create Memorials of Absence and conventional means of memorial are impossible in a post-apocalyptic world.

1. Introduction

This project grew out of a vested research interest developed in Dr. Christopher K. Brooks’ Intro to Graduate Studies Class. The project originally focused on Marxist literary interpretations of works created post 9/11. The project then grew to focus on the special geo-political relationship between America and England and how it effects depictions of 9/11 in film. The original Marxist interpretation then expanded to include materials from film and cultural studies. Storytelling acts as the first form of memorial for human beings. Survivor’s testimony is primary in beginning the healing process. But determining which stories have the most weight or importance is the focus of research here. Proximity to the attacks and subconsciously, the economic class of those telling the story changes the landscape of the oral memorial dramatically. Storytelling in post 9/11 fiction is either told in concert or singular forms depending on the class of the individual telling or collecting those stories. For example, members of staff from Windows on the World restaurant are remembered as a working unit. Meanwhile Cantor Fitzgerald’s memorial eulogized their employees separately. Labor or class divisions change the mode in which a story should be told, and who tells it. This provides one unique interpretation for narratives specific to September 11th: Marxist literary criticism. Ross C. Murfin is quoted as, “Marx and Engels would not-indeed could not -think of aesthetic matters as being distinct and independent from such things as politics, economics and history.” (133). However there is a compelling discrepancy in the exclusivity of 9/11 narrative as a National story as opposed to a global tale. “those issues- including race, class, and the attitudes shared within a given culture - are as much with us as ever, not only in contemporary Russia but also in the United States” (131). Classically considered a theory only informed by political ideology, political centered literary theory informs the reading of materials for this project.

2. Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance

The research methodology used for this project included scholarly research as well as analysis of key scenes in *Revenger’s Tragedy*. The initial idea stemmed from an interest in narrative structures that develop following crisis. The events of September 11th, 2001 were selected because this event is still shaping literary and artistic narratives. Initially the project consisted of close reading of literature, poetry and key scenes in film. However, the observation of political proximity to the United States began to take shape. The focus of the project then shifted to the Anglo-American produced film, *Revenger’s Tragedy*. Philp E. Wegner’s close analysis of fiction and film produced in the “long nineties” between the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Twin Towers. His work *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties* provided much of the theoretical backbone to this project. Marxist criticism can be constructed in the “gaps” or a silence found in narrative, though Wegner chooses to explore narratives through the avenue of allegory. “Allegories enable a complex or abstract historical processes to take on a concrete form.” (6). Wegner’s assertion offers a contemporary interpretation of Marxist literary theory that looks not strictly at content or gaps, but at constructions within the text itself to achieve its ends. “[Allegories] often offer figurations of these historical movements before the emergence of a more proper conceptual or theoretical language.” (6). Allegories become constructed when there is a lack of language or image available for narrative construction. Early images of the attacks gave little information and media resources were left silent to respond. Only after the repetition of attack did reports and phrases to define the event begin to be made. However, for all of allegories complexities, they can also be problematic.
3. Conclusions

The course of research discovered that geo-political relationships effect the types of images used in film. It was also discovered that while a global event, the United States curates the terror attacks of 9/11 as a singularly American event. It was also discovered that memorials of absence exist throughout narratives of tragedy and are not unique to this singular event. Through Marxist literary interpretation new forms of narrative can be discovered. Moving from the “Image-Event” of early Post 9/11 narratives, I suggested Memorials of Absence as the next logical step in literary interpretation. However, the lack of Tower collapse at the end of Alexander Cox’s film serves not as a warning for revenge for the attacks of September 11th, but signals a return to military action and aggression on the part of developed nations.

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5. References