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September 11, 2001, through its over-mediation and saturation within modern memory, has become a ubiquitous signifier for a fundamental cultural ‘shift’ in American identity. As opposed to positioning 9/11 within a larger geopolitical and global lens, the Bush administration catalyzed this ‘shift’ through a proprietary claim to 9/11’s singularity. The Bush administration used ‘9/11’ as a discursive tool to posit what Richard Gray cites as an “everything has changed”¹ epistemological framework for dealing with the magnitude of the event.² Although over a decade has passed since 9/11, the political fallout and detriment of its aftermath still ripple through cultural, economic, and political spheres. Donald Pease claims that 9/11, effectively, is articulated as “a historical turning point that brought about change in the entire symbolic apparatus.”³ 9/11, through this rhetorical framework, further reinforces a US-centric agenda that becomes problematic for literary

¹ Richard Gray, “Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis.” *American Literary History* 21.1 (2009): 131.

² This is readily available in Bush’s 2002 “State of the Union Address” where he states: “In a single instant, we realized that this will be decisive decade in the history of liberty; that we have been called to a unique role in human events. Rarely has the world faced a choice more clear or consequential.” George W. Bush, “President Delivers State of the Union” (Speech, Washington, D.C., January 29, 2002), www.whitehouse.gov

³ Donald E. Pease, “9/11: When Was ‘American Studies after the ‘New Americanists’?” *Boundary 2* 33.3 (2006): 73.

representation. The purported epochal status afforded to 9/11 is arguably derived from what Jacques Derrida described as the initial impact of the event: “[The] fact that we have perhaps no concept and no meaning available to us to name in any other way this ‘thing’ that has just happened, this supposed ‘event.’”⁴ This ostensible incomprehensibility and the epochal positioning of the event has led to literary and critical stasis wherein authors and theorists alike have attempted to discern ‘meaning’, or, more accurately, appropriate the events of 9/11. Vaheed Ramazani writes how attempts at comprehensive appropriation seek recourse in psychoanalytic encodings of the events: “Like the child who repeats his unpleasurable experience in play, we, as a people, cling to the instinct for mastery, to a compensatory fantasy of control or revenge.”⁵ In this psychoanalytic structuring of 9/11, Ramazani alludes to the critical impulse to ‘read’ 9/11 as singular ‘trauma’ in order to ‘master’, or comprehend, it. Incidentally, this singular status negates larger global traumas and articulates ‘trauma’ as a fundamentally American experience. Following suit, many of the critical and literary responses to 9/11 position the event within the orthodoxy of trauma theory.⁶ Through this framework, 9/11 is removed from larger historical, material, and global continuums and approached as a traumatic lacuna in the American episteme. James Berger, hinting at the ways in which American political agendas dominate alternative geopolitical discourses informing and stemming from 9/11, sees this as “another strange [cultural] movement” wherein “the aftermath of trauma has

⁴ Quoted in Giovanna Borrardi, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues With Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003): 86.

⁵ Vaheed Ramazani, “September 11: Masculinity, Justice, and the Politics of Empathy,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* (21.1 2001): 118.

⁶ This critical trend is apparent in anthologies such as Ann Kaplan’s *Trauma Culture*, Judith Greenberg’s *Trauma at Home* and Ann Kenniston and Jeanne Quinn’s *Literature after 9/11*.

been the transformation of overwhelming loss into a kind of victory.”⁷ This promulgates a concomitant reconciliatory logic requiring closure and comprehension.

Through this lens, much post-9/11 criticism perpetuates psychoanalytic discourses that relocate collective trauma as individual epistemic ruptures. This narrow focus on the individual (American) experience of trauma, in the words of Judith Butler, “privatizes” grief as “it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing.”⁸ Depoliticized grief, especially as located within 9/11’s constructed singular status, nullifies the possibility for collective change through its individualized and Americanized location. Ella Shohat highlights the fallacy of this interpretative technique: “Despite its traumatic magnitude, September 11 is neither the end of history nor its beginning.”⁹ Here, Shohat posits space for intervention away from American, political hegemony; a space for ‘readings’ of 9/11 that go against the singularly lacunal status of depoliticized grief. Specifically, within literary representations of 9/11, there exist political and gender discourses that reach beyond the critical apparatuses of trauma studies. In this paper, I will revisit 9/11 to investigate how the Bush administration mobilized the event in order to instantiate oppressive modalities of masculinity.

I will work against this traumatic orthodoxy through gendered reading of Jay McInerney’s *The Good Life* (2006) and Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007). The impetus for a post-9/11, gendered intervention stems from Zillah Einstein’s proposition that, “[9/11] must also be viewed in relation to the way that male patriarchal privilege

⁷ James Berger, “There’s No Backhand to This,” in *Trauma at Home: After 9/11*, ed. Judith Greenberg (Winnipeg: Bison Books, 2003): 55.

⁸ Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, (London: Verso, 2010): 22. Subsequent references to this text will appear parenthetically as *PL*.

⁹ Ella Shohat, “Area Studies, Gender Studies, and the Cartographies of Knowledge,” *Social Text* 20.3 (2002): 67.

orchestrates its hierarchical system of domination.”¹⁰ Locating 9/11 within trauma theory can, in and of itself, perpetuate dominance of patriarchal hierarchies. As Judith Drew notes, “injury and trauma... are assumed to be predicated on weakness... which are read as feminine.”¹¹ Susannah Radstone extends this, claiming: “[Trauma] theory feminizes its subject.”¹² Paolo Bacchette, et. al. articulate how the feminization-of-trauma is a fundamental critical fallacy:

Focusing only on the personal or narrowly defined psychological dimensions of the attacks... obscures the complex nexus of history and geopolitics that has brought about these events... [The] culture industry of ‘trauma’ leads to a mystification of history, politics, and cultural critique.¹³

That is, the move to decontextualize trauma from its larger geopolitical and gender perspective “[debases] the value of the concept by applying it too liberally to both major historical catastrophes and personal life events.”¹⁴

Working against this, I investigate a post-9/11 cultural preoccupation with the demasculinization of America. As I will argue, masculinity becomes a contested site for post-9/11 reconciliation. The Bush administration utilized the symbolism of ‘castration’ as a rhetorical tool for (re)structuring post-9/11, American identity. This post-9/11 rhetoric is, itself, reflective of a deeper American anxiety at the turn of the century. McInerney and DeLillo represent millennial, American masculinity as a ‘crisis’ in the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity. In turn, resolution of this ‘crisis’ requires a

¹⁰ Zillah Einstein, “Feminisms in the Aftermath of September 11,” *Social Text* (20.3 2002): 81.

¹¹ Judith Drew, “Identity Crisis: Gender, Public Discourse, and 9/11,” *Women & Language* (27.2 2004): 71.

¹² Susannah Radstone, “The War of the Fathers: Trauma, Fantasy, and September 11,” in *Trauma at Home: After 9/11*, ed. Judith Greenberg (Winnipeg: Bison Books, 2003): 121.

¹³ Paolo Bacchette, et. al., “Transnational Feminist Practices Against War,” *Meridians* 2.2 (2002): 305.

¹⁴ Susannah Radstone, “The War of the Fathers: Trauma, Fantasy, and September 11,” in *Trauma at Home: After 9/11*, 118.

nostalgic, or originary, claim resurrecting a ‘lost’ masculinity. It will be my argument that the Bush administration established this paradigmatic ‘return’ through recourse to a ‘lost’ modality of American masculinity. It will be my argument that both McInerney and DeLillo appropriate the collective trauma of 9/11 and conceptualize it as individual crises where masculinity is threatened within the teleological site of the ‘home’.

Within this argument, however, there are varying degrees to which these texts succumb to and resist the Bush administration’s discursive framework. Working within the emerging field of the ‘post-9/11 novel’, selection of texts itself becomes deeply problematic. With that in mind, both *The Good Life* and *Falling Man* present pertinent insights into literary representations of the event and pick up upon a multitude of thematic threads available within the burgeoning ‘canon’. Some texts, including Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) and Jess Walter’s *The Zero* (2006), exhibit a preoccupation with the perpetuation of a strictly traumatic logic that centers upon an ineffable and foundational epistemic blank yielding a circular structure to the narratives. Other texts posit the aforementioned teleological impulse towards definitive (domestic) ‘closure’, as in Frédéric Beigbeder’s *Windows on the World* (2003) and Ken Kalfus’s *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006). Still other texts, such as Lorrie Moore’s *A Gate at the Stairs* (2009) and Claire Messud’s *The Emperor’s Children* (2006), move away from direct presentation of 9/11 and posit the event as ‘incidental’ to the momentum of the narrative. *The Good Life* and *Falling Man*, on the other hand, incorporate some level of all of these thematic tendencies. *The Good Life* follows the disintegration of two families, the Calloways and the McGavoks, in the day leading up to 9/11, and the months that follow. McInerney describes an upper middle class struggling with familial drama, extramarital affairs, socio-economic gains, and a diluted sense of self-worth that is exaggerated and exacerbated following 9/11. Read in this way,

McInerney's text is highly evocative of the Bush administration's paradigm and will be used to exemplify the pitfalls of post-9/11 gender models. DeLillo, on the other hand, is more sensitive to the politics informing post-9/11 masculinity. *Falling Man* follows the relationships between Keith Neudecker, his estranged wife, Lianne, and their extended family in the years following 9/11. DeLillo describes a broken family struggling to find 'meaning' after 9/11. Through a fractured domestic sphere, DeLillo simultaneously (re)presents and subverts hegemonic masculinity. In this way, these two texts act as exemplars of certain literary negotiations troubling the expanding field of the 'post-9/11 novel'. Through representation of pre-9/11 and post-9/11 New York, as well as explicitly detailing the events of 9/11, both *Falling Man* and *The Good Life* can be taken paradigmatically for the challenges facing authors attempting to directly interrogate the event. Through these texts, I will ultimately revisit the dominant readings of 9/11 literature through a gendered perspective looking for alternatives to the reproduction and perpetuation of oppressive masculinities in the wake of 9/11.

By the end of the 20th Century, Susan Faludi writes, "American manhood was under siege."¹⁵ Faludi is describing a 'crisis' of masculinity in the transition to a "culture of ornament" wherein "manhood is defined by appearance."¹⁶ This culture of ornamentation has created a performative masculinity in which authenticity is defined through external repetition. This 'crisis' followed what Carole Jones calls a disconnect from masculinity's "traditional moorings and separated from its historic, social location."¹⁷ Hamilton Carroll continues this thought, claiming masculinity has become restructured within the domestic:

¹⁵ Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of Modern Man* (London: Vintage, 2000), 6.

¹⁶ Ibid, 38.

¹⁷ Carole Jones, *Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979 – 1999* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 14.

In the United States this detachment from ‘traditional authority’ has produced an understanding of worker disenfranchisement that manifests itself along predictably gendered lines as transformations of labor roles require the reconstitution of domestic labor in the private sphere of home and family.¹⁸

Carroll’s argument is structured around the disrupted dialectic relationship between an outwardly facing masculinity (i.e. ornamentation) and the epistemic structure of masculinity in the domestic. As Faludi sees it, this domestic crisis stems from an “unspoken sense that [men] are being mastered, in the marketplace and at home.”¹⁹ With the loss of control in both the ‘marketplace and at home’, millennial masculinity has become unanchored.

McInerney reproduces this ‘crisis’ in *The Good Life*’s first pages. Shifts in domestic roles are apparent as Russell’s masculinity is portrayed as performative and ornamental through his obsession with German cooking knives:

[The] heft of which seemed to [Corrine] to have as much to do with the macho aesthetics of amateur cheffdom as with heat distribution. Cooking was the new sphere of masculine competition. Russell and Washington and his chef friend Carlo had lately taken to comparing notes on butchers and cutlery the way they used to deconstruct stereo equipment, garage bands, and young novelists.²⁰

This passage highlights two components of millennial masculinity. First, there is a fetishistic impulse towards ornamentation that defines Russell’s masculinity. Corrine locates this performative masculinity within a heteronormative lexicon as Russell asks

¹⁸ Hamilton Carroll, *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

¹⁹ Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of Modern Man*, 13.

²⁰ Jay McInerney, *The Good Life* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 8 – 9. Subsequent references to this text will be cited parenthetically as *GL*.

her for thyme. Corrine responds, “Sometimes, you can be such a fag” (*GL*, 24). This ‘queering’ of Russell suggests sexual emasculation. Second, Corrine employs a nostalgic apprehension towards this new expression of masculinity. She remembers ‘stereo equipment, garage bands, and young novelists’ to suggest that some integral component of masculinity has disappeared. The value of knives lacks heft and does not carry with it the same *gravitas* of these earlier masculine signifiers. Furthermore, Corrine’s nostalgia for a ‘lost’ masculinity is augmented through the film director, Dale Erhardt. During dinner, Erhardt reflects, “I grew up in the era of the existential hero... the search for authenticity” (*GL*, 38). Erhardt’s existentialist discourse creates a dyadic tension with the ornamental masculinity of Russell. Russell’s masculinity is signified through repetitive performance as opposed to the existentialist quests that defined Erhardt’s generational masculinity.

Luke’s masculinity is also performative. After Luke’s retirement from banking, “Sasha seemed slightly embarrassed at having a husband whose place in the community was no longer clearly defined” (*GL*, 24). Luke, removed from the ornamental world of finance is emasculated in the eyes of Sasha. Luke, although attempting to uncover a patriarchal lineage through his self-projected image “as a ronin, a samurai without a master” (*GL*, 24), is unable to embody this idealized form “after spending half a lifetime enslaved to the rhythms of the financial markets” (*GL*, 50). Carroll’s argument that masculine authority within the domestic realm has been fractured is reflected through Luke. Without a career, Luke is relegated to the periphery of the domestic. Like Corrine’s ‘queering’ of Russell, Luke is sexually emasculated when Sasha begins an affair with Bernie Melman. As Sasha and Melman dance at a fundraiser, Luke can only look on wistfully from the sidelines (*GL*, 53). Through Luke and Russell, McInerney suggests that pre-9/11, masculinity had assumed a performative dialectic through a culture of

ornamentation. Neither Luke's quest to become a samurai, nor the fetish logic of Russell's cooking, offer satisfactory substitutions for lost 'existential heroes'.

The pre-9/11 section of *The Good Life* exemplifies a contested notion of hegemonic masculinity. Jones summarizes hegemonic masculinity:

[The] configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.²¹

As evidenced by the actions of Luke and Russell, McInerney approaches this 'problem of legitimacy'. Masculinity, through its relocation to performativity and ornamentation, does not reinforce the dominance of men. Incidentally, McInerney's dislocation of masculinity points to the possibility of dethroning hegemonic masculinity in the days before 9/11.

This opening is quashed, as McInerney does not bring this alternative modality to fruition. Following 9/11, *The Good Life* 'turns back' to oppressive discourses of masculinity.

This literary turn is contiguous with the Bush administration's post-9/11 rhetoric, which deployed a pointed discursive response honed at (re)defining gender roles. Locating precedence, Gretchen Ritter writes, "In periods of war, American political leaders have been particularly attentive to the ways that gender roles and ideals represent the nation, as they sought to differentiate the United States from its international enemies."²² The historical covariation between war and gender underlies the Bush administration's response to 9/11. Analogous to Corrine and Erdhart's nostalgia, the Bush administration sought to resolve the millennial 'crisis' by recoding gender along

²¹ Carole Jones, *Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979 – 1999*, 77.

²² Gretchen Ritter, "Domestic Containment or Equal Standing?: Gender, Nationalisms and the War on Terror," *Journal of Policy History* 21.4 (2009): 439.

'traditional' lines.²³ Drew argues, "[f]ollowing [9/11], the U.S. immediately began the rhetorical work of (re)constructing itself through public discourse which sought to name the crisis, define its meaning... [through] an identity significantly polarized along gender lines."²⁴ The logic governing this transition viewed "the gender identity of a weak America, and insisted that we masculinize ourselves in order to become and remain safe."²⁵ Through this rhetorical lack of "masculine fortitude" 9/11 was (re)located as a figurative castration wherein America was portrayed as overly feminine and required a resuscitation of its masculinity.²⁶ This (re)masculinization was inextricably linked to a logic of Cold War nostalgia as Faludi argues, "[the] cultural troika of media, entertainment, and advertising together declared the post-9/11 era an era of neofifties nuclear family togetherness, redomesticated femininity, and reconstituted Cold Warrior manhood."²⁷ This activates what Iris Young calls "the logic of masculinist protection"²⁸ allowing America to reassume its role as "freedom's home and defender"²⁹ through the acquisition of 'traditional', patriarchal gender roles. Effectively, this logic attempts to solidify, from within, gendered boundaries that differentiate the U.S. from its feminized 'other'. Masculinist protection works through patriotism in order to "affirm our oneness with our fellow citizens and together affirm our single will behind the will of the leaders

²³ This dimorphism is found in Bush's rhetoric. He locates an invigorated virility rising from a patriarchal lineage: "the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time," George W. Bush, "President Discusses War on Terrorism," (Speech, Atlanta, Georgia, November 8, 2001), www.whitehouse.gov

²⁴ Judith Drew, "Identity Crisis: Gender, Public Discourse and 9/11," in *Women & Language*: 71.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 75.

²⁶ Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: What 9/11 Revealed About America* (London: Atlantic, 2008), 8.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 3 – 4.

²⁸ Iris Marion Young, "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 29.1 (2003): 2.

²⁹ George W. Bush, "President Discusses War on Terrorism" (Speech, Atlanta, Georgia, November 8, 2001) www.whitehouse.gov

who have vowed to protect us.”³⁰ The ‘oneness’ is not generated from benign intentionality; it marks a ‘return’ to oppressive, gendered antagonism.

This ‘return’ is a discursive manifestation of what Butler calls “aggressive nostalgia”, which functions to shore up the discreteness of binary boundaries in light of ontological permeability (*PL*, 61). 9/11 presented such a moment of ontological permeability. The collapse of the World Trade Center collapsed the myth of American invulnerability through the dissolution of America’s borders.³¹ Instead of mobilizing this into Butler’s hope for a “radical and effective form of egalitarianism,” the Bush administration deployed aggressive nostalgia to shore up nationalistic ethos.³²

Summarizing the oppressive telos of this nostalgia, Carroll writes, “Bush has arrogated to himself an increasingly shadowy and complicated series of sovereign powers. This authority is yoked to the construction of a reinvigorated masculinist prerogative in which the War on Terror provides the *raison d’être* for the recuperated forms of nostalgic masculine authority.”³³ Elizabeth Anker reads this in gendered terms: “[These] narratives partake of a longing to return to a bygone era of American omnipotence wherein white, heteronormative, patrician masculinity was still sacrosanct.”³⁴ The appropriation of 9/11 into a struggle for gender dominance stagnates the political possibilities opened through the event through the reification of the boundaries between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’, ‘Masculine’, and ‘Feminine’. Rebecca Carpenter writes, “[i]n this post-9/11 world, the United States has been particularly invested in a rhetoric of masculinity and power,

³⁰ Iris Marion Young, “The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State,” in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*: 8.

³¹ The Bush administration was quick to locate 9/11 within this over-determined rhetoric, as “All of this [fear] was brought upon us in a single day – and night fell on a different world,” George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” (Speech, Washington, D.C., September 20, 2001) www.whitehouse.gov

³² Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2010), xxii.

³³ Hamilton Carroll, *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity*, 34.

³⁴ Elizabeth Anker, “Allegories of Falling and the 9/11 Novel,” *American Literary History* 23.3 (2001): 468.

labeling both perceived enemies... as either feminine or deviant in their masculinity.”³⁵

Carpenter’s observations echo Corrine’s harangue: on the global stage, America was too feminized, too close to being a ‘fag’.

This nostalgic modality of American masculinity is not merely a ‘return’ to a hegemonic, heteronormative form. Rather, the Bush administration sought recourse to reactionary, retrospectively constructed *hypermasculinity*. Meghana Nayak writes:

[In] order to save US state identity... Bush and his advisors have promoted hypermasculinity... Hypermasculinity is the sensationalistic endorsement of elements of masculinity, such as rigid gender roles, vengeful and militarized reactions and obsessions with order, power, and control.³⁶

Furthermore, hypermasculinity is unfettered to the historical continuity of hegemonic masculinity. Anna Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling summarize this difference:

“[Hypermasculinity] arises when agents of hegemonic masculinity feel threatened or undermined, thereby needing to inflate, exaggerate, or otherwise distort their traditional masculinity”³⁷ (519). Like Faludi’s culture of ornamentation, hypermasculinity is defined by performative authentication as opposed to ontological grounding. The Bush administration employed hypermasculinity to reinstate the ‘lost’ gender roles of pre-9/11 America. The hypermasculinity embraced by the Bush administration employs aggressive nostalgia to retrospectively construct a ‘lost’ modality of masculinity that was *never really there*. Moreover, hypermasculinity attempts to reconstitute binaric boundaries

³⁵ Rebecca Carpenter, “‘We’re Not a Friggin’ Girl Band’: September 11, Masculinity and the British-American Relationship in David Hare’s *Stuff Happens* and Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*” in *Literature After 9/11*, eds. Ann Kenniston and Jeanne Quinn (London: Routledge, 2010), 144.

³⁶ Meghana Nayak, “Orientalism and ‘Saving’ US State Identity after 9/11,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8.1 (2006): 46.

³⁷ Anna Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling, “Powers, Borders, Security, Wealth: Lessons of Violence and Desire,” *International Studies Quarterly* 48.3 (2004): 519.

destabilized by 9/11. Hypermasculinity is the return of Erhardt's heroes or, in Faludi's terms, it is the return of "John Wayne manly men."³⁸

McInerney uses Luke to exemplify this 'return'. As Luke returns from the towers, he is mythologized through heroic tropes as "a Confederate general... It was as if this solitary figure was re-enacting the retreat of an already-famous battle" (*GL*, 69). Post-9/11 Luke evokes a specific heroism located within the strictures of American genealogy: Luke as Robert E. Lee. Unlike the earlier emasculation of Luke, he is able to reclaim the domestic as "the ghetto of his masculine prerogative" (*GL*, 84) and resurrect a locus of hypermasculinity codified through weaponry: "The gun rack over the fireplace with his matched sidelock Purdy twenty-gauges and the samurai sword" (*GL*, 85). Even his financial success is equated with Faludi's 'John Wayne' masculinity; his IPO certificates are imagined as "tombstones" (*GL*, 84) evoking a sense of the 'lost' American west. Unlike Luke's pre-9/11 ornamentation, he is now able to (re)appropriate these signifiers. This change is also manifest between Luke and Sasha. The indexing of his masculine signifiers is brought into a tensive foreground: "[Luke and Sasha] were sitting in his library – his turf... Complete with defensive weaponry, shotguns, and sword, should he be required to defend the castle" (*GL*, 170). As opposed to Russell's secondary 'weaponry' (German knives), McInerney imbues Luke's weaponry with symbolic and literal value. The domestic, therefore, is reclaimed as a site of patriarchal dominance.

Luke's sexuality also reveals a heteronormative logic that subtends his hypermasculinity. Post-9/11, Luke is no longer the cuckolded voyeur, now he feels "the desire to ravish and possess [Sasha], to reclaim what had once been his" (*GL*, 81). McInerney suggests that this newly invigorated virility carries proprietary claims to feminized counterparts. In Young's terms, this embodies the contingent femininity

³⁸ Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: What 9/11 Revealed About America*, 199.

concurrent with masculinist protection wherein “the woman concedes critical distance from decision-making autonomy.”³⁹ Luke (re)claims his role as Sasha’s masculinist protector through sexuality. In his affair with Corrine, Luke extends this proprietary claim. Corrine “never felt such craving, such desire to be possessed and filled, never known she had so much desire inside of her, so urgent a need” (*GL*, 219). While Luke’s post-9/11 masculinity restores his sense of agency, Corrine and Sasha’s femininity is defined as a blank ‘need’ only satiated through Luke’s hypermasculinity.

Luke’s ability to participate within hypermasculine discourse arises from his post-9/11 actions. After the event, Luke rushes to help. As Corrine thinks of Luke, she realizes that, “He was one of the men who had risen to the moment while others remained dazed and helpless, gaping at their television screens” (*GL*, 147). Luke is a man of action, a neo-super hero emblematic of Bush’s ‘Let’s Roll’ “ethic and creed” supplanting his earlier emasculation.⁴⁰ As they fly to Cape Cod, Corrine envisages Luke through this newfound light:

She made an inventory of the other men around her, deeply satisfied with the favorable contrast he presented, not only in terms of comeliness but also, so she imagined, in *masculine authority* and vitality. In the event of a crisis – a bomb, another attack – possibilities that hovered at the back of all their minds now – she was confident that he would be one to whom they looked to lead them out of danger, exhorting them to *action*, with no thought of his personal safety (*GL* 237 – my emphasis).

³⁹ Iris Marion Young, “The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State,” in *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture & Society*, 4.

⁴⁰ George W. Bush, “President Delivers State of the Union Address,” (Speech, Washington D.C., January 29, 2002) www.whitehouse.gov

Corrine is content in passivity, opting for the ‘heroic’ protection of hypermasculinity. Luke’s daughter, Ashley, sums this up pointedly: “Dad gets a huge kick out of being the hero” (*GL*, 282). In Luke’s performance of ‘hero’, however, McInerney alludes to another component of hypermasculinity: it is not ontologically stable and relies on a performativity threatened by interruption. That is, for Luke, it is only through a contingent, feminized counterpart that he is able to adopt hypermasculine agency as he “[performs] for Corrine, to whom he hoped to appear a figure of stoic dignity, a lone ranger of downtown canyons” (*GL*, 177).

Luke’s hypermasculinity directly contrasts Russell’s masculinity. Whereas Luke embodies post-9/11 hypermasculine agency and co-opts the nostalgic sign of ‘hero’, Russell is continually emasculated. As a counterpoint to Luke’s agency, McInerney portrays Russell as static:

[He] might have rushed down after the fact, as Jim had done, to see if he could offer help. He oscillated between feeling grateful for being spared and feeling guilty that at no point in the hour or so between the impact of the first plane and the collapse of the first tower had he experienced the altruistic impulse, though he’d been only ten blocks away from the disaster (*GL*, 117).

Russell is defined by inaction. Russell’s failure to act, taken in context with Luke’s post-9/11 role, is not merely a failure of ‘altruistic impulse’, but can be read as a lack of ‘*masculine* impulse’. The millennial crisis of masculinity is not alleviated for Russell by 9/11: “Middle age and parenthood had long ago begun to erode his sense of invulnerability. Recent events had accelerated the process” (*GL*, 122). Corrine reinforces this confrontation of masculinities through the image of ‘fire making’. Luke is “a man who knew how to build a fire” while Russell is “quite the opposite” (*GL*, 243). By

reverting to caveman motifs, Corrine creates a contestatory realm for masculine representation: Russell, who cannot make fire, is also unable to ‘roll’ when threatened.

The Russell/Luke dichotomy also presents through sexuality. Luke and Corrine experience post-9/11 sexual dimorphism: Corrine is defined by void/inaction, whilst Luke participates in a phallic economy of hypermasculine agency. Russell, on the other hand, is ‘castrated’ within this sexual dyad. Stemming from his diminished role in the domestic sphere, Russell has an affair with his assistant, Trisha. Their relationship is based solely on domination and submission, evoking Russell’s need for ornamental authentication of his masculinity. Russell and Trisha only have anal intercourse and Russell writes her emails imagining her performing fellatio “in a posture of worship and submission” (*GL*, 189). This affair suggests that Russell, unlike Luke, has remained stagnant within the topos of pre-9/11 ornamental, fetishistic masculinity. Russell’s sexuality embodies Carpenter’s deviant and secondary masculinity: ornamental, but artificial, demarcations of dominance and control. Luke and Russell’s sexual contest comes to a tipping point when Russell rapes Corrine after Thanksgiving. Russell’s epistemic depletion of masculine value is cemented as he asks Corrine if she’s “getting it from someone else” (*GL*, 305). Immediately, he proceeds to try and reassert his dominance *inside* Corrine. Russell begins “probing with his cock between her legs, thrusting himself half an inch into her ass before he retreated and probed again” (*GL*, 306). McInerney uses Russell’s sexual ineptitude to highlight the failure of Russell’s claim to hypermasculinity. Unlike Luke, whose agency has embedded him within the hero logos of post-9/11 ‘manly-men’, Russell continually prioritizes ornamental performativity and is unable to participate as a masculinist protector.

It has been my argument, thus far, that *The Good Life* is paradigmatic of a literary impulse that employs the post-9/11 gendered rhetoric of the Bush administration. This

paradigm reasserts American dominance through recourse to hypermasculinity. Acknowledging a pre-existing (pre-9/11) crisis of masculinity, *The Good Life* instantiates hypermasculinity through an aggressive form of nostalgia seeking to reconcile the figurative ‘castration’ of the American political psyche. Although McInerney does not wholly succumb to this, *The Good Life* exhibits all of these premises and exemplifies the intersection between post-9/11 socio-political responses and the ‘9/11-novel’. Using this as a point of departure, I will now (re)examine DeLillo’s text.

DeLillo, like McInerney, portrays a ‘crisis’ of millennial masculinity. This ‘crisis’ stems from a specific contingency. Ruth Helyer suggests that DeLillo’s presentation of masculinity works through an oscillation between mediated imagery and an ontologically destabilized center: “[Masculinity], rather than being inherent, is an insecure construction based on dominant societal norms and presented via mediated images.”⁴¹ For Keith, like Russell, this is manifest through performative, fetish logic as represented by a weekly poker game. Keith’s poker game is constructed through fetishistic ritualism:

They used intuition and cold-war risk analysis... They regressed to preliterate folkways petitioning the dead. There were elements of healthy challenge and outright mockery. There were elements of one’s intent to shred the other’s gauzy manhood.⁴²

Poker facilitates performativity that allows ‘gauzy manhood’ to authenticate masculinity. The ‘gauziness’ of this masculinity signifies the inherent contingency of ontological stability. Although the players attempt to establish a masculine lineage through ‘cold-war

⁴¹ Ruth Helyer, “DeLillo and Masculinity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, ed. John Duvall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 125.

⁴² Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (New York: Picador, 2007), 97. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically as *FM*.

risk analysis', DeLillo paints this as secondary and artificial by taking this ritualism *ad absurdum*: they only play 5-Card stud, stop serving food, and only drink "the manlier tones and... intense distillations" (*FM*, 98). Through this, DeLillo portrays a masculinity that has become, like the poker game itself, ritualistic and performative, lacking ontological grounding.

Although this seems to recreate McInerney's paradigm, DeLillo has a more dialogic approach towards what Mary Parish calls the ideology of the 'man's man': "To assume this idealized role, a man must disengage from his own emotions and project a persona characterized by qualities understood stereotypically as masculine."⁴³ This construction gives priority to the performative and ornamental whilst disavowing ontological validity. The pitfalls of this construction are manifest in the emotive disengagement between Lianne and Keith. Lianne's mother, Nina, claims that Lianne married Keith, "To feel dangerously alive. This was a quality you associated with your father" (*FM*, 11). Jack, Lianne's father, assumes metonymical status for a 'lost' masculinity. Echoing Corrine's nostalgia, Lianne thinks of how her father "liked to talk about the anatomy of racecars, motorcycles, hunting rifles, how things worked" (*FM*, 41). DeLillo is articulating a nostalgic impulse to recreate the 'lost' masculinity of Jack leading to Nina's interpretation of Keith as the quintessential 'man's man': "[An] archetype, he's a model of dependability for his male friends, all the things a friend should be, an ally and confidant, lends money, gives advice, loyal and so on, but sheer hell on a woman" (*FM*, 59). Keith's masculinity has no depth; it is the hollow-shell of 'an archetype' (re)created through performance. Furthermore, this suggests the attendant oppression of this gendered paradigm, as Keith is 'hell on a woman'.

⁴³ Mary J. Parish, "9/11 and the Limitation of the Man's Man Construction in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*," *Critique* 53.3 (2012): 186.

DeLillo, like McInerney, uses 9/11 to reclaim this ‘lost’ masculinity. Keith’s return from the towers mirrors Luke through codification within historical, heroic, and militaristic signifiers: “[Keith] was tall, with cropped hair, and she thought he looked like army, like career military” (*FM*, 18). Post-9/11, Keith recovers his masculine agency and returns to his place as head of the familial unit. As in *The Good Life*, the home becomes the locus for reconciliation. This is compounded through Justin who “sees [Keith] as a figure that looms over the household, the man who went away once and came back” (*FM*, 101). Keith embodies a doubly discursive post-9/11 agency: he reclaims his masculinity *as* he reclaims ‘his’ family. Keith’s ‘return’ allows for the perpetuation of familial continuity: “There was Keith in the doorway. Always that, the desperate sight of him alive, *her husband*” (*FM*, 126 – my emphasis). It is not just *Keith* that has returned, but the missing *signifier* within the dyadic logic of marriage. 9/11 allows a clean slate to emerge for masculinity *and* domesticity. In Carroll’s terms, Keith highlights how through “the events of [9/11] white masculinity founds its most expressive modality.”⁴⁴ Effectively, Keith’s post-9/11 agency allows participation within a reinvigorated hypermasculinity.

Falling Man, again mirroring *The Good Life*, participates in the heteronormative sexualization of 9/11. Lianne describes how sex has become the salient feature of post-9/11 consciousness: “Sex was everywhere at first, in words, phrases, half gestures, the simplest intimation of altered space” (*FM*, 7). This sexuality continues through Keith’s affair with another 9/11 ‘survivor’, Florence. Retelling running from the towers, Florence describes her body as “wet” and Keith “understood that she hadn’t meant to say this. It sounded intimate, to be wet all through” (*FM*, 54). This post-9/11 sexualization allows Keith to assume hypermasculine agency over Lianne and Florence. Echoing Nayak’s

⁴⁴ Hamilton Carroll, *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity*, 18.

formulation of hypermasculinity, DeLillo translates sexuality into violence. The inextricability of violence and sexuality are illuminated when Keith and Florence go mattress shopping. Keith assaults a man in the mattress shop, “Because if anyone said a harsh word to Florence, or raised a hand to Florence, or insulted her in any way, Keith was ready to kill him” (*FM*, 133). This returns Keith to an earlier image when Lianne remembers him “ready to break up a table and burn it so he could take out his dick and piss on the flames” (*FM*, 104). These scenes present the continuity of Keith’s hypermasculine performance pre- and post-9/11. Through violence, Keith is able to reassert control and reclaim his gendered identity. These scenes are redolent with sexualized, heteronormative subtext. With Florence, Keith is being challenged by a sexual rival, and, with Lianne, the heightened sexuality evoked by ‘his dick’ brings lucidity to the inseparability of sexuality and violence underwriting hypermasculine performance.

Although these passages support the paradigmatic formula of masculinity-in-‘crisis’ requiring a post-9/11 reassertion of hypermasculinity, DeLillo does not follow this monolithically. Thomas Bjerre articulates DeLillo’s resistance as “counternarratives that suggest another, more complex story, one that deconstructs and reinvents the notion of masculinity in the wake of 9/11.”⁴⁵ DeLillo, unlike McInerney, does not retreat to a nostalgia-based modality of hypermasculinity. Rather, DeLillo presents Agathangelou and Ling’s premise that, “Hypermasculine certainty masks an underlying insecurity.”⁴⁶ DeLillo’s creates this salient ‘insecurity’ through a dialogic space that simultaneously presents and subverts the performance and perpetuation of hypermasculinity. This is manifest in the relationship between Keith’s outwardly performative masculinity and his

⁴⁵ Thomas Bjerre, “Post-9/11 Literary Masculinities in Kalfus, DeLillo, and Hamid,” *Orbis Litterarum* 67.3 (2012): 241.

⁴⁶ Anna Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling “Powers Borders, Security, Wealth: Lessons of Violence and Desire from September 11,” in *International Studies Quarterly*: 527.

emotive, epistemic state. Bimbisar Irom locates this tension as “a binary grid between the chaotic events outside and the emotional core of Keith, between the events on the ground and those up in the air.”⁴⁷ Before 9/11, Keith embodies the austerity of ‘hypermasculine certainty’ as “the man who would not submit to [Lianne’s] need for probing intimacy” (*FM*, 105). Following 9/11, however, Keith begins to open up, transcending his and Lianne’s “separation marked by symmetry” (*FM*, 29). This transition is concomitant with his return to the ‘home’. Post-9/11, the strictness of boundaries authorizing and authenticating hypermasculinity become porous:

Now he finds himself drifting into spells of reflection, thinking not in clear units, hard and linked, but only absorbing what comes, drawing things out of time and memory and into some dim space that bears his collected experience (*FM*, 66).

Following the epistemic intrusion of 9/11, Keith’s outwardly performative masculinity is fractured as it is mediated into his consciousness. The inside/outside dichotomy that structures the performance and perpetuation of hypermasculinity is destabilized and dislocated. This failing binary can be extended towards a reading of a larger anxiety around the category of ‘terrorism’. As Slavoj Žižek writes, “[when] we try and preserve the authentic intimate sphere of privacy against the onslaught of instrumental/objectivized ‘alienated’ public exchange, it is privacy itself which becomes a totally objectivized ‘commodified’ sphere.”⁴⁸ Žižek is arguing that the category ‘terrorism’ problematizes the boundaries that differentiate inside/outside. DeLillo, through Keith’s relationship to hypermasculinity, disavows the binaric structure necessary for hypermasculinity to (re)present through a deviated dialectical relationship of Keith’s external performance

⁴⁷ Bimbisar Irom, “Alterities in a Time of Terror: Note on the Subgenre of the 9/11 Novel,” *Contemporary Literature* 53.3 (2012): 530.

⁴⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), 85.

(outside) and his epistemic disposition (inside). Keith's inside/outside dissolution is symptomatic of a post-9/11 collapse between public/private. As Michael Rothberg writes, "terrorism is a public act that defines its success or failure by its ability to penetrate into the private sphere"⁴⁹ leading to "a transformation of the relationship between the public sphere and the intimate realms of the personal."⁵⁰ 9/11, effectively, catechizes the foundational ontology of inside/outside. And in this way, DeLillo works against imagining the 'home' as a teleological site of post-9/11 reconciliation.

Although DeLillo creates this dialogic space and disavows the teleological closure of the 'home', it is eventually closed as Keith contemplates a return to work. The inside/outside binary of hypermasculinity is restituted:

He would need to burn things off, test his body, direct himself inward, working on his strength, stamina, agility, sanity. He would need an offsetting discipline, a form of controlled behavior, voluntary, that would keep him from shambling into the house hating everybody (*FM*, 143).

DeLillo restitutes the privilege of the outwardly performative (the gym) as it intersects with capitalism. This also works through Keith's relationship within the domestic: "How is it possible that he was about to become someone of clear and distinct definition, husband and father, finally, occupying a room in three dimensions in the manner of his parents?" (*FM*, 157). Through this spatial restructuring, DeLillo moves Keith away from the opened intersections suggested by the collapse of the inside/outside binary of hypermasculinity. DeLillo removes Keith from the teleological sites of 'home' and 'fatherhood' through the restoration of the inside/outside binary. As the boundaries

⁴⁹ Michael Rothberg, "Seeing Terror, Feeling Art: Public and Private in Post-9/11 Literatures," in *Literature After 9/11*, eds. Ann Kenniston and Jeanne Quinn (London: Routledge, 2010), 125.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

inside/outside, public/private are restructured, Keith 'returns' to the oppressive discourses of hypermasculinity. This is highlighted as he asks Lianne "[w]hat strength" (*FM*, 215) did he have to help her through the attacks? She responds, "[t]hat's what I saw and felt. You were the one in the tower but I was the berserk" (*FM*, 215). In this scene, DeLillo reveals that the text's alternative masculine modality is still premised on a formulation of antagonistic, gender identity. This evokes Young's logic of masculinist protection and its attendant feminine contingency: Lianne's identity, like Corrine's with Luke, is inextricably premised on Keith's agency. Finally, DeLillo returns Keith to the pre-9/11 dialectic of fetishistic hypermasculinity. Again, this is taken *ad absurdum* when Keith moves to Las Vegas:

He was fitting into something that was made to his shape. He was never more himself than in these rooms, with a dealer crying out a vacancy at table seventeen... These were the times when there was nothing outside, no flash of history or memory that he might unknowingly summon in the routine run of his cards (*FM*, 225).

Keith's interpellation, through this ritualism, into "a self-operating mechanism" (*FM*, 226) dissipates his subjectivity as the hallowed shell of performativity takes priority. Keith's liminal position following the collapse of the inside/outside binary, no longer works to interrupt hypermasculine agency; DeLillo 'returns' Keith to the millennial 'crisis' of ornamentation. DeLillo's continuation of masculine crisis, however, still deviates from the nostalgic-based 'return' read in McInerney. DeLillo, throughout the text, resists presenting full teleological closure through post-9/11, domestic reconciliation. Although this teleological 'openness' presents alternative formulations of masculinity, DeLillo is not able to fully sidestep the oppressive gender discourses systemic of post-9/11 ideology.

In summary, DeLillo, although momentarily troubling the claims of both sovereignty and hypermasculinity to hegemonic agency, is unable to take this modality any further. Like McInerney, post-9/11 reconciliation is imagined as the establishment of an equilibrium that is tethered to oppressive models of gender dimorphism. Moving away from trauma's critical monopoly on 9/11 and its concomitant claim to depoliticized grief, 9/11, as event, can be read as a redistributive 'opening'. Reading the gendered implications of 9/11 offers an evaluative cultural moment to reassess American's geopolitical position in a globalized world. This stands in contrast to the proprietary claim of the 'everything has changed' rhetoric. This opening, however, was quickly closed by the Bush administration's pointed discursive project of (re)defining gender roles through the reclamation of a 'lost', American masculinity and domestication of the event. The political capital of 9/11 dissipated as the Bush administration quickly sublated the event into a gendered and individualized rhetorical framework in order to reinforce American hegemony. Literary representation of 9/11 should offer a space to imagine alternatives beyond socio-political discourses. Unfortunately, as my argument has proven, McInerney and DeLillo, as representatives of the 'post-9/11 novel', do not offer literary alternatives, but return to formulations of masculinity advocated by the Bush administration. However, as opposed to McInerney's text, DeLillo does point to gendered alternatives available to post-9/11 literatures. *Falling Man* offers insight into how performativity can expose the artifice authorizing the perpetuation of hypermasculinity. Although DeLillo's project ultimately fails to bring these ideas to fruition, it is my hope that this offers the beginning of an alternative discourse which seeks to trouble the gendered implications and hegemony salient within much post-9/11 literature.

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First Response

A bold and interesting reading of two "post 9/11" novels. The readings of McInerney and DeLillo map crises and "resolutions" of masculinity in the novels onto the implicit gender politics of the Bush administration's nationalistic rhetoric. The readings are convincing and the notion of hypermasculinity works well throughout. The novels are also situated interestingly within a more general context of "the emerging field of the 'post-9/11 novel'." Perhaps, in an international journal like this, there might be more here though on the U.S. tendency to hype up the horrific singularity and importance of this particular atrocity.