

8-12-2014

Representing the Past and Future Post-9/11 Manhattan: Jonathan Lethem's Chronic City and Colum McCann's Let the Great World Spin as Disavowing Fiction

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REPRESENTING THE PAST AND FUTURE POST-9/11 MANHATTAN: JONATHAN
LETHEM'S *CHRONIC CITY* AND COLUM MCCANN'S *LET THE GREAT WORLD SPIN* AS
DISAVOWING FICTION

by

RICHARD LANCE CONLEY

Under the Direction of Dr. Christopher Kocela

ABSTRACT

Jonathan Lethem's 2009 novel *Chronic City* and Colum McCann's 2009 novel *Let the Great World Spin* can each be read as unique forms of the post-9/11 novel. In this study, I take up the argument that much of the established scholarship analyzing post-9/11 fiction often examines the same set of texts and frequently employs similar theoretical lenses, more often than not a specific form of trauma analysis. I argue that McCann and Lethem's novels can each be read as unique forms of the post-9/11 novel for the way each work incorporates the Freudian processes of fetishism and disavowal into their respective narratives. In two close readings, I analyze each text to demonstrate how these processes function and what they offer both the authors and readers of the novels.

INDEX WORDS: Jonathan Lethem, Colum McCann, *Chronic City*, *Let the Great World Spin*, Post-9/11, Disavowal

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Art

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2014

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August 2014

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my aunt, Carolyn Conley, one of the most brilliant and generous people I have ever had the privilege of knowing. Thank you for the profoundly beneficial influence you have had on my life. Without your help and love, I would not be where I am today.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Christopher Kocela for his advice and guidance with both this project as well with my other academic and professional endeavors. His input throughout my studies has been invaluable; Dr. Calvin Thomas for introducing me to theory, reading and editing my thesis, and helping me further my academic studies; Dr. Mark Noble for reading and editing my thesis and giving me tips for managing the project; Dr. Paul Schmidt for introducing me to the world of literary research and aspects of the academic profession and helping me further advance my graduate studies; Dr. James Hirsh for his evidence-based analysis of literature, which has had a profound influence on the way I do my own research; and Dr. Lynée Lewis Gaillet for giving me the confidence to succeed in academia and helping me with that task in multiple ways. Without the advice, guidance, and encouragement from all of these scholars, I would not have been able to complete this project.

I would also like to thank my family: my brother, Jimmy Conley, whose initial encouragement gave me the confidence to attend Georgia State University, my sister, Jennifer Martin, whose love, perseverance, and sense of humor never cease to amaze me, and my parents, Les and Cindy Conley, for both their unending faith in my abilities and their unconditional love throughout my life. I am beyond lucky to have such a family and forever grateful for all they have done for me.

Lastly, thank you to Megan Schmidt, for everything. You have loved me and made me a better human being. You are my best friend, and all of my love is forever yours.

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1 Introduction

In “Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis,” Richard Gray writes that “perhaps the way to tell a story that cannot be told is to tell it aslant, to approach it by circuitous means, almost by stealth” (136). This statement reveals a great deal about “post-9/11” novels. Jonathan Safran Foer’s 2005 *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Ian McEwan’s 2006 *Saturday*, Don DeLillo’s 2007 *Falling Man*, and Joseph O’Neill’s 2008 *Netherland* serve as just a few examples of some of the most celebrated post-9/11 novels. According to most scholarship, what constitutes a post-9/11 novel is its treatment of 9/11 as a significant historical event around which different narratives can be constructed. Birgit Däwes suggests in her expansive 2011 *Ground Zero Fiction: History, Memory, and Representation in the American 9/11 Novel* that “as of late June 2011, at least 231 novels from around the world are available in print which can be classified as ‘9/11 novels’” (6). Dawes later claims that “if it seems, at first glance, that all of these texts share the same historical tenor, they are, in fact, marked by a notable degree of diversity” (6). Indeed, many post-9/11 novels depict, represent, or engage with the event and its historical and cultural ramifications in various ways. For instance, DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, whose narrative depicts specific aspects of the event and its aftermath but does not take place exclusively on 9/11, can be read as an example of an aslant approach. On the other hand, Claire Messud’s 2006 *The Emperor’s Children* or Hugh Nissenson’s 2005 *Days of Awe*, whose narratives, according to D.G. Myers, are the only two that “take place on the day in question,” contain a more direct approach.¹ In short, post-9/11 novels have addressed both the event and its aftermath from multiple perspectives. However, much of the scholarship dedicated to analyzing post-9/11 fiction approaches the event in similar ways. Therefore, my plan in this study is to analyze examples of post-9/11 literary scholarship with the hope of demonstrating the

similarity of the critical approaches completed thus far on largely the same set of texts. After completing this examination, I will demonstrate how a theoretical approach using the Freudian concepts of fetishism and disavowal can be read in two specific novels: Jonathan Lethem's 2009 *Chronic City* and Colum McCann's 2009 *Let the Great World Spin*. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how this approach, on display in both novels, functions as an insightful way of addressing the traumatic events of 9/11.

In *Ground Zero Fiction* Dawes argues:

What emerges most clearly from the various attempts at defining the state of the American novel after 2001 is their lack of agreement about turns, trends, and textual characteristics. Instead of systematic approaches, or comprehensive maps, most scholars provide snapshots of a limited area, agreeing only on the fact that it may be too soon to state anything definite about 9/11 fiction. Few efforts have been made at developing a terminology for these novel's narrative strategies. (51)

Dawes spends much of the rest of her book delineating the different theoretical approaches applied to post-9/11 fiction thus far. She then provides an extensive categorization of texts she considers to be post-9/11 and offers detailed readings of a wide variety of novel.² Her work stands out as the most comprehensive, all-inclusive, and cogent study of post-9/11 fiction written to date. Aside from her own work, she singles out Kristiaan Versluys's 2009 *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* and Gray's 2011 *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* as "the only book-length analyses of the impact of September 11 on the novel to date" (40). Versluys' work seeks to answer the question that nearly all examples of post-9/11 literary scholarship have asked: "how can words be found that are capable of naming the unnamable?" (15). Or, as Gray writes at the beginning of *After the Fall*, "if there was one thing writers agreed

about in response to 9/11, it was the failure of language; the terrorist attacks made the tools of their trade seem absurd”(1). Indeed, nearly all of the scholarship analyzing post-9/11 fiction has foregrounded the inability of language, specifically fictional narratives, to represent the trauma of the event. Hence, as Dawes asserts, “it is thus unsurprising that the initial narratives to be printed and published legitimized themselves by claims to authenticity. Most of the immediate responses were collections of interviews, ‘oral histories,’ and autobiographical or journalistic reports” (29).

Other book-length studies have been written that discuss post-9/11 American novels. However, these texts also address other forms of media including films, television shows, comic books, and plays.³ Consequently, the work of Dawes, Versluys, and Gray, as well as the more recent *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics & Literary Culture After 9/11* (2012) by Georgiana Banita, will receive more attention in this study because of their specific focus on fiction. Banita’s work investigates “how narrative strategies in post-9/11 fiction resonate with issues of race, spectatorship, profiling, torture, and mourning that circle 9/11 and its aftermath” (1). Jo Lampert’s *Children’s Fiction about 9/11: Ethnic, Heroic and National Identities* (2010) serves as another example of a book-length study of 9/11 fiction, but because its main texts of analysis are works of children’s fiction, it will receive less attention in this study as well.

Other interesting examples of post-9/11 fiction scholarship are what I consider tangential approaches. These are recent examples of contemporary fiction scholarship that address 9/11 tangentially as a means of making an argument that does not relate specifically to 9/11 or post-9/11 fiction. For example, Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate’s 2010 *The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic after 9/11* attempts “to trace the literary reception of the New Atheism in the work of four canonical contemporary novelists: Ian McEwan, Martin Amis,

Philip Pullman and Salman Rushdie” (11). Bradley and Tate complete this analysis because they argue that, for these authors, “the contemporary novel represents a new front in the ideological war against religion, religious fundamentalism and, after 9/11, religious terror” (11). Samuel Cohen’s 2011 *After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s* “looks back on the period whose end is marked by September 11 and reads the historical fiction of that period in the light of the event that marks its beginning — the end of the Cold War” (3). Cohen argues that these novels suggest “that the course of the nation cannot be understood simply as a long victory march, that it cannot be seen as entirely lost to our understanding” (28). Moreover, *After the End of History*, like many other tangential approaches to post-9/11 fiction, features a chapter that looks at examples of post-9/11 fiction.⁴ In one of the text’s last chapters, Cohen analyzes Jeffery Eugenides’ 2002 *Middlesex* and Lethem’s 2003 *The Fortress of Solitude* “to examine the ways in which American history and the construction of stories about it continue after the decade defined by history’s alleged end” (29).

In terms of articles addressing post-9/11 fiction, “Fiction after 9/11,” an entire issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* published in 2011, analyzes multiple examples of the recent sub-genre. This text, like a great deal of post-9/11 fiction scholarship, features readings of what Däwes has labeled “the emerging Top Five or Six (*sic*)...best known 9/11 novels” (45). That is, the issue features readings of Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, and John Updike’s 2006 *Terrorist*. However, the issue also features articles focusing on lesser known or non-traditional post-9/11 novels. Andrew Pepper’s “Policing the Globe: State Sovereignty and the International in the Post-9/11 Crime Novel,” Margaret Scanlan’s “Strange Times to be a Jew: Alternative History after 9/11,” and John N. Duvall and Robert P. Marzec’s “Narrating 9/11” serve as excellent examples of post-9/11 fiction scholarship that challenge what

Duvall calls the “hypercanonical...discussion of 9/11 fiction” (394) and “move the discussion of 9/11 fiction past the dominant theoretical paradigm for understanding it – trauma studies” (395-396).

Other noteworthy articles dedicated to post-9/11 fiction include Gray’s aforementioned “Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis” and Michael Rothberg’s “Failure of the Imagination: Diagnosing the Post-9/11 Novel. A Response to Richard Gray,” both published in a 2009 issue of *American Literary History*. These two articles deal with the difficulties of representing the event via fiction, and they point to what Rothberg calls the necessity of “a fiction of international relations and extraterritorial citizenship” (153). Moreover, according to Gray, contemporary American fiction authors must possess “not only the capacity to recognize that some kind of alteration of imaginative structures is required to register the contemporary crisis, to offer testimony to the trauma of 9/11, and its consequences, but also the ability and willingness imaginatively to act on that recognition” (134). Lastly, though there are other significant articles, Don DeLillo’s 2001 “In the Ruins of the Future” stands out because of the way DeLillo, a highly regarded author, emphasizes the failure of language in addressing traumas such as 9/11.⁵

While much scholarship addresses the work of authors such as DeLillo and Foer and their fictional engagement with specific aspects of 9/11, the work of McCann and Lethem, especially the novels examined in this study, receives relatively little critical attention. Both authors, however, have at least one book-length study dedicated to their work. John Custatis’ 2011 *Understanding Colum McCann* and Eóin Flannery’s 2011 *Colum McCann and the Aesthetics of Redemption* provide readings of McCann’s novels up to *Let the Great World Spin*. While Custatis’ book reads more like a general summary of McCann’s life and work, Flannery’s deftly

analyzes McCann's "highly affective narratives of displacement, impoverishment, vulnerability, exile, grief, and disorientation" (15). Rather than fixating on this somber aspect of McCann's work, Flannery suggests that McCann "in each case...encourages us to empathize with his abjected protagonists, and, furthermore, he cleaves to the utopian notion that even in these lives and stories there is the prospect of redemption" (15).

Similar to Custatis and Flannery's work, James Peacock's 2012 *Jonathan Lethem* serves as a survey of Lethem's novels up to *Chronic City*. Peacock structures his work around the way that "Lethem's novels and short stories subvert established fictional genres in some way" and how "the frequent intermingling and clashing of genres is reflected in the bizarre characteristics displayed by many of the characters" (1). Peacock claims that the essential thesis of his book is that "genres reflect and frequently dramatise (*sic*) the human need to shape and make sense of a complex and shifting world" (2). He spends the rest of his book showing how Lethem's novels and short stories often combine and challenge the concept of genre in fiction, and he discusses the implications of these tactics for both Lethem and his readers. *Jonathan Lethem* contains a section dedicated to *Chronic City*, and its contents will be incorporated in greater detail later in this study in the chapter dedicated to Lethem.

To clarify why these two novels by Lethem and McCann warrant an analysis of this size and a reading from this theoretical perspective that utilizes fetishism and disavowal, I refer first to Versluys' *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel*. Versluys claims that certain post-9/11 novels explicitly "express raw outrage and revanchist feelings" (13). Moreover, he posits that these texts are "often patriotic or Christian-revival novels" and "sell in large numbers but have little or no literary merit" (13). He also claims that these texts feature, though in a different context, a concept labeled by Eric Santner in his "History beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some

Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma” as “narrative fetishism” (144). Santner defines narrative fetishism as “the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place” (144). More precisely, narrative fetishism can be understood as “the way an inability or refusal to mourn emplots (*sic*) traumatic events; it is a strategy of undoing, in fantasy, the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere” (Santner 144). Versluys suggests that “the formulaic plots of the narratively fetishized 9/11 novels are always the same. The attack on the homeland is the occasion for a conversion: from a sinful or worldly attitude to a religious and pious one or from lukewarm citizenship to flag-waving patriotism” (13). Though I agree with Versluys’ assessment of these conversional and patriotic texts, I believe he oversimplifies the concept of fetishism and its relationship to trauma and the construction of narrative.⁶ To explain this oversimplification, I turn first to Freud’s 1927 essay “Fetishism” and then to more recent literary scholarship focusing on the concept of fetishism as it relates both to contemporary American and post-9/11 fiction.

In “Fetishism,” Freud claims that the fetish can be understood as “a substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and...does not want to give up” (152-53). That is, the fetish functions as a substitute coping mechanism that allows a little boy to deal with the trauma of what he perceives as his mother’s castration. This preliminary perception is traumatic because, according to Freud, “if a woman had been castrated, then his [the little boy’s] penis was in danger; and against that there rose in rebellion the portion of his narcissism which Nature has, as a precaution, attached to that particular organ” (153). To deal with this traumatic perception, the boy disavows the sight of the mother’s missing penis (153-

54). Freud's description of the process of "disavowal" (153) and what the practice offers the fetishist appears below:

It is not true that, after the child has made his observation of the woman, he has preserved unaltered his belief that women have a phallus. He has retained that belief, but he has also given it up. In the conflict between the weight of the unwelcome perception and the force of his counter-wish, a compromise has been reached, as is only possible under the dominance of the unconscious laws of thought—the primary processes. Yes, in his mind the woman *has* got a penis, in spite of everything; but this penis is no longer the same as it was before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its substitute, as it were, and now inherits the interest which was formerly directed to its predecessor. But this interest suffers an extraordinary increase as well, because the horror of castration has set up a memorial to itself in the creation of its substitute. (154)

In short, for Freud, the fetish functions as an object that provides the fetishist with the ability both to accept and deny simultaneously the perceived trauma of the mother's castration.

Furthermore, Freud claims that "the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic one is retained as a fetish. Thus the foot or shoe owes its preference as a fetish" (155). With this brief explanation of the Freudian concepts of fetishism and disavowal complete, I turn now to more recent contemporary American fiction scholarship that incorporates this theoretical practice. I focus particularly on the concept of disavowal and how it can be abstracted from the childhood-trauma perspective described by Freud and applied to a larger traumatic canvas to address national traumas like 9/11

In his 2010 *Fetishism and Its Discontents in Post-1960 American Fiction*, Christopher Kocela contends that “although Freud was not the first theorist to suggest that the sexual fetish derives from associations formed during childhood, his emphasis on the constructive logic of disavowal has elevated his theory to a place of eminence in poststructuralist and postmodern theory” (9). In his brief reading of Derrida’s *Glas*, Kocela claims that “according to Derrida, Freud’s theory breaks with a long philosophical tradition that treats the fetish as a simple embodiment of false value; though Freud defines the fetish as a substitute penis, that definition is less important than the interpretative strategy used to generate it” (9). Indeed, the phrasal title for the logic and process of disavowal Kocela discusses—“I know very well, but nevertheless...” (9)—serves as an excellent way of comprehending disavowal and its usefulness for traumatized postmodern subjects.⁷ He suggests:

The Freudian fetishist’s ability to live by the logic of “I know very well, but nevertheless...” appears especially attractive as a coping strategy for postmodern subjects traumatized by the horrors of twentieth-century history. Postmodern distrust of metanarratives is the result of the fact that, after two world wars, the Nazi death camps, and Hiroshima and Nagasaki, faith in the idea that human civilization is progressing toward a utopian end has been shattered. Fetishistic disavowal, which enables the fetishist to both acknowledge and to deny a traumatic reality, seems like a uniquely effective way of carrying on in the face of potentially debilitating knowledge. (11)

9/11 can undoubtedly be read as one of the defining horrors of the still young twenty-first century, and I argue the process of disavowal possesses the potential to function in the same way for individuals traumatized by the event.

Rather than narratively fetishizing the event the way that Versluys claims the conversional, patriotic novels do, Jonathan Lethem's *Chronic City* and Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* present readers with narratives that disavow the event. That is, these two novels never directly depict or represent the horrors of 9/11, and the event itself is mentioned only briefly towards the conclusion of *Let the Great World Spin* and never throughout *Chronic City*. However, these novels allude to 9/11 multiple times. As such, they should not be considered forms of narrative fetishism as described by Santner and later discussed by both Versluys and Banita. These two texts do not attempt to "expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place" (144). Instead, by both setting their novels in Manhattan and alluding to 9/11 while simultaneously never depicting or representing the event, these two novels take part in the process of disavowal. In the same way that the fetish affects the Freudian fetishist, these two texts affect readers because their narratives simultaneously acknowledge and deny 9/11. They are not examples of what Santner calls "a strategy of undoing," a tactic that provides traumatized subjects with the "the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere" (144). These authors, on the contrary, set their novels at the primal scene of trauma and compel their readers to take part in the coping process of disavowal.

In his 2000 *Difference and Disavowal: the Trauma of Eros*, Alan Bass claims that "a mechanism like disavowal is intrinsic to the idea that defensive substitutes are created to avoid a registered reality. While the operation of defense always implies an attempt to convince oneself that something disturbing has not been registered, the defense itself always implies that the disturbance has been registered" (29). This implied registration of a disturbance can be better understood by referring to Banita's "Falling Man Fiction," a chapter from *Plotting Justice*.

Banita reads Art Spiegelman's 2004 graphic novel *In the Shadow of No Towers* through a Freudian lens utilizing both Freud's theory of fetishism and Santner's concept of narrative fetishism. Though a graphic novel, *In the Shadow of No Towers* has received significant amounts of critical attention, and because of Banita's reading of its fetishism, I include it in this study. Banita claims that "one cannot help detecting an uncomfortable parallel to the arguably phallic Twin Towers and the empty space where they once stood, a space that 9/11 fiction often attempts to cover by locating the origin of trauma in a different place (from Dresden and Hiroshima in Jonathan Safran Foer to Vietnam in Paul West's novel *The Immensity of the Here and Now* [2003])" (79). She further claims that "fetishistic about Spiegelman's book is its dexterous replacement of objects and rituals derived from an earlier trauma" (79).

Despite offering an engaging fetishistic reading of a post-9/11 text, Bantia's analysis of *In the Shadow of No Towers* falls back on the belief that narrative fetishization, according to Santner, involves the denial of trauma via narrative displacement. What makes *Chronic City* and *Let the Great World Spin* unique forms of post-9/11 fetishistic fiction is their refusal both to replace 9/11 with a trauma from a different era and to set their novels in different locales. Set in Manhattan but in two different time periods, each novel, in subtle and specific ways, alludes to and all but blatantly acknowledges the trauma of 9/11. However, the narrative construction of both novels does not allow readers to define the novels as particularly post-9/11 or essentially engaged with representing the trauma. Both novels, rather, through their setting and subject matter, simultaneously acknowledge and deny the horrors of 9/11. As such, they function as examples of disavowing fiction.⁸ This facet of each text warrants further close analysis because of its implications for both the authors and readers of the novels. Therefore, in the rest of this study, I closely examine both novels to demonstrate how they incorporate fetishism and

disavowal in their narratives. The first chapter is dedicated to McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* and addresses the way both the novel's specific setting and story forces readers to disavow the trauma of 9/11.

2 Rebuilding the City or Denying Its Destruction: *Let the Great World Spin*

Colum McCann's 2009 National Book Award-winning *Let the Great World Spin* is a work of historical fiction that connects the lives of numerous characters living in Manhattan in 1974. Philippe Petit's actual August 8, 1974 tightrope walk across the twin towers of the World Trade Center functions as the event that unites nearly all of the novel's major characters. I argue that the text functions as a work of disavowing post-9/11 fiction for multiple reasons, but first and foremost, the novel encourages disavowal through its setting in Manhattan. I propose that contemporary readers cannot help but envision the horrific images of 9/11 when McCann begins the novel's prologue with the following passage:

Those who saw him hushed. On Church Street. Liberty. Cortlandt. West Street. Fulton. Vesey. It was a silence that heard itself, awful and beautiful. Some thought at first that it must have been a trick of the light, something to do with the weather, an accident of shadowfall. Others figured it might be the perfect city joke—stand around and point upward, until people gathered, tilted their heads, nodded, affirmed, until all were staring upward at nothing at all, like waiting for the end of a Lenny Bruce gag. (3)

In this passage, which actually describes Petit's first appearance before he walks across the towers, the nameless narrator vacillates between using three different pronouns to refer to what the people standing on the street view: "him," "it," and "nothing" (3). The first pronoun used after "those," which refers to the individuals who see Petit in the sky, is "him": "those who saw *him* hushed" (3).¹ In both this sentence and the four fragments that follow it, the object viewed is an individual, "him." However, in the next complete sentence of the passage, the pronoun changes to "it": "*it* was a silence that heard itself, awful and beautiful" (3). Here, the "it" the

narrator refers to seems to be the silence of all of the individuals looking up at the nameless “him” (3). However, in the following sentence, “it” no longer seems to be the silence of the spectators but rather the spectacle of a large group of random individuals simultaneously looking up at the Manhattan skyline: “others figured *it* might be the perfect city joke” (3). Before readers can be confident in this interpretation, the narrator once again changes pronouns when he says that “all were staring upward at *nothing* at all” (3).

The narrator’s shifting usage of pronouns functions as a deliberate stylistic tactic employed by McCann. By varying the narrator’s pronoun usage in this first passage of the novel, McCann compels readers to recount the chaotic nature of both 9/11 and its multiple perceptions both during and after the event. This assertion can be better understood by referring to Slavoj Žižek’s 2002 essay, “Welcome to the Desert of the Real.” In this essay, Žižek describes a scene from the Wachowski siblings’ 1999 film *The Matrix* in which the character Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) shows Neo (Keanu Reeves) the real world outside of the Matrix. After showing Neo this image, Morpheus says, “Welcome to the desert of the real” (which is a direct reference to Jean Baudrillard’s 1984 work, *Simulacra and Simulation*). After providing this brief reference, Žižek then asks, “Was it not something of the similar order that took place in New York on September 11? Its citizens were introduced to the ‘desert of the real’—to us, corrupted by Hollywood, the landscape and the shots we saw of the collapsing towers could not but remind us of the most breathtaking scenes in the catastrophe big productions” (386). Indeed, the images of 9/11 and their continual coverage on every news-channel forced individuals to see the event in multiple ways. Ranging from disaster-movie spectacle, individualistic acts of religious terror, or the manifest destruction of two of America’s most famous skyscrapers, the perceptions of 9/11 in its immediate aftermath varied. McCann captures this multi-faceted view

of the event at the beginning of the text, for, as Flannery suggests, “vision, spectacle and sightings provide a link between the opening act of funambulism in *Let the Great World Spin* and the brute spectacular of 9/11” (209). In short, in the novel’s first paragraph, McCann illustrates how 9/11 can be viewed as an individual act (him), a spectacle (it), and an instance of utter destruction (nothing). Yet, ironically, the narrator does not make it known that the towers being viewed comprise the World Trade Center until three pages later. Moreover, when he does, he makes it clear that a terrorist attack is not taking place. Readers, then, are given the option of deciding whether both this passage and the entire prologue allude to 9/11. The process of residing in this state of indeterminacy, of simultaneous confirmation and denial, is disavowal.

To better understand the process of disavowal and its relationship to *Let the Great World Spin*, I briefly turn once again to Freud’s essay “Fetishism.” In “Fetishism,” Freud describes his experience of analyzing two young men who at different ages “failed to take cognizance of the death of [their] father” (155). He initially believes that the two young men denied or “scotomized” (156) the death, but near the end of the essay he states that “further research led to another solution out of the contradiction” (156). Freud claims:

It turned out that the two young men had no more “scotomized” their father’s death than a fetishist does the castration of women. It was only one current in their mental life that had not recognized their father’s death; there was another current which took full account of that fact. The attitude which fitted in with the wish and the attitude which fitted in with reality existed side by side. (156)

This side-by-side acceptance and denial, that is, this disavowing state of perception, can be found throughout *Let the Great World Spin*. Moreover, it encompasses the novel’s thematic goal: in the face of unimaginable trauma, solace, and more importantly for McCann, redemption, are

found in the act of creation. *Let the Great World Spin* has the emotional effect it does because its narrative takes place at the most traumatic scene of 9/11. However, in the novel, the scene of trauma has changed, not in terms of location, but rather temporality. In the Manhattan depicted in the text, the two towers still stand, yet outside of this depiction in modern day Manhattan, they do not. Therefore, to once again quote Freud, “the attitude which fitted in with the wish and the attitude which fitted in with reality” (156) exist, simultaneously, side-by-side.

McCann himself acknowledges this simultaneous existence and destruction of the towers in both an essay and interview featured in the 2010 Random House Trade Paperback edition of *Let the Great World Spin*. In the essay “Walking an Inch Off the Ground,” McCann asserts that “the tightrope walk was an act of creation that seemed to stand in direct defiance to the act of destruction twenty-seven years later” (359). He also concedes that “nowadays it does not seem to be an original image. The walk itself has become iconic: Petit wrote a book called *To Reach the Clouds*, and James Marsh made a wonderful documentary, *Man on Wire*. There has been a children’s book, a play, paintings, and talk of an animated film” (359). However, though McCann recognizes this potential oversaturation, he still chooses to construct a narrative around the historic event. He writes:

But stories are there to be told, and each story changes with the telling. Time changes them. Logic changes them. Grammar changes them. History changes them. Each story is shifted sideways by each day that unfolds. Nothing ends. The only thing that matters, as Faulkner put it, is the human heart in conflict with itself. At the heart of all this is the possibility, or desire, to create a piece of art that talks to the human instinct for recovery and joy. (359)

This idea, “the human heart in conflict with itself,” or, more precisely, “the possibility, or desire, to create a piece of art that talks to the human instinct for recovery and joy” (359), serves as the main focus of the novel. Furthermore, I argue that this idea can also be understood as a commentary on the process of disavowal. What makes disavowal different from denial is its creativity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “denial” as “the asserting (of anything) to be untrue or untenable; contradiction of a statement or allegation as untrue or invalid; also, the denying of the existence or reality of a thing.”² By this definition, the act of denial, though certain scholars have addressed its differing forms, functions directly and unimaginatively.³ That is, in the simplest form of denial, a subject simply states the falsity of an occurrence; no creativity is needed or exuded. As has been demonstrated, the act of disavowal is a creative act: a fetishist imbues an ordinary object with powers to deny a trauma. However, the very process of imbuing confirms that a trauma has occurred.

With this difference in mind, consider McCann’s motives for writing the novel as discussed in “A Conversation with Colum McCann and Nathan Englander.” McCann claims that “I was wondering how it might be possible to talk about the events of that terrible September, and all the Septembers that followed, and I said ‘Ah yeah, that’s it. I should go backwards. Wherever we go now is wherever we once were’” (362). After deciding on Petit’s tightrope walk as the narrative focus for the novel, McCann claims:

I wanted to reanimate it and give it a different meaning. And eventually I used the tightrope walk only as a way to pull the reader through the novel. In fact, the tightrope walker doesn’t matter at all in the end of the story. The story comes right down the ground, in the very dark of night, in the roughest part of New York, when two little girls emerge from a Bronx housing complex and get rescued

by strangers. That, for me, is the core image of the novel. That's the moment when the towers get built back up. (362-63)

As this quotation proves, McCann concedes that his novel functions as a fictional response to 9/11 that, though acknowledging the event, ultimately attempts to reconstruct the towers by providing readers with a non-9/11 narrative set at the scene of the trauma. *Let the Great World Spin* can thus be read as a work of disavowing fiction that simultaneously denies and acknowledges the trauma of 9/11. Or, as Flannery claims, "it is a novel that responds to 9/11 without ever becoming obsessed by the immediate repercussions in 2001 in any direct way" (208).

In my reading, the characters are divided into roughly two categories: those dealing with specific traumas and those enraptured by Petit's tightrope walk as it is depicted throughout the novel. This dichotomy works well because of how it highlights the disavowing nature of the novel's narrative. I begin with the two brothers, Ciaran and Corrigan, whose intertwined story, told in the first-person by Ciaran, comprises the first chapter of the novel entitled "All Respects to Heaven, I Like It Here" (11). After recounting the events of their childhood in Dublin, which ends with Corrigan, a young monk, leaving for the U.S. shortly after the death of their mother, Ciaran describes what made him decide to leave for the states as well. Again, McCann compels readers to envision 9/11 without ever directly describing the event. Ciaran, on a trip "to the Dandelion Market one Friday evening to buy some marijuana," (22) describes an incident that bears a striking resemblance to images of 9/11:

I was walking along South Leinster Street into Kildare Street when the air shook. Everything went yellow for an instant, a perfect flash, then white. I was knocked through the air, against a fence. I woke, panic all around. Shards of glass. An

exhaust pipe. A steering wheel rolling in the street. The wheel flopped, exhausted, and all was strangely still until the sirens rang out, as if already in mourning. A woman went by with her dress torn neck to hem, as if designed to show off her chest wound. (22)

Describing a Northern Ireland terrorist attack and not 9/11, Ciaran claims that after surviving this event, “I went straight to a travel agency on Dawson Street, bought my ticket out” (23). Similar to the first passage of the novel, this brief excerpt compels contemporary readers to see, simultaneously, separate images of a 1970s Northern Ireland terrorist attack and the September 2001 terrorist attack in Manhattan. With this reading in mind, then, it comes as no surprise that Ciaran goes to live with Corrigan in New York City. However, instead of residing in Manhattan, Corrigan lives in a terrible neighborhood in the Bronx.

Ciaran, upon arriving in the Bronx, finds that Corrigan lives in a dilapidated housing project where Corrigan serves as a non-assuming but ever-giving hero. For instance, Ciaran claims that Corrigan “wore no religious garments, or collars, carried no Bible, and preferred to stay quiet, even around the brothers of his own Order” (21). Corrigan lets various prostitutes use his apartment as “a little spot they can call their own” (26), and he also makes a little extra money “driving a van for some old folk in the local nursing home” (32). Indeed, as Flannery claims, throughout the text Corrigan “is described in sacrificial and saintly terms” (218). Consider, for example, how Ciaran describes the life that Corrigan lives:

I recalled the myth that I had once heard as a university student—thirty-six hidden saints in the world, all of them doing the work of humble men, carpenters, cobblers, shepherds. They bore the sorrows of the earth and they had a line of communication with God, all except one, the hidden saint, who was forgotten.

The forgotten one was left to struggle on his own, with no line of communication to that which he so hugely needed. Corrigan had lost his line with God: he bore the sorrows on his own, the story of stories. (44)

Corrigan, as Ciaran describes him throughout this first chapter, serves as one of the most benevolent characters depicted throughout the novel. Corrigan claims that he lives his life the way he does because, quite simply, “it’s about fear” (29). This statement implies that fear exists everywhere and that the prostitutes and elderly people he helps, as well as everyone else in the world, are all affected by it. Or, as Corrigan states, “They’re all throbbing with fear. We all are” (29). Against this all-consuming fear, Corrigan serves as a peaceful inspiration.

Immediately following this line of dialogue, McCann provides another apparent allusion to 9/11 when Corrigan describes the nature of fear in New York City:

Bits of it floating in the hair. It’s like dust. You walk about and don’t see it, don’t notice it, but it’s there and it’s all coming down, covering everything. You’re breathing it in. You touch it. You drink it. You eat it. But it’s so fine you don’t notice it. But you’re covered in it. It’s everywhere. What I mean is, we’re afraid. Just stand still for an instant and there it is, this fear, covering our faces and tongues. (29-30)

Taken out of context, this passage could presumably allude to the dust that coated Manhattan during and after 9/11. However, when read in the context of the novel, readers are once again forced to see two separate images: one of a metaphorical fear covering every individual in the world in 1974 and another of the actual dust that covered Manhattan in September 2001. Either way, the towers still stand in the text, yet contemporary readers envision them as both standing and destroyed because of McCann’s prose.

At the end of this chapter, tragedy strikes while Corrigan drives Jazzlyn, a prostitute he has befriended, home to her two children. Ciaran retroactively describes how the accident occurred and how he was powerless to prevent it. Once more, McCann's prose seems to allude to 9/11, in this case to the victims' sudden deaths:

We have all heard of these things before. The love letter arriving as the teacup falls. The guitar striking up as the last breath sounds out. I don't attribute it to God or to sentiment. Perhaps it's chance. Or perhaps chance is just another way to try to convince ourselves that we are valuable. Yet the plain fact of the matter is that it happened and there was nothing we could do to stop it. (68)

Ciaran then recounts a shocking car accident that kills both Corrigan and Jazzlyn. In graphic detail, Ciaran describes the way the accident occurred, referring specifically to how "Jazzlyn went head first through the windshield, no safety belt, a body already on the way to heaven" (68). He later describes how her "body... made a flying arc through the air, fifty or sixty miles per hour, and she smashed in a crumpled heap by the guardrail, one foot bent in the air as if stepping upwards, or wanting to step upwards" (69). I contend that McCann describes this scene in such specific detail to force readers to read the text dichotomously. That is, Jazzlyn's falling body can be read as both taking place specifically in the 1970s and as an allusion to the various bodies that fell or jumped from the towers on 9/11. This dichotomous depiction, as I have argued, compels readers to disavow the trauma of 9/11. Readers may be left depressed after reading this chapter because of both its content and its multiple allusions to 9/11. Consequently, they may question McCann's storytelling motives. McCann, however, accounts for this possibility by structuring the rest of the novel in a specific way. In the novel's next chapter, entitled "Miró, Miró, on the Wall" (73), he tells the story of Claire Sodeberg, a mother who has

lost her only son, Joshua, to the Vietnam War. In this chapter, which I turn to next, McCann describes Claire's experience hosting a grieving mothers' group and what Petit's tightrope walk means to her and the other mothers.

Throughout the beginning of this chapter, Claire's grief is described in great detail by an omniscient third-person narrator as she prepares to host the meeting at her Manhattan high-rise apartment. Her thoughts range from miniscule particulars regarding the tidiness of her apartment to Joshua and his job in the war of "figuring out how many dead there were" (83). Recollecting a conversation she had with Joshua before his death, Claire claims that Joshua, who worked with state of the art computer technology, "put his head down, worked it, asked no questions. It was, he said, the patriotic thing to do" (88). Later she describes how Joshua felt about his profession, and the way the narrator describes his thoughts makes readers think about not only 9/11 but human suffering in general and its relationship to technology in both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries:

It was easy enough to write a program that would collate the dead, he said, but what he really wanted to write was a program that could make sense of the dying. That was the deep future. One day the computers would bring all the great minds together. Thirty, forty, a hundred years from now. If we don't blow one another asunder first. We're at the cusp of human knowledge here. (88)

Thirty years from when this fictional conversation takes place would be very close to 2001, and I believe McCann's inclusion of this specific temporal estimation is no accident. However, before readers can become even more disconsolate by these sad and ironic aspects of the first part of the chapter, McCann changes the focus of the narrative as the other members of the group arrive at Claire's apartment.

As the four women enter Claire's home, one of them, Marcia, walks in "like she's just flown through a window and needs to bash at walls" (91). The other women all try to decipher why she is so flustered, and she responds through short breaths, "Man in the air!" (92). After catching her breath, she describes what she saw on her way to Claire's:

So I'm watching this helicopter and it's hanging in the air almost like it's doing a double take. Up there, but not very well. Suspended, like. But rocking back and forth. And I'm thinking about how Mike Junior would hang a much better turn than that, how he'd handle the craft so much better, I mean he was the Evel Knievel of helicopters, his sergeant said so. And I thought maybe there's something wrong with it, you know? I had that dread. You know, hanging there. (94)

"That dread" (94) Marcia refers to can be read as an allusion to the constant fear of other potential terrorist attacks in the aftermath of 9/11. Yet, once again, this specific emotion is felt by contemporary readers of the novel, not its characters. Marcia continues her story and states that she "saw this little flyspeck" (94) very high in the air. This "little flyspeck" (94) is Phillippe Petit performing his tightrope walk "up there. Between the towers. A million miles up" (94). The rest of the chapter depicts the women's meeting and their separate thoughts about Petit's walk, but the narrator describes Claire's thoughts in greater detail.

After Marcia finishes her story, Claire has a brief conversation with another woman, Gloria. Gloria believes that Petit's walk is extraordinary, but Claire feels ambivalent about the stunt for some reason:

But what it is about the notion that she doesn't like? Amazing, indeed, yes. And an attempt at beauty. The intersection of a man with the city, the abruptly

reformed, the newly appropriated public space, the city as art. Walk up there and make it new. Making it a different space. But something else in it still rankles. She wishes not to feel this way, but she can't shake it, the thought of the man perched there, angel or devil. (103)

This quotation serves as one of the better depictions of disavowal in the text. Like the readers of the novel, Claire sees Petit's walk dichotomously. That is, for both her and readers, Petit's stunt serves as creative act that simultaneously acknowledges and denies a specific trauma. For Claire, the act relates specifically to the trauma of her deceased son. For readers, the act relates to the trauma of 9/11. She claims towards the end of the chapter that "it has nothing to do with angels or devils. Nothing to do with art, or the reformed, or the intersection of a man with a vector, man beyond nature. None of that" (112). Rather, she believes that Petit was "up there out of a sort of loneliness. What his mind was, what his body was: a sort of loneliness. With no thought at all for death" (112). Regardless of the fact that she claims his walk has "nothing to do with art" (112), in positing a reason for his walk, she imbues the act with a creative meaning. For her, Petit's walk signifies a total disdain for death that she has trouble accepting because of the death of Joshua. She asks angrily, "How dare he do that with his own body? Throwing his life in everyone's face? Making her own son's so cheap" (113). In seeing the image of Petit's stunt and defensively deciding on its meaning, Claire acknowledges her trauma. As Bass observes, "while the operation of defense always implies an attempt to convince oneself that something disturbing has not been registered, the defense itself always implies that the disturbance has been registered" (29). Indeed, in her defensive response to Petit's walk, Claire simultaneously acknowledges and denies not the death of her son but rather the purposelessness of his death. Her son died in a war that "was about old men who couldn't look in the mirror

anymore and so they sent the young out to die” (102). Yet, according to the sergeant who broke the news of Joshua’s death to her and her husband, their son “died a hero” (112). Therefore, Claire, in both viewing Petit’s tightrope walk and attributing a meaning to the act, simultaneously acknowledges and denies the meaninglessness of her son’s death. In short, for Claire, Petit’s tightrope walk makes Joshua’s death full of meaning and at the same time utterly meaningless.

Earlier, I claimed that McCann structures his chapters in a way that helps his readers not to focus on only the depressing aspects of the content depicted at the beginning of the novel, and thus far, my reading of the text does not seem to validate this claim. However, at the end of this chapter, McCann suggests where solace lies when facing unimaginable traumas such as a child’s death. After Claire ponders Petit’s demeaning act of death-defiance, she comes to a specific realization. As the section comes to a close, Claire looks at the other women in her group and “pauses a moment wondering what she should say” (114). Readers are not sure what to expect from Claire given her feelings about Petit’s act compared to the other women in the group. Claire, rather than vocally condemning the stunt or awkwardly ending the meeting, utters six words that point to a specific concept emphasized throughout the novel: “I like you all so much” (114). This statement has profound thematic implications. For instance, as Flannery suggests, these individuals’ “lives may have been assailed by the machinations of global politics, but there is the mutual recognition of humanity in their supportive relationship” (227). Indeed, for both the characters in the novel assailed by tragedy and the readers outside of the novel still trying to process the horrors of 9/11, healing is found in relationships with other individuals. As the narrator of the chapter states, “we hurt, and have one another for the healing” (114).

Closing this chapter and others on this thematic note prevents readers from becoming disheartened by the scenes of sadness depicted throughout much of the text. I believe a pattern exists in the novel that can be read as vacillation between characters dealing with trauma autonomously (such as Ciaran dealing with the death of Corrigan), and characters for whom Petit's walk serves as what Flannery calls a "metaphor of the...notion of connection" (227). Moreover, this wavering between character types often occurs in succeeding chapters. This structural fluctuation can be read as a form of disavowal that provides readers with a simultaneously rising and falling narrative filled with characters either facing or overcoming trauma. That is to say, McCann compels readers not to deny but rather to overcome creatively the trauma of 9/11 by means of disavowal. The pain of 9/11 exists, but via the creative act of fiction, the towers can be rebuilt and the trauma can be not only disavowed but ultimately overcome.

Rather than providing a comprehensive analysis of all the characters in the novel, I will spend the rest of this chapter highlighting those characters whose narratives further support my claim that the novel is structured around the concept of disavowal. I turn to Lara Liveman, who, according to Cusatis, serves as "another character who undergoes an awakening" (188). Lara's chapter, entitled "Fear of Love" (115), is told in the first-person from her perspective and begins by making readers aware of her connection to an event depicted in a previous chapter: "Being inside the car, when it clipped the back of the van, was like being in a body we didn't know. The picture we refuse to see of ourselves. That is not me, that must be somebody else" (115). The connection established in this first passage of the chapter is that Lara and her husband, Blaine, caused the accident that killed Corrigan and Jazzlyn. The last two sentences of this quotation can be read as disavowing statements because, in making them, Lara simultaneously

acknowledges that the accident occurred and also denies its happening. The trauma that Lara autonomously deals with is her involvement in an accident that killed two other individuals. This chapter thus serves as the second traumatic chapter, and it accordingly follows one in which Petit's walk serves as a narrative crest in opposition to this trough-like portion of the novel.

Later in this chapter, McCann provides yet another allusion to 9/11, this time focusing on the event's effects on individual consciousness: "There is something that happens to the mind in moments of terror. Perhaps we figure it's the last we'll ever have and we record it for the rest of our long journey. We take perfect snapshots, an album to despair over. We trim the edges and place them in plastic. We tuck the scrapbook away to take out in our ruined times" (116). The phrase "moments of terror" (116) holds a specific connotation in twenty-first century American culture that relates directly to 9/11 and other terrorist attacks. In this quotation, however, McCann employs it to refer to a fatal car accident for an individual in a fictitious Manhattan in 1974. Still, this allusion, like the others I have discussed, compels readers to see two moments of terror: the 1974 car accident as described by Lara in the novel, and the various moments that made up 9/11 in 2001. Contemporary readers envision the twin towers still standing in the Manhattan depicted in the novel, but with this description, contemporary readers are also reminded of the destruction of the towers outside of the novel in the present. Thus, to quote Freud once again, "the attitude which fitted in with the wish and the attitude which fitted in with reality" (156) exist simultaneously.

Much of the rest of this chapter focuses on Lara's coping with her involvement in the accident. Blaine continuously tells her "you've gotta forget about it" (120). At one point, he even goes so far as to say "you didn't see the goddamn thing. You listening to me? We saw nothing" (120). This narrative shift of focus between Lara, who fully acknowledges the

accident, and Blaine, who vehemently tells her she saw nothing, can be read as another depiction of disavowal. However, in this instance, the process occurs in the consciousness of two separate individuals who witnessed the same event, which is unlike the traditional Freudian process occurring in the consciousness of one individual. In this depiction, these two characters drift apart because of how they each handle a trauma. This portrayal functions as another deliberate stylistic tactic employed by McCann that shows readers characters dealing with the same trauma in different ways, i.e. denial and acceptance. Moreover, these differing forms of coping, while functioning together as an example of disavowal, also differ greatly from the way in which McCann suggests solace can be found in the face of trauma. That is, in Claire's chapter, McCann makes it clear that recovery can be found in relationships with other individuals. In Lara's chapter, by describing two different coping tactics, McCann seems to suggest that simple denial, as opposed to disavowal, not only leads to personal turmoil but also the deterioration of interpersonal relationships as well. The chapter ends with Lara ironically connecting with Ciaran and admitting her role in the accident. Despite this connection, I believe the chapter's main thematic focus is on Claire's and Blaine's responses to the car accident and what those responses indicate about themselves as individuals and as a couple.

The next two chapters I analyze point to the necessity of human connection in the face of trauma. McCann, however, ironizes this connection by presenting readers with two linked characters on opposite sides of the law. In "This is the House that Horse Built" (198) and "Part of the Parts" (247), readers meet Tillie, Jazzlyn's mother who is on trial for prostitution, and Solomon Sodeberg, Claire's husband and the judge overseeing Tillie's trial. While Tillie's chapter features the fewest allusions to 9/11, it serves as the most stylistically inventive chapter of the novel. Similar to David Foster Wallace's 1999 short story collection *Brief Interviews with*

Hideous Men, “This is the House that Horse Built” is divided into chunks of text written in the first-person from Tillie’s perspective, ranging in length from one short sentence to three or four long paragraphs. These passages read as if they are either answers to absent interview questions or unrelated journal entries written by Tillie while awaiting trial. Either way, readers can never be sure of the exact nature of her thoughts. Regardless, as Cusatis claims, both the structure of the chapter and the content featured within it make her one of the most “sympathetic characters in the novel, despite the ‘facts’ of her rapsheet” (190). The text also alludes to Tillie’s impending suicide at the end of the chapter when she says, “I’d say good-bye, except I don’t know who to say it to. I ain’t whining. That’s just the fuck-off truth. God is due His ass-kicking. Here I come Jazzlyn, it’s me. I got a knuckle duster in my sock” (238). This portion of the text, like “All Respects to Heaven I Like It Here” (11) and “A Fear of Love” (115), functions as a chapter dedicated to a character facing a specific trauma, i.e. Tillie dealing with Jazzlyn’s death. Cusatis observes that “it is at the end of Tillie’s chapter that McCann places the photograph of the airplane approaching the tower above the tightrope walker; the novelist thereby underscores the deaths of Jazzlyn and Tillie, symbolized in the towers, and the rebirth of the others, symbolized in the walker” (191). While providing a cogent reading of this portion of the novel, Cusatis fails to include a key word in his ultimate claim about the chapter: “simultaneously.” That is, McCann, via disavowal, *simultaneously* emphasizes both the destruction of the towers and their creative rebuilding by focusing on the deaths of Tillie and Jazzlyn and the death-defying stunt of Petit captured in the photo. While not featuring many allusions to 9/11, Tillie’s chapter also lacks direct references to Petit’s walk other than the photo. On the other hand, Solomon’s chapter points to both events multiple times.

“Part of the Parts” begins with an allusion to 9/11 that resembles a range of references featured in *Chronic City* discussed later in this study. The section opens with Solomon, described in the third-person, considering Petit’s stunt and its effects on the city. The narrator states:

His fellow judges and court officers and reporters and even the stenographers were already talking about it as if it were another of those things that just happened in the city. One of those out-of-the-ordinary days that made sense of the slew of ordinary days. New York had a way of doing that. Every now and then the city shook its soul out. It assailed you with an image, or a day. Or a crime, or a terror, or a beauty so difficult to wrap your mind around that you had to shake your head in disbelief. (247)

At this point in the novel, most readers can deduce that the “it” (247) and “thing” (247) Solomon contemplates is Petit’s stunt. However, this excerpt, with its inclusion of the word “terror,” (247) refers to 9/11 as well. Consequently, I believe Solomon’s thoughts read as if they are McCann’s ironic meta-textual views on how Petit’s stunt has been described throughout the novel, and how it relates both to 9/11 and contemporary Manhattan. The narrator states:

He had a theory about it. It happened, and re-happened, because it was a city uninterested in history. Strange things occurred precisely because there was no necessary regard for the past. The city lived in a sort of everyday present. It had no need to believe in itself as a London, or an Athens, or even a signifier of the New World, like a Sydney, or a Los Angeles. No, the city couldn’t care less about where it stood. He had a seen a T-shirt once that said: NEW YORK FUCKIN’ CITY. As if it were the only place that ever existed and the only one

that ever would. New York kept going forward precisely because it didn't give a good goddamn about what it had let behind. It was like the city that Lot left, and it would dissolve if it ever began looking backward over its own shoulder. (247)

With this passage, Solomon suggests that the inhabitants of this fictional Manhattan care little about the past because it provides nothing for the present. Ironically, McCann's novel compels readers to look into the past. He makes them look back on the scene of one of the most distressing occurrences of the young twenty-first century to see how an event that happened in the past can offer redemption to the present. Flannery elaborates on this notion when he claims that Petit's walk functions as "powerful symbolic act for McCann in the wake of 9/11, what he calls a 'spectacular act of creation'" (211). Further elaborating on Flannery's assertion, I posit that *Let the Great World Spin* allows contemporary readers to experience this redemptive act of daring creativity as well and, in doing so, it connects readers. Indeed, similar to the way in which Petit's stunt connects certain characters and compels others to acknowledge trauma, McCann's novel serves as a fetishistic text for contemporary readers that disavows the traumas of 9/11 by attempting to overcome them creatively.

The last two characters I analyze from *Let the Great World Spin* are Jaslyn and Petit. Jaslyn is Jazzlyn's daughter and Tillie's granddaughter who, late in the novel, is adopted with her sister by Gloria, the woman Claire bonds with in "Miró, Miró, on the Wall" (73). With this character history in mind, I begin with Jaslyn's chapter entitled "Roaring Seaward, and I Go" (325). The temporal setting of October 2006 stands out as noteworthy, and the only direct reference to 9/11 appears in this chapter. Furthermore, perhaps the best example of disavowal can also be found within this portion of the text. Jaslyn, described in third-person, waits for a flight at an airport at the beginning of the section, and the narrator describes her as she considers

some of the events and characters that have been described in the novel. Specifically, she thinks about a photograph she owns. The photograph, which first appears a little over halfway through the novel, is taken by Vic Deluca on August 7, 1974, and is an actual photograph of Petit's stunt and an airplane flying over the scene in the upper left portion of the frame. Readers learn that Jaslyn found the photo at a garage sale in San Francisco, and the photo now functions as a fetishistic object for her. The narrator claims that "the photo was taken on the same day her mother died—it was one of the reasons she was attracted to it in the first place: the sheer fact that such beauty had occurred at the same time" (326). The narrator elaborates upon this idea through the only direct reference to 9/11 in the novel:

A man high in the air while a plane disappears, it seems, in the edge of the building. One small scrap of history meeting a larger one. As if the walking man were somehow anticipating what would come later. The intrusion of time and history. The collision point of stories. We wait for the explosion but it never occurs. The plane passes, the tightrope walker gets to the end of the wire. Things don't fall apart. (327)

While serving as the only direct reference to 9/11 in the novel, this quotation also alludes both to William Butler Yeats' 1919 poem "The Second Coming" and Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*. These allusions are noteworthy because, in providing them, McCann acknowledges two other texts that have dealt with past traumas in different ways. While Yeats' poem can be read as a response to the horrors of the First World War, Achebe's novel deals with the consequences of the European colonization of Africa in the late nineteenth century. In both works, the traumas of the past trounce the creative acts that created them. That is, "things," which are the traumas the two texts address, "fall apart." That is, these specific traumas are too

traumatic to conquer creatively, and, as such, they are not overcome. At the conclusion of Yeats' poem the apocalypse is imminent, and Achebe's novel ends with the protagonist's suicide.

McCann, seeing in Petit's walk the potential to put "things" back together, incorporates this reference into the final chapter of the novel. However, by including a direct reference to 9/11, he reminds readers that the event occurred: no longer is it just an (a)illusion as earlier in the novel. The photo of Petit's walk thus exemplifies the Freudian fetish for Jaslyn because it functions as an object that simultaneously confirms and denies the trauma of 9/11. Consider the importance she sees and the care she takes in handling the object, as well as the language the narrator uses in describing her relationship with the photo. The narrator states that "it strikes her as an enduring moment, the man alone against scale, still capable of myth in the face of all other evidence. It has become one of her favorite possessions—her suitcase would feel wrong without it, as if it were missing a latch. When she travels she always tucks the photo in tissue paper" (328). The phrase "still capable of myth in the face of all other evidence" (326) strongly suggests the Freudian fetishist's disavowal of his mother's castration in the face of inarguable proof that her castration has occurred, and I believe McCann did not accidentally include this overt reference. Like the rest of the evidence I have examined, this passage demonstrates McCann's attempt to place readers into a historical nexus in which they both can and cannot think about the 9/11 attacks while reading the novel. By doing so, the twin towers exist in a fictional state of fluctuation for readers. That is, similar to the way the Freudian fetish disavows the sight of the mother's castration, *Let the Great World Spin* disavows the destruction of the World Trade Center.

While the novel ends with Jaslyn taking care of a dying Claire, hinting once again at the novel's theme of connectivity, I want to close this chapter by backtracking somewhat to analyze

the funambulist himself, Petit. Petit is the central character in three chapters of the novel, and all of them are narrated by an omniscient third-person narrator. The latter two chapters, “Let the Great World Spin Forever Down” (157) and “The Ringing Groves of Chance” (238), depict Petit practicing at a cabin before the walk, preparing for the stunt by casing the buildings, and before finally performing the walk itself. I focus now on “Let the Great World Spin Forever Down” (157) because I feel that a particular passage from it captures McCann’s thematic goal. Before analyzing this passage, I briefly want to posit a question, which will then lead to my analysis of Petit. I have spent most of this chapter analyzing multiple characters from the novel with the intention of demonstrating how the text—through its content, characters, and structure—functions as a unique post-9/11 novel that addresses the event via disavowal. This analysis, while attempting to shed a new light on a recent sub-genre, still leaves us with an unanswered question: what does this disavowing nature of the novel ultimately offer readers? More precisely, what makes McCann’s novel and this approach more useful than others? I briefly compare the novel to two other post-9/11 novels, *Falling Man* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, and critical readings of each to provide this answer.

Let the Great World Spin differs from DeLillo’s *Falling Man* because, as the narrator of “Let the Great World Spin Forever Down” (157) states, “the core reason for it all was beauty” (164). *Falling Man*, which Versluys’ claims is “utterly aporetic and deliberately antiredemptive” (21) and “the most gloomy of the 9/11 novels” (20), does not provide readers with a creative means to overcome the destruction of the towers. Rather, as Versluys suggests, “the endless reenactment of trauma presented in *Falling Man* allows for no accommodation or resolution” (20). In Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, the novel’s conclusion, which is a flip-book depicting one of the falling bodies of 9/11 flying upwards instead of plummeting,

represents for Patrick O'Donnell a "wish that history reverse itself to before 9/11" (166). More precisely, O'Donnell claims "it is possible to view such devices as conveying Foer's sense that the contemporary response to catastrophe in the United State is, precisely, childlike, narcissistic, a matter of wanting to wish it all away" (166). While more similar to McCann's thematic goals and my theoretical approach, specifically their focus on the idea of narcissism, Foer's novel and O'Donnell's reading exclude the importance of creativity. Though the flip-book closing *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* represents an act of creation, it functions as a wish-like gesture offered in the present to deny the past. Contrarily, as Flannery argues, *Let the Great World Spin* "anticipates, but creatively contradicts, the spectacularly spatial violence of 9/11" (213). That is, McCann's novel, written in 2009, transports readers to the most traumatic scene of 9/11, yet in this fictional Manhattan the towers still stand because of the text's setting in 1974. This narrative fact is not a melancholic reenactment or a child-like wish but rather an example of disavowal that allows for readers both to mourn and rejoice in the creative acts that are Petit's walk and McCann's novel. One could call this form of disavowal trans-historical sublimation. Or, as Däwes suggests, in *Let the Great World Spin* "the terrifying sights of 9/11 are transpositioned into the safe distance of well over three decades, into an event, which—like a stencil—shares the same semantic contours" (347). In short, Petit's daring stunt of funambulism, as it is represented throughout the novel, serves as an act that simultaneously confirms and denies 9/11. As the narrator states, "everything was rewritten when he was up in the air" (164). Yet, in acknowledging the act of rewriting, the original writing, i.e. 9/11, is also acknowledged.

While McCann's novel functions as an example of disavowing post-9/11 fiction that trans-historically sublimates the trauma of 9/11, Jonathan Lethem's *Chronic City* approaches the event in a slightly different way. In the "9/11 and Book Tour" (219) section of his 2011 *The*

Ecstasy of Influence, Lethem states that with *Chronic City* he attempted “to rework the 9/11 discomfort in a sidelong glance, sublimating the fact in speculation” (235). I turn now to this sidelong, speculative sublimation as it is depicted in *Chronic City* to analyze how it features examples of both fetishism and disavowal, and to assess how it is both similar and different to the fetishism and disavowal represented in *Let the Great World Spin*.

3 Reality or Simulation: *Chronic City*

Jonathan Lethem's 2009 novel *Chronic City* tells the story of former child television star Chase Insteadman, a man in his mid-thirties living in a temporally unspecified Manhattan. The novel, which is divided into twenty-nine chapters, is set sometime after 2001, but Lethem provides few details that allow readers to pinpoint the specific temporal setting. Chase narrates from the first-person, and early in the text he meets Perkus Tooth, an eccentric cultural critic who becomes both Chase's best friend and his guide to dealing with the ideological and illusory nature of Manhattan as it is depicted in the novel. The Manhattan that Chase and Perkus inhabit may or may not be a computer simulation isolated from an outside reality, but Lethem never provides a definitive solution to this possibility. In this fictional Manhattan, there are both subtle and telling allusions to a trauma that is possibly 9/11. However, unlike McCann in *Let the Great World Spin*, Lethem never refers to the event directly. That is, the narrative of *Chronic City* functions as a conspiratorial sidelong glance in which the event may or may not have happened at all. In this chapter, I analyze this sidelong approach to demonstrate how it can be read as a form of disavowal. Specifically, I focus on the novel's direct and subtle allusions to 9/11, how those allusions appear in the narrative, and what they offer readers in comparison to *Let the Great World Spin* and other works of post-9/11 fiction. I also pay particular attention to the principal characters' fascination with a certain "type of ceramic...called a chaldron" (92). A chaldron is described by Chase as "an enigmatic orange-glowing ceramic vase" (77), and I analyze this fascination because I argue that it functions as a form of fetishism with a specific connotation. The tangibility of the chaldrons also suggests one of the text's main themes, ideology. I turn to a close reading of the text, focusing primarily on Chase, his relationships with other characters, and various narrative episodes that symbolize the process of disavowal.

Chronic City begins with Chase describing the first time he met Perkus Tooth at “the headquarters of the Criterion Collection, on Fifty-second street and Third Avenue” (1). According to Chase, this office was “not an office where he [Perkus] worked, though I was confused about this at the time. (Which is itself hardly an uncommon situation for me)” (1). Chase elaborates on the meeting when he states that he went to this office “to record a series of voice-overs for one of Criterion’s high-end DVD reissues, a ‘lost’ 1950s film noir called *The City is a Maze*” (1). He further claims, “My role was to play the voice of that film’s director, the late émigré Von Tropen Zollner” (1). With these quotations in mind, I contend that Lethem, only six sentences into the novel, lays the groundwork for both the thematic content the text will contain and the style in which he will write. I make this claim because of the way the first six sentences allude to the celebrated postmodern American fiction author, Thomas Pynchon.

In her 2009 review of the novel, Micho Kakutani claims that Chase Insteadman is a “Pynchonian name,” and one could certainly make the same claim for his fellow *Chronic City* characters “Perkus Tooth,” (1) “Richard Abneg,” (28) “Georgina Hawkmanaji,” (33) and “Oona Laszlo” (43).¹ Furthermore, Chase indicates early in the text that he is often confused, a mental state frequently experienced by the protagonists of two of Pynchon’s best known works: Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973). Finally, one of the primary themes of *Chronic City* is paranoia, and that concept functions in the same way in much of Pynchon’s fiction. With these stylistic similarities to Pynchon in mind, specifically the importance of paranoia in his fiction, the title of the film for which Chase records voice-overs, “*The City is a Maze*” (1), relates directly to *Chronic City*’s narrative, particularly its overarching themes of paranoia and ideology. I will elaborate on this connection in greater detail later in this chapter when I discuss the possibly simulated nature of the Manhattan depicted in the

novel. Chase, rather than saying “my job was to do” or “my task was to complete,” states “my role was to record” (1). These passages reveal a great deal about Chase as the narrator because, with them, readers have encountered a confused character with a strange name playing a specific role. This role is to play the fake voice of a fictitious director for a fabricated film with a paranoid title. This aspect of the text thus raises multiple questions: most importantly, what do the characters have to be paranoid about?

In “Hiding in Plain Sight’: Reality and Secrecy in *You Don’t Love Me Yet* and *Chronic City*,” Peacock claims that an “over-arching anxiety about the decline of reality” (149) causes the characters of the novel, particularly Perkus, to be paranoid. Lethem alludes to this anxiety throughout the text, and it functions as one of the novel’s primary conflicts. Sounding similar to the fictional Lee Harvey Oswald depicted in Don DeLillo’s 1988 *Libra*, or a Pynchon character contemplating conspiracy, Chase considers the disordered nature of Manhattan early in *Chronic City*:

To live in Manhattan is to be persistently amazed at the worlds squirreled inside one another, the chaotic intricacy with which realms interleave, like those lines of television cable and fresh water and steam heat and outgoing sewage and telephone wire and whatever else which cohabit in the same intestinal holes that pavement-demolishing workmen periodically wrench open to the daylight and to our passing, disturbed glances. We only pretend to live on something as orderly as a grid. (8)

As this quotation implies and as Peacock suggests, “something is seriously wrong with Manhattan” (148) as it is depicted in the text. That is, the “passing, disturbed glances” (8) of the characters viewing the mechanical underbelly of the novel’s Manhattan reveal that the sprawling

metropolis these individuals inhabit actually covers a mass of disorder. Facing this disorder, characters such as Perkus become paranoid in order to make order out of the chaos.

Focusing on this notion of paranoia as a mental state necessary for ordering chaos, O'Donnell claims in his 2000 *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S. Narrative* that “paranoia manifests itself as a mechanism that rearranges chaos into order, the contingent into the determined” (11). He further argues that the idea of paranoia as “the classic, universalized symptoms of an individual pathological condition can be seen as symptomatic of a collective identity” (14). This collective symptomatic identity can be discovered “when we regard those contemporary events and narratives that reveal paranoia as a kind of narrative work or operation that articulates the ‘individual’s’ relation to the symbolic order” (*Latent Destinies* 14). With these statements, O'Donnell seems to suggest that when viewed in a specific context, paranoia can be read as a creative act that functions as a communicative tool for an individual in relation to the symbolic order. This claim then raises a specific question: what are the “contemporary events and narratives” (14) that allow for paranoia to function in this specific way? In *Latent Destinies*, O'Donnell analyzes historical events such as the assassination of JFK to demonstrate how they generate paranoid responses, which then lead to fictional representations.² In *Chronic City*, the contemporary event that allows for paranoia to function in this specific way is presumably 9/11. Furthermore, rather than functioning as a communicative tool for individuals related to the symbolic order, paranoia allows characters to confront the horrors of the Real in *Chronic City*. To understand this interpretation, though, the reading of 9/11 as an “introduction to the ‘desert of the real’” (Žižek 386) and the emergence of what Grey calls the “the blank stare of the actual” (*After the Fall* 2) must be understood.

In his *Ten Lessons in Theory: An Introduction to Theoretical Writing*, Calvin Thomas claims that “language must *separate* itself from the real thing, cut itself off from the really real” (63). 9/11, in the way that it embodies what Gray calls the “widespread sense that words failed in the face of both the crisis and its aftermath” (*After the Fall 2*), is a traumatic event in which language fails as a tool of human symbolization. Critics have often suggested that 9/11 stands outside of symbolization, linking it to the concept of the Real that refuses to be symbolized. I argue *Chronic City* confronts the Real as exemplified by 9/11 by ironically acknowledging the inability to represent the event. That is, the text’s paranoiac allusions to 9/11 that never actually say if the event occurred and its characters’ fetishistic fascination with chaldrons make the novel an example of disavowing fiction that simultaneously confirms and denies the actual incident for readers.

Lethem seemingly defines an example of disavowal on the novel’s third page. Chase, still describing his initial meeting with Perkus, claims that Perkus had “lapsed into what I would soon learn to call one of his ‘ellipsitic’ moods” (3). Chase states that “Perkus Tooth himself later supplied that descriptive word: ellipsitic, derived from *ellipsis*. A species of blank interval, a nod or fugue in which he was neither depressed nor undepressed, not struggling to finish a thought nor to begin one. Merely between. Pause button pushed” (3). This passage functions as an example of disavowal because it captures the indeterminate state that defines disavowal. Perkus’ “ellipsitic mood” (3) resembles the Freudian fetishist’s dichotomous view of his mother’s castration, and, as such, raises the question of what exactly Perkus chooses to disavow. As I claimed before, the event Perkus and all of the other characters in the novel disavow is possibly 9/11, yet Lethem never explicitly states whether or not 9/11 occurred in the novel. He comes very close sometimes, but reading even his most specific allusion to the event as an explicit

reference is a leap that textual evidence does not justify. Therefore, as in *Let the Great World Spin*, the act of disavowal works on two levels in *Chronic City*. On one level, characters in the novel disavow an unnamed trauma that may or may not be 9/11. On a second level, readers, in attempting to define the textual trauma as 9/11 but not being able to do so because of a lack of evidence, disavow the event as well. In *Chronic City*, the event exists in an “ellipsitic” (3) state in which, like the perceived castration of the mother of the Freudian fetishist, it has both occurred and not occurred.

The narrative of *Chronic City* focuses primarily on the relationship formed between Chase and Perkus as a result of their first meeting. Peacock posits that because this friendship serves as the primary narrative focus, “*Chronic City* can be considered a contemporary participant in a genre dubbed by Lawrence Buell ‘observer-hero narrative’; other examples include *Moby Dick*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Good Soldier*” (150).³ Citing Buell, Peacock claims that the observer-hero narrative “is characterized by the interdependence and inseparability of the observer and hero, despite the latter’s ‘more intensely focused and more romantic worldview’” (150). Peacock further claims that in *Chronic City*, Perkus is the hero and Chase the observer (150). While providing an interesting insight into the novel, Peacock erroneously claims that the strategy used to deal with the trauma alluded to throughout the novel is “willed amnesia” (151-52). He contends that after Perkus visits a doctor for migraines early in the text, Perkus is “instantly diagnosed” with “the willed amnesia at the heart of *Chronic City*, the deliberate avoidance of the event which more than any other has shaped attitudes to New York City in the twenty-first century – the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center” (151-52). He makes this claim based on two separate passages: Perkus’ doctor telling Perkus, “You mourn a loss suffered by the world. Something in living memory, but not adequately remembered” (79)

and Chase mentioning Perkus' use of the word "*amnesiacked*" (*sic*) (13) early in the text. Chase defines "*amnesiacked*" (13) as "something like the Mafia itself would do, a whack, a rubout. Everything that mattered most was a victim in this perceptual murder plot. Further: always to blame was everyone; when rounding up the suspects, begin with yourself" (13). Again, though Peacock provides a cogent and valuable analysis of *Chronic City* based on evidence, "willed amnesia" (152) is not the proper term for Perkus' affliction.

Rather than "willed amnesia" (152), the mental process that Perkus undergoes that also functions as the thematic focus of *Chronic City* is disavowal. I make this claim because Peacock's proposed "willed amnesia" (152) can be understood as an intentional form of forgetting. However, I believe that Lethem does not want both his characters in and readers of *Chronic City* to forget intentionally any specific trauma. Instead, the fact that multiple characters experience paranoia about an unnamed trauma that may or may not be 9/11 indicates that some sort of trauma occurred and that one should feel paranoid about it in response. In Freudian terms, similar to the way "the horror of castration has set up a memorial to itself in the creation of its substitute" (154), experiencing paranoia, by its very nature, sets up a memorial to an event that first caused paranoia, which could be witnessing 9/11, viewing the disordered underbelly of Manhattan, or experiencing a traumatic event. Contrarily, the act of willed amnesia resembles a simple form of denial in that no creativity is required for the completion of the act because one simply denies or willfully forgets a specific occurrence. However, as I stated earlier, disavowal possesses a creative characteristic, and in *Chronic City*, that characteristic is paranoia. An unnamed trauma has occurred at some point before the start of the novel, and the characters' paranoid responses throughout the text, particularly Perkus', inarguably implies that a trauma has happened. However, the text never makes clear if this trauma is 9/11. In assuming that it is,

readers thus interpret the novel itself as a sort of fetish that allows for 9/11 both to have occurred and not occurred. I turn to the text's many possible allusions to 9/11 to validate this claim.

The most direct allusion to a trauma that is possibly 9/11 appears very early in *Chronic City*. Chase and Perkus attend a dinner party, and they participate in a conversation that refers specifically to the year 2001. Richard Abneg, one of Chase and Perkus' friends and also a member of what Peacock calls the "idiosyncratic subculture, haunting the Upper East Side's privileged dinner party circuit" (148) describes his lackluster trip to Stonehenge. He claims that he "wanted to be like one of those apes in, whatchamacallit, *2001*, by whatisname, Kubrick, you know, kneeling in fear before those slabs, getting brain-zapped" (39). Another individual at the party responds, "They should change the name of that movie since the real 2001 turned out so different" (39). Readers may assume that Lethem will provide proof of whether or not the 2001 referred to in this passage is the same as the historical and non-diegetic 2001, but he leaves this possible allusion behind and never provides substantial evidence to confirm this possibility. Furthermore, the thirty-nine pages of text that readers have experienced prior to this point contain too great a mixture of actual and fictional individuals, dates, and occurrences for readers to say definitively if this mention of 2001 is an allusion to the historical 2001 outside of the text. For instance, aside from "*The City is a Maze*" (1), Chase and Perkus' first conversation contains references to the fictional films "*Prelude to a Certain Midnight*" (3), presumably based on the 1947 novel of the same name by Geraldine Welsh; "*Recalcitrant Women*," (3) a film with no real-life referent; "*The Unholy City*," (3) presumably based on the 1937 novel by Charles G. Finney; and "*Echolalia*" (3), a fictional documentary made by the real-life director Werner Herzog. Additionally, in the novel's first chapter, Chase learns of Perkus' affinity for a television puppet show called "*The Gnuppet Show*," a fictitious allusion to *The Muppet Show*.

However, Chase also contemplates Perkus' love for "Slavoj Zizek on Hitchcock" (12), Norman Mailer, and Marlon Brando, all of whom are individuals that exist or have existed outside the narrative world of *Chronic City*.

What this mixture of the real and the fictional points to is the concept of disavowal. That is, in a direct quotation from DeLillo's *Libra*, *Chronic City*, as a work of disavowing fiction, immerses readers in what Chase calls "the world inside the world" (27). In this "world inside the world" (27), Norman Mailer and Marlon Brando exist, but so does "Ralph Warden Meeker" (100), the fictitious author of the enormous novel "*Obstinate Dust*" (100), an obvious homage to Wallace's 1996 novel *Infinite Jest*. More importantly, in this "world inside the world" (27), the twin towers exist in a state of simultaneity in which they both stand and do not stand. That is, because of the lack of evidence related to the novel's temporal setting and the text's continuous supplying of actual and fictional details, readers cannot say if 9/11 occurred in the novel. Nevertheless, the barrage of allusions to 9/11, which I continue to examine below, compels readers to deduce that the event occurred in the text. Therefore, in *Chronic City*, just like in *Let the Great World Spin*, 9/11 resides in a state of indeterminacy for readers. What is arguably more interesting is that the characters in the novel cannot determine if the event occurred either. Peacock labels this inability "willed amnesia" (152), but I claim it to be disavowal. Regardless of this interpretative difference, this inability leads to specific desires and complications for the novel's characters.

The next possible allusion to 9/11 in the text appears when Chase and Perkus help Richard deal with a pair of eagles that have built a nest directly outside of Richard's apartment, which is located in a Manhattan high-rise. The three characters discuss possible ways of getting the eagles to leave and have trouble devising a solution. Perkus suggests, "Maybe we could

corral a whole bunch of mice and squirrels and pigeons together. If they somehow were all run up the side of the building at once, when the eagles were sleeping” (53). Chase then states that Perkus “flipped eagerly through the *Guide’s* back pages, perhaps scanning the index for some precedent” (53). These two quotations are difficult not to read as ironic allusions to 9/11 for multiple reasons. The scenario Perkus describes can be read as a recreation of 9/11 with the mice, squirrels, and pigeons, which symbolize the terrorists, surprisingly attacking the sleeping eagles in the tower, which symbolize the innocent victims of the attack. Furthermore, it seems to be no coincidence that the animal being attacked is an eagle, which appears on the Great Seal of the United States, sleeping in a tower. The fact Perkus looks in the index of the “*Field Guide*” (51) to see if such an event has occurred before further complicates matter because Lethem wants readers to read this possible allusion dichotomously. That is, this scenario functions as both a reference to 9/11 and as a fictional solution to a unique pest problem. In reading the text this way, the towers can be read as both standing and destroyed in the narrative world of *Chronic City*.

In what Peacock claims is the “most obvious symbolic contrivance” (152) in the text alluding to 9/11, Chase contemplates a different group of birds on “a church spire three or four blocks away” (67) from his apartment towards the end of chapter four. Chase claims, “I take a moment every day on waking to glance at it to see whether the birds are there” (67). He further elaborates on this ritual and its possible significance:

On some days, while I’m watching the flock loop at the spire, a passing airplane putters at high layers past the top of my window frame, leaving a faint contrail [...]. A planeload of people on their way somewhere from somewhere else, having as little to do with birds or tower as birds or tower have to do with

each other. I am the only witness to their conjunction. The privilege of my witnessing is limited to that fact: there's nothing more I grasp [...]. Or if a relation exists, I don't fathom it. (68)

Däwes provides a sound reading of this passage that encapsulates the way in which Chase disavows a traumatic event, possibly 9/11. She claims that “in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the semantic relation between airplanes and tower is evident, and Chase's simultaneous elaboration and denial of this connection testifies to its significance. 9/11 enters the novel through implication and absence” (110). This entrance through implication and absence is generated by readers' inferences and deductions. Unlike *Let the Great World Spin*, *Chronic City* never directly mentions 9/11. Accordingly, readers can claim, based on analysis of multiple forms of evidence, that the towers still stand in the Manhattan of the novel. However, readers can also claim that the novel's possible allusions to 9/11 function as evidence that the twin towers in the novel fell. As I claimed earlier, the novel, when viewed in this dichotomous lens, functions as a sort of fetish that allows readers to deny 9/11 while simultaneously accepting its occurrence. Or, as Lethem states in *The Ecstasy of Influence*, in *Chronic City* the horrors of 9/11 are disavowed in a “sidelong glance, sublimating the fact in speculation” (235).

Though others exist throughout the text, one of the most telling allusions to a trauma that is possibly 9/11 appears at the beginning of chapter ten in what Peacock calls “the closest Chase's narration comes to explicit acknowledgement” (152). In this episode, Chase describes a recent phenomenon that has occurred in the Manhattan of the text:

Then came the weird pervasive chocolate smell that floated like a clover over Manhattan. At first you thought it was local, you'd passed an unseen bakery, smelled something wafting, chocolate-sweet, stirring cravings and memoires both.

You'd scan the area, find nothing, continue on, but the smell was with you everywhere, with you in your apartment, too, though the windows were tight. On the street again, you'd see others glancing up, sniffing air, bemused. And soon confirming: yes, they smelled the same thing [...]. Someone said that the mayor had already given a statement, enigmatically terse, maybe hiding something. The chocolate tugged Manhattan's mind in two directions, recalling the inevitably gray fog that had descended or some said been unleashed on the lower part of the island, two or three years ago, and that had yet to release its doomy grip on that zone. (173-74)

This passage features possible allusions to 9/11, ranging from the gray fog hanging over the city to the mysteriousness of the chocolate smell and its dichotomous effects on the inhabitants of this fictional Manhattan. In this quotation and the one that follows it, perhaps the most important implication is that the individuals who acknowledge the chocolate smell interpret the incident as simply another occurrence confirming the ideological notion that, as Chase claims, "We all dwelled in Candyland" (174). He elaborates on this notion when he states, "So much for the deliberate terrors advancing on our shores, let alone our complicity with any wider darkness. We were, it turned out, a whole island of crimeless victims, survivors of nothing worse than a cream pie in the face, which, hey, tasted pretty good" (174). This passage implies that the inhabitants of *Chronic City's* fictional Manhattan acknowledge that there is an ideological structure in place governing the reality around them. Moreover, this structure is potentially benevolent and ultimately enjoyable and may or may not be connected with the unnamed trauma that occurred. Before discussing the implications of the ideological nature of the text's Manhattan, I clarify the concept of ideology according to Louis Althusser and Žižek. From there, I demonstrate what the

chaldrons symbolize in relation to that ideology, what certain characters do when learning of it, and the significance of Chase and Perkus' ultimate fate at the novel's conclusion.

About halfway through his 1970 essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," Althusser succinctly defines ideology as the way "men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form" (123). With this statement, Althusser posits that ideology functions when human beings represent the world to themselves as something other than what it actually is. This claim implies a question: what would possess human beings to misrepresent reality intentionally? Theoretical writers such as Karl Marx have argued that reality, that is nature in its most primitive form, "first appears to men as a completely alien, all-powerful, and unassailable force, with which men's relations are purely animal and by which they are overawed" (158). Facing this issue, human beings have to do work both on and against nature, and, in doing so, they create an ideological structure out of nature that they then imagine has always existed and will continue to exist forever. More often than not, for Marx, Althusser, and Žižek, one group of individuals holds power over another group of individuals and uses ideology as a non-violent tool to keep that power structure in place. Žižek claims in "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?" that "ideology consists in the very fact that the people 'do not know what they are really doing,' that they have a false representation of the social reality to which they belong (the distortion produced, of course, by the same reality)" (314). With this framework of ideology in mind, I turn back to the text to demonstrate how characters in *Chronic City* deal with their ideologically structured environments and what happens when certain characters discover the truth of their false perceptions.

In chapter nine, Chase, Richard and Georgina Hawkmanaji meet at Perkus' apartment because Perkus wants to discuss an important matter. The four characters smoke marijuana together because Perkus claimed that "you'll want to be freshly stoned" (139) before experiencing his discovery, which is that a chaldron can be purchased on eBay. Gathering around his computer in Perkus' dark apartment, the four individuals view a computer-generated image of a chaldron. Chase describes the euphoric feeling he gets when viewing the object. He claims:

The glowing peach-colored chaldron smashed all available frames or contexts, gently burning itself through our retinas to hover in our collective mind's eye, a beholding that transcended optics. Ordinary proportions and ratios were upturned, the chaldron an opera pouring from a flea's mouth, an altarpiece bigger than the museum that contained it. The only comparison in any of our hearts being of, of course, *love*. (141)

As this passage illustrates, the chaldrons hold a powerful sway over Chase, Perkus, and the other characters in the text who view the objects. Chase later states, "I couldn't doubt the chaldron as a *door*, even if I hung somewhat at the door's threshold" (142). He even goes so far as to say that "its effect was to make constructed things, theories and arguments, cities and hairstyles, attitudes, sentences, all seem tawdry, impoverished, lame[...]. The chaldron's door might open to a place where selves dissolved and merged. Anything was possible" (142-43). These ecstatic feelings Chase experiences show that the chaldrons produce a specific effect on their viewers: they have the potential to blur the lines between self and object. As such, a chaldron can function as a door to another perception of reality wherein, as Chase claims, the object "possessed *thingliness*, yet was wholly outside the complex of *thing-relations*" (143).

However, the characters' relationships to the chaldrons are complicated when an anonymous bidder swoops in and purchases the object for a high price of fourteen thousand dollars. Chase states, "We'd never been in the game, never been near to in it" (149). Perkus, nevertheless, suggests that "I've come to see that it's enough to put on the music, smoke some Ice, and, you know, bid on them. Just that feeling is enough. It gets me through, knowing that it's out there. Increasingly, I think that that's what they're *for*. It's like an indirect thing, who knows if it would even work if you had it right in front of you" (145). This indirect relationship holds specific implications for the principal characters of *Chronic City* and can be understood as a form of fetishism that relates to the ideological nature of the text's fictional Manhattan. I turn to Christian Metz's essay "Disavowal, Fetishism" to help explain these implications.

Metz claims that "the fetish itself, in its cinematic manifestations...consists fundamentally of the equipment of the cinema" (30). He then delineates the various ways in which film equipment can be understood as different fetishes. While *Chronic City* is not a film, I contend that Metz's utilization of Freud's theory of fetishism, as it relates to film projection, resembles the fetishistic nature of the chaldrons in the novel. Towards the end of his essay, Metz claims that the fetishistic nature of film projection can be understood as follows:

The point is to gamble simultaneously on the excitation of desire and its non-fulfillment (which is its opposite and yet favors it) by the infinite variations made possible precisely by the studios' technique on the exact emplacement of the *boundary* that bars the look, that puts an end to the "seen," that inaugurates the downward (or upward) tilt into the dark, towards the unseen, the guessed at. (32)

I argue that the "studios" (32) from Metz's quotation can be interpreted as the nameless individuals, whom Chase refers to as "the mayor and other overlords" (284), which structure the

ideological nature of Manhattan in the novel. Whoever created the chaldrons in *Chronic City* gambles “simultaneously on the excitation of desire and its non-fulfillment” (32) in the individuals that view the chaldrons. That is, the creators of the chaldrons want to generate a sense of desire and excitement in individuals that view the chaldrons. More importantly, this desire will never be satiated but rather will create a lasting longing for the chaldrons that will keep the ideological structure of the fictional Manhattan in place. Therefore, the fact that the chaldrons are fake objects in the diegetic world of the novel holds thematic significance as well because their artificial nature both prevents characters from ever possessing the objects and maintains the ideological structure the chaldrons reify. They are the “crème de la crème of virtual treasure” (344) in what the text describes as “neither a video game nor an online community” (224), the virtual experience known as “Yet Another World” (224). “Yet Another World,” is “only a set of templates and tools...a place where you can do things” (224). Chase describes it in more detail when he claims “you might go there to build a virtual house, to furnish it with the virtual objects you liked. Much of it...was pretty much like the world out here—homes with belongings inside” (224). The fact that characters in the novel had quit trading the chaldrons for virtual currency and that “they only changed hands for dollars now, and quite a lot of those” (345) holds significance for both Chase and Perkus as well as my overarching argument.

The chaldrons, as objects that cross the line separating the fictional Manhattan in *Chronic City* and the simulated “Yet Another World” within that Manhattan, function as fetish objects that complicate the process of disavowal. Perkus clarifies this complication when he claims that, “the fact that we develop simulations of our own only drains their computing power if the way they simulate is to make everything exist *whether we look at it or not*. If, on the other hand, the

simulators only trouble to put stuff where we're going to look at it, then the amount of effort and energy is the same" (266). He provides a hypothetical scenario to further elucidate his complex argument. He states:

It's like this. Picture a man in a library. The books are all blank, until he picks one out. Then the simulator—or whatever—fills in that book, only for as long as he leafs through it, inscribing the minimum number of words, just in time for his eyes to meet the page. If he drops that book and selects another, the simulator's efforts go to making *that* book exist. But the preponderance of the library is a bluff, just a lot of book spines that that wouldn't even have titles if you didn't look too closely. (266-67)

This hypothetical example relates specifically to fetishism and disavowal, so I return to Freud's traumatic scene of the little boy perceiving his mother's castration to demonstrate this claim. Similar to the way a book in Perkus' imaginary library does not have words in it until the man picks it up and views it, before the boy sees his mother naked, the mother is not castrated. However, the boy's consciousness, or the "simulator" or "whatever" (266) Perkus refers to, misinterprets the image, and in doing so, changes it. That is, the boy sees his mother's lack of a penis, and his consciousness determines that she has been castrated and then utilizes a fetish to deal with this inaccurate interpretation. Commenting on Freud's traumatic scene, Metz claims that "thus is established the lasting matrix, the affective prototype of all the splitting of belief which man will henceforth be capable of in the most varied domains, of all the infinitely complex unconscious and occasionally conscious interactions which he will allow himself between 'believing' and 'not believing'" (29). I turn to Perkus' response of learning of the

chaldrons true nature to bring my analysis back to the possibility of 9/11 having occurred or not occurred in the text and what that possibility offers readers.

After learning that the chaldrons do not really exist, Perkus comes to believe that the Manhattan he and Chase inhabit is a simulation. He also catches a chronic case of powerful hiccups from which he eventually dies because he “ruptured his internal organry in ten places” (423). His speech begins to suffer from his affliction, which is illustrated by large blank spaces separating his portions of his dialogue. Late in the novel he makes his ultimate claim about the fabricated nature of reality as depicted in *Chronic City* and what he believes caused it to become that way in the first place. He tells Chase³:

Something happened, Chase, there was some rupture in this city. Since then, time’s been fragmented. Might have to do with the gray fog, that or some other disaster. Whatever the cause, ever since we’ve been living in a place that’s a replica of itself, a fragile simulacrum, full of gaps and glitches. *A theme park*, really! Meant to halt time’s encroachment. Of course such a thing is destined always to fail, time has a way of getting its bills paid. So these disjunctions appear, and we have to explain them away (389).

The disjunctions Perkus refers to include but are not limited to the artificial chaldrons, the gray fog hovering over the island, and the chocolate smell whose source no one can determine. All of these seemingly imply that an event or events happened that first caused the disjunctions or that individuals exist who are responsible for these disjunctions. However, most of the characters that inhabit the Manhattan depicted in the text do not seek the cause of these occurrences. More importantly, the one character who discovers the possible truth is destroyed. Therefore, as Perkus claims, “the point is how we forget the most basic fact of ourselves on a daily basis, even

while we go around playing our parts, believing ourselves perfectly continuous. Yet a thing can be blotted from the very center of our vision and we won't notice! Even the very thing we should most remember" (393)⁵. This "blotting out" Perkus describes is disavowal, and it raises a specific question about Lethem's thoughts on 9/11 and how they are communicated throughout *Chronic City* (393).

I argue that with *Chronic City* Lethem attempts to place his readers in a simultaneous textual space of belief and disbelief in which a trauma like 9/11 can be better understood. I make this claim because of the way Perkus' physical demise and death is depicted in the novel. Perkus, the most paranoid character in the text who also first found out that the city he inhabits may be simulated, loses both his mental sanity and physical capabilities and eventually dies from a simple bodily function, hiccups. Contrarily, Chase, who witnesses his friend's demise, chooses to exist in a state of indeterminacy in which the disjunctions of the city around him indicate a dichotomous fact. That is, a traumatic event has occurred, but it has also not occurred. More precisely, the birds outside his window and the gray fog indicate a traumatic occurrence worth being paranoid about, but they also indicate nothing more than the meaninglessness of random events. Even so, Lethem does not want readers to forget that 9/11 occurred outside of the text. Rather, I believe that he wants them to accept its occurrence but to disavow any possible meaning or connotation that can be found in the event. In doing so, the destruction of the twin towers, which represents the terror of the Real, holds a specific meaning and at the same time lacks one. Consider the brief essay "Further Reports in Dead Language" Lethem wrote shortly after 9/11 to understand this claim better. In the aftermath of the event, Lethem concludes that "language is metaphysics, and I hate metaphysics today. I hate the religious and philosophical lies which estrange me from the immediate life in favor of lost or imaginary kingdoms and

gardens, in favor of paradisiacal or hellish afterlives, all lies” (228). Indeed, Lethem’s immediate response to 9/11 as recorded in his essay and his negative feelings about language complicate my interpretation of *Chronic City*, a literary text that uses language to communicate its ideas. Consequently, I attempt to clarify my final thoughts on what Lethem hoped to achieve with the novel and what the text offers readers compared to other post-9/11 novels.

Chronic City ultimately illustrates the different ways individuals can view a traumatic event like 9/11. Rather than becoming a manic paranoid who finds meaning in everything related to the trauma or a nihilist who detaches from any possible synthesis, with *Chronic City*, Lethem suggests disavowing the event is the most beneficial coping mechanism. Disavowal allows for 9/11 to exist in a simultaneous state in which, in one state, it can be mediated via language, and in another, it exists as traumatic product of the Real, forever outside of language and symbolization. Lethem captures this simultaneous existence at the end of the novel as Chase ponders the possibility that the tower outside of his window may have moved. He claims, “The Dorffl Tower had shifted a little to the right, shaving another margin from my window’s view. I don’t know how this can be possible, but then again there are so many things that escape me. It’s still a view I can live with. I only hope it doesn’t get smaller” (467). This passage implies that Chase has chosen to live in a state of disavowal in which the tower has both moved and not moved, but the point is that he can live with the view. Lethem leaves readers with this simultaneous view for a specific reason. In living in this simultaneous view, readers can come to comprehend 9/11 as an occurrence at once defined through language and speculatively distorted through fiction.

4 Conclusion

Chronic City concludes with its readers still left questioning whether or not the Manhattan depicted in the novel is, in fact, a simulation. I believe Lethem leaves his readers in this state of unknowing because it forces them out of their possible comfort zones regarding closure and meaning in narrative and makes readers consider their own position within the ideological environments around them. Furthermore, in killing off the most paranoid character of the novel, Perkus, while allowing the role-playing narrator, Chase, to live, Lethem indicates where devout paranoia can lead, but also where suspicious submission can lead as well. I make this claim because of Chase's final depiction in the novel. He resides in a place of mental indeterminacy in which an ideological structure controls the text's Manhattan but also, at the same time, does not. He believes that Perkus was murdered by the conspirators controlling the city, but he also believes Perkus died of a freak case of the hiccups. The point Lethem attempts to make is that devout paranoia and lackadaisical compliance sit on opposite ends of a spectrum of perception on which individuals in the twenty-first century cannot reside. While Perkus is destroyed because of his paranoia, a character such as Oona Lazlo, Chase's lover throughout much of the text, becomes a part of the controlling ideology because of her compliance. The ultimate message *Chronic City* attempts to convey is that there is no answer to why traumatic events such as 9/11 occur, but willfully accepting or skeptically rejecting any possible reasons or meanings leads to further personal trauma that prevents one from ever living with the ramifications of the initial trauma. The best one can hope for is to find a perception one can live with that, according to Chase, "doesn't get any smaller" (467).

This message differs from McCann in *Let the Great World Spin* because McCann does not tackle the implications of ideology and paranoia in relation to 9/11. Rather, he emphasizes

the importance of human connection and how it can help individuals overcome multiple traumas. Moreover, he stresses how fictionally recreating the past, rather than living it, can function as a redemptive and consoling strategy for individuals dealing with trauma. Consider, again, the way *Let the Great World Spin* differs from other major works of post-9/11 fiction. From *Falling Man* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close to Netherland* and even *Terrorist*, all of these texts, in some way, attempt to represent the event or aspects of the event from specific points of view. However, as McCann asks in his interview with Englander, how is it possible to represent accurately “the events of that terrible September, and all the Septembers that followed” (362)? Facing this dilemma, an author can approach the event like DeLillo, whose text denies solace and in which, as Versluys claims, “trauma is not healed” (30). An author can try to depict the event like Foer, whose text examines the trauma through the eyes of a child affected by the event but also provides dozens of page-length photos that slow down and ultimately sentimentalize the narrative and its representation of 9/11. An author can attempt to view the event from the perspective of outsiders, similar to the way O’Neill and Updike do. However, even when viewed by fictional foreigners, the event transcends aspects of twenty-first century political correctness and conquers representation from an unfamiliar point of view. In short, analogous to the way that it took roughly fourteen years for narrative films to be released that accurately and affectively represented the trauma of the Holocaust (*The Diary of Anne Frank*, 1959) and Hiroshima (*Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, 1959), it may take that long for accurate fictional representations of 9/11 to be released as well.¹ 9/11 still symbolizes the traumatic terror of the Real, and representing it accurately, even at all, is arguably an impossible task. Myers even goes so far as to claim that “the 9/11 books add little that cannot be learned, and more memorably,

from them.²” While this is a rather lofty claim, it does raise important issues that I have addressed in this study that I believe McCann and Lethem attempt to tackle in their fiction.

If, as Myers claimed in 2011, “very few” worthwhile post-9/11 novels exist and that “every recommendation leads to a ‘but. . . ,’” then contemporary fiction authors face a difficult task.³ But what exactly is this task? Is it to write plot-driven fiction that accurately represents aspects of 9/11? Is it to write challenging fiction that metaphorically addresses the event? Is it a mixture of both of these? These questions are still being debated by authors and critics all over the world, some of whose opinions I have included in this study. I believe that Lethem and McCann viewed this perpetual discussion and decided that a definite answer not only does not exist but may never exist. However, as McCann claims, “stories are there to be told, and each story changes with the telling” (359). Moreover, “the only thing that matters, as Faulkner once put it, is the human heart in conflict with itself. At the heart of all this is the possibility, or desire, to create a piece of art that talks to the human instinct for recovery and joy” (McCann, *Walking* 359). I believe that *Let the Great World Spin* and *Chronic City* each capture this motif. That is, each novel, in different ways, compels its readers to enjoy fictional representations of Manhattan while simultaneously making them question the occurrence of 9/11 in those fictional Manhattans. In doing so, the novels exist as works of fiction that, through the process of disavowal, accurately represent 9/11 without ever actually representing it.

Notes

1 Introduction

1. Taken from Myers' annotated list featured in *Commentary* magazine in August 2011.
See: <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2011/08/24/911-novels/>
2. Däwes proposes that post-9/11 novels can be divided into five separate categories: metonymic, salvational, diagnostic, appropriative, symbolic, and writerly (8).
3. See *Portraying 9/11: Essays on Representations in Comics, Literature, Film and Theatre* (2011) by Veronique Bragard, Christophe Dony and Warren Rosenberg, *9/11 Culture* by Jeffery Melnick, *From Solidarity to Schism: 9/11 and after in Fiction and Film from Outside the US* (2009) by Cara Cilano, *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* (2011) by Martin Randall, and *Literature After 9/11* by Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn for examples of post-9/11 popular culture scholarship featuring essays on major works of post-9/11 fiction.
4. See "Truth Telling Fiction in a Post-9/11 World: Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*" in Marni Gauthier's 2011 *Amnesia and Redress in Contemporary American Fiction* and "New York and Its Fantasies After 9/11" in Max Page's 2008 *The City's End: Two Centuries of Fantasies, Fears, and Premonitions of New York's Destruction* for other examples of tangential approaches to post-9/11 fiction.
5. See Marco Abel's "Don DeLillo's 'In the Ruins of the Future': Literature, Images, and the Rhetoric of Seeing 9/11" (2003) and Linda Kaufman's "The Wake of Terror: Don DeLillo's 'In the Ruins of the Future,' 'Baader-Meinhof,' and *Falling Man*" (2008) for two excellent readings of DeLillo's article. See also Julien Bringuier's "Fiction After 9/11: A Journey Through the Desert of the Real" (2010), Richard Crownshaw's

“Deterritorializing the ‘Homeland’ in American Studies and American Fiction after 9/11” (2012), Kate Mason’s “The Corporeal Limits of Representation within Narrative: Bodies in American Literature of 9/11” (2008), and Penelope Pether’s “The New Exceptionalism: Law and Literature Since 9/11” (2007) for other noteworthy articles dedicated to works of post-9/11 fiction.

6. Versluys claims that the “novels by Charlotte Vale Allen, Rick Amburgey, Karen Kingsbury, and Kingsbury with Gary Smalley” (196) are conversional fetishistic post-9/11 novels. He also claims that “fetishistic 9/11 narratives mostly demonstrate a right-wing political bias, but not always” (196). He singles out Peter Hamill’s 2003 *Forever* as an example of a “left-liberal account” of the event that incorporates aspects of fetishism (196).
7. Kocela cites Octave Mannoni’s 1969 essay “*Jes sais bien, mais quand même*” for the phrase “I know very well, but nevertheless...” (9).
8. Kocela provides a list of texts that “dramatize in highly sophisticated ways the conventional Freudian logic of fetishism” (222). He also suggests that “short stories appear to be a particularly apt venue for representing disavowal” and includes works by Gloria Naylor, Ann Beattie, A.M. Homes, and Jhumpa Lahiri as examples (222). Aside from Kocela’s list, little scholarship analyzes fiction that uses the Freudian concept of disavowal to address trauma, specifically 9/11. Francis Mulhern’s 2006 “Inconceivable History: Story-Telling as Hyperphasia and Disavowal” analyzes the work of Joseph Conrad via fetishistic disavowal. Luke John Howie’s 2009 “Representing Terrorism: Reanimating Post-9/11 New York City” provides an excellent analysis of post-9/11 episodes of *Friends* using fetishistic disavowal. Lastly, Jean Wyatt’s 2009 “Signifying

Contortions: Disavowal, the Enigmatic Signifier, and George W. Bush after 9/11” analyzes how the process of fetishistic disavowal allowed people to accept the dishonest tactics of George W. Bush after 9/11.

2 Rebuilding the City or Denying Its Destruction: *Let the Great World Spin*

1. My emphasis added on all pronouns.
2. Definition taken from the online Oxford English Dictionary. See:
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/view/Entry/49965?redirectedFrom=denial#eid>
3. See Stanley Cohen’s 2001 *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* for an interesting and cogent analysis of what he considers to be three different forms of denial (3-5).

3 Reality or Simulation: *Chronic City*

1. Taken from Kakutani’s article featured in the October 10, 2009 edition of the New York Times. See: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/13/books/13kakutani.html?_r=0
2. O’Donnell analyzes fictional texts such as DeLillo’s *Libra* and *Underworld* (1997), Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, and Oliver Stone’s 1991 film *J.F.K.*
3. See: Buell, Lawrence. "Observer-Hero Narrative." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language: A Journal of the Humanities* 21.(1979): 93-111. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 7 Apr. 2014.
4. Spacing as it appears in the text
5. Spacing as it appears in the text

4 Conclusion

1. To date, I believe only one narrative film accurately represents events of 9/11, Paul Greengrass’ 2006 *United 93*. Oliver Stone’s 2006 *World Trade Center* and Stephen Daldry’s

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close feature outstanding depictions of the event, and Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* addresses the aftermath of the event and its global consequences. However, Greengrass' film is the only narrative film that, I argue, accurately captures the chaotic and terrifying nature of the event as it happened. See Versluys' "9/11: The Discursive Responses" in *Out of the Blue* for a brief but cogent analysis of the challenges of representing 9/11 in a narrative film.

2. See: <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2011/08/24/911-novels/>
3. See: <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2011/08/24/911-novels/>

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