At a Loss:
the Process of Mourning in Three Post-9/11 Novels

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Introduction
Introduction

The subject of this paper is post-9/11 literature. Literally speaking all literature written after 9/11 could be considered post-9/11 literature however, for the purpose of this dissertation I will only refer to novels by that term that specifically deal with 9/11 and its aftermath. The September 11 terrorist attacks have often been labeled as a global event as America’s response to it was felt throughout the world; and there is no denying the fact that 9/11 has changed the world considerably. In her works *Precarious Lives* and *An Account of Oneself* Judith Butler investigates, among other things, the impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on American culture, America’s response and its impact on the global community in general. She also points out that the changes in the world as a result of 9/11 can be considered a mourning process. The event shattered the existing worldview in which the United States was considered a leading nation and an invincible super power. This resulted in a questioning of relations between countries; nations, western and otherwise, felt compelled to re-evaluate their cultural identities and their loyalties towards America and/or other countries. They were also expected to take a clear political stand concerning the attacks, the alleged perpetrators, and the US’s military response to 9/11.

“Either you’re with us or you’re with the terrorists!” President Bush’s famous phrase is indicative of the general mindset prevalent in the US in response to the attacks. This reaction of suspicion towards anything non-patriotic has highlighted the cultural differences within US borders as well as in the world. Since then there has been the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. The USA detained suspected terrorists indefinitely and without any form of a trial in Guantanamo Bay. Pictures of soldiers torturing inmates in Abu Ghraib went around the globe and the world has felt the increasing tension between the Muslim world and the West. However, as opposed to the “big picture” described above I am interested in how the attacks have affected the lives of individuals. As I consider literature to be a reflection of
society I would like to research how characters that were either physically or emotionally (or both) close to the attacks have responded to the loss and devastation as a result of 9/11. Can the characteristics of mourning, as described by Judith Butler in her works, also be found in literature? Butler proposes that in mourning the Self suffers not only because he/she has lost the Other but that in that loss the Self has also lost his/her sense of Self. Recognition and responsibility are important elements in the relationship between Self and Other. In this dissertation I want to research in what way Butler’s ideas of mourning can aid an analysis of the following three post 9/11 literary works: Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close by Jonathan Safran Foer, Joseph O’Neill’s Netherland, and The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid. Personal taste aside, my choice for these three novels can be explained through their similarities as well as their differences. The most important reason for my choice of these three novels is that 9/11 plays a central role in all three of them marking the attacks as an essential and life-changing moment in the personal lives of the protagonists.

In all three novels the central theme is loss. The protagonists have all lost something significant as a result of 9/11. In Netherland the protagonist loses his family as a result of marital difficulties; his wife leaves him, moves back to London, and takes their son with her. In Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close Oskar Schell is devastated when his father dies in the attacks while at the same time his grandfather mourns the loss of his son. A thoroughly different loss is experienced by Changez in The Reluctant Fundamentalist; experiencing the changes 9/11 has brought on in American society as a Muslim immigrant brings about a slow transformation in his attitude towards his host-country resulting in the loss of his love for America, the loss of his American Dream. The main characters all undergo a profoundly life-changing experience and the novels are a testament to their mourning. An in-depth analysis of the novels will show that the protagonists all go through a mourning process similar to the
one Butler describes in her works. However, the particulars of the process differ for each novel.

Themes of communication or lack of communication, loss, feeling lost, identity or identity crisis, the importance of family and cultural heritage are present and important in all three novels. Furthermore; the protagonists are all residents of New York City and they all have mixed cultural backgrounds. However, what makes it fascinating to examine these novels concomitantly is that all of the themes mentioned above are presented in three very different ways and from very different perspectives but that despite these differences the mourning process of the protagonists are very similar. This is significant as it shows that regardless of the character’s background, personal loss, social status, age, race, or attitude towards – in this case – America; subsequent to a traumatic event like 9/11 the characters go through similar mourning processes. Changez, the protagonist in The Reluctant Fundamentalist, comes from Lahore, Pakistan. His family is upper-class but they have fallen on hard times financially. The only way they can send their son to Princeton is by means of financial aid. At the time of the attacks Changez has graduated from university and has just started a promising career with a prestigious company in New York City. In Netherland, Hans van den Broek is a Dutch well-to-do stock analyst, married to an English attorney. This distinctly European family resides in Tribeca, New York City, when the towers collapse. Finally, in Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close the story is told by 9 year old Oskar Schell. On 9/11 he loses his father in the attacks. In an attempt to solve one last mystery concerning his father he goes all over New York City in search of answers. His family’s history is presented in letters written by his originally German grandparents who both survived the Dresden bombing in World War II.

I want to research mourning in these novels and I will use Judith Butler’s ideas to answer the questions I posed above. Earlier work by Butler has also been highly influential in
the discussion surrounding identity and the formation of identity and I will employ her theories on the concepts of Self and Other and the relationship between them to explain how this affects their mourning process. The following statement by Judith Butler shows how, in general, people respond to loss:

When we lose certain people, or when we are dispossessed from a place, or a community, [...] something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us. (*Precarious Lives* 22)

The phrase “something about who we are is revealed” indicates that identity is formed by extricable connections to others. What happens then if that other, that place, or that community is lost? When people mourn they do not only mourn the loss of the other, but they also mourn the loss of themselves. In my research I have found that what is revealed about the Self does not reveal itself instantly, but is reached through an intense process of mourning and re-evaluation of the self.

Chapter One presents the wider context of 9/11 literature. I will also discuss how the critics and the public in general have responded to art (or literature) dealing with 9/11. Then I will give a short summary and present the most important issues for all three novels as well as pay some attention to their reception.

The following questions will guide my analysis of the three novels in chapters Two, Three, and Four; first: what is the significance of communication and/or speech in the “self-other relationship”? Second: how does this influence the protagonists’ sense of self? And third: what is the importance of responsibility, towards the self as well as towards the other, in the completion of the mourning process?

Chapter Two gives an in-depth analysis of Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland*. After 9/11 Hans and Rachel’s marriage is broken. Hans is devastated and he mourns the loss of his
family. The faltering communication with his wife Rachel but also with others, the literal and figurative wanderings through New York and his (childhood) memories, and the importance of family are key subjects in the novel and important aspects of Hans’s mourning process.

Chapter Three discusses *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid. In order to show Changez’s response to the attacks and to analyze his mourning process I will discuss the themes of communication and language use, Changez’s memories of Pakistan combined with his views on the cultural change in America after 9/11, and eventually his loyalty towards his family and his homeland.

In chapter Four I will focus on two main characters in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*: Oskar Schell, the nine-year old who lost his father, and his grandfather Thomas Schell who lost his son. However, Thomas Schell has lost much more as becomes clear in the novel. His life story is presented in the form of letters Thomas has written to the son he never knew. In those letters we learn what he has lost in World War Two and how he has mourned that loss.

In my research I found that despite the many differences between the three novels in what the protagonists have lost, differences in perspective, style, and types of characters and their attitudes towards America, the process they go through is extremely similar. All experience sentiments as specified by Butler in her works. However, Butler’s ideas on mourning consist of separate elements and in this dissertation I will tie those elements together. Tying Butler’s theories together has enabled me to contend that mourning is a process in which the mourner goes through several stages before achieving closure. The literary representation of mourning in twenty-first century novels shows that communication, the protagonists’ sense of self, and responsibility are three key elements of the process that the characters undergo.
Chapter 1

9/11 and its Literature
9/11 and its Literature

9/11 Literature in a wider context

There are not many events in the history of the US that have had such an intense impact on American culture as the September 11 attacks. It is the most filmed day since the beginning of film and it is this abundance of live images that went all over the world that has made 9/11 into a global event (Marc Redfield, 66). It has stirred up much discussion about what images could or should be shown and which not. Many will remember the terrible images (film and photographs) of people who either fell or jumped out of the burning buildings. Within the US the general feeling was that these pictures should be kept out of the media. This discussion caused a dilemma; on the one hand people wanted to know about and record as much as possible while on the other hand there was this ethical issue: how far can you go in recording other people’s suffering? Even though literature obviously occupies a different realm than the world of journalism and the culture of real-life film and photographs, literature did find itself to be under a similar kind of scrutiny as the media. As Marc Redfield states in his article “Virtual Trauma”: “the aesthetic rendering of catastrophe [...] is sensed to be at once necessary and violent, imperative and obscene activities.” (71).

On the one hand people are looking at literature for answers: “Literature is analysis after the event” (Doris Lessing), on the other hand critics were unsure whether “the novel” would be the best medium for a discussion of 9/11. Is it a novel’s function to respond so soon to such an era-changing event? Jerome Weeks, on his blog, comments on the function and the place of the novel within a society that is characterized by round the clock reporting, a society in which everything is filmed, described and commented on almost simultaneously with the event:
In this light -- the light of a video monitor -- the "need" for a Great 9/11 Blockbuster Novel -- coming up next! -- is a journalism value, a value of corporate media, not an artistic value. It’s in response to a supposed consumer demand […] it’s misplaced:

Immediacy is not one of the novel's deep purposes.

As many critics have noted the emergence of a great literary work concerned with hefty issues like the Second World War or the Vietnam War always take time. The best novels usually appear years, sometimes even decades, after the event. The most famous examples are Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* (1961), a novel depicting World War II from 1943 onwards, *The Tin Drum* (1959) by Günter Grass in which Grass narrates the horrors of the Nazi regime through his protagonist Oskar Matzerath who decides never to grow up, and *War and Peace* (1869) by Tolstoy which chronicles the French invasion of Russia.

9/11 Literature as a genre then is still very new. As of 2009 there is already a considerable list of novels dealing, directly or indirectly, with the attacks even if, for many authors, it was not an easy task. Well known authors referred to their profession as something of a curse in the aftermath of 9/11. In his review of 9/11 fiction Pankaj Mishra quotes several of these authors. Knowing that the elephant in the room could not possibly be ignored yet at the same time reluctant to acknowledge its presence by writing about it Jay McInerney said, “Most novelists I know […] went through a period of intense self-examination and self-loathing after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.” (The End of Innocence). Martin Amis even takes it a step further by declaring that "after a couple of hours at their desks, on September 12 2001, all the writers on earth were reluctantly considering a change of occupation." (The End of Innocence). For the first few years writers tiptoed around the subject feeling that the wound was too fresh. America was still too steeped in nostalgia and extreme patriotic sentiments initiated by the American government
and mainstream media right after the attacks that many authors did not dare to touch the subject.

When the first 9/11 novels finally did appear responses were varied; some reviewers thought it was about time while others felt it was too soon and that the works that appeared is proof of that feeling. One Guardian reviewer stated that, “Post-9/11 fiction often seems to use the attacks and their aftermath too cheaply, as background for books that would have been written anyway.” (Does literature sell 9/11 short?). Another common point of critique concerning 9/11 fiction was that they did not offer any insight into the psychology of the perpetrators; that the authors cowardly avoided an attempt to analyze the evil Other or pass judgment on them. However, the few attempts that were made to crawl into a fundamentalist’s skin – Terrorist by John Updike and The Last Days of Muhammed Atta by Martin Amis – were not altogether successful. The novels offered a white man’s interpretation on issues far more complicated than just an infatuation with explosives and the promise of 72 virgins. In “The End of Innocence” Pankaj Mishra explains:

If inviting terrorists into the democratic realm of fiction was never less than risky, it is now further complicated by the new awareness of the mayhem they cause in actuality. Their novelist-host has to overcome much fear and revulsion in order to take seriously murderous passions aimed at his own society. Sympathy often breaks down, and hasty research reduces individuals as well as movements to stereotypical motivations.

Besides Amis and Updike there are several more well-known authors that have dared to broach the subject of the terrorist attacks. What follows is a short description of the novels that have received the most attention within the context of 9/11 literature. Two of the earliest post-9/11 novels that have received a considerable amount of attention were
written by well-known European authors: Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* and Frédéric Beigbeder’s *Windows on the World*. *Saturday* deals with a middle aged surgeon in London who ponders over the effects of the attacks on the Twin Towers when confronted with an anti-war rally in his city. *Windows on the World* has had considerable more impact than Ian McEwan’s novel as it takes its readers into one of the Towers where a father is having breakfast with his son at the time of the attacks. The novel is the narrative of the father who reflects on his life during his final minutes. Quoted in “Literary Novelists address 9/11, Finally”, Beigbeder remembers how readers responded to it: “I've had people say it is really obscene and disgusting to do that," he said. "But that is the idea of writing fiction about history. It is always shocking. We should not be afraid of writing about what is important."

Another novel that takes the reader very close into the action of the attacks is *Falling Man* by well-known author Don DeLillo, the master of conspiracy and ‘terrorist’ fiction. His novel opens with a man stumbling out of one of the burning towers, alive. In his shock he walks down to his wife’s apartment, who he has been separated from for a long time. In the months that follow they slowly assume their former family life while at the same time he engages in an affair with another 9/11 survivor and indulges in a gambling addiction. Much was expected from DeLillo’s novel but many critics commented on the story’s lack of coherency.

One of the most daring 9/11 novels is Ken Kalfus’ novel *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*. Published only 5 years after the attacks Kalfus boldly combines humour with the trauma of 9/11. Reviews varied from “the best novel yet about 9/11” (Salon.com, Laura Miller) to “a promise unfulfilled” (SFGate.com, Elizabeth Kiem). In the novel a husband and wife simultaneously hope that their estranged partner has died in one of the towers. Their disappointment is great when they find out neither of them has. Some reviewers have
criticized the fact that in the novel it never becomes clear why the characters hate each other so much and that because of that the narrative becomes something like an empty shell.

Change in communication, feelings of being lost, the remembrance and realization of the importance of family are essential themes in the novels that I have selected for this dissertation. *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close, Netherland,* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are all highly personal accounts of how 9/11 has affected the lives of the protagonists. In the novels the loss the characters experience as a result of 9/11 mark the onset of an intense mourning process in which the characters find themselves re-evaluating their sense of self and the transformation that is inherently connected to that process. One of the first 9/11 novels from an American author was *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer. This is one of the novels accused of using the attacks merely as a means to give it weight, a novel “that would have been written anyway despite the attacks” (Does literature sell 9/11 short?). The story revolves around loss. Loss of a father, loss of a son, loss of an unborn child and loss of a great love. The narrative is that of dealing with loss, coming to terms with it, surviving the pain. Both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and *Netherland* by Joseph O’Neill deal with 9/11 in a similar fashion. What I find interesting about these three novels is that despite the many differences, in style, voice, perspective, even subject matter, they share very similar descriptions of loss, grief and mourning; the process and transformation these characters go through are very much the same. The protagonists all lose something as a result of the attacks.

Hans van den Broek, a well-to-do Dutch stock analyst, loses his family when his wife and son leave him. The trauma of the attacks have caused a rift between Hans and his wife and their deteriorating communication leads to estrangement. This causes Hans to feel at a
loss as he is unsure of who he is without his family. Experiencing first-hand the change in American society in the months following the attacks Changez, a highly intelligent Pakistani immigrant, gradually loses his love for America as he finds himself moving back and forth between his American Dream and his loyalty towards his family and his homeland. Oskar Shell, the 9-year old protagonist in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* loses his father in the attacks. The novel is an account of how Oskar deals with this loss while at the same time it relates the story of the trauma experienced by his grandfather Thomas Schell and the fiancée and unborn child he lost in the bombing of Dresden during World War II.

**Netherland**

Joseph O’Neill, born in Ireland, raised in the Netherlands, and currently living in the Chelsea Hotel and working as a barrister in New York City has written one of the most well received “9/11 novels” to date. Reviews were lavish in their praise of the novel and so it was a big surprise for many critics that O’Neill was not shortlisted for the Booker Prize. *Netherland* was mostly heralded as being the best “American Dream” novel since *The Great Gatsby*, but it was also recognized as an important 9/11 novel: “But here’s what “Netherland” surely is: the wittiest, angriest, most exacting and most desolate work of fiction we’ve yet had about life in New York and London after the World Trade Center fell” (Andrew Anthony).

The story is not chronological. The opening chapter of the novel is set in 2006. Hans has been back in London for over two years now. One spring evening he receives a telephone call from a New York reporter informing him that Chuck Ramkissoon’s remains have been found in the Gowanus Canal. This disturbing news marks the onset of Hans’s retelling of his years in New York and all it entailed; the breaking up of his marriage, his bizarre friendship with the eccentric Chuck and his indulgence in his favorite childhood
sports: cricket. Despite his best efforts “to look away from New York – where, after all, I’d been unhappy for the first time in my life” (3) the said phone call forces Hans to remember those years and the novel follows Hans’s life from 9/11 onwards. Following the attacks on the Twin Towers Hans, Rachel, and their son have been evacuated from their loft in Tribeca. They move into the Chelsea Hotel where they remain even after the authorities have given the green light to return to their own apartment. Fear of another attack dominates their every day life, especially Rachel’s. Hans struggles with nightmares while “the fantastic howl of a passing motorbike once caused Rachel to vomit with terror” (23). Tired of living in constant fear Rachel decides to move back to London where it is safer, she feels, than in New York. After much talk and discussion it becomes obvious that Rachel’s anxieties are not the only reason for leaving; she feels that their marriage has suffered almost beyond repair and she wants a separation in order to gain some perspective. Rachel and their son move back to London while Hans remains behind. The separation from his family causes Hans to feel numb, lost and unhappy for the first time in his life. Every other weekend Hans flies to London to be with his son, but on the weekends that he stays in New York he plays cricket, his childhood sports, in order to chase away the pain of being alone. While playing cricket Hans meets Chuck Ramkissoon, a cricket fanatic from Trinidad who has great plans for a big cricket stadium in New York. Cricket also allows Hans to travel back in time to memories of his mother and the country he grew up in.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist

Mohsin Hamid is a 38 year old Pakistani writer who was born in Lahore, Pakistan. When he was three his family moved to America but returned to their homeland when Hamid was nine years old. When he was eighteen Hamid moved back to the States where he was
educated at Princeton and Harvard and since then he has lived both in the US and England. He still visits Pakistan regularly, mostly to write. Until now he has written two novels, *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Both books were received enthusiastically and have won many awards. The protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reminds of Hamid himself. Changez too is a Pakistani immigrant, educated at the best schools in the USA. This perspective, of a Pakistani living in the West writing about a Pakistani in New York at the time of the attacks, lends the novel its authority. The novel very subtly explores and explains how it is possible that “a lover of America” eventually turns his back on his American Dream. Before its publication in 2007 Hamid was a bit anxious about the novel’s reception. He felt it might be a bit too early for the American public to be confronted with the other side of the coin. Even though the book begins with the statement that the narrator is “a lover of America”, the narrative slowly and subtly evolves to show us American hypocrisy and the effects of the its aggressive response to 9/11. Great was his surprise when his novel became an instant bestseller and was rewarded with several prizes. One of the most significant reviews is by Kiran Desai,

> A brilliant book. With spooky restraint and masterful control, Hamid unpicks the underpinnings of the most recent episode of distrust between East and West. But this book does not merely excel in capturing a developing bitterness. The narrative is balanced by a love as powerful as the sinister forces gathering, even when it recedes into a phantom of hope. It is this balance, and the constant negotiation of the political with the personal, that creates a nuanced and complex portrait of a reluctant fundamentalist. (The Reluctant Fundamentalist website).
Mohsin Hamid’s novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a one way conversation between Changez, a Pakistani college professor in Lahore, Pakistan, and a silent American. Throughout the novel it remains unclear whether this American is either just a tourist or a rather threatening CIA agent as he never speaks, or is never allowed to speak. The story begins in a Lahore café where Changez approaches the American, initially to offer his assistance, but instead Changez ends up telling this stranger of his life in New York and his experience as a foreigner in America during the time of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Changez’s narrative begins before the attacks. As he graduates from Princeton, top of his class, he is invited to come work for one of the most prestigious firms in New York City. At the same time his friendship with his fellow Princetonian Erica slowly develops into something more romantic. Even though Changez misses his family often and despite a few irritations he feels when he is confronted with the cultural differences between America and Pakistan, he loves New York and the life that he leads there. However, after 9/11 things change, slowly but drastically. Both his relationship with Erica as well as his relationship with America deteriorate. While Erica is crippled by a severe depression which strains their still developing romance, Changez is also confronted with an aggressive and vengeful post-9/11 America.

Changez’s narrative is that of a young Muslim man juggling his American Dream simultaneously with a growing antipathy towards the US and feelings of loyalty towards his family and his home country. He struggles terribly with these ambiguous feelings: how can he be trying to pursue his American Dream while at the same time his host country’s missiles are aimed at his homeland? Over the course of the novel Changez is more and more confronted with the differences between America and Pakistan and eventually he decides for himself which of the two is deserving of his loyalty.
Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close

Jonathan Safran Foer whose debut novel Everything is Illuminated was an immediate success was one of the first to take it on himself to create a 9/11 novel: Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close. Unlike Netherland and The Reluctant Fundamentalist however, Foer’s novel was met incredibly varied commentary. There were of course positive reviews but a lot of critics were annoyed with almost everything in the novel: “I’m no ordinary boy, but the creation of a writer who's trying too hard. That's why you'll find doodles, photographs, pages with just a few words on them, blank pages and very small print littered throughout the text” and “Extremely annoying and incredibly pretentious.” (Editorial review “The Guardian”). Tim Adams summarized one of the most heard commentaries in his review; that by creating a nine-year old narrator, Foer managed to avoid “to do all the joined-up thinking that a more mature perspective might require” (“A Nine-Year-Old and 9/11”). Foer’s novel and himself were called arrogant and smug for using such an earth shattering event as a means to display his own wittiness, creativity, and ‘cuteness’. Michael Faber admits that, “Inauthentic though Foer's creations may seem, they are suffused with a profound sadness for things lost, a yearning to reconstitute a shattered past, to retrieve the irretrievable, repair the irreparable, express the inexpressible. In this he is as sincere and committed as he needs to be" (“A Tower of Babbel”).

Nine-year old Oskar Schell is, among other things, an inventor, jewelry designer, and amateur archeologist, who lost his father in the Twin Towers in the 9/11 attacks. After his father’s death Oskar finds a little envelope with the word Black written on it in his fathers closet. Inside there is a key. Hoping to solve the mystery of the key and the lock that it opens, and hoping that the answer will once more bring Oskar closer to his dad, he decides to visit every person in New York City named Black and ask them about the key. All through
the novel Oskar wanders around New York looking for answers. He is an anxious boy, often scared of another attack. He makes up impossible inventions to calm his nerves and spends a lot of time with his grandmother who lives in the apartment building across the street and knits him white sweaters, mittens and scarves. Another important character is Oskar’s grandfather who left his son before Oskar’s dad was even born. His life story is presented to the reader in the form of letters he has written, but never sent, to his son. Grandfather Schell is a man tormented by memories of the Dresden bombing in World War Two. Years after the war he conceives a child with Oskar’s grandmother but is emotionally incapable of raising him and he leaves them to return to Europe. It is only after another disaster, the attack on the Twin Towers, that he returns to New York to mourn the son he has never met. The twinned stories of Oskar’s grief over the death of his father and his grandfather’s grief for all he has lost in World War Two form the backbone of this novel. It is both their mourning processes that I will analyze in the chapters to come.
Chapter 2
Netherland
In the first chapter I have provided a basic summary for all three novels. In the following chapters I will discuss the novels in detail focusing on the difficulties and ambiguous feelings of the protagonists that have either come to light or were brought on by the devastating events of September 11th. Mourning follows after loss and as Butler explains, “There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss, and this latter cannot be charted or planned” (Violence, Mourning, Politics, 21). It is Hans’s mourning process and the “transformative effect of loss” that I will analyze in this chapter by answering the following questions: first: what is the significance of communication and/or speech in the “self-other relationship”? Second: how does this influence the protagonists’ sense of self? And third: what is the importance of responsibility, towards the self as well as towards the other, in the completion of the mourning process?

In *Netherland* Hans van den Broek experiences marital difficulties as a result of 9/11 which consequently forces him to reexamine his life. His soul-searching brings him back to his childhood in the Netherlands; memories of his mother are intertwined with memories of his beloved cricket set against the background of an idyllic Dutch landscape. For the first time in his life Hans is unhappy and this experience leaves him numb and lost. An extensive re-evaluation of his identity as a son, husband, and father, but also as a Dutchman living in New York with no outspoken (political) viewpoint in a time where everybody seems to have a lot of opinions about the workings of the world is an important aspect of Hans’s mourning process. The faltering communication with his wife Rachel but also with others, the literal and figurative wanderings through New York and his (childhood) memories, and the importance of family are key subjects by means of which I will analyze Hans’s mourning and transformation.
Communication

In this paragraph I will explore the way in which speech and communication play a role in Hans’s relationships with others after 9/11. Hans and Rachel are very much affected by the attacks. Both have their own nightmares and both have their own way in which they deal with the situation. However, where Hans is ready to come to terms with New York post-9/11, Rachel decides to leave the city for fear of another attack. The nights following Rachel’s announcement are spent endlessly discussing the matter, weighing options, coming up with alternatives, but to no avail. When Hans declares that they will all move back to London together Rachel reveals her true motive for leaving New York: “We had lost the ability to speak to each other. The attack on New York had removed any doubt about this. She’d never sensed herself so alone, so comfortless, so far from home, as during these last few weeks.” (35/36). Where Rachel’s earlier announcement of leaving New York still held a promise of the continuation of their relationship, this declaration instantly shatters that illusion. With only a few words their relationship as it was has come to an end. Hans’s response indicates that his mourning process starts at that very moment: “A deep, useless shame filled me – shame that I had failed my wife and son, shame that I lacked the means to fight on, to tell her that I refused to accept that our marriage had suddenly collapsed” (37). The recognition of his own fatalism is at the same time an acceptance of the alienation between his family and himself, an acceptance of the changes that are to come, and it marks the onset of his mourning process as Butler describes in “Violence, Mourning, Politics”, “Perhaps, rather, one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say submitting to a transformation)” (21). Later on in the novel it becomes clear that the emotional estrangement between Rachel and Hans actually begun well before 9/11. It was Hans’s unexpressed grief over the loss of his mother that has caused the stagnation in their
communication. However; it was the extreme shock of the traumatic event that intensified that process and made it come to light. Rachel moves back to London whereas Hans remains behind as his wife insists on a temporary separation. Twice a month Hans crosses the ocean to be with his son and wife and during each flight he feels hopeful for a reconciliation. At the end of each visit however he returns to New York disillusioned.

Hans often refers to Rachel’s speech as that of a brilliant lawyer: “She spoke in complete sentences and intact paragraphs and almost always in the trope of the tiny, well-constructed argument” (50). Often it is Rachel’s way of communicating that leaves Hans at a loss especially when he is unprepared. The conversation then becomes one-dimensional as Hans does not know how to respond properly. A year has gone by and Rachel announces that she is not coming back to the States. The accompanying discussion clearly shows that they have grown even further apart. Hans and Rachel are no longer able to “recognize each other”. Butler explains the concept of recognition as: “the struggle for recognition […] requires that each partner in the exchange recognize not only that the Other needs and deserves recognition, but also that each, in a different way, is compelled by the same need the same requirement” (Violence, Mourning, Politics, 43/44). The deterioration of their communication with each other separate Hans and Rachel more and more. Rachel holds the view that America is an “‘ideologically diseased’ and a ‘mentally ill, sick, unreal’ country” (125). Rachel argues, like a lawyer rather than a wife, that the “story of Hans and Rachel”, their emotions, and their relationship are not important at this point of time. A year after the attacks the world is in a state of crisis and there simply is no room for personal feelings. Where Hans is devastated by the (temporary) loss of his family and struggles with the resulting depression, Rachel demands from him an outspokenness on political issues he cannot provide:

Did Iraq have weapons of mass destruction that posed a real threat? I had no idea; and to be truthful, and to touch on my real difficulty, I had little interest. I
didn’t really care. In short, I was a political-ethical idiot. Normally, this deficiency might have been inconsequential, but these were abnormal times (132).

Where, in their marriage, they have never taken to political discussions it now seems to be a decisive factor in their relationship. After 9/11 the communication between Hans and Rachel changes significantly which puts a huge strain on their relationship. Even if they already had “nothing left to say to each other” before, now it becomes even worse as some subjects have unconsciously become off-limits: “I had very little information about her. All we talked of, really, was our son […] And, now the invasion of Iraq had actually taken place, the subject of politics was dropped and with it a connective friction. We rubbed along without touching” (164).

In order to chase away the pain of his loneliness Hans starts playing cricket on the weekends he stays in New York. Gradually he becomes more and more involved and he starts spending more time on the field and less with his family in London. His work and his relationship with colleagues also suffer from his acute obsession with cricket. Where he would first go out for drinks with people from work he now accepts that even in that area things have changed. He makes some effort to stay in touch with one of his colleagues, when this fails he realizes that “Rivera had joined those who had disappeared from his life” (138). Even if he does feel bad about the contacts he loses at work, the estrangement from his co-workers is a result of Hans’s own attitude: […] I wouldn’t have involved them in this part of my life, whose separateness was part of its preciousness.” (228). With “this part of my life” Hans is talking about cricket. He purposefully keeps his three worlds separate from each other; his family, his work, and cricket thereby avoiding possible curiosity from others. As he spends more and more time playing cricket there is a shift in his contacts with others: where
first his life revolved around his family and work his contact with the outside world is now mainly limited to his cricket buddies.

Hans calls himself friendless, a man who is no one without his family (37), and it is this separation from his family and the resulting loneliness that motivates him to surround himself with a very diverse group of people. However, while meeting more people, and more diverse, than ever before - the residents of the Chelsea Hotel, fellow cricket players who are almost all immigrants, Chuck and the people in his bizarre world, Hans is unable and unwilling to truly connect with any of them: “Of course, he didn’t know me, just as I didn’t know him. It was rare for club members to have dealings that went beyond the game we played. We didn’t want to have any such dealings” (228). Hans is already suffering from the loss of his family, he has also already accepted the fact that people disappear from his life.

Butler explains that, “Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure (Violence, Mourning, Politics, 20).

Even though Hans craves company he avoids serious connections and overly personal communications for fear of losing again. Similar is his relationship with some of the residents of the Chelsea Hotel, mainly a silent widow with a baseball cap and a Turkish man whose outfit consists of angel wings, with whom he sits in the lobby at night. They keep each other company more or less without talking. The only relationship that seems to have a little sustenance is Hans’s friendship with Chuck. While playing a cricket match Hans meets Chuck Ramkissoon, a cricket umpire and fanatic about the sport. He is also a great talker. And in this sense their friendship can be seen as one-dimensional. As Hans needs to practice for his drivers license he becomes Chuck’s chauffeur, driving him all around the city, unwittingly becoming an accomplice to Chuck’s more shadier businesses. Chuck talks, endlessly, which in turn suits Hans perfectly as he is never pressed for information concerning his personal life.
and never has to divulge his non-existing political views. Due to his emergence in cricket
Hans does not go to London as often as he did before and the excuses he tells Rachel are
never questioned. Similarly he surrounds himself with people who do not question him or
expect him to open up. Hans’ contact and communication with others are constructed by Hans
so that he hardly ever has to connect with his emotions. Although Hans, to a great extent,
tries to avoid any deeper contact with anyone it is his attachment to this emotional
superficiality as well as the absence of his family that leaves him lonely and lost thereby
revealing his trauma. There is no one left to address, no one to offer or ask for recognition.
Without putting up a fight he has accepted the transformation that was instigated by the loss
of his family. Relationships that existed prior to 9/11, with his family and co-workers,
changed dramatically and there was a shift in which Hans surrounded himself with “new
people.” He has readily embarked on a mourning process and the changes that it entails,
however these changes have brought about an identity crisis that is revealed in his feelings of
being lost.

**Sense of Self**

“So when one loses, one is also faced with something enigmatic: something is hiding in the
loss, something is lost within the recesses of loss (“Violence, Mourning, Politics” 21/22). In
this case, what is “lost within the recesses of loss”, is Hans’s sense of self. He is caught up in
a feeling of: “sadness produced when the mirroring world no longer offers a surface in which
one may recognise one’s true likeness (151). The changing relationship with his family and
the emotionally barren communication he has with the people he knows in New York cause
Hans to feel adrift: “My life had shrunk to very small proportions [...]. To put it another way;
I was to anyone who could be bothered to pay attention, noticeably lost”(93). As a result Hans
wanders literally and figuratively. In his role as Chuck’s driver, but also as a cricket player,
Hans wanders around the city and the state of New York. However, the following quote
shows that Hans not merely wanders in space: “My family, the spine of my days, had crumbled. I was lost in invertebrate time.” (38). This quote not only shows that he literally has too much time on his hands, which makes him turn to cricket. But it also reveals that for Hans time is no longer a linear matter; he is lost in time; meaning he is also lost in his memories. Cricket invokes in him memories of his childhood in the Netherlands, games played in The Hague with his mother watching. A remembrance of a time when everything was uncomplicated and full of the promise of a life to come. This is also the reason Hans refuses to bat the American way even if he has always readily adapted to new things. For Hans it has always been difficult to remember the past except through cricket as the following quote explains:

I, however, seem given to self-estrangement. I find it hard to muster oneness with those former selves whose accidents and endeavours have shaped who I am today. […] These and other moments of cricket are scorched in my mind like sexual memories, forever available to me … (63).

Cricket and the memories it invokes are the only link left to connect him with his former self, the Hans he was prior to 9/11, the Hans he used to be before he became unhappy. His sense of being lost makes him hold on to the past with both hands and sometimes he even starts to idealize the Holland from his youth even though he was never before given in to homesickness.

However, there are other, contradictory, currents at work too. While Hans is looking back in time he is also in the middle of the process of getting his American drivers license as he is not allowed to use his British one in the States. Unknowingly he is already tentatively “embracing an American lot” (82). What is happening here is that Hans is going through the process that Karen Engle explains as “the ego (that) gradually splits its attachment from the lost object” (61). While Hans remains adrift in his “New York confusion” he is slowly
accepting his loss and this is highlighted by the day when he finally acquiesces to batting the American way: “…what counted was that I’d done it. I’d hit the ball in the air like an American cricketer; and I’d done so without injury to my sense of myself. On the contrary, I felt great” (232). This event invokes in Hans a vision of himself in the cricket stadium Chuck is planning to build being “at last naturalised”. (233). Even though this event seems to be the decisive one in which Hans is able to break the ties with both Rachel as well as his former self the following paragraph will show that it was merely part of Hans’s identity crisis in which he swayed back and forth between the past and a possible future.

**Responsibility and Resolve**

In *Netherland* there are two specific events that mark Hans’s turning point. The first is when he is confronted with Chuck’s darker side. On one of Chuck’s more dubious errands Hans finds out that Chuck and his partner have beaten someone up over money. Hans can no longer turn a blind eye to what Chuck can also be and leaves instantly. In *Giving an Account of Oneself* Butler explains how the “I“ has a responsibility to the “other,” “my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others” (53). Even though Hans is still lost within his own loss he does still recognize the vulnerability of the Other. He recognizes his ethical responsibility towards the unknown man and realizes that in his relation to this man the “I”, being Hans, does not want to be part of the kind of life that Chuck leads. All Hans can do at this time is recognize who he is *not* and break all ties with Chuck; this way he has regained some sense of who he is.

If part of the Self is made up by the ties he/she has with Others responsibility for the Other involves at the same time responsibility for the Self. Hans has felt the responsibility towards another human being but in order to resolve his grief he also needs to take responsibility for himself. While playing roulette in a casino Hans spots Jeroen, a man who used to date his mother in Holland. He remembers how Jeroen would take him out to the
casino in Scheveningen: “He made no bones about his need, as he put it, to play; nor did he hide his desperation for company of any sort” (289). Hans suddenly realizes that the tables have turned; now it is Hans who is desperate for any kind of company and this realization makes him feel that he has hit rock bottom: “Then and there, amongst the blushing slots, I underwent a swerve in orientation … I decided to move back to London” (290). Hans finally decides to take matters into his own hands and this is essential for his recovery. The “swerve in orientation” is the 180° turn he makes from the past back into the future.

At the end of the novel Hans and Rachel are back together. The reader learns that through couples therapy their communication has improved considerably and this enables them to recognize each other in a way that Butler describes as: “to ask for recognition […] is to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the Other” (Violence, Mourning, Politics 44). In their renewed communication they recognize and mirror each other, “She had stayed married to me […] because she felt a responsibility to see me through life, and the responsibility felt like a happy one […] My wife’s words had overwhelmed me. She had put into words – indeed into reality – exactly how I felt.

Conclusion

On the last page he once more remembers his mother: “I remember how I turned and caught her […] looking not at New York but at me, and smiling. Which is how I come to face my family with the same smile” (339/340). It is this smile that completes Hans’s journey, the smile which marks the end of his mourning process as he is once more reunited with his family and he is finally at peace as Hans’s Self is mirrored in his family.

In Netherland Hans’s mourning process shows many similarities with Butler’s ideas on mourning as shown above. 9/11 has certainly served as a catalyst for Hans’s depression.
and the breaking up of his marriage to Rachel. Even though the process had started before 9/11 the intense shock of the event made it come to light and intensified it. While communication with his wife deteriorates Hans finds himself looking for new contacts; friendships in which nothing is expected and communication remains superficial. The immediate result of 9/11 – the end of Rachel and Hans’s marriage – leaves Hans devastated and lost. When he loses his family he also loses his sense of self. In desperate search of that sense of self he emerges himself in cricket which makes him remember his childhood, his mother, and the Hans he used to be. It is only when he lets go of the past and takes responsibility for his own as well as others’ lives that he no longer feels lost and regains his sense of self.
Chapter 3

The Reluctant Fundamentalist
“Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America” (1). This statement establishes the mood for the rest of the novel in which the reader is confronted with the growing tension, apprehension, and mistrust between Changez and the silent American. Changez anticipates the American’s preconceptions and then turns around and responds with his own prejudices: “True, your hair, short-cropped, and your expansive chest […] are typical of a certain type of American; but then again, sportsmen and soldiers of all nationalities tend to look alike”(2). This one-way interaction between Changez and the American whose prejudices against each other are at the centre of the “conversation” can be seen as a direct result of the American attitude post-9/11. In Precarious Life Judith Butler explains:

It was my sense in the fall of 2001 that the United States was missing an opportunity to redefine itself as part of a global community when, instead, it heightened nationalist discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship.

(preface)

Further on she explains that both government and media have instigated paranoia and racism by asking the American citizens to be on the look-out for “anything suspicious” without clarifying what it was they were looking for: “so everyone is free to imagine and identify the source of terror.” (39).

Being a Pakistani and having spent his childhood in Lahore makes it possible for Changez to look at America with an outsider’s perspective and it is this perspective that the reader is presented with in The Reluctant Fundamentalist. Highly intelligent, Changez is accepted to Princeton on a scholarship. He is happy in America even if he sometimes feels he does not belong. The shock of 9/11, the American attitude in response to 9/11 and problems in
his relationship with Erica changes that. Where Hans in Netherland loses his marriage after 9/11; Changez gradually loses both his love for America as well as his relationship with Erica. In this chapter I will examine his mourning process by answering the same three questions as in the previous chapter: what is the significance of communication and/or speech in the self-other relationship? How does this affect the protagonist’s sense of self? And finally; what is the importance of responsibility towards the self and others in the completion of his mourning process?

Communication

For The Reluctant Fundamentalist I will start with the form of the narrative as it reveals the significant of the concept of communication in this novel. Changez is engaged in a conversation with an American in which he tells about his time in the USA and his reasons for leaving. The fact that throughout the novel the American never speaks is significant because it is both the result of how Changez experienced the change in America post-9/11 as well as the outcome of his personal transformation. In this novel the Other is not allowed a voice with which to converse, respond to, or refute anything Changez has to say. Many critics have pointed out the allegorical nature of the novel and in this framework of a one-way conversation between Changez (representing East) and the American (representing West) Changez has silenced the American in order to give a voice to that side of the story the West rarely hears, or has refused to hear. As Changez recounts his years in the US he occasionally interrupts his story to address his silent partner directly either to comment on their immediate surroundings or to answer an unheard question seemingly posed by the American. Those intermissions hold the illusion that the American has a voice of his own; however the reader is never allowed to hear it. Almost all the comments Changez directly aims at his partner are assumptions of American, or the American’s, prejudices against
Muslims: “Or are you watching that man, the one with the beard far longer than mine, who has stopped to stand beside them? You think he will scold them for the inappropriateness of their dress – their t-shirts and jeans?” (22). It also works the other way around as I have shown in the introduction to this chapter. Not only the American’s prejudices are highlighted here but also Changez’s albeit more artfully done: “… and there is no need to reach under your jacket, I assume to grasp your wallet …” (5). Changez has a way with words in which he cleverly eludes a confrontation with the American while at the same time letting him know that he is watching him as he really means to say something like “I assume to whip out your gun”. Even though Changez remains polite in his communications with the stranger his speech provides the novel with the suspense of a thriller. Where in Netherland Hans and Rachel have found each other again through communication in therapy, the one-way conversation in The Reluctant Fundamentalist shows that Changez has taken on the responsibility of speaking for his people, without interruption, as a form of closure in his mourning process. I will discuss this issue in more detail when I will answer the third question posed in the introduction.

It is significant that speech and communication are important in Changez’s narrative even before the attacks take place as it indicates that Changez has been in an ongoing process of transformation, a kind of serial transformation, starting prior to the attacks. Much more than in Netherland and Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close does nationality play a role in The Reluctant Fundamentalist. Changez is quite literally caught between East and West. Between on the one hand his family in Pakistan and on the other hand financial independency, status, and Erica in America. Adi Drori-Avraham states that: “one’s relation to another person, to an idea, or to one’s country is always ambivalent. No human attachment is untainted by dissatisfaction or disappointment” (“September 11th and the Mourning After,” 295) and this
statement seems especially true for Changez, at least in the months prior to the attacks presupposing “his country” to be Pakistan and the people – his family – residing there. Even though he marvels over his life in New York and his introduction into the New York elite, he remains acutely aware of his roots. Before the attacks however his sentiments towards home are largely shaped by shame at what his family has lost namely; status and money. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Changez has a way with words. He knows how to use speech and modify it when he knows it will work in his advantage:

I have subsequently wondered why my mannerisms so appealed to my senior colleagues. Perhaps it was my speech: like Pakistan, America is, after all, a former English colony, and it stands to reason, therefore, that an Anglicized accent may in your country continue to be associated with wealth and power, just as it is in mine. […] Whatever the reason, I was aware of an advantage conferred upon me by my foreignness, and I tried to utilize it as much as I could. (41/42)

When on a business assignment in Manila his shame reaches a new peak as he is confronted with the fact that even Manila is wealthier than Lahore: “perhaps it was for this reason that I did something in Manila I had never done before: I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an American” (65). The two quotes shown above are perfect examples of the importance of speech in Changez’s adaptability to his new situation. In “Violence, Mourning, Politics” Butler explains the concept of recognition:

When we recognize another, or when we ask for recognition for ourselves, we are not asking for an Other to see us as we are, as we already are, as we have always been, as we were constituted prior to the encounter itself. Instead, in the asking, in the petition, we have already become something new, since we are constituted by virtue of the address, a need and desire for the Other that takes
place in language in the broadest sense, one without which we could not be. To ask for recognition, or to offer it, is precisely not to ask for recognition for what one already is. It is to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the Other. (44)

In his address to the Other, Changez takes on an American way of speech and communication and in that way he demands recognition quite literally not for the person he is or used to be but rather for the one he is trying to transform himself into in order to gain the same respect he thinks the Americans receive subsequently relieving himself of his shame for his family’s downfall.

Where in Netherland Hans van den Broek loses himself when he loses his family in The Reluctant Fundamentalist Changez undergoes a kind of serial transformation; before the attacks on the Twin Towers he tries to become more like an American whereas after 9/11 he gradually turns his back on his new country instigated by the verbal abuse he experiences caused by his Muslim appearance, the nationalistic discourse offered by the media and the American government, the information he receives about his homeland and neighboring countries communicated through the media, and the conversations he has with Erica which are mainly about her dead lover Chris. Changez’s response to the attacks is at the centre of the novel and indicates the onset of the changes he is about to experience: “I stared as one – and then the other – of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased” (72). Changez is baffled by his own reaction and naturally keeps it to himself. However; immediately following the attacks he experiences the changes in American attitude first hand as he is singled out at the airport for a strip search and his fellow passengers ogle at him with anxiety and suspicion. In the following months he is more and more confronted with what Butler explains as:
… the binarism that Bush proposes in which only two positions are possible – “Either you’re with us or you’re with the terrorists” – makes it untenable to hold a position in which one opposes both and queries the terms in which the opposition is framed. Moreover, it is the same binarism that returns us to an anachronistic division between “East” and “West” and which, in its sloshy metonymy, returns us to the invidious distinction between civilization (our own) and barbarism (now coded as “Islam” itself) (2).

The effect of the quote above is felt most by Changez when he accidently tunes in to the news and is confronted with images of the American army invading Afghanistan described by the anchorman as a “daring raid” (100). For Changez this moment marks yet another turning point in which he realizes that he is “no longer capable of so thorough a self-deception” (100). This is the moment he realizes that he is starting to lose his American Dream while at the same time realizing he had been gradually losing his love for his host country.

Finally I would like to point out the effect of non-verbal communication in Changez’s relations with others. When he visits his family in Lahore he starts growing a beard and decides to keep it when he returns to America. It has an immediate impact on others but Changez chooses to ignore this thereby distancing himself more and more from his co-workers and Americans in general. Even before the beard Changez experiences racism: “fucking Arab” (117) and it is as if that experience makes him decide to “perform” that identity resulting in him growing the beard. Changez is annoyed by the prejudices the beard inspires but refuses however to shave it off as “it is only a hairstyle, after all” (130). Changez is in a sense, willingly and consciously, performing an identity imposed on him by others who discriminate against him. This of course reminds of Butler’s theories on performativity which she explains as follows: “that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’
that are said to be its results” (The Judith Butler Reader 6). The effect of (non-verbal) communication and speech in this sense then is that it results in a vicious cycle; communications through the media at once heighten racism while at the same time infuriating Changez as he watches American troops invading his neighbour country.

**Sense of Self**

The role of nationality plays an important role in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in junction with communication and speech and therefore leaves a deep impact on Changez’s sense of self. The fact that Changez uses American speech and mannerisms in order to gain more respect establishes in him highly ambiguous feelings. On the one hand he is still very much pursuing his personal American Dream but on the other hand he feels guilty and ashamed for rejecting his upbringing. Throughout the story Changez’s struggles with his love for America and the promise it holds and the difficulties he encounters as a foreigner, especially after 9/11. The struggle between his love for America and Erica on the one hand and loyalty towards his family and fellow Muslims on the other results in a feeling of constantly needing to reassess his position in society.

The realization of the significance of his response to the destruction of the World Trade Center marks the onset of his loss, the loss of his love for America, and like in *Netherland* this realization also marks the beginning of his mourning process as he already understands the changes he is going to experience explained by Butler as: “Perhaps, rather, one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say submitting to a transformation)” (“Violence, Mourning, Politics” 21). However; unlike the death of a lost one where the loss is instantaneous, Changez’s loss of his American Dream is that of a slow process in which communication plays an important part. The first
few months after 9/11 Changez does not yet embrace the idea of loss and transformation. By avoiding the news and by avoiding conversations about the attacks and America’s military response he can still pretend it is not happening and desperately tries to hold on to his new life. The awareness of the reality of the events unfolding however is shown in the following quote:

I wonder now, sir, whether I believed at all in the firmness of the foundations of the new life I was attempting to construct for myself in New York. Certainly, I wanted to believe; at least I wanted not to disbelieve with such an intensity that I prevented myself as much as possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream. (93)

The one-sidedness of the conversations between Changez and Erica make him feel he is constantly battling his “dead rival” Chris. The ambiguous feelings towards America highlighted by his own response to the attacks as well as accelerated by American aggression results in Changez feeling lost between two worlds. In his, already tainted, pursuit of his American Dream he makes one final desperate attempt to win his American princess as he is already aware that he is losing her. By asking Erica to close her eyes and pretend that she is really making love to Chris instead of Changez he willingly rejects himself. His insecurity about his identity shames Changez and he is now definitely lost, “Perhaps by taking on the persona of another, I had diminished myself in my own eyes; perhaps I was humiliated by the continuing dominance, in the strange romantic triangle I found myself a part, of my dead rival” (106).

At the time Changez travels to Lahore to visit his family he is in the middle of an identity crisis caused by the loss of Erica and the impending loss of his American Dream: “The disorientation of grief […] posits the “I” in the mode of unknowingness” (“Violence,
Mourning, Politics” 30). After returning to the States Changez is confronted with much hostility on account of his beard. He refuses to shave it off however and this passive aggressive act can be seen as a form of melancholia. In the following quote Drori-Avraham explains Freud’s understanding of melancholia: “the destructive, thwarted or incomplete process of bad or unhealthy mourning. Unable to let go, the grieving self is powerless to overcome its loss and achieve resolution” (289). Butler elaborates on that idea explaining how Freud connects melancholia with aggression: “ the transmutation of mourning into aggression is something Freud talked about as part of melancholia, and it was something that he thought could only be undone by returning melancholia to mourning, to the extent that that’s possible. There would have to be a more overt way of acknowledging loss: aggression is, to a certain extent, an effort to deny loss” (The Judith Butler Reader, 343). Changez feels the impact of America’s global politics the most when he is with his family. Unable to let go of America he returns to the States however, this time, wearing a beard:

It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind; I do not now recall my precise motivations. I know only I did not wish to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters who were my coworkers. (130)

This act of non-verbal communication as I have mentioned in the Communication chapter has a significant impact. The more Changez isolates himself and is isolated by his co-workers and Americans on the streets the more it strengthens his resentment towards his host country. The fact that he keeps his beard despite all the hostility it invokes can be seen as a hostile act and therefore as an expression of melancholia on Changez’s part. The fact that Changez remains in the States while simultaneously refusing to take part in American society shows that he is unable to let go of the lost object, in this case both his American Dream as well as his relationship with Erica, and as a result his grief has taken the form of passive aggressiveness.
Responsibility and Resolve

If the identity of the Self is, at least in part, composed of the relation it has with Others and the other way around it follows then that the loss of the Other can result in an identity crisis. Or as Butler explains, “on one level, I think I have lost ‘you’ only to discover that ‘I’ have gone missing as well” (“Violence, Mourning, Politics” 22). If part of me is part of you and we are both constituted in and for each other by the ties that bind us then the concept of ethical accountability turns into a kind of twinned responsibility: responsibility towards Others equals, at least to a certain extent, responsibility towards the Self and the other way around: responsibility towards the Self equals responsibility towards the Other.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* Changez already struggles with the idea of responsibility when he visits his family in Lahore:

"Indeed, I would soon be gone, leaving my family and my home behind, and this made me a kind of coward in my own eyes, a traitor. What sort of man abandons his people in such circumstances? And what was I abandoning them for? A well-paying job and a woman whom I longed for but who refused even to see me? I grappled with these questions again and again. (128)"

However, unable to let go of his American Dream just yet he returns to the States only to be more and more confronted with a changed society, with racism, and with the American threats aimed towards his home country. “As for myself, I was clearly on the threshold of great change; only the final catalyst was now required”(150). Changez needs one more push in order to fully fathom his loss and accept the ensuing transformation. And when he hears the story of the Janissaries he realizes that that was the final catalyst he needed. Changez finally recognizes why he has been struggling for so long: “I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war” (152).
Even in his grief over the destruction of his American Dream and the loss of Erica Changez finally has the strength to determine his loyalties. His responsibility lies with his family and with his home country and, by virtue of that relationship, with himself. He now understands what he must do in order to regain his sense of self and it is through that recognition that the definite recovery of his sense of self is already realized.

“Our responsibility is not just for the purity of our souls, but for the shape of the collectively inhabited world. And this means that action has to be understood as consequential” (Giving an Account of Oneself 63). In light of this quote the structure of the narrative, in which Changez relates his story of the past to the silent American in the present, can be seen both as a demand for recognition but also as a form of taking responsibility or demanding the Other to take responsibility. Changez did not turn his back on America solely “for the purity of his soul”. He now also feels the responsibility to address “America” in a way that ensures the East to be heard; that is by not giving the American a voice and in doing so demands America to take responsibility for its past and present actions. In her article “Explanation and Exoneration, or What We Can Hear” Butler recognizes that responsibility, collective responsibility not merely as a nation, but part as an international community based on a commitment to equality and non-violent cooperation, requires that we ask how these conditions came about, and endeavour to re-create social and political conditions on more sustaining grounds. This means, in part, hearing beyond what we are able to hear. (17/18)

With his narrative Changez has presented that “beyond” what America was able to hear. Earlier on in the novel Changez ponders over America’s global position, “I wondered how it was that America was able to wreak such havoc in the world […] with so few apparent consequences at home” (131). If and when America realizes that actions have consequences then it can maybe also start to take responsibility for its actions not just “for the purity of its
soul, but for the shape of the collectively inhabited world”. Changez has resolved his mourning process as he is now able to give an account of himself and by doing so he engages in a relationship with the Other displaying his vulnerability and thereby asking the Other for recognition.

**Conclusion**

Changez’s sense of self is severely challenged; first in his ambition to become more like an American with at its peak his “transformation” into Chris and later when he is no longer able to identify with a post-9/11 America. He is losing his direction and his sense of self as a result of the loss of Erica as well as the destruction of his personal American Dream. The story of the Janissaries is the final incentive he needs in order to take matters into his own hand and leave America. He realizes the importance of family and community and is finally able to acknowledge his own responsibility towards them. The final closure of his mourning process is narrating his story in which he asks for recognition and beseeches the American to take responsibility on his part.
Chapter 4

Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close
Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close


On the morning of September 11, 2001 instead of going to his jewelry store Thomas Schell is at a meeting in “Windows on the World”, the restaurant in the North tower of the World Trade Center. When the plane hits the tower and everything is full of smoke and fire and panic Thomas Schell calls home to reassure his son and wife that he is OK. His final message however is ominous and is cut off at 10:24 am, the exact time at which the tower collapsed, as Oskar recounts towards the end of the novel.

In Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close the different stories in the novel; that of Oskar, his grandmother, and his grandfather, are entwined and together they tell a story of loss, of remembrance, and of mourning. In the novel Foer connects the trauma of the 9/11 terrorist attacks with another devastating event, the Dresden bombing of 1945. There is also a brief mention of the nuclear attack on Hiroshima. In his review Keith Gessen states that: “The effect of these other catastrophes in the novel is to suggest that all human suffering is equivalent, be it American, German, or Japanese” (“Horror Tour”). In this dissertation I will focus on two main characters, namely; Oskar Schell and his grandfather. The main narrator is Oskar. His mourning process however is juxtaposed with that of his grandfather whose life story is presented in the form of letters that are scattered throughout the novel. The importance of including Oskar’s grandparents in my analysis is that it shows very clearly the significance of communication and speech in the relationship between the Self and Other and therefore in the mourning process.
Communication

What is the significance of speech and communication in the Self-Other relationship in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*? Besides loss the predominant theme in Foer’s novel is communication. Reviewers have pointed out that the letters written by his grandparents, the pages on which Oskar’s grandmother types her life story and which remain tragically empty, the typographical anomalies, and the photographs interspersed throughout the novel are a symbol of the “incommunicability of real human emotions” (Gessen), although “the incommunicability of human suffering” would be a better description. Almost every one in the novel is mourning someone or something and it is expressed in their inability to communicate. Old Mr. Black who has removed himself from society and has turned off his hearing aid after his wife died. Mrs. Black who has been living in the Empire State Building ever since her husband died and has not been down since. The only conversations she has is with strangers when she tells them about the history of the building.

After “the worst day” as he calls 9/11, Oskar too is no longer able to communicate with his loved ones. He is devastated by the loss of his father who was the only one who could calm him down when he would get “panicky”: “Being with him made my brain quiet. I didn’t have to invent a thing” (12). Since 9/11 Oskar has been making up impossible inventions almost non-stop. The fact that he is the only one who knows about and heard the messages his father left on the answering machine just moments before his death depresses him even though he made a conscious choice about keeping them from his mother. The mysterious key he finds in his father’s closet gives him the opportunity to embark on one last “Reconnaissance Expedition”.

Internalization preserves loss in the psyche; more precisely, the internalization of loss is part of the mechanism of its refusal. If the object can no longer exist in the external world, it will then exist internally, and the internalization will be
a way to disavow the loss, to keep it at bay, to stay or postpone the recognition
and suffering of loss. (The Judith Butler Reader, 247)

Keeping the messages and the key a secret from his mother and grandmother is
Oskar’s way of internalizing his loss and keeping his father close to him. His fathers last
words, recorded on the phone, are more important and more of a comfort to him than
connecting with his family. In a research involving children who had lost a parent
psychologists found that: “most of the children maintained a connection to the deceased
parent through dreams, waking memories, and by keeping personal objects that had belonged
to the parent” (Baker, 64). Saving his fathers messages and pursuing the enigma of the key is
the ultimate form of staying connected to his father and thereby internalizing his grief. The
result is that Oskar becomes secretive, uncommunicative, and more and more isolated from
his friends, his mother, and his grandmother. The loss of his father leaves him unable to
connect with his loved ones as in death his father’s presence is almost larger than life.

The most powerful illustration of the effect of mourning on speech and
communication is the case of Oskar’s grandparents. The fact that we learn about their life
story through letters rather than speech is significant in itself; they are both unable to
verbalize their trauma’s and the effect it has had on them.

The very “I” is called into question by its relation to the Other (and especially
so in case of the loss of the Other)\(^1\), a relation that does not precisely reduce
me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of my
undoing. I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere
along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My
narrative falters, as it must. (‘Violence, Mourning, Politics,” 23)

\(^1\) In brackets: my insertion
Traumatized by the Dresden bombing, in which he lost his fiancée and unborn child, Thomas Schell loses the power of speech. In the following quote Butler explains what happens when we lose someone: “When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost “you” only to discover that “I” have gone missing as well” (“Violence, Mourning, Politics” 22). And this is, very literally what happens in Thomas Schell’s speech. First he loses the word “Anna” his dead fiancée’s name and the object of his mourning. Slowly he loses all kinds of words until: “and then I lost “I” and my silence was complete” (17). The loss of Anna has brought about Thomas’s loss of his sense of self. He carries a “daybook” around which he uses to communicate only the most elementary things like “I’m sorry,” or “do you know what time it is?” Yes and No are tattooed on his hands. Oskar’s grandmother on the other hand craves language. She wants as much as she can get her hands on. She uses language however to forget about the past:

… she wanted to talk like she was born here, like she never came from anywhere else, so I started bringing a knapsack, which I would stuff with as much as would fit, it got heavy, my shoulders burned with English, she wanted more English, so I brought a suitcase, I filled it until I could barely zip the zipper, the suitcase sagged with English, my hands did, my knuckles, people must have thought I was actually going somewhere, the next morning my back ached with English. (108/109)

Another way in which language plays a part in their mourning process is that they never use German again. German is the language of their past; a past they so desperately need to forget. So in the quote above Thomas’s back is aching with the language of his new life. A life that, as it turns out, he is not able to commit to as he is incapable in dealing with his grief. In an attempt at a normal life after the war avoiding as much of the trauma as they can they base their marriage on rules instead of communication: “Your mother and I never talk about the
past, that’s a rule” (108). Silence is at the core of their communication supported by writing and sign language which often results in miscommunication:

The longer your mother and I lived together, the more we took each other’s assumptions for granted, the less was said, the more misunderstood, I’d often remember having designated a space as Nothing when she was sure we had agreed it was Something, our unspoken agreements led to disagreements, to suffering. (111)

The differences in how they both experience and interpret their contact with each other and the misunderstandings that subsequently arise are most clear when grandmother’s letters are compared to Grandfather’s letters. They both have their very own interpretation of shared experiences like the Nothing and the Something places or the account of when they first met again after the war. The distortion of their communication leads to much suffering and grandfather Schell towards the end of the novel wonders thereby touching on the very essence of true communication: “why can’t people say what they mean at the time?” (279). As is the case in all three novels the deterioration of communication, the inability to connect and speak with Others, only leads to an intensification of the mourning process. The mourner becomes more and more isolated thereby internalizing his grief.

Contrary to what the paragraphs above might suggest, Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close is actually steeped in language. Despite, or rather because of, the absence of sincere communication Oskar’s grandparents feel an intense urgency to communicate their stories. The only way Thomas knows how is through writing and he encourages his wife to the same: “I thought maybe if she could express herself rather than suffer herself, if she had a way to relieve the burden” (119). The tragedy of their life together becomes painfully clear when all those thousands of pages she has been typing turn out to be empty. He thinks she does not know that her story is missing because her eyes are “crummy” but decides to act as if it is
there. She has been hitting the space bar for years and pages on end so knows her husband is pretending. It is their shared history that brought them together in the first place however it is the incommunicability of that past that keeps them at a distant from each other and eventually drives them apart. Butler says that “The struggle for recognition […] requires that each partner in the exchange recognize not only that the Other needs and deserves recognition, but also that each, in a different way, is compelled by the same need, the same requirement” (“Violence, Mourning, Politics,” 43/44). The only thing Oskar’s grandparents recognize in each other is the suffering. To ask for recognition is as Butler explains “to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the Other” (44), and this is what they cannot offer each other as she wants to live while he does not know how to.

From the day Thomas leaves his wife and unborn child he starts writing letters to his son. One letter every day even after Oskar’s father has died in the attacks. By giving an account of himself in those letters he not only asks for recognition he also asks for forgiveness. All he ever sends are empty envelopes though. Still unable to let go of the past, incapable of living, not ready to offer up his story to anyone else Thomas remains alone and his story untold. In Judith Butler in Conversation Butler elaborates on her previously written An Account of Oneself, “As a narrative withheld, it either refuses the relation that the inquirer presupposes or changes that relation so that the one queried refuses the one who queries” (23). In his forty year mourning process Thomas Schell refuses the inquirers, his wife and son, leaving him alone and unrecognized. The reader never finds out what happened to Thomas Schell in the forty years he was away as his life story is presented in code. The numbers are supposed to correspond to the letters you find on the dial of your phone however after hours and hours of trying to crack the code most readers will have come to the conclusion that there is no story. Even within the safety of code language Thomas Schell is still unable to connect.
**Sense of Self**

While his father was still alive Oskar felt safe. The shock and violence of 9/11 causing the
death of his father has left Oskar anxious and insecure. He is in desperate need of love and
recognition. The fact that his mother lets him wander around New York City without
guidance and protection gives Oskar more space to try to complete his mission but it also
frustrates him that his mother does not seem to care: “So why was she suddenly starting to
forget about me?” (52). Throughout the novel Oskar occasionally refers to the last
“Reconnaissance Expeditions” his father designed for him. Contrary to all the previous
expeditions his father did not give him any clues. Oskar searches for days but the expedition
is broken off by his father’s sudden death. For Oskar finding the lock that fits the key is like
finishing that last Reconnaissance Expedition. Losing his father was losing part of himself
and the “key mission” is a symbol of his search for his own sense of self. It is not a conscious
search, contrary to the other two novels where Changez and Hans van den Broek clearly
articulate their feelings of being lost and their insecurity about their sense of self. The novel
contains many elements of a Bildungsroman in which Oskar motivated by the loss of his
father embarks on a journey which isolates him from his family emotionally. Explaining
Nietzsche, Butler says, “we become conscious of ourselves only after certain injuries have
been inflicted” (Judith Butler in Conversation 21). In the novel people tell Oskar that he
reminds them of others and even if he is still unaware of his own sense of self he does realize
that he is his own person, or rather; that he wants to be his own person:

“It doesn’t make me feel good when you say that something I do reminds you
of Dad.” “Oh. I’m sorry. Do I do that a lot?” “You do it all the time.” […]

“And Grandma always says that things I do remind her of Grandpa. It makes
me feel weird, because they’re gone. And it also makes me feel unspecial”
(43).
So, however much Oskar loves and looks up to his father he has become conscious of himself and needs to be his own person. “Why couldn’t I remind people of me?” (252).

For forty years Thomas Schell sees himself as someone who cannot live. His sense of self is characterized by melancholia in the Freudian sense which Drori-Avraham explains as: “the destructive, thwarted or incomplete process of bad and unhealthy mourning. Unable to let go, the grieving self is powerless to overcome its loss and achieve resolution” (289). Healthy mourning as explained by John Baker has to do with “creating an internal relationship that allows the bereaved to maintain some tie with the inner representation of the love object but that also leaves room for investment in new relationships and new activities” (68), and this is exactly what is lacking in Thomas Schell’s mourning process. He is unable to create an internal relationship with Anna and his unborn child that is healthy and leaves room for other commitments. His sense of self is still very much entwined with Anna and his sixteen-year-old self that he is unable to move forward and let go. He spends forty years mourning over what he has lost and besides Anna and their unborn child he has lost the ability to live and love: “I am so afraid of losing something I love that I refuse to love anything” (216).

**Responsibility and Resolve**

Inspired by Foucault Butler introduces his ideas of the confession as a form of giving an account of oneself, “an act of speech in which the subject “publishes himself”, gives himself in words, engages in an extended act of self-verbalization […] as a way of making the self appear for another” (Giving an Account of Oneself 65). The story Oskar tells “the Renter” at the end of the novel is, in a sense, a form of confession. He admits to the lies he has told and plays the first five messages his dad left on the phone. In this account Oskar has taken responsibility for his actions which consequently brings him closer to a resolution. His honesty and responsibility has given him the courage to pick up the phone thereby receiving
Abby’s message that she has left for him eight months prior. Solving the mystery of the key has not provided Oskar with the answers he had hoped for however; meeting William Black does give him the opportunity to make his final confession in which he explains why he could not pick up the phone when his father called from the World Trade Center. In “making himself appear” for his grandfather Oskar has found a healthy way in which to retain a tie with his father internally while making room for other relations. Digging up his father’s coffin is a final goodbye through which Oskar achieves closure and reconnects with his mother as “In my only life, she was my mom, and I was her son” (324). It has taken Oskar eight months to realize the importance of family and to find out that the answers have always been “incredibly close.”

Thomas Schell’s forty years of absence come to an end when he reads his son’s obituary in the paper: “…and then one day I saw it, Thomas Schell, my first thought was that I had died. “He leaves behind a wife and son,” I thought, my son, I thought, my grandson, I thought and thought and thought, and then I stopped thinking” (273). When Thomas Schell finally stops thinking he is able to take action. He is able to move from the “narcissistic preoccupation of melancholia” and becomes aware of the “vulnerability of others” (“Violence, Mourning, Politics” 30). After forty years of mourning he moves back to New York to be with his wife and support her in her mourning. When he arrives he declares the purpose of his visit: “To mourn try to live” (268). He recognizes his wife’s grief and is now able to support her as he has found a new “reason” in the realization that he has a grandson. Feeling an intense responsibility for the safety of his grandson he follows him all around New York in those eight months of Oskar’s journey. The resolution for Thomas’s mourning process lies in the recognition of his own actions as Butler describes as follows, “the account we give of ourselves is one that accepts the presumption that the self has a causal relationship to the suffering of others” (Judith Butler in Conversation 23). The following quote shows that
Thomas Schell has recognized his own causal agency: “… I tried to learn about him as he tried to learn about you, he was trying to find you, just as you’d tried to find me, it broke my heart into more pieces than my heart was made of, why can’t people say what they mean at the time?” (279). If he had been honest with his wife from the start, if had told her his story then maybe they could have made it work and he would not have felt the need to leave. His salvation lies in the return from melancholia and opening up to his wife and grandson. He has found a reason to live and is finally able to “give an account of himself” by placing all the unsent letters in his son’s coffin.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter it has become clear that mourning begins and ends with communication, or the absence of communication. Oskar’s mourning intensifies as he is unable to connect with his remaining loved ones and the same can be said for his grandfather. Where Oskar embarks on a journey that symbolically entails the search for himself his grandfather has spent his only life melancholically mourning the loss of his first love. His inability to give a true account of himself when he meets his future wife results in a marriage characterized by miscommunication and misunderstanding. Oskar’s journey comes to an end when he confesses his story and takes responsibility. Thomas Schell finds salvation when he recognizes how his actions have affected others. In his grandson he finds a reason to live.
Conclusion
Conclusion

In all three novels that have been analyzed in this dissertation the protagonists undergo a great loss. The way they experience their grief shows many similarities to Butler’s ideas on mourning. However, where Butler’s names characteristics of grief and mourning I want to tie those elements together and propose that it is a process they go through with a very distinct pattern.

Butler’s philosophy of the Self being lost on account of the loss of the Other has proven to be correct as all protagonists experience a form of identity crisis. What this dissertation has also shown however is that grief deeply affects the relation of the Self with Others that still remain. Mourning someone or something cripples the communication with remaining Others to such an extent that it intensifies the grief as well as the feelings of being lost. The loss of a sense of self then does not only follow from the loss that has initially instigated the mourning process but also from the inability to connect with Others that are still there.

In Netherland the inability to communicate his grief for the loss of his mother has caused the emotional estrangement between Hans and his wife. The lack of communication here is the actual cause for the breaking up of their marriage. In mourning the loss of his family Hans becomes unable to communicate and connect with Others which in turn worsens his relationship with his ex-wife subsequently intensifying his mourning process. Without his family Hans is at a loss. Only when he recognizes the vulnerability of Others does he regain a sense of self and is able to take matters into his own hands. Responsibility for Others translates into responsibility towards the Self and in that way it becomes the crucial element in the resolve of the mourning process.
Changez loses both his relationship with Erica and his love for America. The realization that the destruction of his personal American Dream is impending cripples his communication with others which accelerates the decline of his love for America. Caught between two cultures Changez is unsure of who he is and where his loyalties lie. Finally recognizing the importance of community and family he takes responsibility as he refuses to be a modern day Janissary. In the account of himself that he offers the silent American Changez, representing the East, asks for recognition while at the same time imploring the American, representing the West, to take responsibility for the vulnerability of Others.

*Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* is a novel steeped in language. It is the clearest example of the importance of communication in the mourning process. When an account is withheld it cripples the healing process thereby endangering the relationship between the Self and the remaining Others. Oskar and Thomas’s sense of self is entwined with the memories of their lost Others. In opening up and confessing his story Oskar has grown enough in order to solve the mystery of the key. For his grandfather it is the recognition of his actions as a causal agency in the suffering of Others that leads to his salvation. In taking responsibility as a grandfather he is able to do for Oskar what he has not been able to do for his own son. The story of himself that he has been writing for forty years is completed when he finally offers his account to his son by placing it in his coffin. Finally at peace with the past he has completed his mourning process and found a reason to live.

Mourning begins and ends with communication, or the absence of communication. In all three novels the protagonists follow the same path in their mourning process. Butler’s separate theories on the relationality between Self and Others, the concept of recognition between the Self and the Other, taking responsibility towards both the Self and the Other, and giving an account of Oneself all come together in the mourning process of the
protagonists. A deterioration in the communication between the Self and the remaining Other colors the mourning process and intensifies the feelings of loneliness and being lost. In search of a sense of self the characters need to first recognize the remaining Other in order to let go of the lost Other and the final acts of taking responsibility and communication through offering an account of Oneself reconnects the protagonists with their remaining loved ones. Changez, Hans, Oskar, and Thomas are in the end able to achieve closure through the recognition of the importance of family and the taking on of the responsibility towards themselves and their families.

That the world has changed since the terrorist attacks is obvious, those changes are both significant and perpetual. What then can a “9/11 novel” contribute to a post-9/11 world? The novel in itself can provide solace in a time of grief and mourning. The reader is confronted and comforted by the fact that (s)he is not alone in his/her grief. In other words, the novel can play an important role in the collective mourning process. Good writers have the gift to put into words what other people think and feel.

The novel can also create understanding. Understanding about different cultures, religions, sexualities, and modes of thinking. After reading *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* it is much easier to appreciate a young Muslim’s sensibilities towards America, for example. An important conclusion of this dissertation is that despite differences in age, cultural background, race, and loss, everybody mourns. Of course everybody mourns in their own individual way, but the 9/11 novels not only offer insight into the mourning process but reassures the reader that (s)he is not alone.
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