

Introduction *Terrorism and Literature*

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The purpose of *Terrorism and Literature* appears simple – to trace how terrorism has functioned and continues to function as a critical concept in literature – but as so often is the case, what appears simple is not.

Unlike, say, “technology,” “allegory,” or “emotions,” topics for other books in this series and words on which people generally agree as to their meaning, nobody quite knows how to define “terrorism.”¹ The term itself entered the English language shortly after the French Revolution as a negative adjective describing the policy of “intimidation as directed and carried out by the party in power in France during the Revolution of 1789–94; the system of the ‘Terror’ (1793–4)” (OED, def.1).² However, after that things start to become very complicated. First, while the original meaning of terrorism appertained to a policy practiced by “the party in power in France,” the force of “terrorism” became diluted by its application to all manner of greater or lesser violence.³ For example, in 1822, after a canal boat owner fired the “old hands” and took on a new crew, he was met with a mob who demanded that he rehire the experienced workers: “The owner was required to procure a guard of police . . . From this and other transactions of which we have been apprised, it would appear a regular system of terrorism has been introduced on the canal.”⁴ “Terrorism,” it seems had devolved into a synonym for any kind of intimidation. The meaning of “terrorism” shifted again after the invention of dynamite and its appropriation by the radicals of the late nineteenth century for their bombing campaigns. “Terrorism,” once a tactic practiced by a legitimate, if terrible, government, shifted to describe the deeds of those opposing governments or policies they (usually rightly) perceived as tyrannical, raising the questions of whether terrorism denotes a legitimate or illegitimate form of resistance, and whether only nonstate actors can be terrorists.

Then there is the question of chronology. While one could argue that “terrorism” begins with the introduction of the term (i.e., in 1795), many

today argue that what we call today “terrorism” long predates the French Revolution. Some historians, for example, view the *Sicarii* – a first-century AD Israelite group opposed to Roman rule who anonymously assassinated Roman officials and collaborators, such as the High Priest Jonathan, thereby creating an atmosphere of fear – as precursors of contemporary terrorism.⁵ Robert Appelbaum examines the phenomenon of “terrorism before the letter,” meaning, terrorism before the coining of the term, in early modern Europe in his book of the same title.⁶ Take, for instance, the Gunpowder Plot, in which a group of disaffected Catholics attempted to blow up the English parliament, thereby destroying the government. In his opening speech at the plotters’ trial, Sir Edward Coke called their plan a treason that “doth want an apt name.”⁷ We have a name for it, of course: terrorism.

Settling the chronological question should, in theory, be easy: determine what sort of violence qualifies as terrorism, and then find the first instance of it. But defining “terrorism,” and distinguishing it from other sorts of political violence, seems a nearly impossible task. Why, for example, do the *Sicarii* merit the appellation “terrorism” but not, say, Ehud’s assassination of King Eglon in Judges 3:12–30, or the assassination of Julius Caesar? Or Samson’s destruction of the Philistine Temple (now often considered an act of terrorism)?⁸ Does, as Appelbaum has argued, John Felton’s assassination of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, in 1628 constitute terrorism, or does one need something more?⁹

Over the course of the twentieth century, various official bodies have attempted to come up with a universal definition of terrorism, and all have failed. In 1937, the League of Nations, responding to the 1934 assassination of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia, tried to define terrorism as all “criminal acts directed against a State and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons, or a group of persons or the general public,” but the definition was never formally adopted.¹⁰ The United Nations tried several times to come up with a definition, but enjoyed no greater success than its predecessor.¹¹ Lacking an agreed-upon definition, various organs of national governments employ different definitions of terrorism. The United States State Department, the House of Representatives, the FBI, the Department of Defense, and the CIA all employ their own definitions of the term.¹² The CIA, for example, defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents.”¹³ The FBI, on the other hand, defines terrorism slightly but significantly differently: terrorism will “Involve acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law; [and] Appear

Introduction

3

intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.”¹⁴ For the FBI, terrorism is a legal matter, to be dealt with, presumably, by the courts. The CIA, on the other hand, sees terrorism in terms of insurgency movements against a legitimate government. The one constant in these definitions has been the assumption that states cannot be terrorists or engage in terrorism. But even that has been questioned recently. The movement known as “Critical Terrorism Studies,” for example, not only posits that “states can be terrorists too,” but that “many acts of non-state terrorism can be best understood in relation to, and as a reaction to, state terrorism.”¹⁵

The problem is so acute that many discussions of terrorism begin by admitting that it may be impossible to come up with a definition that satisfies everyone.¹⁶ Yet definitions abound. In the mid-1980s, Walter Laqueur found “109 different definitions of terrorism provided between 1936 and 1981,” and the ensuing years have not provided any more clarity.¹⁷ There is no agreement on whether terrorism constitutes “a real, distinctive form of political violence characterized by epistemologically identifiable objective features” or if terrorism is really “terrorism,” i.e., “a social construct rather than a brute fact.”¹⁸ Or as Richard Jackson puts the question, is terrorism “a socially constructed category or signifier without any essential ontological content,” and so, a rhetorical ploy to vilify one’s enemies?¹⁹ The matter has become so confused, there are so many contradictory definitions of terrorism, that one group of scholars has proposed that “‘terrorism’ should be abandoned in academic usage as both a descriptive term and an empirical analytical category.”²⁰

And yet, despite these unresolved questions, there is general agreement that something called terrorism (however variously defined) has long been a major shaping force in the world, and that terrorism today constitutes a major shaping force in both politics and culture. A Google search of “terrorism” yielded about 155 million results. Clearly, terrorism, despite or because of its definitional problems, is something we think about a lot.

As one might expect, terrorism, as a topic of enduring fascination and unresolvable ambiguity, has attracted the attention of the fictive imagination. To give a few admittedly random examples, the Gunpowder Plot generated works by William Shakespeare, John Milton, and a host of other writers. The Fenian and anarchist bombing campaigns of the late nineteenth century inspired books by Fyodor Dostoevsky, Robert Louis Stevenson, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad. Such notable Irish writers as

Brian Friel, Paul Muldoon, Eoin McNamee, and Seamus Heaney engage with the Troubles in Northern Ireland and beyond. Terrorism is also a mainstay of movies (e.g. Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* [1966]) and television shows (e.g. *24*, *Homeland*, and *Fauda*) and the topic remains vital for today's writers, poets, and film-makers, including, among many others, John Updike, Hany Abu-Assad, Naomi Shihab Nye, Steven Spielberg, Andrew O'Hagan, David Hare, and Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya.

Literary scholars, however, have been surprisingly reluctant to deal with the topic. According to the MLA International Bibliography, between 1970 and 1989, only fifty articles were published addressing terrorism, rising to 101 for the period 1990–1999. (By way of contrast, a search on “science fiction” in the MLAIB for 1970–1989 yields 2,861 hits, and 2,283 hits for 1990–1999.) Even though many writers of greater and lesser distinction wrote books inspired by the dynamite attacks on London by Fenians and the assassination campaigns in Europe by anarchists, the first critical book on the topic, indeed, the first book in English devoted to terrorism and literature, came out as late as 1985: Barbara Melchiori's *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel*, and it is telling that the subject had to wait twenty-six years for another scholar to revisit it.²¹ The first critical book on terrorism in contemporary literature – Margaret Scanlon, *Plotting Terror* – was published in 2001, followed a year later by Alex Houen's *Terrorism and Modern Literature*.²²

This lack of attention parallels terrorism's place in academia generally. Before the 1970s, terrorism was studied (when it was studied at all) under the rubric of political science, history, or military history, not as its own topic.²³ Starting in the 1970s, more attention started to be paid, largely because terrorism started to become a central concern for Western governments, who started funding research, yet the total amount was not large. In his review of social sciences research on terrorism between 1990 and 2007, Andrew Silke notes that “prior to 911, the study of terrorism was carried out on the periphery of academia,” as shown by the paucity of books and articles devoted to the topic.²⁴ Between 1995 and 2000, the number of monographs with “terrorism” in the title (an imperfect rubric, to be sure, but still indicative) rose from less than fifty to a little more than one hundred.²⁵ The International Bibliography of the Social Sciences records 133 articles on “terrorism” for the year 2000; PsycINFO, which covers nearly 2,000 social science journals, recorded only twenty-five.²⁶

Introduction

5

To state the obvious, attention soared after 9/11. Outside of literary studies, dissatisfaction with previous modes of inquiry led to the invention of new approaches and the creation of new journals, in particular *Critical Studies on Terrorism* and *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, to showcase new scholarship.²⁷ Literary critics also returned to the topic with renewed vigor, writing books on such topics as 9/11 literature and culture (e.g. Versluys, *Out of the Blue*; Gray, *After the Fall*; Banita, *Plotting Justice*; and Däwes, *Ground Zero Fiction*), nineteenth century American literature (Clymer, *America's Culture of Terrorism*), Gothic fiction (Crawford, *Gothic Fiction and the Invention of Terrorism*), Anglo-Indian novels (Tickell, *Terrorism, Insurgency and Indian-English Literature*), and contemporary American literature (Gourley, *Terrorism and Temporality in the Works of DeLillo and Pynchon*).²⁸ In addition to these monographs, we now have anthologies of essays,²⁹ special issues of journals,³⁰ and nearly one thousand individual essays on topics that range from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the Gunpowder Plot to graphic novels and zombies.

Given terrorism's extensive history, its undiminished importance in both world and domestic politics, and the wealth of new writing on the topic, the time is ripe to summarize the state of literary criticism on terrorism, to produce an overview of terrorism's development and representation in imaginative literature, to develop a canon of fictional works dealing with terrorism, and to investigate how terrorism shapes the way we read literature. That is the burden of this collection. While new histories of terrorism continue to be written (e.g. *The Routledge History of Terrorism* and the *Oxford Handbook of the History of Terrorism*³¹), these anthologies focus mainly on the facts of terrorism, paying scant attention to literature and what literature can contribute to terrorism studies. The last item is especially important, as many outside literature departments believe that fiction in all its forms has very little to contribute to the understanding of terrorism due to the inability of contemporary novelists to empathize with terrorists. Consequently, as one distinguished critic puts it, "the literary 'terrorist' is most often personified simply as sociopathic."³² *Terrorism and Literature* collectively demonstrates that literary treatments of terrorism have in fact much to offer, that the literary portrayal of terrorism can be much more sophisticated and challenging than many allow. While it would be foolish, and wrong, to assert that all literary treatments of terrorism are equally wonderful, it is equally a mistake to dismiss the entire history of terrorism in literature as uniformly simplistic and disappointing. The plays, novels, poems, and movies that confront terrorism, as the various contributors show, more often than not prod the

reader or audience into finding complexity in the simple, and they pose difficult questions that challenge the notion that terrorists are by definition taboo. They do so mainly through depicting the *drama* of terrorism, meaning, the clash of multiple narratives and multiple points of view that are often mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, while such estimable books as *Terrorism in Context*, ed. Martha Crenshaw; *The History of Terrorism from Antiquity to Al Qaeda*, eds. Gérard Challand and Arnaud Blin; Matthew Carr, *The Infernal Machine*; and Walter Laqueur's many volumes testify to how terrorism has changed over time, almost all analyses of the literature of terrorism focus on one period and one period only.³³ Occasionally, critics will draw a parallel between their topic and other instances of terrorism, but the connections are usually tangential and not part of a larger argument.³⁴ There has been little attempt at looking at the broader sweep of how the fictive imagination deals with terrorism.³⁵ This volume intends to help remedy this situation.

Terrorism and Literature is not meant to be encyclopedic, and for the record, I am painfully aware of just how much has been left out, but an entry point for a more comprehensive study of terrorism's chronological, cultural, and geographical reach and how terrorism has been represented in literature. As a casual glance at the essays shows, just as there is no one definition of terrorism, neither does literature treat terrorism in one way. Or to put the matter another way, there are as many different approaches to terrorism in literature as there are definitions. Part of this volume's goal is to give the reader a sense of the topic's plenitude, not to settle the matter of terrorism's definition or to specify the precise manner in which fiction responds to terrorism. The point is to demonstrate the seemingly infinite range of responses. To that end, this anthology is divided into three parts.

Because "terrorism" is so historically situated, it is essential to understand the historical contexts for the literary treatment of terrorism. Consequently, the first section, "Origins," contains essays that collectively outline some of the history of terrorism from antiquity to today along with innovative approaches to the topic. This section begins with Reuven Firestone's "Savagery and the Sacred," a consideration of how all three Abrahamic religions contain elements of "radical violence and terror," demonstrating that no one religion has a monopoly on religiously motivated terrorism.³⁶ Robert Appelbaum (Chapter 2), "Early Modern Terrorism," looks at the various forms of terrorism in early modern Europe, including mass killings, violence against property, assassination,

Introduction

7

and massacre, in particular, the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, in which Catholics slaughtered the Protestant Huguenots, who the Catholic majority considered "enemies of church and state." Lindsay Parker (Chapter 3), in "Carrying patriotism in their hearts': The Terror in the French Revolution," focuses on the terror of the French Revolution. How, Parker asks, did the values of 1789, "which included the universal right to life and liberty," transform into Robespierre's policy of terror? Since "terror is a feeling," Parker looks at "the emotional factors in the original and operations of the Terror." Gillian O'Brien examines the conscious decision by the Fenians to embark on a new form of warfare: terrorism. As the leader of Clan na Gael, Alexander Sullivan, said, the Clan would "carry on incessant and perpetual warfare with the power of England in public"; The point, however, is not to inflict terrible physical carnage on the enemy, but to a psychological toll that would, he hoped, eventually become intolerable to the English: "the mystery of the unknown power striking in the dark, always able to evade detection, is far more terrible than the damage inflicted."³⁷ Nathan Greenfield's essay, "The Play's the Thing: How Governments in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century North America Used 'Terrorism' to Further Their Own Aims," moves (as the title says) across the Atlantic to survey the development of terrorism in the United States and Canada. As Greenfield notes, terrorist acts are intended to tell a story, to propose a narrative, and Greenfield examines both the acts (the Haymarket Massacre; Fenian raids into Canada; and lynching) and the "'standard stories' produced by the authorities in Canada West, Illinois, and the American South" in response to terrorism.³⁸ With Rini Bhattacharya Mehta's "The Nation-State's Other: Postcolonial Terrorism in the Indian Context," we look at how terrorism functions in a postcolonial context outside of North America and Europe. In particular, Bhattacharya Mehta illuminates how "both the Hindu nationalist parties and the erstwhile secular Indian National Congress found the new global focus on terrorism conducive to their national policies and discourse."³⁹ Terrorism, in other words, can have the paradoxical effect of shoring up established regimes rather than challenging them.

Simon Prince (Chapter 7, "Conflict and Violence in the Early Northern-Irish Troubles") questions looking at the conflicts and violence of the Troubles through an ethnic lens, arguing instead that the Troubles centered on a political conflict – one over rival visions of modern democracy. As the main political actors competed with each other for power and publicity, some were encouraged to adopt violent strategies. Irregular

warfare, in turn, made the personal political and personalized politics. Multiple dynamic and intersecting conflicts became arrayed around the central one, shaping how the Troubles developed. Lorenzo Bosi, in “The Trajectory of the Red Brigades,” looks at the proliferation of ultra-left wing, revolutionary groups in 1970s Europe. The theory, Bosi says, behind their violence was to “provoke state authorities to reveal their true authoritarian, repressive face,” which is exactly what happened in Italy.⁴⁰ This section concludes with David Cook’s (Chapter 9) “Terrorism in the Middle East,” which surveys the development of Middle East terrorism from the nationalist resistance against the Ottoman Empire and then European domination to the rise of Al Qaeda and Isis.

The next section, “Development: Terrorism in Literature,” surveys some of the ways in which the literary imagination has confronted terrorism, and the essays discuss literature produced from the early modern period to the post-9/11 era. A very wide swath of territory, in other words, and taken together, the contributors demonstrate that the fictive responses to terrorism vary as much as terrorism itself. This section begins with Robert Appelbaum’s “Terrorism in Literature to 1642,” which surveys the many and varied approaches to terrorism in French, English, and Spanish early modern literature. Focusing on such nexes of terrorist violence as Ancient Rome, the Samson story, and the Gunpowder Plot, Appelbaum observes that there is no one approach to terrorism in this period: “One model, critical of the violence, favored law and order and saw terrorists as mistaken or deranged. The other, supporting the violence, though often only allegorically, saw terrorists as spiritual models, and their acts of violence as examples of what a people ought to do in the face of oppression or persecution.”⁴¹ Joseph Crawford’s “Terror in Inquisition”: Terrorists and Inquisitors in the British Gothic Literature of the 1790s “takes as its starting-point the critical commonplace that the popularity of Gothic ‘terror fiction’ in 1790s Britain was partly due to the anxieties aroused by the rise of political ‘terrorism’ in revolutionary France, this essay explores the ambiguous role played within this body of fiction by the Roman Catholic Inquisition, generally regarded in eighteenth-century Britain as the most terrible and terrifying of all institutions. Next, Deaglán Ó Donghaile examines “the popular and sensational late-Victorian fictions that were inspired (or, depending on the author’s political perspective, shocked into existence) by” the Irish bombing campaign of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century, including such lesser known works as Edward Moran’s *Edward O’Donnell: A Story of Ireland of Today* (1884), Grant Allen’s *For Maimie’s Sake: A Tale of Love and Dynamite*

Introduction

9

(1885), Tom Greer's *A Modern Dædalus*, and Donald MacKay's *The Dynamite Ship* (both 1885) as well as "works with more enduring literary reputations such as Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima* (1885) and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907)."⁴² The next essay moves from Britain to Russia. In "Dostoevsky's Terrorism Trilogy," Lynn Patyk examines how Dostoevsky's "remarkable attunement to and synchrony with Russian revolutionary terrorism as it coalesced in the years following [his] return from Siberian penal servitude until his death and the Tsar's assassination in winter of 1881." *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *Demons* (1872), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) comprise what Patyk calls Dostoevsky's "terrorism trilogy," since they "coincide with and reflect upon watershed moments in the emergence of terrorism: Dmitry Karakozov's attempted assassination of Alexander II in 1866, Sergei Nechaev's murder of a revolutionary co-conspirator in 1869, and the People's Will protracted "emperor hunt" in 1879–1881."⁴³ Turning to the United States, Ann Larabee, in "Perils and Pleasures of the Bloody Oath: The Nihilist Conspiracy in American Popular Fiction, 1881–1901," looks at the different response in American fiction to the terrorism addressed by Dostoevsky and the British "dynamite novels": "American popular literature – such as the dime novel and the romance novel–addressed terrorism, but not in ways that we would expect today. Many of these literary offerings were openly sympathetic to Nihilism. They featured American characters drawn to a philosophy of violent opposition to all autocratic rule in the name of Republican political virtue."⁴⁴

With Ève Morisi's "Staging the Limit: Albert Camus's *Just Assassins* and the Il/legitimacy of Terrorism," we move to a twentieth century, post-World War II consideration of what is often considered terrorism's origin. Focusing on Camus' play, Morisi argues that "Camus creates a fiction in and from which to think about the conditions of legitimacy of organized political and lethal violence in the late 1940s: he imagines a model form of terrorism, a terrorism of limits and at the limit, by resorting to a hybrid literary form that borrows from tragedy, melodrama, and dark comedy. Ultimately, this fictional terrorism, however exemplary, is shown to be unjustifiable, notably by this very literary hybrid."⁴⁵ Tony Shaw's "Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* and Terrorism on Film" brings us to the cinematic treatment of postcolonial terrorism. Shaw demonstrates that the enduring appeal of Pontecorvo's film and its ability to attract both terrorists and counter-terrorists stems from the movie's avoiding "agit-prop, good-versus-evil stereotyping in favor of an even-handed look at events from the French and Algerian perspectives"; even further, "no film before

The Battle of Algiers had demonstrated that terrorism was as much the preserve of the state, of democratic governments even, as that of non-state groups.”⁴⁶

The next three essays cover the three major sites for terrorism in the late twentieth century: Northern Ireland, the Middle East, and 9/11 America. Tom Walker, in “‘something in the making’: Writing the Troubles and the Singularity of Northern Irish Literature,” looks at how Northern Irish fiction’s engagement with post-modernist writing techniques (e.g. self-reflexivity and narrative instability) demonstrates how such writers as Seamus Heaney, Deirdre Madden, and Brian Friel engage in “ongoing reflections on how one can write of terror, in intersecting formal, linguistic and ethical terms.”⁴⁷ Rachel S. Harris, in “No Heroes in a Cycle of Violence: Collaborators, Perpetrators and the Never-Ending Terror of the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” discusses how Israeli and Palestinian filmmakers have confronted terrorism. Harris proposes that such films as *Omar* (2013), *Bethlehem* (2013), and *The Green Prince* (2014) “provide a picture of the complicated internecine struggles within Palestinian society and the groups who engage in violence against Israelis. They also showcase Israel’s counter-terrorism measures, particularly its dependence on informers, thereby establishing the battleground of contemporary guerrilla warfare.”⁴⁸ Michael C. Frank’s essay, “‘Why Do They Hate Us?’ Terrorists in American and British Fiction of the Mid-2000s,” brings us to the question of how American literature dealt with 9/11. Focusing primarily on Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007), Frank argues that

fictional engagement with terrorists must be considered in relation to a larger cultural process of meaning-making. As a form of ‘extreme communication’ actions that we classify as ‘terrorist’ do not speak for themselves; they are symbolic messages that require interpretation (in the dual sense of ‘translation’ and ‘explanation’), and this interpretation is a key element of the cultural response to terror.⁴⁹

This section concludes with David Simpson’s consideration of how theory, in particular Jacques Derrida, responded to 9/11. After making the point that theory was supposed to have died numerous times before the terrible events of that day, and yet somehow continues to thrive, Simpson argues that just as 9/11 did not come out of nowhere, neither did Derrida’s response in an extensive interview published in Giovanna Borradori’s *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*. Derrida’s “interest in the autoimmunity syndrome, whereby an organism operates to dismantle its own apparent security mechanisms, goes back at least to the 1990s and arguably to his