Abstract

This study is primarily concerned with the impact of and challenge posed by September 11 on “the liberal imagination” and on the capacity to produce “democratic criticism” of the liberal public sphere in the twenty-first century. September 11 has given impetus to the self-reflexive impulse in American culture and literature has joined the national process of self-searching and self-questioning. Seeing literary works as an expression of what Lionel Trilling has called “the liberal imagination”, I will argue for the necessity of updating the term with the help of Edward Said’s defense of humanism for the twenty-first century. The close readings of major literary works depicting September 11, as well as of several works that do not engage with the attacks directly, but have unmistakably been written in and about the decade marked by what Art Spiegelman has called “the shadow of no towers,” offer a particularly poignant perspective on the role of literature within the public sphere and reveal the challenges that “the liberal imagination” faces at a time when liberalism itself is once again both highly contested and fiercely defended.

Each chapter of the dissertation is grounded both in wider discussions prominent in the public sphere (the death of irony, terrorism, memorialization, trust and the fate of liberalism) as well as in individual theoretical frameworks (post-postmodern satire, the representation of the Other, trauma culture, cosmopolitanism, neoliberalism). My concluding chapter argues for the necessity of moving beyond a trauma-centric historicism and points towards a potential way out of the neoliberal impasse in which liberalism and consequently also “the liberal imagination” have found themselves in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.
throwing light on the close link between both sides and the literary consequences resulting from this. This will be done with the help of Mohsin Hamid's novel The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) which has by now been accepted as a masterpiece of this new genre. The political instability in Iraq, the religious hardliners in Iran and Afghanistan and the rise of terror networks like Al-Qaida were followed by an ideological radicalisation on both sides. Post-Colonial Criticism • Focus is on works created by Colonial powers and the impact on those Colonized • Approach is similar to New Historicism/Cultural Studies Applying Post-Colonialism • How does the literary text, explicitly or allegorically, represent various aspects of colonial oppression? • What does the text reveal about the problems of post-colonial identity, including the relationship between personal and cultural identity and such issues as double consciousness and hybridity? • What person(s) or groups does the work identify as "other" or stranger? How are such persons/gr