

September 11 as a Political Conspiracy in Frank Bidart's "Curse"

Zeena Younis Khalif Al-naeemi

Tikrit University- College of Education for Woman –English Department

zyounis@st.tu.edu.iq

Asst. Prof. Faisal Abdul-Wahhab Al-Doori

Tikrit University- College of Education for Woman –English Department

faisal_hayder@tu.edu.iq

Abstract

The 9/11 attacks have horrified America and the broader international community. The attacks of September 11, 2001, were extraordinary events, as they were described as an earthquake of the whole world, and it caused a coup on various levels and left its impact on the world. September 11th tragedy is one of the most influential and effective events that affect the history of the American content and especially on poetry showing it in many contemporary American poems. Many American poets consider the situation of September 11th as a political conspiracy and these poets are the ones who believe in conspiracy theory. In this paper, Frank Bidart considers the 9/11 attack as a political conspiracy.

Keywords: The September 11 attacks, political conspiracy, Frank Bidart.

Introduction

This chapter clarifies the opinions of many critics or movements who viewed the 9/11 tragic attacks as a conspiracy. Since the accidents of 9/11, great attention has been paid not only to extremism and Islamist terrorism in the Middle East, Muslim and Arab worlds, but also to conspiracy theories about 9/11, American foreign policy, and Jews, Israel, and Zionism. High-profile examples encompass theories that say 9/11 was an American and/or Israeli conspiracy, anti-Semitic conspiracy theory. The Protocols of the Elders of Zion promoted on Radio Islam, jihadist websites, and, in drama, on Hezbollah TV shortly after 9/11, and Holocaust denial by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in his 2005 address and at the Holocaust conference in Iran in 2006. In a September 2010 United Nations speech in New York, Ahmadinejad also said that the United States government was behind 9/11 to support Israel. Since 9/11, this idea or phenomenon has been checked and commented on in various books and essays on Islamist terrorism, conspiracy theory, and the relation between them – a topic first published by Daniel Pipes in *The Hidden Hand: Middle East Fears of Conspiracy* (1996), in particular Matthew Gray's *Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World: Sources and Politics* (2010). The connection was also debated in several books and articles on a conspiracy theory that emerged after 9/11, such as David Aaronovitch's *Voodoo History: How Conspiracy Theory Has Shaped Modern History* (2009). Aaronovitch argues that:

“all sorts of conspiracy theories were springing up around the attack on the World Trade Center and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, theories that seemed to be potentially dangerous in the world view they expounded” (Aaronovitch 3).

The 9/11 Truth Movement supporters are conspiracy theorists who question the prevailing official version, dispute the public consensus of the attacks of September 11, 2001. The primary emphasis is on missing facts that adherents claim are not properly clarified in the formal NIST report, such as the breakdown of 7 World Trade Centers. They suggest that cover-up and, at the very least, the complicity by insiders (Feuer Para. 4).

They analyze facts, evidence from the attacks, discuss various theories of how the attacks unfolded, and advocate for a new investigation into the attacks. Some inside the movement who argue that insiders within the United States government were forthright responsible for the September 11 attacks also say that the attacks had been organized, planned, and carried out to provide the United States Motives proposed by the movement that comprises the use of the attacks as a pretension for fighting the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the creation of opportunities to limit American civil liberties. According to these claims, these allegations may have given the Bush management the justification for the widespread violations of civil liberties and the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan to ensure future oil supplies. The September 11 attacks are a thinly disguised pretext to invade Iraq to impose American domination, get oil, and vindicate the first Bush presidency's defence of Kuwait in the 1990s during the first Persian Gulf War. In some cases, including in mass media, "hawks" in the White House, particularly Vice-President Dick Cheney and members of the New American Century Project, the neo-conservative think tank, have been accused of either being aware of or participating in, the pretended conspiracy (Sullivan 2).

A relatively popular, but not exclusive opinion within the 9/11 Truth movement alleges that the buildings of the World Trade Center have been demolished by controlled demolition (Mole Para. 4). Many speakers at the Hyatt Conference contrasted the footage of the tower collapse with videos of recorded controlled destruction, observing the similarities in both the presence, appearance, and pace of the collapse. The site 911truth.org stated that "Truth Movement" maintains that if it had been indeed pummeled by an aeroplane, the steel frame of the WTC buildings should have given at least some resistance to the weight of the floors above, allowing the collapsing structure to incline over to one side instead of pancake straight down. They further claim that fires caused by jet fuel burning from crashed aircraft may not have caused a collapse, as jet fuel burns at a temperature of not more than 1500°F, whereas a temperature of approximately 2800°C is required to melt steel. David Heller shows the point in a widely read essay:

"The official story maintains that fires weakened the buildings. Jet fuel supposedly burned so hot it began to melt the steel columns supporting the towers. But steel-framed skyscrapers have never collapsed from fire, since they're built from steel that doesn't melt below 2750° Fahrenheit. No fuel, not even jet fuel, which is really just refined kerosene, will burn hotter than 1500° Fahrenheit"

(Ibid Para. 6)

Conspiracy theories were the idea that 9/11 was an "inside job" for government formal as an excuse to attack Iraq and Afghanistan. The conspiracy theory includes primarily two theories, but there are several impulses that many September 11 theorists believe in. The prime two are the tenet that state officials had advanced knowledge of the attacks and did not stop the attack, and the fall of the towers was the result of controlled demolition to mimic intense aircraft crashes. It is also theorized that a missile struck the pentagon, but with more facts, researchers continue to blame the pentagon and believe that the tower collapse was the result of detonations. Theorists argue that the pentagon struck and controlled himself (Beaver Para. 1).

September 11 as a Political Conspiracy in Frank Bidart's "Curse"

New research by ADL shows that anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that blame the terrorist attacks on Israel and Jews on September 11, 2001, continue to earn currency around the world and contribute to a new form of global anti-Semitism. These theories claim increasingly overwhelmingly common among American right-wing extremists, white supremacists, and the Muslim and Arab worlds, say that Israel, not Osama bin Laden, was behind the horrific events of 9/11. Where "conspiracy theories about the Mossad's culpability for the attacks mushroomed." (Konda 275). Anti-Semitic conspirators say that the 9/11 attacks were indeed conducted by Israeli spies, who claim to be the only ones with enough wickedness and cunning to commit such an act. Their theories carry the Protocols of the Elders of Zion into the 21st century, upgrading the familiar subject: the Jews are naturally wicked and have a "master plan" to judge the world. Although Muslims in the Middle East had long been obsessed with conspiracy theories focused on Israel, "a new and more aggressive form of conspiracy theory and attendant demonization of the 'conspirators took on worldwide proportions'" (Ibid 275).

The main group of believers is The Scholars for 9/11 Truth founded by James Fetzer. Simply put, Scholars for 9/11 Truth (S9/11T) is a non-partisan group of faculty, alumni, and scholars in fields as varied as history, research, military policy, psychology, and philosophy, committed to exposing falsehoods and disclosing the truth behind 9/11. Scholars for 9/11 Truth members are persuaded that their report shows that this administration has been lying on what occurred in New York and Washington, D.C. Their continued conviction may be largely the product of the founder's contention that he seeks to apply the ideals of scientific reasoning to the directory and to allow the fact to speak for itself. Many communities, such as this one, appear to be able to obtain pseudo-scientific information, making a narrative that appears legitimate. On the scholars of 9/11 truth "Why Doubt 9/11" several of the arguments, claims are facts that may be in line with reality and act on scepticism. For example, they provide a lot of information about the melting points and temperature of jet fuel burns to constantly reinforce their argument that aircraft could not generate all the damage on their own (Beaver Para. 7).

Investigation of the Anti-Defamation League supported the relevance of the Mossad to conspiracy theories centred on the Israeli government or corporate espionage in America. This investigation is linked to the "WTC7" sub-theory, in which the 7th World Trade Center building was demolished for eliminating incriminated documents. The second main anti-Semitic conspiracy theory set forth a vague financial plot according to which Jewish owners" of the "World Trade Center" plotted the attack for the "insurance money," Jewish businessmen, "in an effort to obtain millions of dollars in insurance money, plotted to destroy the World Trade Center. This conspiracy theory goes to the heart of the myth of the greedy Jew." (Tobias and Foxman 3). From the outset, the emerging September 11, conspiracy genre was dominated by theories that blamed the terrorist accident on Israel precisely or on Jews in general. Two years after the attacks, these conspiracy theories have grown into a big try effort to use the "Big Lie" to blame, affix responsibility to the Jewish people for the most egregious terrorist attack in history (Ibid 5).

This research studies the contemporary American poet "Frank Bidart" who agrees with the ideas of critics. The poet discusses the concept of conspiracy in his poem the "Curse" relating to the tragedy of September 11.

Frank Bidart's "Curse"

Frank Bidart (born 1939) is an American poet and academic, and a Pulitzer Prize-winning for Poetry. Bidart was growing up and raised in California and had dreams and ideas of becoming a director or actor since he was young. However, after he was introduced to literature at the California State University-Riverside, his intentions changed. During his university studies, he became acquainted with the work of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. In an interview with Mark Halliday in 1983, which was

included in *In the Western Night*, the poet discussed how reading Pound's Cantos opened his eyes to poetry's ability and power to cover a broad variety of topics:

“They were tremendously liberating in the way that they say that anything can be gotten into a poem, that it doesn't have to change its essential identity to enter the poem—if you can create a structure that is large enough or strong enough, anything can retain its own identity and find its place there” (Bercovitch 215)

Bidart continued his studies at Harvard University, after graduation in California—Riverside, where he had been a schoolboy and friend of Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell. In 1962, he started studying with Reuben Brower and Lowell. He was unsure, however, of where his studies would take him. In his interview with Halliday, Bidart stated:

“I took classes with half my will —often finishing the work for them months after they were over; and was scared, miserable, hopeful. I wrote a great deal. I wrote lugubrious plays. . . More and more, I wrote poems.” (Bidart and Halliday 21)

Bidart admits that his first efforts at poetry were failures. He carried on with his interview:

“I was doing what many people start out by doing, trying to be ‘universal’ by making the entire poem out of assertions and generalization about the world —with a very thin sense of a complicated, surprising, opaque world outside myself that resisted the patterns I was asserting. These generalizations, shorn [sic] of much experience, were pretty simple-minded and banal” (Ibid 11).

Furthermore, Bidart's diction is unique in poetry: it is sparse yet intellectual, contemplative, and seldom imagistic, despite being common among educated English speakers. Finally, Bidart utilizes little or none of the ridicule specified with postmodern poetry, prioritizes instead to engage great ontological questions: the relationship between body and mind, the anxiety induced by the knowledge of death, the thwarted search for meaning, and the ravage of guilt, love, and loss. Bidart's poetry is discourse poetry, though unlike any other poet of his day in certain ways, Bidart, as many of his contemporaries, C.K. Williams, Jorie Graham, Louise Gluck, and Charles Wright, among others, is a poet of abstraction rather than a poet of the physical world (Rector and Swenson 44).

Reviewers and critics have also often become drawn attention to Bidart's uncommon typography, and to the freedoms, he takes with capitalization and punctuation, Bidart explained to Halliday in his interview that:

“the only way I can sufficiently . . . express the relative weight and importance of the parts of a sentence —so that the reader knows where he or she is and the ‘weight’ the speaker is placing on the various elements that are being laid out —is [through] punctuation. . . Punctuation allows me to ‘lay out’ the bones of a sentence visually, spatially, so that the reader can see the pauses, emphases, urgencies and languors in the voice”

(Bidart and Halliday 23)

Desire, a book by Bidart was nominated for the triple crown includes the National Book Award, Pulitzer Prize, and the National Book Critics Circle Award. Bidart received the Library of Congress's Rebekka Bobbitt Prize for the best book of poetry written in the previous years in 1998. *Desire* opens with thirteen short poems, one of which is a memorial to AIDS-dead artist Joe Brainard. These poems “prepare the psychology” of “The Second Hour of the Night,” the first part is good, and it is a masterpiece such anything Bidart had done, The second half of the book, “The Second Hour of the Night,” is an account of The Ovid tale of Myrrha's incestuous love for Cinyrus, her father (Clark 128).

September 11 as a Political Conspiracy in Frank Bidart's "Curse"

Bidart won Yale University's Bollingen Prize in American Poetry in 2007. *Watching the Spring Festival* (2008), Bidart's first collection of lyric poems, which was one of his most recent publications. His book *Metaphysical Dog* won the National Book Critics Circle Award and was a finalist for the National Book Award in Poetry in 2013. *Half-light: Collected Poems 1965–2016* was awarded the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry by Bidart (Bidart *Half-light* para. 1).

Frank Bidart's "curse" is directed at the September 11th masterminds, those who plotted and executed out the attacks in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., on the World Trade Center. The poem is a bitter and cruel condemnation of these horrific and heinous acts by a set that carried them out with organized conspiracy, as the title implies, and Bidart leaves no question over his contempt and feeling of hatred for the perpetrators. He does not use racial slurs, vulgar emotion, or angry language. Instead, Bidart approaches this sensitive subject provocatively and methodically that causes readers to think, regardless of their individual views. "Curse" is a short poem, but its carefully selected vocabulary, meticulously styled, and powerful meaning make a powerful statement about one of recent history's most world-changing events. Bidart, ironically, uses an early-sixteenth-century way of cursing an individual or a vile act to express his displeasure with an incident that happened in the early twenty-first century, the blending of the curse of the old-fashioned with contemporary resolution. It makes this poem an unforgettable statement in one day of United States history that controlled headlines for several years. The interpretation of "the curse" is as much about understanding her style as her language. Bidart is known for its strange punctuation and word widths, such as using italics or all capital letters. The poet uses a large number of iterations from the title to the last word. In this poem, he uses gaps and italics in lines to assert his viewpoint, but what he does not use is equally significant (Gray and Keniston 127).

In line 1, where the speaker expresses his wish or aspiration for what is to follow, so beginning the sentence with the word "May," which conforms to the poem's title. The "curse" begins and through it, the speaker wants to infect the targets of his hex. Specifically, the first line reflects the desire of the speaker that "you" in the poem (here, plural) become so shocked by what happens until they forfeit their breath for a brief second and cheer in reply to the scene. The truth that the moment was "dead" predicts the sadness and death that lay behind the main thematic focus of the poem.

In lines 3 and 4, the speaker expresses his curse more specifically and precisely, in which he called the same number of floors to crumble on the attackers because they caused them to fall on people in the World Trade Center.

*"head upward you hear as if in slow motion floor
collapse evenly upon floor as one hundred and ten
floors descend upon you."*

(ll, 2-4)

These lines describe the poem's subject, as indicated by the allusion to "one hundred and ten / floors" collapsing. In the 9/11 attack, each tower of the World Trade Center had 110 floors that burned and collapsed. These towers collapsed through an orchestrated, prior and coordinated conspiracy. This information is mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Here, the desire of the speaker is that those in charge of the accident tragedy should have to face in slow motion the same fear and horror from falling into a dilapidated skyscraper. The hope that this thing will happen slowly indicates the desired speaker for the attackers to suffer for as long as possible. He wants them to hear the floors equally fall, one on top of the other, over their heads so that all floors at the end "descend upon you."

Although the word curse is used only once at the end of line 17 in this poem, its connotations extend throughout. Language, style, and themes refer to an organized and systematic placement of a curse on a certain goal - the ancient notion of "eye for an eye" is used as punishment. While there is a clear feeling of disgust, even hatred, expressed in a "Curse," Bidart never gives in to anger or emotional rhetoric. Instead, his desire for revenge was carefully defined at the ceremony, step-by-step in the indictment of the 9/11 responsible. His decision to harangue such an event speaks to his ability and potential as a poet, but it also provides a strong more case for its cause. It is reasonable to expect ranting and raving. However, placidly building a curse against his subjects proves painful and spiritual simultaneously. Just as the 9/11 officials "made" the World Trade Center down and killed nearly 3,000 people, the speaker hopes the same will happen to them. Another common phrase that comes to mind while reading this line is, "You reap what you sow." At the heart of the curse of speaker is the desire of the conspirators themselves to experiment with the conspiracy. The curse the speaker places on the conspirators call for equal retribution for their actions: in line 5, "May what you have made descend upon you" and "May their breath now, in eternity, be your breath." In these lines, the desire of the speaker is more metaphorical than literal, as he is speaking in general about what was "made" on this day and the eternal fallout for the actions committed. The notion of equal retribution, of course, in this poem is symbolic because the hijackers have already died — dying alongside their victims while the planes smashed. However, this obvious truth is overshadowed by a burning desire for vengeance, even if it is merely symbolic. The word "you" covers anyone who has had a role and is responsible for planning the attacks, so that the attackers can be brought to justice, the possibility of justice - or revenge - will continue after September 11, 2001. In the poem, the poet means that those responsible for the attack are more than 19 hijackers. The subject of equal retribution readily enforces both the deceased kidnappers and the still alive conspirators.

The rage expressed in lines 8-9 is biting but well-controlled. About to the preceding two lines, the speaker desires the conspirators to be so influenced by their actions that the breath of their victims may in fact "enter" their bodies and be sordid, vile, and destructive, "like acid." The part of the conspirators and attackers that the speaker desires the acid to "eat" is important to note: "the bubble of rectitude that allowed you breathe." "Rectitude" means integrity or morals, or correct behaviour. It is a kind of goodness that means strictness and conformity to adhere to a set of laws and rules. The word shows twice in the "Curse" and has great weight in evaluating the mentality of the conspirators. While it seems paradoxical to apply any word related to morality or integrity to persons who commit heinous crimes, the speaker employs "rectitude" to describe killers' beliefs and the concept that they are justified and have a good reason for attacking a state, regardless of the loss of innocent lives. He claims that it is their feeling of self-righteousness that grants them a target and life in the first place.

The term "rectitude" occurs again in line 13, but this time the conspirators are "disenthralled," or set free from it. Describing them as in the phrase "at last disenthralled" hints at the hijackers deaths on September 11, in which they were said to have accomplished what they wanted in their own "moral" context. They now "seek the dead," attempting to "enter them" in the same way as the conspirators entered and reached their victims who are alive on the last day of their lives. This line 15 expresses the disgust and defiance that the victims sense toward their assailants. They can "spit... out" any unwelcome object that attempts to enter their mouths in death. Finally, they have the force to prohibit the conspirators and, in more particular, the conspirators from being a source of nourishment or energy. They are "not food" for the dead.

In lines 5 and 17, the word "made" appears twice in the poem. For both cases, it aligns with an opposite idea, what the conspirators did should go back to haunt them and what the poet did is a curse. From the beginning, the poem to the final statement, "what I have made is a curse." The hex is made up of a sequence of phrases that start with the word "May," followed by an explanation or description of what the poet wants to hit his targets. Each one includes a shape of retribution that the poem's "you" can suffer because of the suffering they created. In reality, the action of the poet of creating is a mirror picture of what the 9/11 architects made. In the first statement, the poet hopes that the conspirators will

September 11 as a Political Conspiracy in Frank Bidart's "Curse"

live the same predestination as their victims, and they only look forward to realizing that many floors are collapsing on them. His subsequent statements pair the action of attackers with a fair and egalitarian return, step-by-step until the curse has been completed. The poem reads as if it describes something that was made from the ground up (i.e., from A to Z), a layer put upon layer until the building is finished, such they did tower architects. Ironically, what the poet constructs would ultimately lead to devastation, just as what the conspirators made, led to destruction. Furthermore, whether the act of making is main to human desire.

To conclude, the aspect that makes Bidart's poem particularly interesting is the parallel way he employs to get metaphorical justice to the hijackers and conspirators who planned and orchestrated the tragic incidents of September 11 and because they perished in the end with their victims. From the first line to the last, the poet builds his curse step by step, beginning with a chilling signal to the breakdown of the "World Trade Center" and the poet hopes the co-conspirators endure the same terror. The curse is inspired by a need for justice such that one is to endure the penalty for the harm caused to others. Bidart's poem "Curse" is based on this principle of justice. Because of what the conspirators did, they suffered and lived with the same terror and eventually died together with the victims.

Conclusion

This study summarizes that contemporary American poetry was deeply affected by the tragedy of the September 11 attacks. Poets were drawn more toward the events of 9/11 as the main subject because it has many connections with the intellectual and historical turns that shook the world and, which poets tended to scrutinize their great texts, and were influenced by political conspiracies. However, these poems - the 9/11 anthology, those opposing the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan, their "conspiracy" will remain a historical record of people's response to their world and government. A lot of contemporary American poems showed in the period following the attack on the World Trade Center. The impact of 9/11 on poetry is characterized by the emergence of a view that the events of the eleventh were a political conspiracy, and among the poets, who considered it to be the conspiracy of the poet Bidart in his poem the "Curse." Through this study, the conspiracy has continued to this day.

Work Cites

1. Aaronovitch, David. *Voodoo Histories: How Conspiracy Theory Has Shaped Modern History*. Vintage, London. 2009
2. Beaver, Dabria. "9/11 was an Inside Job". The Ohio State University. 2018. <https://u.osu.edu/vanzandt/2018/03/07/911-was-an-inside-job/comment-page-1/>
3. Bercovitch, Sacvan. "The Cambridge History of American Literature: Volume 8, Poetry and Criticism 1940- 1995". Cambridge University Press. 1996.
4. Bidart, Frank. "Half-light: Collected Poems 1965-2016". The Pulitzer Prize Winner in Poetry. 2018. <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/frank-bidart>
5. -Bidart, Frank and Halliday, Mark. "Frank Bidart- An Interview (with Mark Halliday)". *Ploughshares*, Vol. 9, No. 1. 1983.

6. Clark, Nora .*Aphrodite and Venus in Myth and Mimesis*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2015 .
7. - Feuer, Alan. "500 Conspiracy Buffs Meet to Seek the Truth of 9/11." New York Times. 2006 <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/05/us/05conspiracy.html>
8. Gray ,Jeffrey and Keniston ,Ann. *The News from Poems: Essays on the 21st-Century American Poetry of Engagement*. University of Michigan Press. 2016.
9. Al Ghaberi, J. (2017). Post-9/11 Anglophone Arab Fiction. A Dialogue Between the West and the Arab World. GRIN Verlag.
10. -Konda, Thomas. *Conspiracies of Conspiracies: How Delusions Have Overrun America*. University of Chicago Press. 2019.
11. Moghari, S. . (2021). Racism, Ethnic Discrimination, and Otherness in Shakespeare's Othello and The Merchant of Venice. *International Journal of English and Comparative Literary Studies* , 2(4), 25-41. <https://doi.org/10.47631/ijecls.v2i4.252>
12. Mole, Phil. "9/11 Conspiracy Theories: The 9/11 Truth Movement Perspective." eSkeptic. 2006. <https://www.skeptic.com/eskeptic/06-09-11>
13. Rector, Liam and Swenson, Tree. *On Frank Bidart: Fastening the Voice to the Page*. University of Michigan Press. 2007.
14. Sullivan, Will. Viewing 9/11 From a Grassy Knoll You won't believe what the conspiracy theorists are claiming-or will you? U.S. News & World Repor. 2006. <https://web.archive.org/web/20090422142323/http://usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/060903/11conspiracy.htm>
16. Tobias, Glen and Foxman, Abraham. *Unraveling Anti-Semitic 9/11 Conspiracy Theories*. Anti-Defamation League, United Nations Plaza, New York. 2003.