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Tales and Torment: An Exploration of the Intersection of Personal and Cultural Trauma through

Fantasy and Fairy Tale in Clair Messud's *The Emperor's Children*

Claire Messud's novel *The Emperor's Children* explores the lives of five major

characters, and a host of minor ones, in New York during the months surrounding the September

11th attacks.1 Danielle, a documentary producer, Julius, a freelance writer, and Marina, daughter

of the illustrious writer Murray Thwaite and burgeoning author herself, became fast friends at

their alma mater, Brown University, and struggle to find themselves as they cross into their

fourth decade. Thwaite, the titular "emperor," according to many critics2, hides his *magnum*

opus under lock and key – "[p]artly aphoristic, partly essayistic…the distillation, crystalline, of

all he had learned, and knew, and had come to live by," entitled *How to Live* (Messud 69) – and

spends his time, when not writing or guest-lecturing, seducing younger women, including

Danielle. Thwaite's nephew, Frederick "Bootie" Tubbs, strives throughout the novel to become

a self-made man from within first his mother's cosseting, the university system, and, finally, his

uncle's shadow, before rising from the ashes of tragedy, "like the phoenix" (441).

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1 Current scholarship on *The Emperor's Children* exists as a combination of book reviews (Amidon, Gardom, Griffiths, Iannone, Levin, and Yarbrough) and critical examinations of her use of 9/11 (Keeble, Versluys, and Oates), with no reference to narrative form, and little information on how individual and cultural traumas intersect.

2 Stephen Amidon, Jane Gardam, and others.

Throughout the novel, Messud utilizes numerous such allusions to fantasy and fairy tale alike, ranging from names and daydreams to outright descriptions and experiences, with much else besides. Yet these same allusions, so abundant during the first half of the book, become less and less frequent as the characters hurtle toward both The Day the World Stopped Turning and actual adulthood. Indeed, Messud's choice to place one of the most prominent events in current American memory in the final 70 pages of the novel – the traditional place for a climactic moment, which is in itself significant – and use it merely as a catalyst rather than a more central theme to the novel invites a more serious investigation, especially in relation to the significant decrease in the fairy tale and fantasy allusions the closer the story comes to September 11, 2001, which, in turn, studies the effects of both individual and global trauma on young adults and their development and maturation.

Cultural Trauma and Its Elements

If you, dear reader, were to now rise from your chair and walk to the nearest person over the age of 18 (though the Incident did occur but sixteen years ago, youthful memories are fickle things) and ask that person – or mirror – "Where were you when the world stopped turning?", you would receive a response similar one of to these: "that September day?"[3] perhaps, and then, "I was waiting on phone call from [family member or friend] that [never/eventually] came," or, more likely, "It shocked me, but had no actual effect on my life." For most of the country, the latter answer is most prevalent. Yet we still, as a nation, consider September 11 to be one of the

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[3] The next line in Alan Jackson's "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)", 2002.

foremost traumatic moments of our time. We refer to it as a world-shaking event, whether the attacks themselves, the nation's near-immediate response, or both, though the planes remained with in the US borders. We have since let the day's aftermath affect our travel, our economy, our military deployment, and even our reputation. This phenomenon is known in critical circles as cultural trauma.

Much like scaffolding assignments so that undergraduates can build upon what they already know, let us first explore the concentric circles of trauma in order to better understand how it applies to the September 11 attacks, and, further, to Messud's novel. While trauma itself does have grades of intensity, the circles to which I refer focus more on where in the grand scheme of society each particular version of trauma stands. Trauma itself "stems from the ancient Greek, meaning 'wound'" and "[in] contemporary medical and psychiatric literature, writes Cathy Caruth (1996: 3 f.): 'The term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind'," one so intense that "it breaches 'the mind's experience of time, self, and the world'" (Eyerman 42, emphasis his). Essentially, when an individual experiences an event that shakes their perception of reality to the core – an "unthinkable," "forceful" event "in that it 'resists simple comprehension' (p. 6) and cannot easily be assimilated into already established frameworks of understanding" – that individual experiences true trauma, and can suffer symptoms varying from "dreams" to "flashbacks…[i]n addition to numbness" and beyond, not only from the memory of trauma itself, but from "the repression of its memory" (42). In addition, contemporary theorists have suggested revisions to this classical understanding

of trauma to "focus on two aspects, first, the traumatic effects on the victim, the recurrent

unwanted intrusion of memory and its affect [*sic*] on behavior; secondly, on the possibility or, as

Caruth (1996) expresses it, the 'impossibility' of memory" in order to better study memory,

trauma, and the "deeply hidden" (42).

Surrounding the individual trauma stands the circle of cultural, or collective, trauma.

Generally caused by a major crisis within the society itself – a war or economic depression, as

opposed to witnessing violent death or experiencing a severe accident, as in an individual trauma

– a social trauma "is a shocking occurrence which can cause a breakdown in daily routines and

expose at the same time the largely taken for granted values that guide them" (Eyerman 42).

Both individual and social traumas "issue from shock," and reinforce "one another, making the

shock and sense of loss even greater" – especially if the triggering event is war or depression,

"one's personal loss is intimately tied to those suffered by others. The cumulative impact would

only intensify the trauma, where a sense of belonging, a collective identity, is shattered along

with the individual identity" (43), and this "threat to the collective rather than the individual

identity [is what] defines the kind of suffering at stake" (Alexander and Breese xii).

Collective traumas, too, must be "conceived as wounds to social identity" – rather than

merely repressing the event, as in an individual trauma, the society experiencing the event(s)

must shift their mindset, as a whole, from individuals suffering "a multitude of private disasters[,

as t]he trauma is their own and not yet shared" to those who "perceive the similarity of their

situation with that of others, define it as shared" (Sztompka 160). The social actors within the

collective, too, must "transform individual suffering into a matter of collective concern…[I]t is a matter of symbolic construction and framing, of creating a narrative and moving along from there. A 'we' must be constructed via narrative and coding…[which] requires speeches, rituals, marches," and other forms of enacting changes (Alexander and Breese xii-xvii). The largest difference between a cultural trauma and an individual one stems from narrative – from process. Suffering "must be framed against background expectations" in order for the sufferers to find meaning, and can only do so "if they are conceived as wounds to social identity" (xii). People "make traumatic meanings, though they do so in circumstances which they have not themselves created" (xxiii), with those who directly experienced the event expressing themselves "verbally and visually, in a sustained way and project[ed] their personal tragedies onto the larger moral screen of the nation" in order to create the perfect storm from which a cultural trauma can arise (qtd. in xxv). In other words, in "constructing cultural traumas[,] social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but 'take on board' some significant responsibility for it" (Alexander 1) – that is, by participating in the process of trauma creation, society can begin healing and accepting the world-shaking events which caused the individual traumas in the first place.

Now that we have a thorough grounding in Trauma theory as it applies to both individual and collective suffering, we can better understand how September 11, 2001 became a cultural trauma. The attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the White House (though diverted into an open field in PA) at 8:45AM were quickly broadcast throughout both the nation

and the world, and the Nation rapidly responded by near-instantaneously blaming (the later

identified) Al Qaeda terrorists, shutting down airports, and whisking into hiding the country's

highest authorities ("September 11: Chronology of terror"). The targets themselves, "the single

most salient symbol of American-dominated global capitalism and the single most visible

symbol of American military domination" (Smelser 264), were elevated "to near-sacred status"

and became "an integral part of what made the events so traumatic" (265).

The individual traumas of the people who lost family and friends through the attacks, the

simultaneous broadcast of the action as Breaking News, and the sacrifices of law enforcement

and First Responders, both in time and lives, combined to create a major national, collective

trauma. In the moments and months afterward, the response to "September 11 seemed designed

to fit Alexander's initial definition of cultural trauma: 'When members of a collectivity feel they

have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group

consciousness…changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways' (ch. I, this

volume)" (265). Smelser goes on to say that "September 11 constituted simultaneously a serious

cultural trauma, a burst of national unity, a reaffirmation of Americanism, a substantial national

mobilization, a righteous mission, and a cause for celebration" (279) in the moral, religious, and

outright propaganda against Al Qaeda expelled by the government at large in order to form a

cohesive narrative and to respond quickly and decisively. He argues that the national response to

the attacks, the process by which it created the cultural trauma was "truncated…[into] a matter

of short days, if not hours," and the "little evidence of social division around the trauma" (280)

created a simplistic cultural trauma (282), as opposed the complex processes of such traumas as

the narratives around the Holocaust.

Since Smelser began his research in the weeks post-9/11 (and the later publication of it in

2004), the narrative has somewhat shifted due to the effects of counter conversation – the

involvement of the US in the Middle East, for instance – and the portrayal of the attacks and

their aftermath in fiction. The ways in which authors portray the trauma, both in order to

interrogate the narrative at large and to understand and recover from the trauma itself, range

from "tangentially: as a tragic moment that punctuates other, more mainstream (mostly love)

interests," to the expression of "raw outrage and revanchist feelings…but have little to no

literary merit" with few novels "that succeed in engaging the full range of the imagination,

beyond patriotic clichés…resist such premature closure" as suppressing "the trauma of 9/11.

Tragedy is turned into triumphalism without proper mourning or working-through" (Versluys

22) – a complaint directed at the very definition of cultural trauma we have worked towards.

Versluys also goes so far as to identify Messud as one of these first authors, who uses the

tragedy to "punctuate other, more mainstream" love interests (195 n.7), though he does later

admit she wrote "an important [novel] in which 9/11 figures as a plot element" (202, n.1).

Perhaps, instead, Messud keeps 9/11 on the periphery to call attention to its more

primitive self, to underscore the individual trauma which underlies and allows the creation of

cultural trauma in the first place, by instead using the more subtle narrative trope: repeated use of

literary elements, specifically with regards to fairy tales and fantasy, which, in turn, illustrate the

maturity of the main characters within the text.

Referential Elements in *The Emperor's Children*

Before diving into the meaty bits of the text itself, let us take a moment to examine the

empirical data concerning the appearance of various allusions to fairy tales, fantasy, and

fantasies throughout the text. I will hence refer to the allusions in two categories: fairy and

fantasy. The fairy category, based on a combination of wide folkloric study[4] and brevity,

includes such references as fairy tales (such as Rumpelstiltskin and "The Emperor Has No

Clothes"), creatures of myth and/or legend (phoenix, dragons, the Trojan Horse, and monsters),

fairy tale themes (telling stories, princesses, happy endings, named stories, and lore), omens,

Irish/Scottish mythology (will o' wisps, the fairy court, the Sight, and sprites), and gods. The

fantasy category encompasses fantasizing (about sexual intercourse or situations, life, suicide,

and more), the comparison of fantasy to reality, the realization of fantasy as reality,

mythologizing, and the making of fantasy into reality, among others.

With regards to these categories, *Emperor's Children* contains at least thirty-four

separate instances of the fairy, and twenty-four or more of the fantasy across the two sections of

the book – separated by the Fourth of July.[5] In the fairy category, Danielle's perspective contains

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[4] For Celtic references, see Nora Chadwick and Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees. For fairy tales, Wonder Tales, folk tales, or *Maerchen*, see the Grimm Brothers, Henry Glassie, and others.

[5] Also notable is that Chapter 42, "Let Go," is the first chapter after the Fourth of July. Whether there is a correlation between Douglas Adams and the end of the Fourth of July remains to be seen.

nine references, eight pre- and one post-Fourth, Bootie, seven, with four pre- and three post-

Fourth, Marina, three, with two pre- and one post-Fourth, Thwaite a mere one pre-Fourth,

Julius, seven, two pre- and five post-Fourth, Seeley, five, four pre- and one post-Fourth, Judy,

one pre-Fourth, and five attributed to the Narrator/narratorial voice, only one of which occurs

post-Fourth. In the fantasy category, Danielle receives a total of five references, three pre- and

two post-Fourth, Bootie, eight, five pre- and three post-Fourth, Marina, three, all pre-Fourth,

Thwaite, five, all but one pre-Fourth, Julius, four, all pre-Fourth, and none pertain to Seeley,

Judy, or the Narrator/narratorial voice. The chart (Figure 1) illustrates more fully the spread of

references within the novel, by which we can better examine the effects of these allusions.

Considering the postmodern[6] time period in which this novel was penned, however, and the

(selective?) avoidance of traditional order inherent in the concept of postmodernism, let us

proceed with the understanding that the novel has two climaxes – the Fourth of July, and the

Eleventh of September – and both affects and further illustrates each character development arc

from childishness into maturity through the change in the frequency of allusions within the text.

The fairy allusion, and therefore Ludovic Seeley, deserves a bit of attention before we get

started discussing climaxes, though he exists as a minor character without point-of-view

dedicated chapters. Acting as a barometer for the novel, he first appears in chapter 1 to Danielle

as "slightly fey" (4). He was "at once loose and controlled, as if he played with the illusion of

looseness" with "ears, pinned close to his head" with a face "as that of a nineteenth-century

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[6] Henceforth, any use of the term "postmodern" refers to the

portrait, a Sargent perhaps, an embodiment of sardonic wisdom and society, of artistic

refinement" (5). This description, one of predatory grace, projection of illusion, and trickster-

esque buoyancy, reflects the Irish *sídhe*.[7] These characters of mythology, also known as the

Tuatha Dé Danann, exist in the liminal space between "men," "demons," and "fallen gods"

(Rees and Rees 30), and were the Fifth People of Ireland, who "came from a land of magic

learning" (115). These gods, too, perpetuated the ideal of perfection, in that no man could be

king if he possessed any disfigurements or flaws – the first example of whom, Nuadu, lost his

kingship after his arm in the First Battle of Mag Tuired (32). Indeed, "the gods are beautifully

dressed and most are of startlingly beautiful appearance…There is no sin and no

punishment…Those [mortals] who die, or who are lured away to the Land of Promise, the land

of the young, leave for an idealized existence, amid beauty, perpetual youth, and goodwill"

(Chadwick 186). After the Milesians, or current Irish people, invade, the Tuatha are relegated to

a kind of godhood and banished to the *sídh*, Irish for both "prehistoric burial mounds" which the

gods inhabit, and the gods – or, in later traditions, the fairies – themselves (174). While these

characters "are neither worshipped nor sacrificed to" (174), they do play major roles in the

mythology of Ireland, and later influence the development of the fairy mythos which persists

today in both Ireland and popular culture the world over.

    Once the Tuatha become part of the fairy legend (post-Christianity), the term 'Fay-

erie'… [referred to] a state of enchantment or GLAMOUR, and was only later used for the fays

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[7] Pronounced "Sheehd"

[*sic*] who wielded those powers of illusion. The term 'fairy' now covers a large area, the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian ELVES, the DAOINE SIDHE of the Highlands, the TUATHA DE DANANN of Ireland" among others (Briggs 131, emphasis hers). On down the line, the fairy legends split into light, or "Seelie" – along with the Gaelic[8] "seely" was Middle English "seely…seeley, seelye," which translated to "Happy, blissful; fortunate, lucky, well-omened, auspicious ("seely, adj." 2.), or to "Innocent, harmless" (5.) – and dark, "Unseelie" courts (122), who were constantly at war, "for the evil fairies are strong and wicked" (379). Those of the Seelie Court are mischievous, immature, and morally ambiguous, but, unlike those of the Unseelie court, do not intentionally harm humanity.

Messud's choice of Ludovic "Seeley" as a reference to the fairy folk can be nothing but deliberate, judging not only on personal experience in choosing character names that reflect character personalities without giving too much away, but on the sheer amount of scholarship pertaining to the analysis of names within any given text. In addition to his name (first appearing on p. 4 of the novel) and description as "fey," Seeley also chooses to leave his home in Australia – interestingly enough, one could argue that the "Land Down Under" is a home of the *sídh*, as they were relegated to the underground half of Ireland after the loss of the Second Battle of Moytura (Rees and Rees) – to start *The Monitor* in the US (Messud 11), a magazine purporting a "no-holds-barred organ of truth in which anything – anything true, that is" spread (238). His

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[8] For the purposes of this paper, "Gaelic" refers to both Irish and Scottish literature and legend, as, across the centuries, the cultures have mixed time and again.

aim to unmask "these hacks [like Thwaite] for what they are" – and to question "the meaning of emotions… [to let] go of their falsehoods so you can see things for what they are" (122) – reeks of not only ambition but of moral ambiguousness: what does it matter, he seems to ask, if Thwaite and his ilk lose their reputations because of my magazine, as long as I reveal the Truths of the World, "something bigger than private opinion" (123)? While a few suffer, the Greater Good benefit – as does Seeley in his profit margin. Too, his attempts at revolution through *The Monitor* reflect an immature, youthful outlook, also seen in Thwaite's consistent complaints on him throughout the novel, and therefore another fey link. Yet, while Seeley drives Marina both away from her family and friends, through their relationship, and into maturity, as in her engagement, marriage, and completed novel, he does not grow himself. Instead, directly after 9/11, he escapes to the British Isles to start the whole process over again, that he "can't lose momentum…Not only was it a matter of income – her parents could help, for a while – but his career, of course" (449).

If we allow the assumption that there are two climaxes in the novel, we must first unpack how, and why, the Fourth of July functions as the first. Freytag's Pyramid of dramatic structure, the general go-to in creating a narrative (outside the postmodern sense), first sets up the premise (Exposition), then moves on to establish stakes (conflict), create tension (rising action), pit the protagonist against the Big Decision and/or Engage in Direct Conflict with the Antagonist (climax), solve all the problems (falling action), and resolve any loose ends (denouement) ("Plot (narrative)"), which the novel, up through the Fourth, follows faithfully.

Each character has their own pyramid, and each character reaches their direct conflict before or on the Fourth – Danielle gives (inner)voice to her fear that "their intimacy were merely her imagining" (297); Bootie learns he's lost the race for Marina's affections (288); Marina announces her engagement (252); and Julius realizes he may have made a mistake in choosing David over his friends (292). After these moments, two-thirds of the way into the text, things begin rapidly changing for all the characters, representing the falling action in the pyramid. Julius, a man who lives for power (32), recognizes that once David loses his job, he also loses the glamor that job cast over him to make him attractive, that "David, drunk, was [of a sudden] moving like a fat man…He couldn't imagine David without his job" (314) – the job is the physical manifestation of his power to continue to improve Julius' life, to support and protect him through his income. Immediately after the Fourth, Marina announces the completion of her book (which, up until falling in love with [the idea of] Seeley, would have been the climax of her story considering the length of time and personal energy she has/not poured into it), only to receive poor reviews from her primary role model, her father (322) – an immediate rise again – yet proceeds toward her wedding undaunted, moving, again, into falling action and denouement. Bootie completes his article and submits it to Marina, Murray, and his mother (330), partly, perhaps, as revenge for Marina's engagement, only to be told it was "an insane rant" (333) and that according to "[Thwaite], the thinking portion of [New York], and by extension…this nation, you will simply cease to exist" (338) – yet once this moment is completed, he packs up his apartment and moves on (351), as if to, again, follow the denouement of his story arc. Danielle's

next chapter, six post-Fourth, helps to resolve some of Marina's falling action, and relegates her

firmly in the "denouement" moment in that, while she does have a chapter in her "voice," it is

primarily dialogue with Marina and thus out of her own point of view, with her next point of

view chapter being the arrival of 9/11, and thus our second climax.

 Beyond the decisions made by each character surrounding the Fourth and the

significantly reduced allusions to both fairy tales and fantasy, the chapters post-Fourth delineate

a shift in the specific types of allusions within the fairy references themselves, moving from a

lighthearted tone to a morbid and foreboding one, or, depending on the category, disappear

entirely. Before the Fourth, these allusions run along the lines of "fleeting illusion[s] that her

mother was a girl from a storybook, uncorruptible and free" (Messud 251) and "[Danielle]

believed a little in magic, too" (9). Post-Fourth, on the other hand, sport cynical allusions.

Marina refers to the *Monitor*'s secretary as "Lizbeth, that smarmy princess" (360) when in fact

Marina herself, daughter of the "emperor" of the novel, requires the submissions to her and

Seeley's newspaper to cross lines much harsher than "smarmy" ones. Danielle's chapter title,

"Lady in Waiting" (368), tops a chapter in which she waits, not only upon Marina for her

wedding, but also for Thwaite's acknowledgement and attention – the traditional High Medieval

Lady in Waiting to which this allusion ironically refers, however, was generally a chaste, if not

virginal, companion and chaperone to her mistress. Bootie reflects his life is "A tale told to an

idiot" and that the citizens living through the aftermath of the September 11th attacks act "as if a

beloved king's death had just been announced" (436), signifying both the traumatic events moments before and his own "death" at the same time.

If we consider, then, the allusions to fairy tales and fantasy to signify growth, how does this "first" climax situate within each character's arc? Arin Keeble would have us believe that, while "in the preceding chapters [to 9/11] all the major characters enter a new phase of their lives, establishing new relationships, which could represent, in every case, a major life change or personal epoch" (368), post-9/11 they regress "to their initial dispositions" (370), glossing over the climactic moments surrounding the Fourth of July in favor of discussing how 9/11 should, but does not, have a lasting effect on the lives of our "largely stock characters whose superficialities are self-evident" (367).

True, each of our protagonists do reach new phases – Julius finds David, who can help him "turn air – or straw, for that matter – into gold" (Messud 67); Marina finds love and inspiration in Seeley; Danielle, along with Thwaite's affection, feels she gains a sort of "sixth sense" about Thwaite, a "gift of clear sight" (232-33); and Bootie has finally found escape from his mother, the "grasping, winged monster" in working on his article (286). If we, too, equate the use of such fairy tale and fantasy allusions to character growth – and, more specifically, the leave-taking of childhood – as I thus far have tentatively tried to connect, and observe the steady decline – or, in some cases, disappearance all together – in such allusions post-Fourth of July,

we see that though the characters *do* return to their pre-9/11, and even pre-Fourth dispositions, they do not leave Experience behind as they progress toward a Second Innocence.[9]

September 11, 2001 as a Secondary Climax

In our earlier discussion of the creation of cultural trauma, we discovered that 9/11, through the propaganda and discourse immediately following its occurrence, quickly shifted from individual to collective, and therefore cultural, trauma. We discussed how cultural and individual traumas differ, in that individual traumas are repressed and can only be overcome through acceptance and working through, while cultural traumas represent the process by which cultures create a new normal after a traumatic event. We have not yet, however, discussed how these concepts apply to Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children*.

After the Fourth of July, we see the fantasy and fairy tale allusions dwindle, as well as the action within the novel start to slow, signaling, as after a climax, the wrapping-up of loose ends. Yet where a dramatic comedy or fairy tale would end after the wedding of Marina and Seeley, *Emperor* keeps going toward a second climactic moment, exemplifying, again, its postmodern tendencies in its attempt to explore what novels would traditionally keep behind the curtain and out of sight of the reader – after the happy ending. In Julius' arc, we move past the realization that he's chosen his boyfriend over his best friends (Messud 292) and, instead of watching him suffer through gladly until things turn out better, as would a character in a fairy tale ("Rumpelstiltskin," perhaps?), he reflects actual human nature in his desire first to mold

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[9] See William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*.

David to his desires (dragging him to the wedding, 367) and then to drive David to leave in the most violent way imaginable (394) rather than take the many opportunities since he began losing interest in David to leave himself (292). In Marina Seeley née Thwaite's arc, we see, quickly post-wedding, she "felt as though she were married not to a man but to *The Monitor*; or rather, that *he* was married to *The Monitor* and she was not married at all" and began questioning whether she even wanted to be within a week of her wedding (397), far from the "Cinderella"- esque ending we were led to expect from her whining about getting a day job (51) to the whirlwind romance that is her perspective of her relationship, which she hopes will pick back up after the magazine launches (398). Danielle, coming out of her emotional slump around the Fourth for having to hide her relationship with Thwaite, glows with happiness, ready to tell all and sundry about the next move she and Thwaite are about to take, *sleeping over* (405, emphasis mine).

Once Thwaite takes that step beyond "just" sleeping with another woman (opportunities he mentions throughout the novel) to spending the night and, for Danielle at least, cementing their relationship as lovers rather than mistress and adulterer – this "grand passion" (405), this "why couldn't [Thwaite] stay in this doll-sized studio, in this lovely young woman's arms, forever?" (408). Immediately following their night of extra-marital bliss dawns September 11, 2001. Danielle emerges from the bathroom to see Thwaite observing the aftermath of the first plane (411), and, after realizing the extent of the damage, Thwaite ends their relationship quite abruptly with "I need to go home" (413) and "I'm sorry…Are you going to be okay?" (414).

Not only does Danielle witness the collective, soon to be cultural trauma that is 9/11, but she also experiences individual trauma, the "unthinkable" and "forceful" event that "resists simple comprehension." We see her attempt to repress the moment by refusing to watch him leave (414). She absorbs, too, the trauma of the people on the streets, "dust-covered, bewildered people, some crying, drifting up the avenue, lots of them, like refugees from a war" (414) and the two events seem to "reinforce one another." Later still, when lounging with her mother in an attempt to escape recent events, Danielle cannot seem to bring herself to discuss the events of September 11 at all, though she "wanted so much to tell someone about it all, about him, about everything leading up to that day and the day itself…And so knew she would never have it aloud" (473), another key symptom of individual trauma.

In Danielle's chapter, individual and cultural trauma intersect on September 11, 2001, which sends the rest of the novel into the more traditional climax-falling action-denouement-end chain of events the novel seemed to suggest after the Fourth of July. Bootie fakes his death in the aftermath of the bombings, which brings Marina and Julius together, and out of their depressive slumps, in an unselfish (a first for them both!) attempt to track him down (albeit unsuccessfully); Thwaite reunites with his wife, no questions asked, while Danielle spirals into depression, attempted suicide, and escape for recovery. For Julius and Marina, Experience has led to a Second Innocence – though they are scarred and lonely, they return, according to Keeble at least, near enough to "their initial dispositions" that he feels they have regressed, and that

"9/11 should usher in a new era of gravity" rather than celebrate the characters' ability to

somewhat recapture their lost past (370). Oates, on the other hand, suggests that

> Messud evokes the elaborate surfaces of American culture in order to go deep
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> beneath; in doing so we see the American idea of the inviolable individual, a
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> status seemingly attained by Murray and desired by all, as predicated on a willful
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> violence and aggression that our culture has hidden from our eyes behind an
>
> ornate curtain. Nine-eleven, this novel shows, tears down not only the curtain
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> between our comfort and the misery of others but also the curtain we've draped
>
> around the idea of ourselves, leaving us for a moment at least naked (160).

Indeed, the events in Danielle's life, specifically, on 9/11 – the bombings, Thwaite's breakup,

and her near-immediate repression and depression – display an astounding connection between

individual and collective trauma which must almost certainly be a deliberate move. Not only do

they reveal "the misery of others" and "the inviolable individual," the traumas force readers to

reflect on how the fairy tale-like "real" lives of the varying degrees of Rich and Famous

characters in *Emperor* (ranging from "desperate to be rich and powerful" Julius to "actually rich

and famous" Thwaite), and, by extension, the real world's Rich and Famous, can still be

interrupted in an instant from traumatic societal events, just like ours were. By reinforcing the

near-mysterious aura the Rich and Famous exhibit in their reclusiveness and the way that they

remain within close-knit circles of their own kind with fairy tale and fantasy references and then

removing such allusions just in time for the American cultural trauma of the century to unfold,

Messud creates a clear dichotomy: the Rich and Famous are people, too, who can feel the same

loss and grief and trauma as the peons of society; yet against the backdrop of the rise and fall of experiences within young adults in that upper echelon, especially when reinforced with those same allusions that rise and fall with their maturity and Experience, we find it difficult to sympathize.

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Appendix

Figure 1

Character	Fairy Category	Pre-Fourth	Post-Fourth	Fantasy Category	Pre-Fourth	Post-Fourth
Danielle	9	8	1	5	3	2
Bootie	7	4	3	8	5	3
Marina	3	2	1	3	3	0
Thwaite	1	1	0	5	4	1
Julius	7	2	5	4	4	0
Seeley	5	4	1	0	0	0
Judy	1	1	0	0	0	0
Narratorial References	5	4	1	0	0	0