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Falling Man as a 9/11 Counter-narrative: Non-disaster Narrative, Möbius Time Loop and Multi-perspectivity*

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[Abstract]

The American official discourse about the September 11 attacks has focused on how the collective trauma of Americans can be overcome without self-reflection. “Official narratives” use patriotism as the solution to collective trauma. The relationship between previous U.S. historical events and the September 11 attacks has not been examined in depth by the mainstream media, despite terrorism on U.S. soil not being unprecedented.

Meanwhile, counter-narratives in literature and films have wrestled with self-pity, but have not been able to overcome completely the official narrative ornamented by patriotism and sentimentalism. However, counter-narratives have challenged the notion of the September 11 attacks as an isolated and unprecedented historical event. Instead, they posit that these attacks should be understood within the broader historical trajectory of the relationship between the United States and the rest of the

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world. In addition, the voices of “the others” have been heard and embedded within the context. Through these representations, the impact of the September 11 attacks can be reevaluated and reinterpreted beyond collective trauma and victimhood.

Falling Man suggests a counter-narrative by challenging the stereotypical chronology of narrating a story and shedding light on “the others” voices using a multi-perspective approach. DeLillo attempts to avoid the trap of the disaster genre and pursues an alternative way of describing the unique characteristics of 9/11 with its circular structure or Möbius time loop. The novel also includes the narratives of survivors, survivors’ families, a former terrorist, and hijackers while wrestling with the issue of how to represent the September 11 attacks, even though the attempt is limited to allow a relatively small portion of the hijackers.

Key words: September 11 Attacks, 9/11, Falling Man, Counter-narrative, Multi-perspectivity

1. Introduction

The September 11 attacks not only destroyed the lives of 2,977 people,¹⁾ but also destroyed the World Trade Center, a symbol that stood as the icon of “the United States’ preeminent place in multinational capitalism” (Conte, “Conclusion” 179). This key symbol was attacked as people around the world watched it live on TV. In the wake of the Twin Towers’ collapse on September 11, 2001, American patriotism and mainstream narratives about the September 11 attacks have been formed in the new “age of terror,” which has produced an oppressive social atmosphere in the U.S. under the guise of security and the “war on terror.”

The official discourse about the September 11 attacks has focused on how the collective trauma of Americans can be overcome by defining their enemy as soon as possible. George W. Bush's Congress speech on September 20, 2001, epitomized this dichotomous discourse: "They hate our freedom. [...] Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists." When the media weren't playing the role of a watchdog, the Bush administration "reshaped America's political discussion" by coining "an Orwellian litany of naming," such as the "coalition of the willing," "preemptive war," the "War on Terror," and "Homeland Security" (Duval and Marzec 381). As Patricia Leavy points out, "the media was further pressured in the post 9/11 weeks by a political climate in which dissent was labeled as unpatriotic" and the official story was dominant "at the expense of circulating alternative narratives that might have promoted public dialogue instead of threatening democracy" (86). After the attacks, "people in public office" in the U.S. tried to manipulate "confidence-building and grief management" instead of "promoting candor" (Sontag).

Jean Bethke Elshtain's *Just War against Terror* tries to theoretically justify the war against the Islam world after 9/11. Elshtain asserts that the war against terror is a "just war" by criticizing Islam. She criticizes radical Islamists because they advocate hatred and destruction and provoke the celebration of death (124). Based on the dichotomy of Christianity versus Islam, she argues that Muslims "hate us for what we are and what we represent and not for anything in particular that we have done," quoting *The Economist*: "Militant Islam despises the West not for what it does but for what it is" (23).

Although the September 11 attacks have been described as unprecedented in American history in terms of media representation that forced Americans to observe the falling of the Twin Towers on live TV, American mainstream media has

ceaselessly equated one historical event with the September 11 attacks: the attack on Pearl Harbor. The official narrative of the U.S. government repeatedly compares the September 11 attacks with the Pearl Harbor attack. As Marianna Torgovnick underscores, “in the United States, when the subject is war, Vietnam and now Iraq produce substantial dissonance and disjointedness; America’s role in World War II does not” (35). The tagline for *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), a war film depicting World War II, was “the movie that inspired the world to remember.” Another tagline for the film—“In the Last Great Invasion of the Last Great War, the Greatest Danger for Eight Men was Saving... One”—epitomizes the meaning World War II holds for Americans and symbolizes how much the U.S. wants to commemorate World War II as an honorable war.

However, the relationship between other historical events in the U.S. and the September 11 attacks has not been examined in depth by the mainstream media, despite terrorism on U.S. soil not being unprecedented. Marc Redfield’s re-examination of the rhetoric of the September 11 attacks reveals the hidden effect of positioning the attacks as an example of discontinuity and the beginning of a new era. For example, he asserts that the name-date, “September 11,” overshadows interpretations of and reflections on earlier historical events that happened on September 11 and implies the recurrence of trauma every year by excluding the specific year.

Imperatively and imperialistically, the empty date suggests itself as a zero point, the ground of a quasi-theological turn or conversion: everything changed that day, as the U.S. mainstream media so often tells itself. (Redfield 17)

What results is “pervasive amnesia” about terrorism in the U.S. and the uses of rhetoric to decontextualize the implications of the September 11 attacks from other historical events while depriving Americans of the opportunity to contemplate the

attacks in the historical and political context that the U.S. had brought upon itself.

Meanwhile, counter-narratives in literature and films have wrestled with self-pity, but have not been able to overcome completely the official narrative ornamented by patriotism and sentimentalism. Like the official narrative, counter-narratives have also focused on how the U.S.'s collective trauma can be healed and overcome while overlooking the reasons for such collective trauma.²⁾ Americans' collective trauma from the September 11 attacks resulted from the destruction of the distance and the border between "us" and "them" on that day. The disasters in the Middle East that had previously been broadcast on the news had finally come to New York. Faced with an atrocity in New York City, Americans were not able to watch the event as they had watched the bombardment of Iraq during the Gulf War—that is, voyeuristically, like a sports game from the perspective of a pilot's radar on TV at home. The September 11 attacks were not a one-directional event like the Gulf War, whose battle and air bombardment had been broadcast on American network television. 9/11 is a two-directional event that involved Americans both actually and virtually. In this way, Americans experienced the September 11 attacks physically and psychologically, resulting in collective trauma.

DeLillo's remark is not just a joke, but also a serious warning: "Five years later people who were not in the area when the attacks occurred will claim to have been there. In time, some of them will believe it" ("In the Ruins" 35). DeLillo focuses on ways to represent 9/11 and suggests a counter-narrative that goes "beyond hard numbers of dead and missing" to "give us a glimpse of elevated being" ("In the Ruins" 34). He adds that Americans need counter-narratives found among "smaller objects and more marginal stories" to "set against the massive spectacle that continues to seem unmanageable" (34). Unlike visual media, novels can replace the spectacle of image via characters' inner thoughts described by the novel's narrator.

However, these attempts were not enough to extend the meaning of the September 11 attacks. How can one escape the perspective of “Americans” or “U.S. self-centeredness,” especially in the age of terror? The answer could be to maintain a balance between the two pitfalls that Žižek points out. Žižek provocatively asserts that:

If we simply, only and unconditionally condemn it, we simply appear to endorse the blatantly ideological position of American innocence under attack by Third World Evil; if we draw attention to the deeper sociopolitical cause of Arab extremism, we simply appear to blame the victim which ultimately got what it deserved. (50)

Contemplating the notion of plurality should be a prerequisite to pursuing the solution to this question not only thematically, but also aesthetically. The September 11 attacks should be reconsidered not as an isolated and unprecedented historical event, but as part of a continued historical trajectory in the context of the relationship between the U.S. and the rest of the world. In addition, the voices of “the others” should be heard and embedded in the context. Through these representations, the impact of the September 11 attacks can be reevaluated and reinterpreted beyond collective trauma and victimhood.

In this article, I assess *Falling Man* from its strategy of narrative to portray 9/11 as a counter-narrative. First, I delve into how DeLillo defines counter-narrative. Second, I examine how DeLillo tries to avoid falling into the trap of the disaster genre and pursues an alternative way of describing the unique characteristics of 9/11. Third, I focus on the structure of the novel—namely, its circular structure or Möbius time loop. Fourth, I examine *Falling Man* by shedding light on “the others” voices using a multi-perspective approach. *Falling Man* includes the narratives of survivors, survivors’ families, a former terrorist, and hijackers. Finally, the limitation of the narrative strategy of *Falling Man* is addressed in terms of plurality.

2. Writing 9/11 and Counter-narrative

Within the span of five years, many authors wrote post-September 11 novels, including *Terrorist* (John Updike), *Shalimar the Clown* (Salman Rushdie), and *Saturday* (Ian McEwan). These novels delve into the notion of September 11 in the context of its aftermath instead of portraying the survivors of the Twin Towers or the passengers in the airplanes crashing into the Twin Towers. In 2003, French writer Frédéric Beigbeder penned the provocative novel *Windows on the World* that juxtaposes the story of the victims in the Twin Towers with the manuscript of the narrator, who is writing this novel in a skyscraper in Paris. In 2005, Jonathan Safran Foer published a novel about the trauma of a kid who lost his father at the Twin Towers due to the September 11 attacks.

Six years after September 11, for the first time, an American writer addressed both the survivors in the Twin Towers and the hijackers in the September 11 attacks in one novel. In 2007, Don DeLillo, who had previously dealt with political issues in his novels such as *Mao II*, *Libra*, and *Underworld*, published *Falling Man*, a novel about the September 11 attacks. This novel addresses not only the trauma of a survivor, Keith, who escaped just before the crash of the World Trade Center, but also that of various New Yorkers, such as Keith's family and friends. The novel also narrates the story of one of the hijackers.

When DeLillo's *Falling Man* was published in 2007, it was the first time a novel had directly portrayed a survivor in the Twin Towers. Linda Kauffman points out that DeLillo's themes are "the repression of memory and the memory of repression," adding that DeLillo noticed that "politicians and media pundits transformed the tragedy into spectacle, which then became the official story" (353-4). By de-emphasizing the spectacle of 9/11, showing the fall of the Twin Towers from the

towers to the street (thereby inverting the conventional view), and expressing the victims' inner thoughts, DeLillo attempted to overcome the limits of visual memory. Because of their endless repetition in the mainstream media, the images of 9/11 conventionalize the September 11 attacks and represent it in a very superficial manner.

As Cheryl Miller highlights in her article "9/11 and the Novelists," DeLillo's writing raises a question that any novelist hoping to evaluate the September 11 attacks must wrestle with: "Is it possible to create art out of horror without being exploitative and tasteless?" (32). DeLillo's dilemma is similar to that of one of the characters in *Falling Man*. The character David Janiak is a performance artist who performs the "Falling Man"—the man photographed committing suicide by throwing himself from the Twin Towers on September 11—by wearing business clothes and posing upside-down with a wire attached to a harness to remind onlookers of the falling man. In the novel, The New School for Social Research Center raises an argument about David Janiak, debating whether he is a "Heartless Exhibitionist or [a] Brave New Chronicler of the Age of Terror" (220). This question can be raised not only for the character, but also DeLillo himself. In writing this novel, DeLillo acknowledges that readers can ask the same question of him: Is DeLillo a heartless exhibitionist or a brave writer? Ironically, DeLillo's expression of self-irony through his description of people questioning Janiak's motives reveals his self-awareness as a writer and his integrity behind writing this novel.

How can writers and artists contribute to overcoming the trauma of 9/11? In his essay "In the Ruins of the Future," DeLillo highlights the concept of "the counter-narrative," which is both subversive and heart-breaking:

These are among the smaller objects and more marginal stories in the sifted ruins of the day. We need them, even the common tools of the terrorists, to set

against the massive spectacle that continues to seem unmanageable, too powerful a thing to set into our frame of practiced response. (35)

In *Falling Man*, DeLillo wants to divert readers' attention from the spectacle of disaster and bring it back to the marginalized stories of its victims. Instead of showing the spectacle of the disaster, DeLillo focuses on describing characters' anecdotes and their trauma from the September 11 attacks. He discards the first-person narrative, which would have been one of the best tools to help readers easily empathize with the characters. Instead, DeLillo writes the novel from a third-person narrator's point of view. The narrator weaves stories together like sewers piecing together a quilt and uses a survivor from the fall of the Twin Towers, Keith, and his wife, Lianne, to incite other characters in the novel to confess their own experiences about the September 11 attacks.

In the novel, the acts of witnessing and remembering are repeatedly emphasized as a main theme through characters' conversations and attempts to overcome their trauma. The man with whom Keith happened to talk while escaping Ground Zero said, "Look at it... I say to myself, I'm standing here. It's hard to believe, being here and seeing it." He repeats "I'm standing here" on the phone. His words infect Keith and, at some point, Keith starts repeating to himself, "I'm standing here" (27). Struggling with trauma and survivor's guilt, Keith happens to meet another survivor, Florence, and they have an extramarital affair while sharing their experiences and opinions about 9/11. Florence later says to Keith, "You ask yourself what the story is that goes with the briefcase. I'm the story" (109).

Twice a week, Lianne coordinates sessions with Alzheimer's patients, who write down their thoughts. The narrator emphasizes that the patients are "characters and authors both, able to tell what they wished, cradle the rest in silence" (30). At one point, the patients choose to write about 9/11, signing these pages with their first

name and last initial, as if to make it clear that they are the authors of these texts. Through this writing exercise, patients try to find “narratives that rolled and tumbled and how natural it seemed to do this” and “tell stories about themselves.” (30). As the meeting proceeds, the patients begin to face their memories about September 11, which they had avoided facing before. They start writing “where they were when it happened and people they knew who were in the towers,” along with religious and existential questions about God: “How could God let this happen? Where was God when this happened?” (60).

3. Escaping the Disaster Genre

To address the disaster of the September 11 attacks, DeLillo confronts two problems. The first is escaping the general dilemma of representing disaster; the second is overcoming the unique dilemma of representing 9/11. In terms of the first issue, how does DeLillo meet the demands of being ethically responsible and avoid spinning a stereotyped narrative and description that exceeds the limits of the disaster genre? The disaster genre is commercially powerful because of its ability to release spectators and readers from serious burdens and arguments. In the disaster genre, spectators and readers not only confront scenes depicting horrible catastrophes, but may also even enjoy them, although they should face ethical problems when enjoying disaster novels and movies. Thus, a question arises: How can ordinary, good-natured spectators enjoy the death of victims and the tragedy of survivors? In other words, how can spectators and readers overcome their discomfort and derive voyeuristic pleasure from disaster novels and films? Disaster movies generally try to offer a spectacular and thrilling experience. An important feature of disaster movies and

novels is to ask spectators and readers who will survive at the end. By revealing who ultimately survives, it is easy to spoil the ending.

In *Falling Man*, DeLillo weaves a plot contrary to the conventions of the disaster genre. Readers know from the beginning which characters survive. The most horrible moment of the disaster—the crash of the airplane and the fall of the Twin Towers—is not described in the beginning of the novel. Instead, it is described in the middle of the novel by Florence, the owner of the briefcase that Keith, a survivor, finds when running from the Twin Towers, as well as at the end from Keith's point of view.

DeLillo begins the book by describing a man escaping the World Trade Center. The point of view is from the Twin Towers looking down to the street, which contrasts with the conventional video clips showing the September 11 events from the streets looking up to the Twin Towers. In addition, the moment of impact is witnessed by another survivor, Florence, in the middle of the book. She only says, "I heard about it." The attempt to illustrate the disaster from the terrorists' point of view inside the plane as they crash into the tower is also unique. The last moments of the terrorist Hammad are continuously and seamlessly overlapped with Keith's experience at the office that day. There are not even divisions between paragraphs.

The second issue DeLillo faced was overcoming the unique dilemma of representing 9/11. Details of disasters are apt to be perverted by the perpetrators, so ensuring that the public knows how a disaster actually occurred is a high priority in the discussions surrounding it. Initially, the perpetrators deny the existence of the disaster; after it has been revealed that the disaster has occurred, they try to minimize its reality. However, in terms of 9/11, people believe that they have already observed the disaster because they watched the fall of the Twin Towers on live TV. For this reason, many people believe they already know the truth of 9/11. In *Falling Man*, a conversation between Lianne, a survivor's wife, and her mother, Nina, reveals this

notion:

Nobody said what's next. This was next. The time to be afraid is when there's no reason to be afraid.

"Too late now."

Lianne stood by the window.

"But when the towers fell—"

"I know."

"When this happened—"

"I know."

"I thought he was dead."

"So did I." Nina said. "So many watching."

"Thinking he's dead, she's dead."

"I know."

"Watching those buildings fall."

"First one, then the other. I know," her mother said. (10-11)

Lianne's mother, Nina, repeatedly responds with "I know." Thus, in the case of 9/11, the impossibility of representation is not an issue, unlike with other disasters. On the contrary, the overflow of representation becomes the problem.

The September 11 attacks were a visual event, like a "Manhattan disaster movie," a combination of "the white magic of the cinema and the black magic of terrorism" (Baudrillard 30). Throughout *Falling Man*, devices for recording voice and text, such as pencils, ballpoint pens, and voice recorders, are emphasized. However, devices for visual recording, such as camcorders and cameras, are not mentioned. De-emphasizing the visual records of 9/11 and describing the fall of the Twin Towers from the towers to the street, thereby inverting the conventional view and expressing the victims' inner stream of thoughts, constitute the techniques DeLillo employs to

illustrate the limits of visual memory.

The narrator in the novel cynically criticizes the characteristics of film by pointing out how movies sentimentalize events when representing specific situations. When the survivor Keith visits his apartment just after escaping the Twin Towers on September 11, the narrator says, “In the movie version, someone would be in the building, an emotionally damaged woman or a homeless old man, and there would be dialogue and close-up. The truth is that he was wary of the elevator” (27). There is no exaggerated description or overwhelming emotion in those paragraphs; instead, the narrator describes what happened on the streets of New York and how the protagonist, Keith, reacted to all the atrocities in a distant manner. When Keith and another survivor, Florence, kiss in a taxi, Florence repeats, “It’s a movie, it’s a movie” (104). Her repetition of “it’s a movie” follows a description of how people passing by the taxi look at and react to them like voyeuristic spectators or bystanders: “People crossing the street stopped to watch, windows, and sometimes only one. The others just crossed, who didn’t give a damn” (104).

DeLillo illustrates the people who survived the fall of the Twin Towers, ignoring the conventions of the disaster genre. Readers are to focus on the trauma of the survivors instead of wondering who will survive in the end. Although readers lose this pleasure, they are invited to observe an argument to redefine 9/11. To represent daily life in New York after 9/11, DeLillo employs the dialogic method, having the characters confess their own feelings and ideas. The descriptions of the terrorists’ internal emotions and motives are especially worth noting. Although brief, they constitute one of the first attempts to show readers the disaster from the terrorists’ point of view. DeLillo’s representational strategy in *Falling Man* consists of going back to a traditional feature of the novel that has enabled the medium to survive in the age of the visual image: exploring the inner thoughts of the characters and

combining different perspectives.

4. Möbius Strip, Vicious Circles, and Others' Perspectives

Falling Man ends the way it begins: with an airplane striking one of the Twin Towers. “Eternal return” is presented in chilling form. In the novel, the image of a spiral is used repeatedly, and the timeline also assumes a circular structure:

Because it was inside them now and because they needed to hear what he [Keith]’d lost in the tracing of memory. This was their pitch of delirium, the dazed reality they’d shared in the stairwells, the deep shaft of spiraling men and women (91).

[...] It was what they knew together, in the timeless drift of the long spiral down (137).

We can also find a circular structure in movies addressing tragedy relating to history or alternate history, such as *Babel* (2006), *Before the Rain* (1994), and *Planet of the Apes* (1968). In the final scene of *Planet of the Apes*, where it is revealed that Charlton Heston’s character is actually being held captive on Earth in the distant future, it is made clear to the audience that the apes will fall into the same traps of hubris and corruption as their human predecessors did before them. Thus, in the disaster genre, we see a common theme of vicious circles. Disasters repeatedly happen; to make matters worse, they repeat despite the development of civilization. As if on a Möbius strip, they reoccur, and history does not seem to progress past

them.

If people want to escape from disasters' "eternal return," an alternative explanation and a new collective memory are needed. As soon as major historians and authors label other explanations as conspiracy theories, such interpretations are regarded as unorthodox or pseudo-theories, which eliminates the possibility of discussing the origins of the disaster. Ultimately, only the interpretation of those who have power survives and becomes history.

In *Libra*, DeLillo explores the Kennedy assassination, which was a favored theme of conspiracy theorists before 9/11. In an interview about *Libra*, DeLillo stated that he wanted to "provide the missing narrative" and "to create [the] missing seven seconds" (Moss 163). However, rather than using conspiracy theories as he does in *Libra*, in *Falling Man*, DeLillo chooses a dialogic representation as his narrative method. This method is particularly useful for describing people's prejudices and criticizing misinformation from closed-minded individuals. Although human agency affects others through relationships, the closed system of religion interrupts this communication.

Two different religions, Islam and Christianity, claim the absolute truth from their sides. One, a doctor, recited the first line of the Koran in his office. This book is not to be doubted (231). [...] She wants to disbelieve. She was an infidel in current geopolitical parlance (232). [...] This book is not to be doubted. She was stuck with her doubts but liked sitting in church (233).

The disastrous characteristics of terrorism render this closed system even more exclusive. Terrorism unites the group of victims, but this spirit of unity is often exclusive and jingoistic, excluding and making scapegoats out of those who share the religious and ethnic background of the terrorists. Stereotypes are very comfortable but

dangerous; they provide an easy frame through which to view people from different backgrounds, but at the same time, they lead to misunderstandings. Once belief has turned into exclusive hate, “disbelief [is] the line of travel that [leads] to clarity of thought and purpose” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 65).

The narrator of *Falling Man* attempts to delve into the inner feelings of various characters such as Keith (a survivor of 9/11), Lianne (a wife of the survivor), and Hammad (a hijacker and terrorist). Exploring the terrorists’ inner streams of thought is especially crucial because previous images of terrorists portrayed in Hollywood films or best-selling American novels usually only reinforced stereotypes and did not allow room for spectators and readers to consider the conditions or perspectives of the terrorists. When recollecting her mother’s opinion about religion, Lianne thinks in the novel, “We want to transcend, we want to pass beyond the limits of safe understanding, and what better way to do it than through make-believe.” (62-3). This idea may be one of DeLillo’s modest proposals for how we should escape from the vicious circle of recurring disaster. He wants *Falling Man* to attempt to break from the existing myths and go beyond them by presenting multilayered stories and opinions about the disaster. *Falling Man* describes not only survivors of the fall of the Twin Towers and their families, but also a former German terrorist to showcase different types of trauma from the September 11 attacks and diverse perspectives about the event.

In addition, the novel directly addresses the hijackers’ perspective, which had previously been avoided in American fiction, although it had been addressed in the British film *The Hamburg Cell* (2004), which depicts how ordinary international students in Hamburg, Germany, end up becoming radical Islamist hijackers. Despite DeLillo’s attempt, it is not easy to portray the hijacker Hammad for only nineteen pages in the novel; as a result, the novel doesn’t achieve an in-depth understanding

of the hijacker, while other characters, such as the survivor Keith and his wife Lianne, are described in detail. As Conte points out when discussing the terse name usage of Hammad in the novel, “an individual would typically bear a full chain of names by Arabic conventions” (“Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*” 570). Yet Hammad is not portrayed as “a full chain” of himself. On the contrary, Hammad’s insufficient description and appearance in the novel reveals the “inability of any author” to fully explain the hijackers’ motivation (Mauro 592). Pankaj Mishra criticizes the limitations of *Falling Man* by emphasizing that “DeLillo confines himself to recording the emotional and existential struggles of 9/11 survivors” and “remains strangely incurious about their pasts and their societies, and he makes little attempt to analyze, in the light of the biggest ever terrorist atrocity, the origin and appeal of political violence.”

5. Conclusion: Limitations and Implications of *Falling Man*

After the September 11 attacks, Pearl Harbor began to be regarded as an earlier instance of a surprise attack by an external enemy on U.S. soil, with many commentators dubbing 9/11 as the “new Pearl Harbor.” The implication of this statement is that there was no home front anymore. If the Vietnam War meant endless guerilla battles and the lack of a specific frontline, 9/11 meant the war front is no longer located abroad but has moved into the homeland of America. While previous historical tragedies went uninterpreted for decades at a time, *Falling Man* was important in that it provided a reflection on the trauma of 9/11 only six years after the disaster had occurred.³⁾

As Adam Kirsch asserts in his review of *Falling Man*, “what that day demanded, above all, was interpretation.” This characteristic differentiated 9/11 from earlier national tragedies, like the attack on Pearl Harbor. According to Kirsch, 9/11 remained “a coded symbolic declaration,” and the meaning of 9/11 could “vary widely from one observer to the next.” On the other hand, the meaning of Pearl Harbor was immediately clear: America had been invaded by Japan. It caused the U.S. to join World War II with an official declaration of war on Japan. This declaration of war is still the most recent declaration of war by the U.S. government, even though the government has since deployed its troops in numerous wars, such as the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Iraq War, and the War in Afghanistan.

In *Falling Man*, DeLillo describes not heroes, but everyday people hurt by the disaster. This novel is a meaningful first step as people continue to redefine 9/11, especially because it is the first novel to directly reflect the trauma of 9/11 survivors. By depicting people who survived 9/11, DeLillo ignores the conventions of the disaster genre, and readers focus on the trauma of the survivors of 9/11 instead of asking who will survive at the end. Readers lose this suspense, but they get to delve into a new perspective instead.

Through the dialogic method, DeLillo has the characters confess their own feelings and ideas, thereby showing multiple interpretations of the same historical event and providing additional avenues to escape the vicious cycle of disaster. Resistance to prejudice and disbelief in stereotypes are suggested as methods to escape closed and spiraling historic tragedies. *Falling Man* succeeds in shedding light on New Yorkers’ trauma and gives readers a way to understand their suffering. DeLillo also attempts descriptions of the terrorists’ internal emotions and motives, but he is ultimately unsuccessful, although his is one of the first attempts to present to Western readers the disaster from the terrorists’ point of view. As Mishra points out, the attempt

could never have succeeded because DeLillo does not describe the violence of 9/11 “in terms of its historical origins or its ramifications.”

The circular structure of the novel symbolizes the pessimistic point of view about the feature of disaster: “eternal return.” How can Americans escape a repeated series of tragic wars? As Maurice Blanchot states, if there is self-reflection and enlightenment, “the disaster is not somber, it would liberate us from everything if it could just have a relation with someone” (5). How can the September 11 attacks drive Americans to overcome their self-centeredness and reconsider their relationships with others? This event needs to position them in others’ shoes beyond victimhood and repeated commemoration; otherwise, victims easily become victimizers by justifying their own harmful acts in a vicious circle of self-pity and revenge.

Notes

- 1) According to the introduction panel at the 9/11 museum, the official number of victims is 2,977. This number includes not only victims from the fall of the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and United Airlines Flight 93, but also the six individuals killed in the bombing of the World Trade Center on February 26, 1993. The panels at the 9/11 memorial also include 2,977 victims. The 19 hijackers involved in the September 11 attacks are not included among the victims.
- 2) Moreover, the defeat of counter-narratives was worsened by conspiracy theory narratives attempting to debunk the official 9/11 report because conspiracy theories, due to their exaggerated and groundless assertions, ironically provided the grounds to believe the official story.
- 3) In *Falling Man*, Lianne compares the Japanese city of Kyoto with New York. Kyoto is one of the Japanese cities that was not bombarded during World War II to protect ancient architecture. Conversely, New York became the first American city on the mainland to be bombed. “Even in Kyoto—I long for Kyoto” (*DeLillo, Falling Man* 32) “Even in New York—I long for New York” (*DeLillo, Falling Man* 34).

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국문초록

9/11 대안 서사로서의 『떨어지는 사람』: 탈(脫) 재난서사, 뢰비우스의 시간성, 다중적 관점

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9/11 테러에 대한 미국의 공식적인 담론은 미국의 집단적 트라우마를 어떻게 극복할 것인가에 집중되어 왔고, 이러한 과정에서 자기반성 없는 애국주의가 그 해결책으로 제시되었다. 미국 영토에서 벌어진 테러가 9/11이 처음이 아님에도 불구하고, 9/11 테러는 이전의 역사적 사건들로부터 고립된 전무후무한 사건으로 주류 언론에 의해서 다루어졌다. 한편, 대안적 담론은 9/11 테러를 미국과 세계의 관계를 고려한 역사가 진행되는 연속적 궤적에서 파악하려 하였고, 또한 이러한 궤적 위에서 '타인들'의 목소리를 부각시키려 하였다.

하지만 이러한 시도에도 불구하고 9/11을 다루는 문학과 영화에서의 대안적 서사들은 여전히 자기 연민에 갇혀, 애국주의와 감상주의로 점철된 공식적인 담론을 완벽하게 극복하지 못한 한계를 보여줬다. 돈 드릴로의 소설, 『떨어지는 사람』 역시 이러한 한계에도 불구하고, 장르와 순차적인 시간 순서라는 이야기 요소들을 뒤틀고, 다중적인 시선을 통해 '타인들'의 목소리를 반영함으로써 9/11에 대한 대안적 서사를 찾았다. 이 소설은 재난물의 장르적 규칙에서 벗어나고, 뫼비우스 띠와 같이 순환되어 돌아오는 시간적 구조를 차용한다. 또한, 생존자와 생존자의 가족들, 전직 테러리스트 그리고 그 때까지 다루어지지 않았던 9/11 테러리스트 등 다양한 시각의 서사를 통해 9/11을 다중적인 관점에서 바라볼 수 있도록 해준다.

주제어: 9/11 테러, 돈 드릴로, 떨어지는 사람, 대안적 서사, 다중적 관점

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