

Re-Shaping Identities in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*

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Abstract

As a trauma novel, Don DeLillo's "Falling Man" deals with the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, revealing the effects that such an event had not only on people who were directly affected, but also on the nation itself. Exposed to a dreadful tragedy, most of the characters become victims whose experiences of time, self and the world were disrupted. The personal and collective consciousness was painfully injured causing an emotional anguish that led to great changes in the community's sense of identity. The present paper intends to illustrate the iconic relationship between traumatic memory and narrative memory as a basis for the re-enactment, repetition and symbolization to become substitutes for a "frozen" identity in the intention of restoring the traumatized self and to function as psychological and literary strategies.

Keywords: *identity, memory, 9/11, trauma fiction.*

General Reflections upon Trauma Fiction

Before referring to trauma fiction it is needed to introduce the concept of trauma as it is defined and characterized by psychology. As it is already known, trauma may be described as a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that unfortunately has disrupted the previous manner in which an individual generates his or her own sense of self and the standard by which the same individual evaluates society. According to Cathy Caruth, the structure of trauma represents a disruption of personal history or temporality. Usually, the traumatic event is not fully assimilated at the time it happens, the person trying to delay the painful experience which makes it unavailable in the normal way to memory and interpretation; but, after a period of latency the events return more intrusively (Caruth, 1995, p. 151). From the psychological point of view, trauma comprises an experience which overwhelms the individual who is no longer able to fully understand and react. The impossibility of dealing with such an event blocks the individual's relationship with his or her own self, changing his or her identity.

It may seem a paradox, or at least a contradiction, to relate the term trauma to what is generally understood by fiction. Since trauma resists not only language but also any form of representation, it cannot be narrated in fiction. Even so, there are few ways of considering the relation between trauma and fiction possible. Ann Whitehead admits that trauma theory has provided new paths of conceptualizing trauma so that it could become one of the important themes for the novelists (Whitehead, 2004, p. 9). At the same time, it has also shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered to why and how it is remembered.¹

According to trauma theory, the disruption of the individual's identity caused by a traumatic event may serve as a basis for a larger argument which sustains that identity is shaped by the intergenerational transmission of trauma. In order to assimilate the traumatic experience the individual needs to recreate or to abstract through narrative recollections the event; but, accepting the fact that the traumatic experience precludes knowledge and representation, the process of remembrance becomes an approximate account of the past. In the act of recollection there could be noticed a striking paradox: although the re-enactments of the traumatic event are literal and even precise they still remain largely unavailable to conscious recall and control. The capability of recovering the traumatic past is tied up with the inability to have access to it² (Caruth, 1995, p. 152). The responses to traumatic experiences are different, from the division of consciousness to the cognitive chaos. They may also be regarded as inherent features of traumatic memory. From the psychological perspective, the traumatic experience may divide the individual's identity and his or her connections to a larger context which consists of important social values that definitely influence the recollections and the reconfiguration of the self. The separation from the self and from society together with all the ways re-shaping the individual's identity, or the attempts of re-shaping it, were transformed into a metaphor used for describing the degree of damage done to the individual's coherent sense of the self and the change of consciousness caused by the trauma experience (Caruth, 1995, pp. 150-151).

The fictional representation of trauma experiences comes in the form of narratives which are meant to show the disruptions between the individual and his

¹ Regarding the boundaries between trauma and fiction, the Holocaust literature could be an important example, since the Holocaust fiction, which is based on extensive historical research and documentation, has been delimited from the Holocaust testimony, which is more a subject of the distortions of individual and collective memory (Whitehead, 2004, p. 30).

² Most of times, the traumatic event returns in a very precise form in nightmares and flashbacks and, at the same time, it is accompanied by amnesia. The connection between the precise recollection and the lack or elision of memory can only be approximated.

or her self and between the self and the others. Because of these two perspectives, trauma fiction contains two types of literary narratives. First, there are the psychic trauma novels which intend to capture the effect of suffering on the mind of the individual and secondly there are the cultural trauma novels³ which focus on the consequences of the traumatic events. While the former is a narrative representation of a wound inflicted upon the mind that breaks the individual's experience of time, self and the world, the latter represents a wound on a group sharing the common consciousness as a whole (Caruth, 1996, pp. 3-4). In both cases the identity is disrupted and it needs reintegration and reaffirmation or, in other words, it needs to be re-shaped.

Traumatic Memory and Narrative Memory

The process of recollecting the past always involves full access to memory. Considering the fact that traumatic experiences tend to avoid being remembered, it becomes imperative for the individual and/or for the community to find valid ways of accessing the past. Thus, it is obvious that trauma requires integration of the traumatic event into the individual or collective memory both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure. Generally speaking, trauma⁴ is more complex than it is known, mainly because of its public nature, although mass denial may take place at some stage in the process of dealing with traumatic collective experiences.

The past could be remembered in different ways. There are different forms of dealing with traumatic experiences of the past, but the most important ones are those which involve the traumatic memory and the narrative memory. It is necessary to make a difference between the two manners of recollecting the past. According to psychoanalysis, the traumatized person's task is to translate traumatic memory into narrative memory with the help of a specialist (Caruth, 1995, p. 143). The access to traumatic memory is difficult mostly because the

³ Cultural trauma affects the members of a community in the moments when they feel as being subjected to traumatic events which have affected their group conscious future identity. As a result of exposing the whole community to a traumatic event, the common sense of identity shared by all the members may be either disrupted or solidified.

⁴ When dealing with trauma it is necessary to take into account its sense, which in Greek has the meaning of wound, originally referring to an injury inflicted on a body. In its larger sense (including the psychiatric literature), the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind, which is embodied in the form of an event that is experienced too soon and unexpected and therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again repeatedly in the survivors' reactions.

survivors usually suffer of post-traumatic stress which is defined as a delayed response that takes the form of repeated nightmares, hallucinations, flashbacks, somatic reactions, behaviours stemming from the event and general numbing (Van der Kolk & Van der Hart, 1995, p. 173). All these forms of individual reactions to the traumatic experience are unwanted and even unrecalled intrusions of the past into the present which explains the person's need of delaying or refusal. These ways of intrusion could be triggered automatically by anything: a sound or a sight, a smell or similar situations. They seem to take possession of the individual and to hold him or her under control. In the process of recollecting the traumatic event, the individual reclaims the painful experience. The attempt to obtain access to a traumatic history is beyond the pathology of individual suffering. It means dealing with the reality of a history⁵ that is in crisis and it can only be perceived in unassimilable forms. The act of refusing such experience may be considered rather a way of gaining access to knowledge that has not yet attained the form of narrative memory than an act of denial of knowing the past (Caruth, 1995, p. 155). In its active resistance to knowledge, this refusal opens the space for testimony which is now able to communicate and to reveal the reality that lies beyond what is already understood. The individual refusal of understanding what had happened may also be seen as a creative act: the blindness was in fact nothing than a vital condition of creation (Lanzmann, 1990, p. 279).

The process of accessing the traumatic memory usually ends with the act of transforming the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the traumatic event to become a story, to be verbalized and communicated; in other words, to be integrated into the individual's own knowledge of the past and in other's knowledge of their history too. At the same time, this act of transformation could lose the precision that characterizes the traumatic act of recalling.

From the psychoanalysis perspective, narrative memory represents the conscious attempt of relating the traumatic events, translating them into the form of a story that, most of times, contains a beginning, a development and an ending.⁶ The difference between traumatic memory and narrative memory is given by the degree of consciousness and control which the traumatic event can be remembered with (Caruth, 1995, p. 143).

⁵ As Cathy Caruth has stated, history may speak through the individual or through the community. History itself reveals its traumatic experience in the voice of a person or in a voice of a nation. Its own suffering is not only a site of its disruption but the locus of wisdom. (Caruth, 1995, p. 156)

⁶ It was already known that the human psychology has an essentially narrative structure.

Using the narrative memory, traumatic events could be revealed and transposed into literary forms, some of them as a form of healing, some of them as a form of literary way of remembering.

Psychic Trauma in 9/11 Literature

As a historic event, 9/11 changed the way people perceive and understand the world. The tragic legacy of these events as the attacks and the events which followed is considerable. What happened then has refigured the whole culture. In his writings, Richard Gray describes these events as defining elements in the contemporary structure of feeling (Gray, 2009, p. 129). The abbreviations of 9/11 are fully and easily understood and considered by Mark Redfield as “a blank little scar around which nationalist energies could be marshaled” (Redfield, 2009, p. 1). Unfortunately, it was these nationalist energies that shaped the post 9/11 literature, media and cinema.

The shock of the hijacked planes flying into the Twin Towers still continues to haunt the present, defining 9/11 as a historical moment. Most of the responses⁷ to the traumatic event have changed from the immediate days to the months and years that followed the attacks, which shows that individuals and communities need time to fully understand the importance of the event. At first, the responses were the survivor' or eyewitnesses' reports that provided information containing empirical evidence of the tragic event. Later some of the fiction writers were asked to give their own interpretation on the meaning of what had recently happened. Their accounts, written in the self-consciously register, were mixing journalism with memoir. Although these writings were not very objective, their importance is huge because they were contributing to the act of shaping the discourses of the tragedy. Thus, a complex narrative has emerged generating a new and contemporary literature of terror which gradually has developed a politics and poetics of representation.

The majority of the books published after the tragic event and constructed on the survivors' and eyewitnesses' accounts emphasised the commitment to relying upon the individual testimonies. It is the case of Dwyer and Flynn's *102 Minutes: The Untold Story of the Fight to Survive inside the Twin Towers* (2005) which is focusing mostly on the accounts of those involved in the events. This journalistic work reflects the contemporary media's reliance on immediate reactions to new

⁷ Most of the first responses to the 9/11 event differ in form and tone from some of the later versions.

stories but, at the same time, it informs of the experiences that were watched on TV and Internet those days (Randall, 2011, pp. 3-4).

One of the most representative text published at that time (2004) was the *9/11 Commission Report* which appeared after two years of investigation. As Craig Warren considered, although the report is a government document, it gave a historical context and provided a helpful starting point for the themes that have dominated the literature of terror.

By standing beyond the generic conventions of both popular literature and bureaucratic prose, the Report at once invited and challenged classification. It demanded the reader train their interpretative powers not only on the accessible language of the commissioners but also on the wounds behind that language. In American literary history, few bestsellers have required so much of the reader, or illustrated so clearly the public hunger for literature as a means of shaping national identity. (Warren, 2007, p. 534)

Described as a means of shaping the national identity, that hunger for literature, described by Craig Warren, was fulfilled by many works of fiction. Unfortunately, realistic fiction failed to represent such a resonant and historically significant event, but there were other forms that succeeded. These were, in fact, attempts to understand the meaning of the tragic event and to assimilate it into the realm of representation. The 9/11 literature comes into being as a commemorative fiction, developing a particular theme: the disparity between those lived experiences of the people actually involved in the tragic event and the experiences of the people watching the same event. The early literary responses⁸ contained poems and plays written in haste. It took some time for the 9/11 attacks to appear in literary fiction. For example one of the first books of fiction published was Béigbéder's *Windows on the World* which appeared in 2004. Later, more writers started to focus on the event among them there should be mentioned McEwan, Martin Amis⁹ and Don De Lillo.

When these writers first tried to represent in a literary manner the attacks of 9/11, they focused mainly in psychic trauma and the domestic, disregarding the political and the cultural consequences of the tragic and traumatic event. It is the case of novels like: *The Writing on the Wall* (2004) by Lynn Sharon Schwartz, *Windows on the World* (2004) by Frédéric Béigbéder, *Extremely Loud and*

⁸ As iconographical responses, there should be mentioned the graphic novel and commix too.

⁹ For Amis, fiction itself was under attack and he suggested that writers should consider a change in occupation, mostly because he understood war as being between the individual voices of writers and the voice of the crowd. This opposition is characterized by Amis as intrinsic to literature. Despite Amis' assertion, the writers do not write about what is going on but about the impact that those events have on their characters.

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Incredibly Close (2005) by Jonathan Safran Foer, *The Good Priest's Son* (2005) by Reynolds Price, *The Emperor's Children* (2006) by Claire Messud, *The Whole World Over* (2006) by Jay McInerney, *A Day on the Beach* (2007) by Helen Schulman, *The Submission* (2011) by Amy Waldman and many others. Some of the writers tried to find ways to represent the traumatic experiences through experimental literary techniques, introducing images to capture the horror of these experiences without simplifying it.

Writing about 9/11 has been and will always be difficult. Many writers found themselves in the position of choosing between the political novels and the novels of psychic trauma in their attempt of dealing with this event. Critics have also taken into consideration this division when referring to the 9/11 fiction. Richard Gray considers that there are two types of 9/11 novels: those which domesticated the crisis and introduced it into the realm of the familiar environment and those that offer a transnational context and extend the psychic trauma to further levels, including the political, historical and cultural perspective (Gray, 2011, p. 17). In his analysis, Richard Gray selects novels like *The Writing on the Wall*, *The Emperor's Children*, *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006) by Ken Kalfus, *The Good Life* (2006) by Jay McInerney and *The Falling Man* (2006) by Don De Lillo to represent the first type of 9/11 novels while novels like Deborah Eisenberg's *Twilight of the Superheroes* (2007), Moksini Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008) and Andre Dubus III's *The Grandfather of the Last Days* (2008) are included in the second type of the same categorization.

All these texts have revealed the major difficulties that the writers had when representing the traumatic event; but, aside from *Windows on the World* and the poem and film *Out of the Blue*, the event itself is mostly absent from an explicit description. This fact could be considered possible mainly because this *looking away* from the vivid reality is in fact a tacit acknowledgement made by these writers for whom the traumatic event is beyond any literary representation or visual symbolism which makes the fictional representation (literary or cinematographic) become unnecessary (Randall, 2011, p. 8).

The use of the tragic event only as a background for the narratives is common for most of these texts, because each case of psychic trauma, individual or collective, which is revealed in a literary form should be universal. The accurate description of the 9/11 attacks is not meant for literature, but for journalism and media. Unlike journalism or/and media, the value of these novels is not given by the ability to provide information, historical context and immediacy. As a form of

artistic representation, literature is independent from history, it may create and use certain rules but it also may function as an alternative to history (Salván, 2009, p. 208).

Don De Lillo's Falling Man as Psychic Trauma Novel

In his writings, Don De Lillo has dealt with both types of trauma, personal or psychic and collective or cultural. He used different genres to express the individual and the collective consequences of the tragic event. The essay *In the Ruins of the Future* was written only after three months after the attacks. In this case, the author focuses on the cultural consequences that the traumatic event may have on people and on the nation. A combination between psychic trauma narrative, based on the accidental murder of one of the main character's friend, and cultural trauma generated by the cold war in the United States of America can be found in *Underworld* published in 1997. The novel *Falling Man* deals mainly with the psychological consequences of the traumatic event on few individuals.

Different from journalism and media, De Lillo's novels offer new perspectives upon the 9/11 attacks. His writings could reenact the traumatic effects of those tragic moments in the mind of the survivors. In order to overcome the psychic trauma that haunts their lives, the individuals need to assimilate the event in their personal history, accessing the traumatic memory and inserting the event in their existing mental scheme. Their purpose is to turn the traumatic memory into narrative memory through the process of narrating the events. They have to become able to use the language in order to describe what happened. The same process, the one of verbalizing the traumatic events, can be found in *Falling Man* where several characters are trying to turn their traumatic memory into narrative memory. The struggle between the characters' need to deny the event and delay the narration and their urge to know and to speak up represents one of the major themes of the novel. In fact, the whole text is a literary representation of the characters' struggle with their memory ready to reveal what happened inside the towers but impossible to narrate just because the psychic trauma was not assimilated and thus remains beyond the bounds of language. This struggle affects not only the individuals but also the narrative itself.

The novel *Falling Man* deals with 9/11 tragic events but the literary strategy the author chose is not a traditional one which proved to be inadequate for showing the effects of the psychic trauma on certain characters; it is a strategy based on fragmentation, repetition and inter-textuality which are more appropriate to present the chaotic aspects of traumatic experiences. The narrative contains

three main parts, each of them being named after a character:¹⁰ Bill Lawton, Ernst Hechinger and David Janiak. Being narrated in the third person, the text shifts from one perspective to another, mostly from Lianne and Keith but also from Hammad, one of the terrorists, and Florance, one of the survivors. The novel is almost circular. It opens with the moment when Keith Neudecker was walking away from the towers, only few minutes after the collapse of the first tower, and ends with the same character coming out on the street, escaping from the burning tower. The author's intention is to relieve the past through compulsively repeated words or phrases, repetitive actions and images, nightmares and flashbacks in a similar way as the traumatic mind would reveal itself. In fact, it is accurate to agree that the traumatized minds of the characters shape the entire narrative. The description of Keith's state of mind is given as a narrative disruption:

He used to want to fly out of self-awareness, day and night, a body of raw motion. Now he finds himself drifting into spells of reflection, thinking not in clear units, hard and linked, but only absorbing what comes, drawing things out of time and memory and into some dim space that bears his collected experience. (De Lillo, 2007, p. 66)

Considering that repetitions, symbolizations, re-enactments and physical suffering are able to replace memory in trauma fiction, in De Lillo's novel they become literary techniques used to reveal the actions, thoughts and reactions of the main characters in the days, months and years after the traumatic event (Vickroy, 2002, pp. 30-33). It is the case of Keith and Lianne. For example, Keith's programme of physical exercises for his wrist also helps him control the unconnected images that spring into his mind like the chaos. He continues to repeat the exercises even when his wrist is fine turning this repetition into a form of mental therapy. The repetition seems it would never end, since Keith still does the old exercise after three years later, counting the seconds needed for the exercise, five seconds each time, and the days after the collapse of the Twin Towers.

He would need an offsetting discipline, a form of controlled behavior, voluntary, that kept him from shambling into the house hating everybody. (De Lillo, 2007, p. 143)

¹⁰ The critic Joseph Conte sustains that the names of the characters share the attribute of metonomasia since they have been altered to fit certain purposes. He claims that Bill Lawton represents the anglicized form of Osama bin Laden, Ernst Hechinger is in fact the real name of Martin Ridnour, a former German activist, and David Janiak stands for the real name of the artist known as Falling Man (Conte, 2011, p. 569).

Because of the memory lapses, while in hospital, Lianne was asked to count down from one hundred by sevens and she continues to do so at home admitting that the repetition brings her comfort.

It made her feel good, the counting down, and she did it sometimes in the day's familiar drift, walking down a street, riding in a taxi. It was her form of lyric verse, subjective and unrhymed, a little songlike but with a rigor, a tradition of fixed order, only backwards, to test the presence of another kind of reversal, which a doctor nicely named retro-genesis. (De Lillo, 2007, p. 188)

Both Keith and Lianne are looking for specific patterns in order to re-shape their identity and lives. The repetitions they continue to do seem to provide them a certain structure in their chaotic thoughts. Along with these repetitions, Keith finds in poker another structure because of the guiding principles of the game which he considers easy interludes of dream logic. Lianne does the same when she chooses to go to church three times a week for the regular congregants.

They'd established a pattern, these three, or nearly so, and then others entered and the mass began. (De Lillo, 2007, p. 234)

A clearer structure could be found in Hammad's life, one of the terrorists who hijacked the plane that crashed into Keith's tower. He has a previously established pattern to follow and for him most of the things were very well defined. On a certain level, there is a similarity among Hammad's narrative, Keith's obsession with poker and Lianne's regular mass attendance: they all share a common need for rules, structures and patterns.

The same need for structure is to be found in the whole narrative and even in small fragments. For example, in a single sentence, describing the situation inside the plane in the minutes just before the crash, two of the main characters, Keith and Hammad, are linked together following a narrative pattern:

A bottle fell off the counter in the gallery, on the other side of the aisle, and he (Hammad) watched it roll this way and that, a water bottle, empty, making an arc one way and rolling back the other, and he watched it spin more quickly and then skitter across the floor an instant before the aircraft struck the tower, heat, then fuel, then fire, and a blast wave passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall. (De Lillo, 2007, p. 239)

On a larger level, the same structure links the opening moment, which describes the scene in which Keith leaves the towers, with the final moment which refers to the same scene but with few seconds before.

Besides the repetitions, there are also symbolic images¹¹ which play an important role in the trauma process and in its representation in *Falling Man*. According to Luckhurst, traumatized persons see intrusive images and also have recurrent dreams and nightmares which are meant to replace narrative memory in a traumatized mind. More than that, the psychic registration of trauma may reside in the image which functions as a symbol. (Luckhurst, 2008, p. 147) Following this point of view, the well-known images of the 9/11 attacks that open the novel achieve the function of symbols:

It was not a street anymore, but a world, a time and a space of falling ash and near night. He was walking north through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads. They had handkerchiefs pressed to their mouths. They had shoes in their hands, a woman with a shoe in each hand running past. They ran and fell some of them, confused and ungainly, with debris coming down round them and there were people taking shelter under cars. (De Lillo, 2007, p. 3)

The power of the image just described lies in the fact that it symbolizes the individual frozen in a free fall, like the traumatic memory frozen in the individual's mind which is no longer able to integrate the traumatic experience into memory, mainly because it lacks a form of reference and narrative. Similarly, the image of free falling¹² becomes the key symbol in the novel, standing for the falling through time, space and memory. The image of falling ashes substitutes Keith's own disintegration as an individual. He can no longer voice his feelings, he can no longer adapt to his new life, to his new identity and to a new reality which he cannot recognize and thus prefers to lose his time playing poker in Las Vegas, but the image still returns in his mind as flashbacks:

These were the days after and now the years, a thousand heaving dreams, the trapped man, the fixed limbs, the dream of paralysis, the gasping man, the dream of asphyxiation, the dream of helplessness. (De Lillo, 2007, p. 230)

In *Falling Man* the focus is on visual images rather than on narrative. Traumatic memory cannot be fixed on a linguistic level but on an iconic and/or symbolic one. It is non-verbal, context-free and non-narrative (Van der Kolk & Van der Hart, 1995, pp. 160-62). The novel reflects this type of memory through imaged, repeated and fragmented episodes. Thus, traumatic memory uses images

¹¹ Some of 9/11 narratives contain literally inserted images. It is the case of Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*.

¹² This image makes reference to the photograph known as *The Falling Man* taken by Richard Drew and published on the page seven of *The New York Times* on September the 12th 2001. The same photograph was further reproduced in lots of newspapers all over the world.

which re-interprets and transcends the traumatic events in order to find a way to understand them. It is the example of the image representing the shirt which falls down out of the smoke in the air. This image functions as a substitute for the real image of a falling man which Keith interpreted as a falling shirt revealing his incapacity of incorporating the image in a normal narrative memory, causing his cognitive and emotional paralysis. Unlike Keith, Lianne needs art to come to terms with the images that haunt her mind and that are freed through Giorgio Morandi's still lives. She tries to interpret the meaning behind the performance of the artist that re-enacts the image of falling people from the Twin Towers. Trauma can be translated and understood via art, stated Ann Kaplan (2005, p. 19). Although it does not provide answers, art may help to work through the pain that trauma causes while the wound is open. This is what Lianne does, uses the painting and the performance as mediators of her own pain.

The two main characters, Keith and Lianne, represent the two sides of the same coin: the one who fails and the one who almost succeeds in the process of overcoming the individual trauma. Their frozen identity remains somewhere between the traumatic memory and the narrative memory. The repetitions, the symbols of the images and the acts of re-enactment the traumatic experiences in order to surpass them represent psychological strategies meant for restoring the traumatic self. At the same time, they could be considered literary strategies for a narrative that shares the same way of functioning as the individual's mind. *Falling Man* intends to describe the chaotic aspects of trauma as they are revealed by a tormented mind and highlighted through literary strategies in a narrative text. All the shifts in time and memory, all the visual images, the textual gaps, repetitions, narrative disruptions, the entire variety of subject changing points of view render the disorienting positions of the characters who have experienced tragic events.¹³

The novel presents trauma by internalizing the rhythms processes and uncertainties of traumatic experience within the characters' sensibilities, structures and identity (Vickroy, 2002, p. 4). Trauma was introduced in the human consciousness as a temporal dislocation and anamnesis disrupting the individual's sense of identity.

What is produced in the post-war world is, then, a disrupted temporality in which the dynamic relation between past, present and future which we saw as intrinsic to modernity is forced to co-exist with elements of frozen time: a lost past, a traumatic present and a blighted future. (Armstrong, 2005, p. 19)

¹³ Both, Keith and Lianne act out their trauma but prove to be incapable to distinguish between past, present and future, feeling their perception of time altered by the tragic events.

In the world offered by the novel *Falling Man* the identity of the characters becomes fluid and loses its form. It has to be re-integrated within the narrative memory together with all the other traumatic moments. The ambiguous ending shows an atmosphere of suspension, reflecting the same inability of assimilating the traumatic reality. This unclear manner of closing a novel may be another literary strategy meant to determine the readers become witnesses of the tragic events and fully understand the characters' trauma.

Conclusion

The novel *Falling Man* as a psychic trauma narrative reflects the effects of a traumatic event on the individual. The 9/11 attacks¹⁴ affected not only those who were directly implicated in the event but also society at large, disrupting the attachments between self and others. The very same event is impossible to be assimilated and integrated in the individual's mind since he or she can no longer take as a reference his or her identity. The individual wounds tend to re-shape the nation's sense of identity just as it tends to re-shape the victim's identity. The literary strategies used in the novel reflect, at a formal level, the traumatic effects of trauma on individuals. The narrative does not represent trauma as a cultural subject matter but it re-enacts the influence that the events had on victims' traumatic memory. The novel is using repetitions, fragmentations, temporal disruptions, symbolic images, shifting perspectives as literary strategies for a particular trauma aesthetic. Thus it renders the manner a traumatic mind works, trying to re-shape reality and identity, being based on the contradiction which states that traumatic experiences resist verbalization and representation. This contradiction causes the rejection of the linear representation of traumatic events in trauma fiction and the use of unsettling temporal structures and various ways of indicating referentiality, figuration and indirection become more appropriate and specific for 9/11 psychic trauma novels.

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¹⁴ As a mediated event, the 9/11 attacks were traumatic more in the symbolic way and rather for what it represented than for the actual damage that it caused. (Redfield, 2009, p. 4)

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