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The Representation of Trauma in DeLillo's *Falling Man*:

A Postmodernist Reading

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Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

We dedicate our work to:

Our dear parents, brothers, sisters and friends.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the representation of trauma in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) through the lens of postmodernist narrative techniques. Focusing on the psychological and cultural effect of the 9/11 attacks, the study examines how DeLillo's fragmented narrative, insecure narration, and intertextual references mirror the disorienting nature of traumatic memory. Referring trauma theory and postmodern literary theory, the analysis identifies how the novel subverts traditional trauma narratives through resistance to linear development and closure. At the heart of the research is the main character, Keith Neudecker, whose disjointed experiences are symbolic of society's collective failure to cope with collective trauma. The dissertation also analyzes how the novel's stylistic ambiguity attests to the unimaginable quality of trauma. By situating *The Falling Man* among post-9/11 fiction and postmodernism, this study demonstrates how DeLillo's innovative style serves justice to the fracture in American identity. The research is decisive in affirming that the novel not only represents trauma but also shows the shortcomings of language in expressing its full impact, making a substantial contribution to debates on trauma fiction and postmodern aesthetics.

Keywords: Collective Trauma, Postmodernism, *Falling Man*, Trauma, ,9/11.

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General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, marked a central moment in global consciousness. This attack changes perceptions of security, identity and narrative context in the postmodern era (Gray, 2011). Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) responds to this cultural fracture. It offers a literary exploration of trauma that resists conventional narrative resolution. The fragmented structure and preoccupation of the novel with memory, dissociation and procession place it in postmodernist traditions. This rejects magnificent stories in favor of fragmented, subjective truths (Lyotard, 1979).

According to Hutcheon (1988), postmodern literature often seizes the lack of language and representation. DeLillo's work exemplifies this tension and question how trauma destabilizes individual and collective identities. Critics such as Ann Keniston (2008) argue that literature after 9/11, including *Falling Man*, reflects a "representation crisis", where traditional forms of storytelling are unable to enclose the extent and emotional gravity of the attacks (p. 365). Similarly, Jean Baudrillard (1994) gives the term hyper reality a framework for understanding the novel's depiction of 9/11 as both a visceral tragedy and a commodified procession.

Scholarship on trauma theory, especially Cathy Caruth's (1996) claim that trauma defies simple narrative, further contextualizes DeLillo's stylistic choice (p. 5). The novel's incoherent timelines and recurrent motifs, such as the enigmatic performance artist "Falling Man," mirror the cyclical, unresolved nature of traumatic memory (Caruth, 1996). However, holes remain in existing research on how *Falling Man* specifically uses postmodernist techniques to criticize the

sociopolitical answers to September 9th. For example, while critics such as Mark Osteen (2015) emphasize DeLillo's focus on individual alienation, fewer studies investigate the novel's broader commentary on national mythmaking and the role of the media in the design of collective trauma.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the extensive critical attention to the Post-11 September literature, insufficient research has examined as Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) employs postmodern narrative techniques to challenge dominant trauma representations and attacks on attacks. Their subversion of redemptive narratives and criticism of national myth through fragmentation, hyper -reality and intertextuality remain sub -explained. This study addresses this gap investigating how the postmodern aesthetics of DeLillo exposes the limitations of trauma representation, while resisting cultural attempts to impose meaning on collective catastrophe.

3. Research Questions

- 1- What are the kinds of the trauma portrayed in *Falling Man*?
- 2- How do postmodernist narrative strategies transfer the psychological stigma of the trauma?
- 3- How does the novel challenge the traditional trauma narratives through its postmodernist form?

4. Research Objective

This study endeavors to achieve three main objectives in the examination of the representation of the trauma in the novel of falling man by Don Delillo through postmodernist

lenses. Firstly, it aims to analyze different forms of trauma and explore how it articulated to create a fragmented real experience. Secondly it searches on how the novel used narratives strategies of postmodernism like fragmentation and temporal distortion, and unreliable narration to embody a psychological frustration driven from trauma. Finally, the study established how the novel's postmodernist formatively subverts traditional trauma narratives which give the priority to coherence and recovery through this analysis the research in the end show how the novel of falling man repeat the definition of the representation of the trauma through contrasting its instability inhered and its in acceptance of representation in a world after the aftermath of 9/ 11.

5. Significance of the Study

This research represents an essential participation in the understanding of the representation of the trauma in postmodernist literature. Through the analysis of the novel, the study represents a deep study of how a limited postmodernist narrative techniques influence our understanding for our reaction to individual and collective 9 / 11 trauma.

6 .Research Methodology

This study is based upon a qualitative research methodology for producing a postmodernist reading of trauma in the corpus. The research uses the descriptive-analytical method to analyze the text. The methodology is designed to related literary criticism by trauma studies, and establishing a framework analyze both stylistics features of the novel and its subjective interests.

To confirm a deep analysis, the study includes different theories. The postmodernist literary theory provides a framework for understanding DeLillo's narrative strategies and the theory of trauma to provide the essential concepts for the explanation of how these techniques transfer from psychological depression to a collective mourning. The methodology also

considered historical side and cultural contexts, with the study of how the novel interact with American consciousness after 9/11 events through Intertextual references to media, art, and public discourse about the attacks.

7. Structure of the Study

This study is divided into two parts. Part one: Trauma from Psychology to Literature, offers a comprehensive framework of trauma from psychological and literary points of view. The second part: A Postmodernist Reading of 9/11 Events in DeLillo's *Falling Man*: A Focus on Trauma, focuses on the reading of postmodernism of 9/ 11 events. It explores the kinds of trauma and the postmodernist techniques that represent it.

CHAPTER ONE:

Trauma from Psychology to Literature

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Introduction

Trauma defies simple articulation, it demands an interdisciplinary exploration. This chapter embarks by trauma from Freudian theories of repressed memory to contemporary discourses on PTSD. It outlines its psychological roots before tracing its account in literature. Trauma positions itself as both a personal wound and a collective metaphor, one that fractures linear narratives and haunts cultural memory. American literature serves as a critical site for this inquiry. The chapter reveals how fiction mirrors trauma's disorientation. Ultimately, it argues that literature transcends mere representation, becoming a dynamic space where trauma is metabolized, reimagined, and, paradoxically, healed through the act of storytelling itself.

1.1 Conceptualizing Trauma

Healthcare practitioners have always been in conflict with the essence of the trauma and its effects. To visualize trauma, it is needed the comprehend the ways through which the traumatic experiences impact individual's lives exactly in psychological side, emotional part and its physical appearance. Trauma has expanded to include many points of view which provide its causes, effects and treatment. Thus, many psychologists, sociologists and cultural studies focus on studying trauma; its concepts that influence individuals and society as the whole.

1.1.1 Definitions and Theoretical Perspectives on Trauma

Trauma is broadly defined as an emotional response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope (American Psychological Association [APA], 2023). With time, the definition of trauma has developed. Early theoretical perspectives, such as Freud's psychoanalytic theory (1917), viewed trauma as a result of repressed memories and unresolved unconscious conflicts. He says that trauma is a result of a repressed flashback

and a subconscious memory, which is not resolved yet, which may lead to losing control over one's body or mind.

On the contrary, contemporary theories focus on the role of external events like natural disasters and violence mistreatments in causing trauma. Contemporary theories emphasize on the role of external events, such as natural disasters, violence, or abuse, in causing trauma (Herman, 1997). One of the most retroactive framework is the theory of trauma for Judith Herman's (1997). He clarifies that trauma happened in three main stages steps of recovery: safety, remembrance and mourning. He was delve in the nature of psychological trauma and defined it as an affliction of the powerless. The reconnection of this model highlights the importance of treatment of both social and cultural trauma.

Additionally, *Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) classifies troubles that has relation with trauma. One of these is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) model Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) may happen when someone passes his life through a circumstance or witnesses an event in which he recognizes that this circumstance or physical appearance has been effected by experiences of fear, terror, or helplessness(Gary et al, 2014.p271-272).

People with PTSD may retrieve the trauma in stronger feelings, remembering, flashbacks, periodic dreams, or nightmares; afraid of doing activities and visiting places that lead them to remember the traumatic events; or experience physiological arousal. This may lead to symptoms such as an excessive surprise response, disrupted sleep, difficulty in concentrating or remembering events, and guilt about remaining and living with trauma when other people live easily. Trauma may lead to group of symptoms and a psychological trouble (APA , 2021)

Table 1.1 Symptoms of Trauma

Category	Symptoms of Trauma
Characteristics of the Person	-Previous exposure to traumatic events - Presence or absence of immunity to the type and characteristics of the event(s)
Emotional & Psychological Responses	Negation - Anger - Fear - Sadness - Timidity - Confusion - Anxiety - Depression - Numbness - Guilt - Hopelessness - Irritability - Difficulty concentrating - Emotional outbursts - Difficulty coping with the situation - Social withdrawal
Flashbacks & Nightmares	- Experiencing flashbacks during coexistence with trauma - Nightmares
Physical Responses	Headaches - Digestive symptoms - Fatigue - Racing heart - Sweating - Jumpiness - Hyperarousal (constant state of alertness) – Sleeplessness

Note: Adapted from (Dan.com, n.d.)

These theoretical insights provide the basis by which we can understand the trauma as an individual and a collective experience

1.1.2 The Psychological Dimensions of Trauma

1.1.2.1 Cognitive and Emotional Effects

The understanding of the essence of psychological dimension of the trauma needs the discovery of its influence on cognition, emotions, behaviors and identity. The trauma can prevent cognitive process, organized perception and correlative relationships. According to Van der Kolk, (2015), persons who suffer from trauma may show many symptoms like excess of exciting, mortifying memories and avoidances behaviors which are considered as characteristic traits. For Breslau et al.(1998), individuals who suffer from trauma symptoms like the excessive arousal, flashbacks and avoidance behaviors which are considered as traits that happened after the

traumatic events. Accordingly, trauma may lead to depression, anxiety and alcoholism which increase the difficulties in curing the patients.

1.1.2.2 Neurobiological Impact of Trauma

Psychiatric studies focus on how trauma affected the brain. Trauma changes the function and the structure of the brain. For example, studies have shown that the method of how trauma effects the brain leading to structural changes in the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex regions participate in the treatment of fear memories and akin decisions (Shin et al., 2006). All these reformulations can alter many functions such as heightened emotional arousal and impaired emotional regulation.

1.1.2.3 Behavioral and Identity Challenges

Trauma challenges the constitution of a safe relationship between humans. Therefore, trauma can disrupt attachment patterns, leading to challenge in forming secure relationships. These changes can lead to the raising of the emotional responses, difficulties in controlling fear, and challenges in maintaining healthy relationships. According to Bowlby (1988), trauma can disrupt attachment patterns, making it difficult for individuals to form secure connections with others.

Also, it prevents the show of attached Modula or styles that lead into challenge in making a safe relationship. The comprehension of these dimensions is important in the development of the effective treatments that mediate to solve the problem such as trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT) and eye movement desensitization (Shapiro, 2018)

The understanding of the psychological dimension's guide to the right treatment. The psychological dimensions of trauma focus on the prevention of the charge in mind and body and

its connections for helping persons to be safe from trauma and to rebuild their lives newly and to increase their feeling of existence and the reconnection.

1.1.3 The Social and Cultural Impact of Trauma

Trauma does not just focus on personal experience, but it may also lead to social and cultural retroaction. Collective trauma portrays all traumatic experiences that societies damaged by wars suffer from (Alexander, 2012). Genocide left battle scars in the memory of people in the affected society, which may have impacted global trauma. Social factors also participate in the quality of the collective trauma and in its treatment and protection. Events such as cremation and genocide in Rwanda left a continuous scar in the collective memory of damaged societies, influencing trauma across generations (Kellermann, 2001).

Trauma has different facets that may lead to frustration, or in contrast, it may lead to the development of individuals and societies. Even cultural factors constitute the modality of how we recognize trauma and how we recover from it. In some cultures, trauma may be considered a stigma, leading to silence and avoidance, while in other cultures, it facilitates social rituals and the oral storytelling of healing (Kirmayer et al., 2014). The social influence of trauma is evident in neglected groups, for example, refugees, survivors of domestic violence, and racial minorities. Constitutional patterns of inequality, such as poverty and social discrimination, increase the impact of trauma and may prevent access to necessary resources for healing (Alexander, 2012).

In all, trauma is a complicated issue that includes different aspects, such as individual, social, and cultural sides. Many theorists, such as Herman's trauma theory and the DSM-5 framework, with suitable information for recognizing the psychological and emotional traits of trauma. Neurobiological studies have developed a deep insight into the long-term effects of

trauma on the brain. Cultural and social studies highlight the importance of the context of trauma and the response to this issue. By combining different points of view, practitioners and researchers can develop endless strategies concerning trauma, such as prevention, intervention, and recovery. Finally, understanding trauma requires recognizing its impacts on individuals and societies. Trauma may happen individually, culturally, and socially. It causes pain and inequality on one side, but on the other, it can be transformative, fostering resilience, solidarity, and cultural renewal.

1.2 Trauma in Psychological Studies

Trauma has a big concern in psychological studies because of its effects on individuals and communities as a whole. This essay explores three main dimensions of trauma studies: psychological approaches to trauma and memory, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the long-term effects of trauma, in addition it clarifies the distinction between collective and individual trauma. Each of these dimensions provides a critical prudence into how trauma is understood, experienced, and addressed in psychological practice.

1.2.1 Psychological Approaches to Trauma and Memory

Psychological approaches consider the relationship between painful experiences in dealing with trauma, how they are symbolized, and how they are stored. Trauma often prevents the natural process of memory formation, leading to fragmented and intrusive memories (Brewin, 2011). Cognitive psychology proposes that painful memories are stored differently compared to natural ones. These memories often overwhelm the hippocampus and are based on sensory and emotional trajectories (Van der Kolk, 2015). This can result in memory flashbacks or vivid recollections that make it seem as though the trauma is being relived.

Many theories, such as the Dual-representation Theory, propose that painful memories are divided into two systems or frameworks: memories that can be recalled verbally and those that are accessed through attitudes. These are referred to as verbally accessible memories (VAMs) and situationally accessible memories (SAMs) (Brewin, et al, 1996). VAMs can be consciously retrieved and expressed, while SAMs are linked to sensory and emotional experiences, making their expression more challenging. This distinction explains the difficulties individuals with trauma face in recounting their experiences in a coherent form.

Pierre Janet was one of the first significant contributors who focused on memory and dissociation as key elements in understanding how trauma disrupts narrative coherence. Janet argued that painful experiences often fail to integrate into personal memory, leading to fragmented recollections and psychological distress (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1989). These early theories laid the foundation for later scholars to explore trauma as both a psychological and literary phenomenon.

1.2.2 PTSD and the Long-Term Effects of Trauma

Post-traumatic stress disorder PTSD is one of the longest term effect in a broader sense. It is characterized by symptoms like whingeing ideas and the behaviors of the excitation of excisable anxiety and the negative changes in mood and cognition [APA], 2013). These symptoms may stay for years, which may weaken the capacity of individual in daily life totally.

Many studies focus on the intensity and the period of PTSD as it is influenced by many natural factors like the nature of the trauma and the precedents mental health situations and the social support (Brewin et al., 2000). Neurobiological studies show that the trouble happened after the trauma is the PTSD and it associated with changes in the brain regions such as the amygdala,

which processes fear, and the prefrontal cortex, which regulates emotional responses. These changes are interested by the importance of precocity of treatments based on proofs, like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), with the sedative of pain comes from the long term effects of trauma (Brewin et al., 2000).

1.2.3 Collective vs. Individual Trauma

It is possible to examine the trauma in both individual and collective level, and each level has a distinctive psychological footprint. When individual trauma refers to the personal experiences that driven from a very contraction, like the mistreatment, incident and the violence which proven the feeling of the individual by peace and by the self (Herman, 1992). In contrast of that, the collective trauma involve on commonly experience for catastrophic events, like the natural disasters or epidemics , which influence the whole of communities (Erikson, 2006).

Usually trauma leads to the common feeling of loss and sadness and the reduction of identity. For instance, the survivors of genocide or mass violence may experience a collective memory for the event which leads to the formation of their cultural identity and the transfer of these culture between generations (Kellermann, 2001).

On one side an individual trauma focuses on personal troubles and the issues of healing and on the other side collective trauma demands interjections of the consciousness of communities and enhancing flexibility between community members (Luckhurst,2008). The understanding of the interplay between individual and collective trauma is very important in the development of comprehensive approaches for healing from trauma.

The trauma is a big issue and it has a big influence on the mental health. The psychological approach highlights the unique path which is concerned with the treatment of painful experience and its remembering. The trouble after the trauma and the long term effect of the trauma clarifies the continuous effect of painful events on to mental health. Finally the distinction between individual and a collective trauma focuses on the suitable interjection special for the treatment of personal and collective experiences. By the integration of these perceptions, psychologist in this case support the individuals and societies in the best way to overcome the effects of the trauma.

1.3 Trauma in Literary Studies

The study of trauma is raised in literature as an important field in literary criticism. It provides a deeper insight into the way a painful experience is represented, as well as its comprehension and treatment through narration.

1.3.1 The Evolution of Trauma Theory in Literature

The origin of trauma in literature goes back to psychoanalysis, especially in the works of Sigmund Freud, who explored the psychological impact of painful experiences. Freud's concepts of suppression and the unconscious mind already anchored the basis for understanding the quality of preventing trauma and narrative coherence (Freud, 1914). In fact, the work of scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman mark the beginning of trauma as a distinctive field within literature. Felman's *Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), confirms the importance of testifying to trauma in the context of historical events such as: The Holocaust. These books coined the method through which scholars theorized trauma in literature. They shed light on its contradictory nature ,which is both unrepresentable and in need of representation.

1.3.2 Cathy Caruth and the Foundations of Trauma Studies

Caruth's pioneering work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) illustrates that trauma is characterized by its delay in happening and its resistance to representation. It proposes that painful experiences are usually understood only reactively and that literature provides a unique space for exploring this temporal disorder. He establishes trauma as a central concern in cultural and literary studies. Caruth's approach confirms the contradictory nature of trauma. It may be experienced belatedly and cannot be fully understood or expressed during the event itself. Thus, trauma is illustrated as an event that is not entirely grasped at the moment of its occurrence (Caruth, 1996). This reflects its deferred effect, which manifests through symptoms such as flashbacks and nightmares.

Caruth's works highlights the role of literature in representing trauma. Literary texts have the ability to portray the fragmented and nonlinear nature of painful memory, offering perspectives on experiences that resist direct narration. For example, in her analysis of texts such as Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* and Holocaust literature illustrates how trauma prevents the classical narrative structures, and imposes a new forms of representation (Caruth, 1996). By focusing on the level crossing of trauma, memory, and narrative, Caruth provides a theoretical framework for clarifying how literature engages with painful experiences.

1.3.3 Dominick LaCapra and Trauma as Historical Representation

Dominick contribution about trauma studies focuses on the relationship between trauma and history, especially in the context of collective and historical trauma such as the Holocaust. In works such as *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2014), LaCapra discovers how trauma prevents the historical narrative and challenges the classical styles of representation. And he distinguishes between the historical trauma, which refers to particular events, for example, wars and

genocides, and the structural trauma, which is related to broader existential circumstances such as loss or absence (LaCapra, 2014).

LaCapra focuses on the importance of dealing with trauma, which is considered the process that guarantees the recognition of the painful experience and its integration into the personal and historical narrative, and he criticizes the approaches that focus just on the representation of the trauma, which may lead to repeated circles and not result in sadness. In contrast, he calls for reasonable approaches recognized by the emotional and creative complexities of the representation of the trauma (LaCapra, 2014). His work has impacted especially the study of the Holocaust when he examined the challenges of the representation of painful events without the appropriation of the victim's experiences or depreciation.

The early theorists' contributions, like Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, form a field of trauma literature. Early theorists like Freud and Janet provide a main insight into the psychological dimension of trauma. However, Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra expand these ideas to explore the historical and literary representation of traumatic experiences. Caruth focuses on the delayed and fragmented nature of trauma in literary analysis, while at the same time, LaCapra emphasizes historical representation and creative participation, which have influenced the discussion about collective trauma. Their work, in collaboration, establishes the study of trauma as a vital multidisciplinary field that provides beneficial tools for comprehending the continuous impact of traumatic events on individuals and communities.

1.3.4 Trauma Narratives and Testimonial Literature

Trauma narratives and testimonial literature serve as critical frameworks for understanding how individuals and communities articulate experiences of violence and oppression. It serves to

understand the transformation from a personal suffering into collective memory and resistance. By foregrounding first-person narrator, these narratives validate survivors' voices, which often challenges dominant historical or political discourses that marginalize their realities (Herman, 1992). Scholars emphasize that testimonial literature, such as memoirs or oral histories, not only documents trauma but also foster healing by reconstructing fragmented memories into coherent stories (Laub, 1992). However, ethical debates persist regarding authorship, authenticity, and the risks of retraumatization when recounting violent events (Felman & Laub, 1992). These narratives thus occupy a complex space, balancing catharsis with responsibility to both storyteller and audience.

1.3.5 The Role of Memory and Fragmentation in Trauma Fiction

The memory and fragmentation is one of the central subjects in the study of the trauma as it reflects the way the painful experience prevents the natural cognitive process. Usually, the trauma lead to the fragmented memories which are difficult to integrate in the coherent narrative. This fragmentation is reflected usually in the building trauma stories. These kinds of stories may use nonlinear narrative and a temporary writing which is not connected. Also, it uses a different point of view for the transformation to represent the confusing nature of the trauma. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (2006), the protagonist Sethe remembers about the slavery by a fragmented view or form. This method used by the authors, who used the trauma, to prevent its sensibility by focusing on the time and identity. Similarly, in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), the protagonist Billy Pilgrim has chosen the era of nonlinear correlation. He uses a narrative technique that reflect the psychological influence of his painful experiences during World War II. These literary techniques do not only reflect the nature of the painful experience but also

challenge the traditional narrative manners which oblige readers to engage with the text differently.

The study of trauma has developed in literature in recent years, benefiting from the perspectives of psychoanalysis, history, and literary theory. Novels about trauma and testimonial literature provide a stronger experience of painful events. The memory's and fragmentation's role in trauma novels reflects the destructive influence of trauma on the coherence of the narrative. Consequently, literature represents a unique lens for understanding the complexities of trauma; both as a personal experience and as a historical collective phenomenon. It highlights the ways in which trauma is represented, remembered, and processed.

1.4 Trauma in American Literature

Trauma is a subject of interest these days in American literature due to its complex and rich with tales of violence and oppression let alone of the stories of individuals fighting back. In the literary works, writers largely bring the emotions and minds scarred by events like the Civil War and slavery, and even more recent issues like September 11th and even the continuing racism. Through different types of writing such as books, poems, and personal stories, authors show how people suffer individually and as communities. Their works help us see the bigger social and cultural impacts of trauma. Literature is not only about capturing these painful experiences; it also offers a way for people to find healing and fight back against what hurts them.

1.4.1 A Historical Context for Trauma in American Literature

Trauma appears often in American literature, starting from when Native American lands were taken and continuing through the ongoing fight for civil rights. Authors use trauma to show

the deep emotional and mental effects of both historical events and personal experiences. A respected expert on trauma, Cathy Caruth(1996) , describes it as an intense experience of sudden or catastrophic events, where reactions often show up later in the form of recurring hallucinations and unwanted thoughts. This idea highlights how trauma memories can be scattered and come back repeatedly, a quality often seen in the way American stories are crafted. Authors use broken timelines, storytellers who might not be truthful, and strong emotional scenes to bring the experience of trauma to life. This method helps readers connect with the complex journey of remembering, dealing with loss, and finding healing.

1.4.2 Trauma from Slavery and the Civil War

As 1865 marked the end of slavery, the trauma that slavery conjured had entered into African Americans' minds and lives. The writers who sought to probe into memory saw slavery as an immediate and painful subject matter for the exploration of such themes as sorrow, loss, and strength intrinsic to the existence of condemned people and their children. Many would consider the trauma of slavery as the principal abiding subject in such literature.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Harriet Beecher Stowe presented the gritty realities of slavery and the associated psychic ravages — the tortured human pain visited on the enslaved and their families. Others examined the legacy of slavery in the post-Civil War years, like Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois coined the term double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), to refer to the internal conflict of African Americans attempting to create a place for themselves in a racially stratified society. The dehumanization of slavery and the search for identity are expressed in Douglass's gripping *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845).

This trauma started in trauma studies to become studied with increasing intensity. The scholar Marianne Hirsch (2012) (and others) coined the term “postmemory,” to explain how the trauma of slavery is passed down and re-experienced by descendants of the enslaved. Because of these concepts, you have a route for making a case for why slavery is still an inextricable part of the lives, identities, and literatures of African Americans today and that the effects of historical trauma, because of slavery, transcend the immediate past and influence generations.

1.4.3. Contemporary Trauma

The American literary scene, especially contemporary, accommodates trauma as a huge motif that highlights the complexity of everyday life with lasting effects of historical violence. Trauma remained an apparent theme in post-9-11 fiction, where largely media-saturated worlds existed. The fragments of memory-time become an intrinsic theme in this narrative art, constantly transforming trauma into an aesthetic vision.

Morrison's *Beloved* is the quintessential novel dealing with intergenerational trauma connected to slavery (1987). With a time, scheme that jumps about and involves the supernatural, Morrison exposes the psychological scars created by historical violence. Sethe embodies her struggles with the past, marking the long-lived effects of slavery into personal identity. Morrison makes exemplary of this very emotionally charged phrase: "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (p. 95). This consideration brings to light issues of emotions and psychology following trauma.

Books written in post the terrorist attacks 9/ 11 are typically those that deal with violent acts and their effects on people and communities as the aftermath of trauma and use fragmented timelines and non-linear forms of narration quite often to highlight the disorientation that results

from suffering. In the narratives, the main topics like racism and social disparity are frequently referred to, while the emotional agony of an individual is carried out even further. The books of journals like *Citizen: An American Lyric*, which is a modern one, post 2014, of the same name by Claudia Rankine, and *Sing, Unburied, Sing* by Jesmyn Ward of 2017, both of which describe in detail the countless traces of racism, police violence, and the historical injustice of the American South. In essence, the said works flesh out the role of trauma as a collective construct that also speaks of the individual in the society and their relationships with the community for many generations.

Overall, trauma in the recent American literature finds application in opening up various aspects of emotional aftermath of violence as well as the continuing quest for healing and securing justice in a fractured society.

1.5 Literature Review: Trauma and 9/11

9/11 attacks in the year 2001 causes an entire change to the American culture, and this was inclusive of literature. There are many books and stories written since the attacks focusing on the psychological pangs and emotional distress of the people who went through the ordeal, as well as the social problems it has generated. There is a preference for broken narrative stories with profoundly unreliable narrators that address subjects like memory, grief, and identity. The experience of narratives most often enables an understanding of collective trauma, working toward meaning-seeking after tragedy. It helps in the construction of theorization of how such writing creates broken timelines and broken identities but at the same time facilitates national collective remembering and healing. It is a cultural reaction to disaster; post-9/11 fiction is about trauma and narrativity in crises.

1.5.1 The Impact of Representations of 9/11 Trauma in Literature

We are writing in a post-9/11 world, and the 9/11 attacks changed how authors write about trauma. This new style features jumbled timelines, a narrator who may not be telling the whole truth, and self-aware storytelling (Gray, 2011). Unlike earlier trauma denouements, such as those regarding the Holocaust, literature about 9/11 is an account of an event seen in its entirety by the world, and something not easy to adequately explain or understand (Gray, 2011). Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) omits the attacks altogether, though they hover around much of the book. Instead, the filled detail with the focus on aftermath psychology, experience of detachment or forgetfulness (Luckhurst, 2008). This resonates with Caruth's (1996) sense that trauma is an "unclaimed experience" (5). Echoing this notion, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) employs creative page layouts (e.g. blank pages, overlapping text) to articulate the difficulty of conveying trauma. Some critics mock these narratives as they render trauma in more artistic terms such that some seriousness has been lost, what with the symbolic and commercial use of the "falling man" from DeLillo's novel (Gray, 2011).

1.5.2 The Transformation of American Trauma Narratives post-9/11

Before the 9/11 attacks, trauma stories, such as those about the Vietnam War, often presented suffering as a part of heroism or something that helped the nation (Luckhurst, 2008). But after 9/11, these stories changed. They began to focus on ongoing pain and uncertainty (Randall, 2011). In the novel *Falling Man*, the main character, Keith, shows self-destructive behavior. He gambles and cheats, which reflects a deeper struggle with what being American means (Duvall, 2008). Unlike stories from World War II that often talk about people coming together, stories about 9/11 highlight feelings of loneliness and fear (Luckhurst, 2008). For example, in *Falling Man*, Lianne is very worried about her father's dementia (DeLillo, 2007).

This worry reflects larger fears about losing memories and culture. These post-9/11 stories question big national myths and focus on how life can feel broken and filled with disagreement.

1.5.3 The Role of Fiction in Processing National Tragedy

Literary fiction presents a different perspective from what we usually see in the media. It helps us understand the emotional and psychological aspects of trauma more deeply (Berger, 2014). The media often showed 9/11 in a way that focused on the same dramatic images, like the towers collapsing or people covered in ash. But books like *Falling Man* go beyond these images to explore the personal, unresolved feelings that come with trauma (Versluys, 2009). Fiction also looks at how tragedy can become something commercial. In *Falling Man*, a performance artist mimics the “falling man” pose, highlighting the tension between remembering the event and exploiting it for gain. Similarly, in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, Jonathan Safran Foer uses collage and visuals to explore whether words or images can ever truly express trauma (Holloway, 2008).

1.6 The Trauma of 9/11 Fiction on an Individual and Collective Level

The writings about the trauma of September 11 reveal two closely connected sides: personal loss and national trauma. This section explores how stories written after 9/11 address the blend of personal sadness and the broader cultural suffering. It focuses on how these stories link private grief with public pain, illustrating how fiction describes the overlapping of individual mourning with a larger national crisis.

1.6.1 The Personalization of Trauma in 9/11 Fiction

Fiction often changes big historical events into stories that feel personal and relatable. When we read books about conflict and community, we see they show trauma in different ways.

In *Falling Man* by DeLillo and "Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close" by Foer, trauma is presented as a personal experience. These stories take national tragedies and make them part of individual lives and relationships (Versluys, 2009, p. 47). This storytelling does two important things: it makes loss feel personal. In *Falling Man*, Keith Neudecker feels disconnected and doesn't recognize himself, showing the deep mental impact of a huge disaster (Travers, 2011, p. 102).

It avoids political messages. In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, Foer tells the 9/11 story through the eyes of a child. Using the character Oskar, the book avoids nationalistic themes and instead focuses on the confusing and ordinary nature of pain (Holloway, 2008, p. 89). Some think this could lessen the broader meaning of 9/11 (Gray, 2011, p. 78), but it does stay away from typical media stories like the *Heroic Firefighter* narrative (Duvall, 2008, p. 112).

1.6.2 Case Study: Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close

Jonathan Safran Foer's novel, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, explores how trauma is passed from one generation to the next using unique storytelling techniques. The young protagonist, Oskar, shares stories that are detailed and playful, which helps him try to make sense of losing his father. The book's style reflects this chaos through overlapping text, red corrections, and blank pages, symbolizing how traumatic memories often feel broken or incomplete (Berger, 2014, p. 33). Oskar's grandfather writes letters to Oskar's dad, who has died, but these letters are never sent, showing the difficulty of expressing trauma. This idea aligns with Caruth's work from 1996 on how trauma is often beyond words (p. 7). The novel ends in a provocative way, with Oskar dreaming of reversing the events of 9/11. This ending suggests that stories can provide emotional comfort and help people cope with events that can't be changed (Versluys, 2009, p. 62).

1.6.3 Narrative Techniques in Depicting Trauma in 9/11 Fiction

Narrative technique	Examples from fiction	Theoretical Basis
Nonlinear Timeline	Falling Man's sudden flashbacks	Cathy Caruth(1996) :Trauma disruptschronology, leadingto fragmented
Multivocal Narration	Extremely Loud and incredibly Close's trio of narrators.	Roger Luckhursts(2008) :Trauma is multivocal,reflectingfragmented identities.
Metafictional Devices	Fraser's inclusion of photographs	Linda Hutcheon(1998) :Historiographic, metafiction challenges historical representation

Authors writing after 9/11 use formal experimentation to reflect psychological disruption:

Conclusion

This chapter underscores trauma's dual identity as a psychological rupture and a narrative challenge. It bridges clinical frameworks with literary innovation. From Freud's theories to Caruth's "unclaimed experience," trauma's resistance to linearity finds expression in literature's fragmented forms. By interweaving individual anguish with collective memory, fiction becomes a vessel for communal catharsis, countering silence with testimony. Through narrative techniques like repetition, omission, and polyphony, authors transform private suffering into shared language, resisting historical erasure. In doing so, literature emerges not just as a mirror to

trauma but as a mediator, offering both confrontation and consolation. As societies grapple with evolving traumas, this synthesis of psychology and art remains vital to navigating the unspeakable and forging paths toward meaning.

CHAPTER TWO:

A Postmodernist Reading of 9/11 Events in DeLillo's *Falling Man*: A Focus on Trauma

Chapter Two: A Postmodernist Reading of 9/11 Events in DeLillo's *Falling Man*.

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Introduction

This current chapter examines the ways through which DeLillo employs postmodern techniques to mirror the psychological trauma following 9/11 attacks. By analyzing Keith's disorientation, Lianne's grief, and secondary characters' struggles, it highlights personal trauma's nonlinear expression. Simultaneously, it investigates how the novel reflects America's collective mourning and the redefinition of national identity post-9/11. Through a postmodernist and psychoanalytic framework, the chapter reveals how trauma disrupts memory, meaning, and narrative coherence.

2. 1 Postmodernist Narrative Techniques and Trauma Representation

The Postmodernist narrative techniques make a revolution in the representation of trauma, through its challenging of linear and coherent narrative techniques in favor of fragmented and subjective expressionist style. These techniques reflect the confusing nature which usually is not suitable for description for trauma experience. Resisting this traditional narrative, the nonlinear structure disability the chronological time order which reflect how the trauma prevent memory and time. The fragmentation of identity and experience disintegrate a combining point of view embodying the shattered self which usually the trauma impose it. Through the personality and ambiguity, the postmodernist narrative techniques protrude the non-authenticity of memory and recognition calling reader to deal with the difficulties of the trauma which are not resolved yet which provide by a deep interaction and originality with a psychiatric injures.

2.1.1 Non-Linear Narrative Structure

DeLillo's narrative in *Falling Man* is nonlinear and thus reflective of trauma's dislocating influence, as amplified by the sudden opening: "He was walking north through rubble and mud

and there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads" (chapter1). This unmediated plunge into chaos replicates trauma's mechanism: the sudden invasion of the present, fracturing time just as Keith himself experiences it, through turbulent memories that refuse coherent integration. With transitions seemingly excluded from the novel's fabric, readers are thus forced to share the scattered outlook embodied by Caruth (1996) when talking about trauma's "unassimilated" quality (p. 4). By rejecting conventional narrative resolution, DeLillo turns the very form into a manifestation of the post-9/11 psychological rupture.

With such imagery as "he tried to tell himself he was alive but the idea was too obscure to take hold " (chapter1), DeLillo's *Falling Man* puts the readers squarely in that chaotic moment on 9/11. Destruction and trauma combine in this opening scene, with gestures of protection famous for their fragility. The cityscape has changed: "it was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night" (chapter1). It becomes a reflection of the devastation of the survivors' consciousness's. The way it is written, DeLillo's style mimics the disconnection of trauma: it offers no closure in the narrative arc and instead draws itself to accurately portray consciousness after the attack (Caruth, 1996). The last quote vividly captures the apocalyptic aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, portraying the collapse of the familiar world into chaos. The "street" is no longer recognizable; it has been transformed into a nightmarish landscape of ash, debris, and smoke. The phrase "a time and space of falling ash and near night" suggests a surreal, almost otherworldly environment, where time feels suspended and the boundary between day and night blurs due to the thick dust and destruction.

The attack has shattered the ordinary reality of New York City, "in time he heard the sound of the second fall. He crossed canal street and began to see things, somehow, differently." (p. 2).

This represents the wider context for how terrorism infringes upon the feeling of safety and weightlessness. "A time and space" implies that this moment exists outside normal chronology, it is a traumatic rupture in history. The phrase "falling ash" imprints an image of two-tower structures collapsing but also represents ultimate death and mournfulness with the aftereffects of these attacks echoing in long-lasting psychological impact. "Near night" also indicates the impending darkness-the kind that is literal (as dust blocks sunlight) or it is metaphorical (the darkness of heart through grief, fear, and anxiety). Like many characters in the novel, Keith is thrust into a state of shock, where the world no longer makes sense. The street becoming "a world" underscores how trauma reshapes perception, making even familiar spaces alien.

Without explanation or context mimicking the sudden, violent storming of trauma in the daily life. The nonexistence of a clear beginning start rattles the stability of the reader. Similarly, as the aftermath of 9/11 rattle the stability of characters' later DeLillo repeat the look in the moment from different point of view or opinion enhancing the idea of trauma is not a one stable event but it is a repeated experience not resolved yet in addition to that the timing, ellipsis in the novel reflect how trauma prevent memories such as Keith sudden memories about his marriage or about the poker games with other survivors. The narrative refuse to represent a seamless gradation from (before) to (after) which clarifying that the time is not heal with a linear narrative with survivors.

2.2.2 Fragmentation of Identity and Experience

The trauma weakens Keith's sense of his self letting himself presented physically but emotionally emptier. DeLillo transfers this dissolution through a fragmented connected scene. Protest against all the coherent things. Keith's relationship with his wife and his lover and even his body in a international moments confirming the impossibility to return in identity before the

9/11 attack "from this point on, you understand, it is all about loss"(chapter10). This line appears after Keith Neudecker, the protagonist, survives the collapse of the World Trade Center and stumbles through the chaos of Lower Manhattan. It marks a turning point—not just in the immediate aftermath of the attack, but in the way the characters (and, symbolically, America itself) must now navigate life. The phrase suggests that from this moment forward, existence will be defined by absence—loss of life, loss of security, loss of meaning. For Keith, it foreshadows his fractured marriage, his emotional numbness, and his inability to fully return to his old self. On a national level, it reflects America's sudden confrontation with vulnerability and mortality after 9/11. On a personal level, it underscores how trauma reshapes identity—Keith's relationships, his sense of purpose, and even his connection to reality are irrevocably altered.

The line echoes the novel's preoccupation with how catastrophe forces people into a new consciousness. Before, life had a narrative; now, it is defined by what is *missing*. This aligns with DeLillo's broader themes of how violence disrupts time and memory, leaving survivors in a suspended state of grief. The *Falling Man* (both the performance artist in the book and the real-life imagery of people jumping from the towers) embodies this idea of irreversible descent—into death, into trauma, into a world where loss is the only constant.

The novel's terse and haunting prose by DeLillo here distills the essence of the book: "going back" is not an option after 9/11. The attack was not merely an event; it became a dividing line, with everything that followed measured by the yardstick of what was taken away. This line serves as a soft, heart-shattering thesis on the issues of mourning, survival, and the precariousness of meaning in the wake of unabated, glaring violence.

The story of Lianne develops this theme, narrating or rather showing Keith through her work in heading a writing group for Alzheimer's patients. "she had her storytelling sessions in

east Harlem, also weekly ,in the afternoon, a gathering of five or six or seven men and women in the early stages of Alzheimer disease (Chapter.4).This part pertains to a woman who has organized a collection of weekly storytelling sessions for a small circle consisting of around 5 to 7 individuals. These would be individuals at the early stage of Alzheimer's disease residing in East Harlem. The term 'Lianne fragmentation' likely spelled or misinterpreted. It could mean either lineal fragmentation or, more appropriately, narrative fragmentation.

"Narrative fragmentation is employed in DeLillo's *Falling Man* both formally and thematically to create an analogy: it evokes not only the dissociation experienced by Keith after September 11 but also the cognitive disintegration of Lianne's father, an Alzheimer's patient. The jaggedness and no chronological nature of the narrative betray the trauma-derived obliteration-an absence of what could have otherwise cohesively integrated past and present. Life narratives become "corrosive" fragments to Alzheimer's (chapter7); Keith's identity too splinters under the weight of unresolved trauma. DeLillo refuses readers to make coherent connections but forces us to feel that "seamless narrative" (chapter11) is only illusion-both through personal history and collective memory after catastrophe.

2. 2.3 Subjectivity and Ambiguity

DeLillo avoids intentionally the firm explanation, letting a principal element such as the role of the artist and his act min the drama of (Falling Man) open to multiple reading. This ambiguity reflect the nature of trauma which is not resolved yet as the narrator states, "It was not a stunt... It was something else, but he didn't know what" (chapter 13).

The performance artist known as the Falling Man represents the cultural uneasiness concerning commemoration of 9/11. His acts incite public disquiet because they treat as

something that cannot be organized-nor is either pure art, a formal monument or just a simple spectacle, but a reflection of society's unresolved conflation between memory and misuse. This ambiguity is deliberately sustained, as well as the motives of the performer, by DeLillo, much like the novel's refusal on cathartics holding to healing, justice, or a reckoning with history. So as an illogical finality, it is Keith's last scene as a professional poker player: a moment of suspended calm signifying not resolution but suspended trauma. The absence of narrative solution is not oversight, but deliberate formal choice; that is to say trauma last beyond storytelling limits.

DeLillo's ambiguity deliberately sustains this state, refusing to clarify the motives that move the performer, just like the novel refuses any cathartic process concerning healing, justice, or reckoning with history" it happened to Rosellen S., an elemental fear out of deep childhood" (Chapter.6). Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* encapsulates a recurring theme in the novel: the resurgence of primal, unarticulated fears triggered by collective trauma, such as the 9/11 attacks. While the exact context of Rosellen S. is not explicitly detailed in the search results, the phrase "elemental fear out of deep childhood" can be interpreted through DeLillo's broader exploration of fear, memory, and existential vulnerability in the novel. Here's a breakdown of its significance:

This structural resistance to closure culminates with the last designed scene as that of Keith as a professional player in poker; a moment of precarious calm which suggests not resolution but suspended trauma. The absence of a narrative solution is not an oversight; it is a choice of form-intentionality: trauma exists beyond the boundaries of storytelling.

2.3. Individual Trauma: Psychological Impact and Personal Loss

Individual Trauma Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* probes deeply into the psychological and emotional consequences of 9/11, investigating the trauma's effects on memory, identity, and human connection. He said “he tried to tell himself he was alive but the idea was too obscure to take hold” (Chapter1). In essence, the quote distills the novel’s exploration of survival as a paradox: Keith is physically present but psychologically adrift, struggling to reclaim a self that feels irreparably altered. It speaks to the dissonance between being alive and *feeling* alive in a world where catastrophe has upended all certainty.

With this, the novel becomes more than a mere record of the day itself and enters into a realm of super-charged anxiety that troubles normal existence after massive history-anxiety perhaps laid out in the person of Keith Neudecker, surviving the day, horrifically traumatizes others, into his estranged wife Liane. A plethora of supporting characters allows the author to create a narrative that interrogates both personal grief and collective mourning. The novel's fragmentation, disturbing imagery, and motifs of repetition suggest unresolved trauma as a permeating state, not an aberration, in modern life.

2.3.1 Keith's Disorientation and Search for Meaning

Keith Neudecker, the lawyer who survives the World Trade Center attacks, embodies the novel's central exploration of disorientation and existential rupture. His physical survival contrasts sharply with his psychological instability as he drifts through the aftermath in a dissociative state. His return to Lianne reflects not a conscious attempt at reconciliation but rather an instinctive grasp for familiarity - a fragile anchor in a world that has lost all meaning. This psychological fragmentation manifests in his compulsive gambling, where the poker table

becomes both a temporary escape from traumatic memories and yet another space where the past intrudes. A key passage highlighting Keith's recurring visions of the towers' collapse underscores how trauma resists linear narration, forcing both character and reader to relive the catastrophic moment in fragments. "He saw it fall again and again, the same persistent dream, the tower coming down in a slow cascade of ash and smoke."

This character personifies the inward exploration of disorientation and existential aperture evinced by the novel. His physical survival starkly contrasts psychologically against the instability he cut through in a dissociative state through the heady days of afterward. His coming back to Lianne does not mark his wrestling with himself for conscious reconciliation but a hollow instinctive groping for lost familiarity - the frail sail in a world that has come to mean nothing. Such a marriage can be observed thematically put to his compulsive gambling, sitting around poker tables as an escape from recollection of the traumatic events but not leaving behind another circling space where memories intrude. One such important passage of Keith's recurrent memories or visions regarding the destruction of towers states that trauma is resistant to a linear form of narration: a narration forces a character and perhaps even the reader to experience the catastrophic moment fragmentarily, again.

Correspondingly, "then he said something else. The briefcase sat beside the table like something yanked out of a landfill .he said there was a shirt coming down out of the sky. this quote about Keith personal trauma" (chapter 6). The briefcase symbolizes the severance of ties that Keith has from his life before 9/11, as its ash-coated surface embodies both survival and ruin. Importantly, its dented shape invokes the random violence-inflicted destruction scattered bits of lives and objects: like landfill debris. This object bears witness to what was and has

become of it. The briefcase reflects Keith's trauma—a wretched memento of all the chaos from a day not long past, and uncertainty thereof. With its presence, the concept of past becomes uncomfortable; thus, as a burden, it is carried but unable to dump.

Keith's PTSD manifests through fractured flashbacks and emotional detachment, his reality splintered by trauma—the disjointed prose mirroring his psychological unraveling. These hallucinatory recollections reveal how 9/11 permanently altered his perception of time and self. This trauma shatters the linear narration in the work, causing the memory to break into disjointed flashes while turning everyday objects—the briefcase or shirt—into charged symbols of loss. This fragmentation in DeLillo's work reflects the nature of this psychological rupture, where the past intrudes as visceral, unresolved echoes. The imprint of the landfill looks similar to Keith's post-9/11 life; a land offering emotional and physical devastation, where traces from the past keep resurfacing like excavated wreckage. This symbolic decay is a lasting trace of the trauma: nothing is fully recoverable or reconstructable.

2.3.2 Lianne's Grief and Mental Health Struggles

Linda's trauma takes the form of manic depression and psychological disturbances that contrast sharply with Keith's emotional detachment. Lianne's obsessive fears, especially concerning mental degeneration (Alzheimer's in particular), cognizant that her father had committed suicide because of this affliction, turn her work with dementia patients into something bordering on a personal rather than professional duty, an exorcism of her own fears surrounding memory and the fragility of identity. "she had no willingness to think of the falling towers but she was doing so" (chapter5); here, the trauma's unavoidable into the present becomes palpable. In her attempt to arrange things to her own desires while adhering to an inflexible sense of

routine, Lianne also works to safeguard Justin from violent, yet, unfortunately, such opposition of memory and reality gets crammed through chaos and loss. Her relations with her mother, Nina, and her lover, Martin—who, as an intellectual European, is distinctly detached from her corporeal anguish—feed back into Lianne's own emotional terrain, pushing her towards unresolved pains. The overlap of personal trauma and historical trauma creates a vault of suffering that the individual must labor through: demonstrating that amid catastrophe, individuals differ from one another in their processing of it, focusing on the cyclical and unrelenting nature of trauma.

2.3.3 Secondary Characters' Responses

In *Falling Man*, secondary characters like Martin—a German art dealer shaped by his Nazi father's legacy, provide crucial counterpoints to Keith and Lianne's trauma, revealing how violence echoes across generations. His clinical detachment "there is no a fully salvage but a moments after other moments" mirrors the novel's rejection of linear healing, framing trauma as cyclical: fleeting respites interrupted by recurring anguish (chapter 8). By connecting post-9/11 trauma to broader historical violence through Martin's mediated perspective, DeLillo resists singular narratives of recovery, instead portraying psychological survival as a fragmented, ongoing negotiation with the past.

DeLillo's putting Hammad, one of the 9/11 attackers, in focus becomes a problem by humanizing a perpetrator along with all the suffering of the victims of that act in this chapter. Hammad's actions are retold within the cultural and ideological forces that shaped him, but his creator will not allow him to be denied as simply a villain. Rather, he foregrounds Hammad's inner conflicts and hesitations and then resolve-these make for him a humanizing one that asks

readers to write out the uncomfortable truth that terrorism originates not from abstract evil but from individual psychology and systemic influences.

One such performance artist would be the falling man, appearing randomly throughout the text, becoming further established as a kind of silent but very weighty symbol of collective trauma that reenactments the now-famed falling bodies, instilling anxiety, confusion, and public disquiet. Such are the reservations in the societal psyche about memorialization; is his art homage or incitement or merely a grotesque spectacle? DeLillo does not answer that question; but what he suggests is that trauma resists neat classification or explanation.

Thus, by placing Hammad's humanity directly against the ambiguous artistry of the Falling Man, the novel opens itself to the unfathomable disjunctions in which post-9/11 lives are lived-in a single historical moment, yet that moment irreparably divides perpetrators and their innocent victims.

2.3.4 Authorial Voice

DeLillo's style in *Falling Man* can be characterized as terse, precise, and self-consciously fragmented, and this mirroring of the fragmented psychology of the characters further motivates his style. The emptiness of the heart in the honest narration becomes a tool for the disturbing rendering of trauma, and it is one such tool that unnerves the reader. The novel is disjointed, with shifting perspectives and timelines that imitate the disjointedness of memory after the trauma. This is best illustrated in the cyclical closing lines: "He heard the sound of the elevator and then the doors opened and he saw himself step out, a figure in a suit, and he knew who it was" (chapter 14). The multiplication of Keith facing his ghostly double emphasizes the traumatic rift

in identity: there can be no return to the self before 9/11; there can only be a confrontation with the aftermath of its fragmentation.

While the novel repudiates conventional constructs of recovery, it casts trauma into an abiding shadow, dimming the brightness of the quotidian worlds inhabited by Keith's numbing, Lianne's anxiety, and the responses of minor characters. DeLillo creates this mosaic of grief within which resolution does not exist “Lianne struggled with the idea of God. she was taught to believe that religion make people compliant” (Chapter 5). This reflects Lianne's internal conflict regarding religion, framed by her belief that it enforces compliance—a notion tied to critiques of institutionalized faith as a tool for social control.

The collapsing towers, the bodies, and an artist known as Falling Man become signs not so much of a life fallen as one endlessly free falling, where the ground will never solidify beneath one's feet. By denying catharsis, DeLillo holds not only the immediate aftermath of 9/11 but rivets it with great efficiency to the universal human experience of loss, where the past remains irreducible and the self is forever changed.

2.4 9/11 As a Collective Mourning in DeLillo's *Falling Man*

The September 11 attacks were a nation's traumatic memory that America cannot but remember, and they also precipitated a bizarre kind of collective mourning, reshaping cultural, emotional, and philosophical landscape. Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) is a novel response to the tragedy, offering a meditative exploration of how citizens, as well as society, deal with loss in the post-terror era. DeLillo presents the interdependence of public pain and personal loss through symbolism, fractured narration, and the distorted perceptions of time, memory, and identity of the characters.

2.4.1 The Public Display of Mourning

DeLillo presents mourning as a performative and public spectacle, an idea reinforced through the titular image of the Falling Man an art performer who mimics the posture of the man photographed falling from the towers. One of the most striking lines in the novel reflects the unease this performance triggers: “There were people clustered near the entrance, on both sides, others pushing through the doors but seemingly still engaged by something happening outside. ‘A man was dangling there, above the street, upside down’” (chapter 4). This depiction of the spectacle serves as a metaphor for the collective repression of grief. The public is both transfixed and repulsed by the reminder of human fragility.

The performativity of mourning is itself a rebuke against the media-mediated, government-endorsed narrative of heroic outpouring after 9/11. Rather than enacting a univocal nationalistic mourning, characters within the novel struggle with the messiness of real mourning: guilt, confusion, denial, and detachment. This aligns with Judith Butler’s (2004) view that collective bereavement exposes the margins of cultural and political norms, defining whose life is grievable.

2.4.2 Memory, Time, and the Lingering Present

DeLillo disrupts linear temporality to reflect the psychological experience of trauma, wherein time collapses and the past intrudes constantly on the present. Lianne’s mother, Nina, observes, “These are the days after. Everything now is measured by after” (chapter 8).

This argument summarizes the manner in which individual and collective chronologies have been re-mapped around a single apocalyptic moment. The post-9/11 world is characterized by a pervasive hyper-vigilance and anxiety.

This spatiotemporal disintegration is instantiated in Keith's repetitive behavior. His repeated attendance at poker games, as a lightweight recreational activity, is transformed into an compulsive search for domination of contingency and reassertion of control. Participation in them involves a psychiatric management and upkeep strategy. The progression of poker game scenes deepens symbolically and reflect the way people retreat to ordered space as refuge from life's disorganization.

The novel also satirizes the political and ideological nature of mass mourning. The terrorist Hammad appears in interspersed chapters, offering an unsettling but insightful look at the motivations and mentality of the perpetrators. One passage reads: “He looked past the mud-brick huts toward the mountains. Bomb vest and black hood. We are willing to die, they are not. This is our strength, love to death, to feel the claim of armed martyrdom. He stood with the others in the Old Russian copper mine...” (chapter8). This passage subtly underscores the ideological alienation that fuels radicalism, framing mourning not just as an American experience but as a global crisis of meaning. By juxtaposing American trauma with the terrorist narrative, DeLillo interrogates whose mourning is acknowledged and validated. The novel resists the binary moralism that often characterizes post-9/11 discourse, instead portraying mourning as a universally human—yet unequally distributed—condition. This aligns with Dominick LaCapra's (2001) assertion that “empathy with trauma does not imply uncritical identification” (chapter4). In this context, DeLillo's narrative cultivates empathy without justifying violence.

2.5 Reshaping the American Identity

American public perception was painfully upended by the September 11 attacks, which called into doubt long-held beliefs about historical continuity, national identity, and security. Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) portrays this existential rupture as a symbolic assault on the core

of American identity rather than merely a physical attack on skyscrapers. In DeLillo's post-9/11 world, identity becomes polarized, dislocated, and fiercely contested. The novel amplifies existing postmodernist concerns - the disintegration of grand narratives, self-destabilization, and alienation - as seen when Keith reflects: "I know. It was totally crazy. I could hear myself speaking. My voice was like it was coming from someone else" (chapter7). This passage illustrates how extreme trauma fractures one's sense of reality and self.

2.5.1 The Loss of Narrative Certainty

Prior to 9/11, American identity was frequently built around a metanarrative of exceptionalism and historical progress. The attacks shattered trust in this stable, unified national narrative, exposing both physical and symbolic vulnerabilities. As Lyotard (1984) famously observed, the postmodern era is characterized by "incredulity toward metanarratives" (p. 24). DeLillo dramatizes this collapse through his characters' disintegrating inner and outer worlds. Protagonist Keith Neudecker, a survivor of the North Tower's collapse, becomes emotionally vacant and directionless: "He was walking north out of the rubble" and "where he [was] supposed to be" (chapter1). This disorientation reflects not just individual trauma but a broader national crisis where the coordinates of identity have been obliterated.

2.5.2 Identity in Displacement and Surveillance

In the post-9/11 context, American identity becomes reconstructed through increased surveillance, distrust, and assertions of difference. The novel highlights tensions between the familiar and foreign, particularly through Lianne's growing suspicion of her Muslim neighbors. Her unfounded paranoia - wondering if her neighbor might be "a man who writes verses to praise the killing" (chapter9) - exemplifies how identity becomes securitized and oppositional. This

dynamic aligns with postmodern critiques of identity as relational and constructed (Hall, 1996), showing how fear rather than shared values comes to define American selfhood after the attacks.

2.5.3 Media, Memory, and the Construction of the Self

DeLillo sharply critiques how media reshapes American identity through endless repetition of the attacks as spectacle. Lianne's compulsive viewing of the footage - "Every time she saw a videotape she moved her finger...The second plane coming out of that ice-blue sky, this was the footage that entered the body" (chapter7) - demonstrates how mediated trauma becomes internalized. As Baudrillard (2002) argued, 9/11's hyper mediation transformed it into an incomprehensible spectacle where images superseded reality. This media saturation forges an American identity perpetually mourning, hyper-vigilant, and shaped by image-based memory.

The post-9/11 world of *Falling Man* presents a patriotism that is fractured and ambiguous. The novel resists simplistic narratives of resilience or revenge, instead offering the unsettling performances of the "Falling Man" artist - whose upside-down reenactments force spectators to relive trauma rather than overcome it. This repeated visual trauma confirms postmodernism's key insight: that identity is often further fragmented rather than healed through remembrance. The characters exist in liminal space between memory and forgetting, reality and representation, embodying the postmodern condition of unstable, externally-shaped identity.

2.6 Terrorism's Legacy

The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in *Falling Man* is portrayed as a profound rupture that transforms victims' reality. DeLillo's imagery underscores the disorientation of survivors: for example, early in the novel Keith walks through the debris, noting that "it was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night" (chapter1). This striking

description shows how the familiar urban environment has become alien and suffocating. Such language signals a loss of normal temporal and spatial coordinates, a point trauma theorist Cathy Caruth highlights: trauma shatters ordinary perception and defers its meaning. In this new “world,” Keith’s psyche is left in shock. Lianne’s reaction similarly conveys the impossibility of moving forward—she tells her mother, “Nothing is next. There is no next” (chapter5). This refusal of a future reflects Caruth’s idea that traumatic events cannot be assimilated into narrative time, leaving survivors unable to imagine what comes after. In psychological terms, DeLillo shows how anxiety and memory become invasive. For instance, when doctors tend to Keith’s burns they find tiny embedded fragments of flesh and grimly note, “They call this organic shrapnel” (chapter7). In DeLillo’s metaphor, even physical bodies carry the “shrapnel” of terror—echoes of the violent event lodged under the skin. Such “organic shrapnel” haunts the characters’ interior lives, a vivid image of trauma’s aftereffects on memory and identity (Caruth, 1996). Together, these passages dramatize the psychological legacy of 9/11 as ongoing trauma: survivors live in altered time and space, burdened by intrusive fragments of experience.

2.6.1 Social and Interpersonal Consequences

At the interpersonal level, *Falling Man* examines how terrorism induces alienation and erodes trust. Prior relationships are strained by the characters’ unspoken pain. Lianne’s interactions with Keith illustrate a new distance between them. In the bedroom scene, DeLillo notes that Lianne “didn’t need to know a man’s feelings about everything, not anymore and not this man” (chapter 6). She no longer seeks emotional intimacy; instead, she tolerates silence, preferring the “spaces he made” when Keith is distant. This line shows how both have become guarded and self-contained after 9/11. Similarly, their young son Justin is drawn into the shadow of terrorism. In one scene, Justin practices speaking Arabic and observes that “today is the

birthday of Charlie Parker” to a stranger—details that suggest an underlying anxiety about the “Other” and cultural difference (chapter 7). (A neighbor even complains about children “talk[ing] in code” on Justin’s street, suspicious of any hint of secret communication (chapter 7). These dynamics echo Judith Butler’s notion that public violence breeds private vulnerability: families become sites of hyper vigilance and fragmented communication . DeLillo shows that social bonds fracture as fear seeps into daily life. Neighbors who were once friendly now monitor one another. Old friends are avoided—for example, Keith increasingly avoids his Pakistani coworker Terry Cheng. He spends hours alone at the gym or poker table rather than confiding, suggesting a breakdown of trust even in casual relationships. In short, the novel suggests that terrorism’s legacy is not only trauma in the individual psyche but also an atmosphere of alienation: survivors withdraw from community and from each other, living in a shared loneliness that transforms family and social ties.

2.6.2 National Security Discourse and Public Life

DeLillo also signals how the attacks reshape the broader public sphere into one of fear and security. Although *Falling Man* focuses on private experience, the national mood pervades the narrative. Lianne, for instance, is summoned as a juror in a trial of "a lawyer accused of aiding the cause of terrorism" (chapter 8), a detail that reminds us of the expanded security apparatus and legal scrutiny in the post-9/11 United States. The characters live under the shadow of new wars and surveillance: the narrative even describes anti-war demonstrations, reflecting a polarized public discourse. Cathy Caruth's concept of "history entangled with trauma" applies here, as the novel shows personal lives caught up in global politics. This atmosphere aligns with Jean Baudrillard's famous analysis that 9/11 exposed the "society of the spectacle" and justified a permanent state of alert (Baudrillard, 2012). In DeLillo's terms, the characters' everyday

interactions are often measured by "the time to be afraid"—Nina warns Lianne that fear has become the default posture "when there's no reason to be afraid" (chapter 10). Although Lianne claims she "no longer follows all terrorism stories in the news" (chapter 11), her mind remains focused on death and loss, illustrating how public fear haunts even those who try to move on. The novel implies that national security policies (increased surveillance, airport checks, loyalty inquiries) create a backdrop of anxiety. Keith's compulsive gym workouts and card-playing can be read as private attempts to impose order amid uncontrollable terror. DeLillo thus engages with postmodern critiques: the war on terror becomes a genre of public life where every routine (airport line, jury duty, language lesson) is inflected by suspicion. In light of Baudrillard, we see that terrorism's legacy in the novel extends beyond trauma to reshape social norms—fear becomes "normalized," and mistrust of outsiders turns into a quiet currency of everyday discourse (Baudrillard, 2002; Butler, 2004).

2.6.3 Cultural Memory and Representation

DeLillo's *Falling Man* tracks how terrorism is remembered and symbolized over time, since the novel itself becomes part of constituting cultural memory of 9/11 by centering on the iconic falling body. The title simultaneously references both the infamous photo and the performance artist within the novel, prompting issues about representation. DeLillo sharply remarks: "This was the world now" (chapter 1), documenting how the attacks irrevocably rearranged reality - the event becoming what Caruth would term the "unclaimed experience" (1996) that structures collective memory. The fractured narrative of the novel and repeated images of plummeting bodies and ash resonate with Lyotard's theory of the postmodern sublime (1979), where trauma exceeds linguistic description. Characters are left unable to narrate an event that resists narration; even when Lianne reads the obituary of performance artist David

Janiak (the novel's "Falling Man"), the meaning still eludes, calling to mind what Caruth identifies as the unknowability of trauma. The falling man motif - whether in media images, children's drawings, or Janiak's performances - becomes what Butler (2004) would call a "grievable" public symbol, its power lying in how it confronts viewers with simultaneous vulnerability and violence. Yet, DeLillo shows this public symbolism coexisting with profoundly private, fragmented memories. While cultural memory fixates on iconic imagery, individual remembrance remains disjointed - Keith's flashbacks to the towers, Lianne's compulsive viewing of news footage, Nina's existential dread about "the time to be afraid" (chapter 10). This duality reflects the central paradox DeLillo exposes: 9/11 became a shared global event that nonetheless resists coherent narration, forcing remembrance through visceral symbols and personal fragments rather than unified history. The novel ultimately suggests terrorism's lasting legacy is this very tension between collective symbolism and incommunicable private trauma what Baudrillard might call the "impossible exchange" (2002) at the heart of catastrophic memory.

Conclusion

DeLillo's *Falling Man* employs postmodernist techniques to depict the profound trauma of 9/11. It illustrates its pervasive impact on individuals and society. The novel's nonlinear structure and fragmented narration mirror the psychological rupture experienced by survivors like Keith and Lianne. This emphasizes their struggle to reclaim agency. Additionally, secondary characters reflect the varied responses to loss and fear. On a collective level, the novel captures America's grief, the erosion of national certainty, and terrorism's lasting imprint on cultural consciousness. By resisting a singular narrative, DeLillo underscores trauma's resistance to closure, leaving meaning perpetually contested. Ultimately, *Falling Man* demonstrates how postmodernist fiction not only represents trauma but also replicates its disorienting effects, offering a literary space

where unresolved wounds persist. This analysis reaffirms literature's vital role in processing historical catastrophes beyond conventional frameworks.

General Conclusion

This study aimed at analysing the representation of trauma in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* by exploring how postmodernist devices contribute to the capturing of the psychological and social disorientation that followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The study sought to determine the types of trauma represented, exploring how narrative devices capture this trauma, and analyzing how the novel subverts traditional trauma narratives.

This research followed a qualitative methodology using descriptive analytical methods. The analysis is based on close reading and theoretical foundations of postmodern literary theory and trauma theory. These theories are used to explain narrative structures such as fragmentation, temporal distortion, and unreliable narration to the representation of trauma.

The current study revealed the following results. First, the analysis revealed that DeLillo's novel presents a multifaceted depiction of trauma through three primary manifestations. At the individual level, characters show classic symptoms of psychological trauma, especially through Keith's dissociation and Lianne's anxiety -driven behavior. Collective trauma emerges through public performances and media presentations of the falling male figure, symbolizing the US national grief. The novel further explores historical trauma through secondary characters such as Martin, whose Nazi past, and Hammad, whose radicalization, demonstrates how violence perpetuates over generations. These layered representations challenge simplified understandings of 9/11's impact, and show trauma as simultaneously personal, cultural and transhistoric.

Second, the study found that DeLillo's experimental narrative strategies effectively simulate the psychological experience of trauma. The fragmented structure of the novel, including abrupt temporal shifts and incoherent perspectives, does not reflect -linear nature to

traumatic memory. Key techniques include: Use of repetitive images (falling bodies, ash); sudden stage crossings that mimic flashbacks; and the conscious withholding of narrative resolution. These methods force readers to experience disorientation and fragmentation that characterize trauma, and match Caruth's (1996) trauma concept as an "unclaimed experience" (p. 4). Particularly effective is the novel's ambiguous treatment of the falling man's performance, which withstands singular interpretation and thus embodies trauma's resistance to understanding.

Third, the research demonstrated how *Man Falls* challenges conventional narratives of trauma through its postmodern form. Unlike the traditional narratives that progress toward healing or closing, DeLillo's novel maintains the irresolution - more impressive at Keith's final meeting with his Doppelgänger. The narrative structure itself becomes a criticism of: commodification of the media tragedy (Baudrillard, 1994); Nationalist rescue narratives; and psychological models that assume the linear recovery. In humanizing the terrorist Hammad while refusing to varie and presenting trauma as cyclic and not finite, the novel rejects simplistic binaries of victim/aggressor and pre/post-trauma identity. This formal resistance to closure is a radical literary approach to representing catastrophic historical events.

Future research may expand this analysis by comparing *Falling Man* with other post-9/11 novels or by incorporating interdisciplinary approaches, such as visual culture or digital media studies, to examine how trauma is represented across forms. Additionally, studies could explore reader reception of postmodern trauma narratives to understand how readers engage with non-linear, ambiguous representations of suffering.

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الملخص

تتناقش هذه الأطروحة تمثيل الصدمة في رواية دون دييلو الرجل الساقط (2007)، وذلك عبر تقنيات السرد ما بعد الحداثيّة، مع التركيز على الأثر النفسي والثقافي لحادثة 11 سبتمبر. يدرس البحث كيفية تصوير السرد التجزيئي، والرواية غير المستقرة، والإحالات التناسية في عمل دييلو الطبيعة المشتتة للذاكرة الصادمة. باعتبار نظرية الصدمة والنظرية الأدبية لما بعد الحادثة كأساس، يحلل البحث كيفية تقويض الرواية للسرديات التقليدية للصدمة عبر رفض التطور الخطي والحلول المغلقة. إذ تمحور ذلك عبر دراسة الشخصية الرئيسية؛ كيث نوديك، التي تعكس تجاربها المفككة عزز المجتمع الجماعي عن مواجهة الصدمة من ذات النوع؛ أي الجمعية. كما تفحص الأطروحة شهود غموض الأسلوب في الرواية على طبيعة الصدمة التي يُمتنع تخيلها. بوضع الرجل الساقط ضمن سياق أدب ما بعد 11 سبتمبر وما بعد الحادثة، تُبين هذه الدراسة على أن أسلوب دييلو الابتكاري يمثل بصدق انكسار الهوية الأمريكية. يخلص البحث إلى أن الرواية لا تُصوّر الصدمة فحسب، بل تكشف أيضاً عن قصور اللغة في التعبير عن تأثيرها الكامل، مساهمةً بذلك إسهاماً مهماً في النقاشات حول أدب الصدمة وجماليات ما بعد الحادثة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة الجماعية، ما بعد الحادثة، الرجل الساقط، الصدمة، 11 سبتمبر.