

Ten Years of Trauma

The Representation of 9/11 Trauma in Fiction between 2005 and 2015

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the representation of 9/11 trauma in fiction published between 2005 and 2015. The main question that will be answered in this thesis is: to what extent and in which ways does the representation of the 9/11 trauma change in fiction published between 2005 and 2015? The field of trauma studies will be connected to representations of 9/11 and the commemoration of the attack in 2011, literary techniques, and symptoms of trauma, such as survivor guilt and ambiguous loss, to form a theoretical framework that will serve to analyse the two novels written before 2011, *The Writing on the Wall* (2005) by Lynne Sharon Schwartz and *Falling Man* (2007) by Don DeLillo, and the two novels that were published after 2011, *The Submission* (2011) by Amy Waldman and *Bleeding Edge* (2013) by Thomas Pynchon. The aim is to analyse the novels closely to determine if there are similarities to be found in the representation of the 9/11 trauma, or if the ten-year marking of the event and the opening of the memorial in 2011 marked a shift or change in the representation of this trauma.

Keywords: Trauma, 9/11, Fiction, *The Writing on the Wall*, *Falling Man*, *The Submission*, *Bleeding Edge*.

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Description

The planned commemoration of the 9/11 attacks in 2011 led to many problems, as involved parties could not agree on the way in which the victims should be remembered. This resulted in disagreements about the kind of monument that should be placed on Ground Zero. Erika Doss mentions that “the design of New York’s 9/11 memorial has been repeatedly altered” (174). The disagreement of the public mainly concerned problems with the plan to conflate memories of the victims working in the towers, and the firefighters, policemen, and other emergency workers into one monument (Doss 174). Moreover, some survivors wanted the names of the secondary victims, such as the people that did not die on but as a result of 9/11, to be featured on the memorial as well, which to the survivors of the primary victims seemed unreasonable and disrespectful (Doss 174). Not only were there problems surrounding the design of the memorial, financial problems were also an issue that raised many questions and disdain. Talk of admission fees angered the surviving family members, as they felt that the public had to “pay to grief” (Doss 175). Ten years after the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers, a monument was finally opened on the same location as where the Twin Towers once stood. The name of the monument, “Reflecting Absence, alludes to the lingering trauma surrounding anonymous remains” (Tuggle 132). Hence, the connection between the 9/11 attacks and the resulting trauma for the survivors is conveyed by and represented in this monument.

The link between trauma and the 9/11 attacks will form the basis of this thesis. It will examine and analyse fiction written after 9/11 and will focus on the way in which the 9/11 trauma is represented in these literary works. In most novels written after 9/11, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre function as a significant theme around which the narrative revolves. How is the trauma of 9/11 portrayed in these works of fiction? How do the representations of the trauma evolve? Are there differences or similarities to be found when looking at fiction written right after the event and fiction that is written after the ten-year commemoration of the terrorist attacks? Is there more objectivity, distance, or even a sense of closure in the more recent fiction when the trauma lies further in the past, or are the events still so recent that they remain to be seen as open wounds? What is the role of the media in these works of fiction? To what extent do these works of fiction represent 9/11 as globalised trauma that affects people transnationally? All of these subquestions are summarised into one research question that will be the basis of this thesis: to what extent and in which ways does the representation of the 9/11 trauma change in fiction published between 2005 and 2015?

To get answers to these subquestions, and ultimately to the research question in general, it will be useful to first give an explanation of the 9/11 attacks and its background. This information will be given later on in this introduction. Chapter two will then focus on trauma theory in general, going into Cathy Caruth's and Geoffrey Hartman's theories, and into the 9/11 trauma in particular, based on articles written by, for example Kristiaan Versluys, Pauline Boss, and Hutson et al. Chapter three will deal with two novels written between 2005 and 2011, *The Writing on the Wall* (2005) by Lynne Sharon Schwartz and *Falling Man* (2007) by Don DeLillo, which will be read closely in the light of trauma theory. Chapter four will then deal with two novels written after the ten-year commemoration of 9/11, *The Submission* (2011) by Amy Waldman and *Bleeding Edge* (2013) by Thomas Pynchon. These novels will be read through the same theoretical lens as the novels in chapter three. The conclusion will then serve to compare and contrast the novels written before 2011 and after 2011 to see if there are indeed differences or similarities to be found in the way in which these works of fiction deal with the trauma of 9/11.

Much research has already been done on traumas in general, but it often focuses on wars, such as the Second World War or the Vietnam War. Extensive research has also been conducted on the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the traumatic results of these attacks on the survivors. Research by Schuster et al. (2001), Schlenger et al. (2002), and Silver et al. (2002) proves that 9/11 had a traumatic impact on the survivors and in many cases caused mental health issues such as acute and posttraumatic stress symptoms. "Exploring the Myths of Coping with a National Trauma: A Longitudinal Study of Responses to the September 11th Terrorist Attacks" by Silver et al. even proves that the influence of the 9/11 attacks on the mental state of the Americans was substantial, whether or not the survivor actually experienced the event, watched it on live TV, or did not learn of the event until after it took place (136). Moreover, many articles, for example by Linda Kauffman, Arin Keeble, and Anne Longmuir, have been written about Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, as this novel is regarded as an iconic work of fiction which links to 9/11, and to a certain extent trauma. However, the other three novels have not yet been researched academically, either because they are too recent or because they are regarded as less significant than *Falling Man*. Furthermore, even though the representation of trauma in general has been researched, the progression of traumas over the years has not been examined thoroughly. Hence, the research question that will form the basis of this thesis will be relevant and aims to fill up this gap in research. This thesis will thus try to draw conclusions by using lesser known works of fiction

as case studies and will attempt to develop a new and relevant theory about how cultural expressions of trauma may change over time.

1.1 September 11 Attacks

When people remember the events of 11 September 2001, they will mainly think about the two collapsing towers of the World Trade Centre. Fewer people will remember that the attacks on the Twin Towers were only two out of the four terrorist attacks executed on that day. Four passenger flights in total were hijacked on 9/11, resulting in the largest loss of life during an enemy attack on American territory. Two of the four planes crashed into the Twin Towers; first American Airlines Flight 11 flew into the North tower and less than twenty minutes later United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the South tower. Both towers collapsed within two hours, and destroyed or damaged buildings around them in their fall. Another airplane, American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into and destroyed part of the Pentagon, the headquarters of the United States Department of Defense. The fourth passenger jet, United Airlines Flight 93, was meant to go to Washington D.C., but crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. In total, close to three thousand people lost their lives on 9/11, including civilians, the passengers on the planes, and the 19 hijackers. On the website of the Department of State, there is a list claiming that more than 3000 people died or went missing following the attacks on 9/11, and these people came from more than 80 different countries. Moreover, approximately 2000 children lost a parent in the attacks and at least 50 pregnant women lost their husbands (“The Global War on Terrorism: The First 100 Days”).

The responsibility for the attacks on 9/11 was claimed by Al-Qaeda, even though Al-Qaeda’s leader, Osama bin Laden, denied any involvement in the attacks in the beginning. However, three years later, Bin Laden sent out a video message that was broadcasted by an Arabic TV station. In this message he claims that the 9/11 attacks were the deeds of Al-Qaeda and that the attacks served as revenge for Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Bin Laden blamed the United States for capturing Muslims and Arabs, for the economic sanctions on Iraq, and for supporting Israel in bombing towers in Beirut, which resulted in Al-Qaeda targeting United States landmarks to take revenge on the American people (“Bin Laden claims responsibility for 9/11”). Al-Qaeda’s quest for freedom of Muslim nations and their people was expressed by Ayman al-Zawahiri, who became Bin Laden’s successor after his death in 2011. In a letter that was released on June 9, 2006, Al-Zawahiri writes:

Judges: you shall only require independence in a free nation, and our homelands will only be liberated when the Shari'ah rules and the invaders are expelled and the tyrants are removed and the rights are returned to the Muslim Ummah. (179)

Thus, Al-Qaeda leaders saw the 9/11 attacks as retaliation on the American people who had invaded the lands of the Muslims and captured Muslim and Arabs. The wrong-doings of the American people had to be avenged by attacking their land and people.

President Bush's speech after the attacks stated that "Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated," indicating that it is not only a war that had to be fought by the Americans and against Al-Qaeda, but that it was a global war that had to be fought by every country against every group that uses terrorist methods to achieve their goals ("Text of George Bush's speech"). The terrorist attacks are therefore not only represented as a national trauma, but were seen as a transnational and transcultural trauma that had an effect on people of many different nationalities and cultural identities, which is also implied by the fact that the victims came from over 80 different countries. Not only were the Americans attacked, but other nationalities were also influenced by the trauma of 9/11, resulting in military operations by the United States, the United Kingdom, and other allies of the United States (Bernasconi et al. 41-2). Almost a month after the 9/11 attacks, troops from the United States and the United Kingdom invaded Afghanistan, conquering ground and defeating Al-Qaeda and Taliban authority.

The year 2011 is a significant year in connection to 9/11. It was the year in which Osama Bin Laden was killed by US troops, which may have resulted in some form of closure of the trauma, as the leader of Al Qaeda who was ultimately responsible for the attacks was now killed and could not issue further attacks. Furthermore, 2011 marked the ten-year commemoration of the attacks and the year in which the monument on Ground Zero was opened to the public. All these incidents might have changed the influence of the trauma on the lives of the Americans. The attacks first had a traumatic impact on many people of different nationalities because of the large number of casualties, the several locations that were attacked and because it resulted in a global War on Terrorism. However, ten years after the fact, the conclusion might be that there is some form of closure; fear and anger might have made place for grief and closure. If the year 2011 is indeed such a turning point, the changes might also be visible when comparing and contrasting fiction written before 2011 and after 2011.

2. Theoretical Framework: Trauma Theory

Dori Laub describes the terrorist attacks on 9/11 as “an event without a voice” and claims that

September 11 was an encounter with something that makes no sense, an event that fits in nowhere. It was an experience of collective massive psychic trauma. Nearly six months after the event that shook our world and our assumptions about our lives, there is no coherent narrative about September 11. This, too, is in the nature of massive collective trauma. (204)

Clearly, the terrorist attacks had an enormous influence on the lives of many. However, nobody knew how to put the event into words or how to give meaning to the attacks right away. “Without a voice” implies that there is not one unified voice, but there are several voices and many different accounts of what has happened. Only, they make no sense. This is exactly what has happened after the attacks on 9/11. There were many different voices speaking, but all told a different story, the only similarity being the trauma, which was shared by all survivors. Right after the attacks there were obviously accounts of the event given in the media; the media tried to cater to the needs of the public and served as a sort of institution to share the trauma and to give meaning to the event collectively (Steiner 13). Not only did the media react to 9/11; there also came an outpour of short texts and responses.

Keniston and Quinn claim that “the history of literature written about and after 9/11 can also be seen, at least in part, as a sequence of genres” (3). Right after the attacks, a stream of poetry, short accounts of people, and essays were published. These texts were often written by anonymous authors, but well-known authors such as Don DeLillo and Toni Morrison contributed as well. It took a few years until the first novels and memoirs appeared; novels and memoirs written before 2004 are quite unique. Moreover, Keniston and Quinn note that “Early works often attempted directly to capture and convey the events of 9/11 and emotional responses to the events; as time has passed, the approach to the attacks has become more nuanced” (3). This shift thus seems to imply that there might be some form of distance or closure, which should then have to become visible in the two novels that will be discussed in chapter four and were written after 2011. Based on what Keniston and Quinn claim, the focus should then also have shifted when the distance in years between the trauma and the texts increases. It may be possible that the texts will not focus on the event itself anymore, but more on the aftermath and the influence the attacks still have on the lives of people nowadays (4).

After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001, the world changed and the traumas connected to the loss and tragedies were often discussed and used as a theme in the novels following 9/11. The link between literature and trauma is not something that is novel, for Freud already made this connection and according to Cathy Caruth this is because “literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing” (*Unclaimed Experience* 3). Caruth goes on by following Freud in his observations that trauma is not “a simple, healable event” because it is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (*Unclaimed Experience* 3). Thus, because the traumatic event is so sudden and unexpected, the person who experiences the event does not have enough time to fully grasp its meaning or motive; therefore the event is not passed into or lodged into consciousness (Hartman 257). It is exactly this form of not knowing that is then problematic in the healing of the trauma. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth argues that

The pathology consists...solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (4; emphasis Caruth’s).

Traumas are thus re-enacted by survivors because they are possessed by the image of the experience and return to the event in their nightmares or through repetitive actions. This is very important when connected to 9/11 and the observations by Silver et al. Obviously, the terrorist attacks happened too soon and too unexpectedly for the survivors. They did not expect to get out of the building on time, and their loved ones were unable to help them or bid them farewell.

Literature pre-eminently captures trauma, because it finds new or different ways to portray the events and the aftermath. It is the connection between the words and traumatic experiences that is interesting to look at. Geoffrey Hartman explains that

trauma study explores the relation of words and wounds. Its main focus is on words that wound, and presumably can be healed, if at all, by further words ... If there is a failure of language, resulting in silence or mutism, then no working through, no

catharsis, is possible. Literary verbalization, however, still remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible. (259)

Thus, language and literature are significant ways to heal or explain traumatic events. The psychological traumas are made visible through language, and verbalising the trauma in literature can have a healing effect. Moreover, as Hartman suggests, trauma is not fully grasped and lodged into the unconsciousness, and memories may be unreliable. Memories are thus, in part, a result of the imagination and therefore fictitious (261). Hence, it makes sense to write traumatic events down in works of fiction, because memory is about reconstructing an event in narrative form. Moreover, it is difficult to grasp the trauma and depict it in words, as the meaning of the words that will be used will be perceived differently by survivors than by people who are not directly traumatised. Kalí Tal explains that “[a]ccurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of ‘normal’ conception. Textual interpretations...are mediated by language and do not have the impact of the traumatic experience” (15). Hence, because the “normal” definition of, for example, the words *terrorist attack*, *death*, *fear*, and *collapse*, does not come close to the experience of these words, it is impossible to represent the trauma accurately and truthfully. However, while this might be true for autobiographical texts about trauma, the narrative techniques that are used in fiction about traumatic events can contradict Tal’s claim.

Literary techniques that are used to represent traumas are various, but the doubling and splitting of the self, which is experienced by trauma survivors who often feel like they are existing outside of time, is one that is significant (Zerubavel 119). Michelle Balaev claims that the strategy used to express this doubling and splitting is the technique of dissociation, which includes “the disjunction of time through the use of repetition and negation; imagistic scenes of violence that lack emotional description; syntactical subversion and rearrangement; atemporality; and a doubled consciousness or point of view” (xvi). She notes that these forms of narrative techniques shows the traumatic tension in and the emotional status of the characters. Moreover, Balaev notes that

The lack of cohesion and the disturbance of previous formulations of self and reality are sometimes conveyed in the form of an interruptive or nonlinear narrative. In addition, a temporally disjointed narrative highlights the struggle of the protagonist to identify the meaning and purpose of an experience. (xvi)

Thus, we may expect the novels that were written before 2011, to show signs of these narrative techniques, by focusing specifically on the trauma, while the novels written after 2011 might concentrate more on the long-term aftermath of the attacks instead of the direct effects. The narrative technique of dissociation is concerned with the direct effects of trauma in the sense that it gives shape to the workings of the human mind after experiencing an event that has had a significant impact on the psychological status of the character and conveys the emotional struggle within the character.

The image of the collapsing towers, whether experienced on site, seen on live TV, or heard of after the event, will forever be connected to the loss of family members or other loved ones. Moreover, the survivors will be haunted by this image because it is so often replayed by the media, making it a collective trauma rather than a personal trauma (Steiner 27). It is clear that the event can never be fully grasped by any survivor and that the haunting image will lead to mental health problems, such as Acute Stress Disorder or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Silver et al. 136). As already implied, the media play a major role in conveying the 9/11 trauma, and will consequently be expected to be a significant theme in the four novels. TV being the prime mass medium for so many people all over the world, consequently means that everybody can share in the trauma. Jurgen Habermas claims that

The presence of cameras and of the media was also new, transforming the local event simultaneously into a global one and the whole world population into a benumbed witness. Perhaps September 11 could be called the first historic world event in the strictest sense: the impact, the explosion, the slow collapse – everything that was not Hollywood anymore but, rather, a gruesome reality, literally took place in front of the “universal eyewitness” of a global public. (qtd. in Borradori 28)

Hence, Habermas says that 9/11 was a unique event, coining the term “historic world event,” in relation to 9/11. Furthermore, because 9/11 was such a unique event and broadcasted into the homes of not only the American people, but to people all over the world, the event became a global trauma.

Due to the effect of the media, the distinction between personal and collective trauma becomes unclear. Traumatic events are broadcasted into the homes of so many people that it is almost impossible to avoid secondary traumatization. Geoffrey Hartman notes that “[a] secondary traumatization threatens the bystander who views mechanically transmitted

pictures of violence and sorrow from all over the world” (258). Looking at how personal trauma becomes a collective trauma, it is important to define personal trauma first. Ron Eyerman claims that “[p]ersonal trauma is difficult to narrate as it is lived through. It is formidable, not to say impossible, to grasp the meaning of shocking occurrences as they are experienced. It is only after fact that interpretation and real understanding become possible” (49). Dori Laub then goes on by connecting personal trauma to collective trauma by saying that when stories about traumatic events are told to a witness, this witness becomes “a participant, and a co-owner of the traumatic event ... he comes to partially experience trauma in himself... [and] comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels....” (“Bearing Witness” 57). Transferring a trauma onto another person is then not only done by transferring the story orally, but also by transferring the story by means of the media. However, the media will influence many people from all over the world at the same time, thereby making the personal trauma not only a collective trauma, but a global trauma.

The people that have lost a loved one during the attacks, might experience what Pauline Boss calls “ambiguous loss.” Boss states that “[t]wenty percent of Americans knew someone hurt, killed, or missing in the attacks,” which only shows the impact that the fall of the Twin Towers and the other two attacks had on the daily lives of so many (552). Moreover, she says that the traumas surrounding 9/11 are so devastating to many because ambiguous loss defies psychological closure, simply because the families are never sure whether or not their loved one has died and because they often do not have a body to mourn (552). This, of course, is the case for the 9/11 attacks because some bodies have never been recovered or identified and many people thus remain “missing.” In this sense, the families are denied a proper mourning ritual, because it is not entirely clear if their loved ones are still a part of their family.

Furthermore, Boss makes the difference between the structural and psychological problems related to ambiguous loss. She mentions that structural problems occur when “parenting roles are being ignored, decisions are put on hold, daily tasks are undone, family members are ignored or cut off, and rituals and celebrations are cancelled even though they are the glue of family life” (553). Psychological problems should be spoken of when “there are feelings of hopelessness that lead to depression and passivity, and feelings of ambivalence that can lead to guilt, anxiety, and immobilization” (553-4). Both structural and psychological problems are expected to come back in the novels that will be studied in this thesis. Moreover, Boss classifies a plane crash, divorce, Alzheimer’s disease, addictions, obsessions with the

internet or TV, and depressions as points that facilitate the feeling of ambiguous loss, either on a physical or psychological level (555). These points are thus also expected to come back in the novels that will be read closely in chapters three and four. It might, however, be expected that ambiguous loss is more apparent in the two novels written before 2011, because the attacks were still so recent, and the fear for new attacks was still very much on the mind of the people. After Osama bin Laden's death and the opening of the monument, which enabled people to grieve for and commemorate their loved ones in a public space, there might have been some form of closure, making ambiguous loss less significant and maybe even obsolete in the novels written after 2011.

Survivor guilt is closely connected to ambiguous loss in the sense that the people who were actually in or very near the buildings and escaped the scene feel a certain connection to the ones that were lost and feel guilty that they were "randomly selected" to survive the event. Hutson et al. defines survivor guilt as follows:

Survivor guilt is a highly-individualized, interpersonal process involving the status of being spared from harm that others incurred, which is adversely experienced as distressing, manifested by diverse responses, and is driven by the context(s) from which it emerges. Survivor guilt is an attempt to maintain a relationship with the victim(s). Predisposing to survivor guilt are personal characteristics, a sense of belonging, sense of fairness, and sociocultural expectations and values. The consequences of survivor guilt may include alterations in identity and interpersonal relationships, mental and physical health problems, as well as resolution. If it is resolved, this may occur over an unspecified period of time. (30)

Hence, survivor guilt can be a problem for a long time and results in the same kind of problems that ambiguous loss causes for others. If this is indeed a long-term issue for the survivors, however, it might be concluded that this will not only serve as a theme in the novels written before 2011, but that it will continue in the novels written after 2011, because survivor guilt is not easily or quickly resolved. Kevin Kelly explains that the emergency workers who escaped the collapse of the towers, and the people that arrived at Ground Zero later, felt guilty that their colleagues did not survive while they did. This resulted in them straining their bodies and pushing themselves to their limits by cleaning up the site and recovering the bodies of the victims as a form of penance (519). For the civilian survivors the guilt was often as strong as for the emergency troops, with the only difference that they were

unable to redeem themselves in the same way that the emergency workers did. This might have resulted in them taking far longer to resolve their survivor guilt.

Karin Jordan has written an article in which she explains terrorist grief and presents a model for the recovery process. Even though this model is connected to terrorist grief, it can be used for any kind of trauma. Jordan determines that there are three stages that survivors have to go through and names them as follows: “Stage I: Disequilibrium—the Immediate Aftermath; Stage II: Denial—Outward Adjustment; and Stage III: Integration—Coming to Terms” (340). During the first stage survivors will feel “terrified, helpless, and overwhelmed” and they will react by “verbally expressing anger, hurt, worry, and anxiety;... avoiding feelings, places, and people associated with the attack;... reexperiencing [sic] the event through nightmares and flashbacks;... dealing with increased arousal, such as exaggerated startle response and hypervigilance” (348). The second stage often means that the survivors try to repress their memories, isolating themselves from society, or making dramatic changes in their way of life, such as changing jobs or moving to another state or country (349). During the third stage people try to come to terms with what has happened and start to deal with their trauma by “maintaining old values and beliefs, ... deconstructing old beliefs and values (assimilation), or ... drawing on old beliefs and values as they construct new ones (accommodation)” (350). However, Jordan notes that the third stage might take some people a long time and might be “interrupted and prolonged when media coverage continues to provide images of the terrorist attack. This is especially true with anniversaries of the attack,...which may interrupt this stage and provoke a reoccurrence of symptoms” (351). Hence, the tenth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on 9/11 might serve as a point in time that provides some closure, but at the same time the anniversary can jolt a survivor in the third stage of terrorist grief back into one of the previous two stages.

A close reading and analysis of the four novels in the next two chapters will help determine which of the discussed theories and tendencies will feature in the novels, and whether they are confined to the novels written before 2011 or the two novels written after 2011. Keniston and Quinn’s theory will help determine whether we can speak of a change in literature about 9/11, while the theories of Caruth, Hartman, and Balaev will help to establish the link between trauma, literature, and narrative techniques. Furthermore, Habermas’ and Laub’s theories will serve to analyse the connection between personal and collective or global trauma and what the role of the media is in transferring trauma. Lastly, the theories by Boss, Hutson et al., Kelly, and Jordan already give some insight into the themes that might become visible in the novels and the ambiguous loss, guilt or grief that the characters might display.

3. Novels Published before 2011

3.1 General Introduction

This chapter will discuss two novels published before 2011, namely *The Writing on the Wall* (2005) and *Falling Man* (2007). Both novels are among the first that deal with the event of 9/11. However, hitherto *Falling Man* has been researched more thoroughly by scholars than *The Writing on the Wall*. It is expected that these two novels will deal with the 9/11 trauma in similar ways, focusing on the event itself and the direct aftermath, and dealing with the symptoms and results of traumatic experiences, such as survivor guilt, addictions, ambiguous loss, difficulty in remembering, and repetition.

3.2 *The Writing on the Wall*

The Writing on the Wall, by Lynne Sharon Schwartz, is one of the first novels written about 9/11 and its aftermath. The novel revolves around the main character, Renata, her family, and her boyfriend. Renata's family is of Italian descent, which shows the myriad of different ethnicities that are connected to the loss caused by the 9/11 attacks. Renata's troubled past precedes, but is also related to the events on September 11, 2001. Renata's twin sister, Claudia, died as a teenager after she has had a secret affair with their uncle, got pregnant by him, and had to give the child up for adoption. After the death of Renata's sister the family falls apart, her mother sinks into a deep depression, and her father starts to drink and eventually crashes his car and dies. Renata tries to keep the family together and takes care of her mother for a while. When taking care of her mother becomes too much and too overwhelming, she moves out of her parental house and starts her own life in New York City.

However, her life is again rudely interrupted when the adoptive parents of her niece disappear and the girl is left with Renata. Just as she thinks she has figured out her life, taking care of the child and overcoming her grief, her niece is abducted. The traumas of her past fuse and merge with the terrorist attacks of 9/11, when Renata's boyfriend, Jack, narrowly escapes the collapse of the towers because he was running late that morning. Surviving the terrorist attacks, however, has an enormous influence on Jack's personal life, and his life shared with Renata. The novel is concerned with the period right after the attacks, from the moment the towers are hit until November 2001, drawing connections between the traumas resulting from the terrorist attacks and the traumas in Renata's past. The 9/11 trauma is represented by focusing on the connections between terrorist grief and previously sustained traumas, language, media, survivor guilt, and ambiguous loss.

The link between 9/11 and the traumas from Renata's past are dealt with in several ways. In the beginning of the novel there are a few references to Renata and Claudia as twins and the connection that twins have to each other, which proves to be significant in relation to the Twin Towers. The bond between Renata and Claudia seems to dissolve in their teens, and their worsened relationship is associated with an article that Renata reads about the twins June and Jennifer Gibbons, whose inextricable but destructive connection is defined in the novel as follows:

Neither one was complete without the other. They were each other's lifeline and torment. "Like twin stars," their biographer described June and Jennifer Gibbons, "they are caught in the gravitational field between them, doomed to spin around each other forever. If they come too close or drift apart, both are destroyed." (Schwartz 36)

Especially the phrase "like twin stars" is significant when placed in relation to the events on 9/11. "Twin" obviously alludes to the Twin Towers, and "stars" might refer to the flag of the United States of America. A few pages later, Renata claims that "[s]he wasn't unique...She was a twin" (Schwartz 53). The connection between the Twin Towers being the same as the twin sisters in the novel in the sense that they are not unique and tend to have the same fate is underscored when Renata's father "seemed faintly puzzled when he passed her in the hall or in the kitchen, as if he considered her dead along with Claudia, as if twins were so inseparable that they couldn't be in such antithetical states as dead and alive" (Schwartz 121). The connection of the Twin Towers is as strong as the bond between the twins mentioned in the novel, and thus they are also destroyed in the same way. When the first tower collapsed, the other one was not complete and fell down shortly after. The collapse of the Twin Towers then serves as an analogy for the fate of Renata and Claudia. After Claudia's death, Renata seems to stay strong for a while, but their undeniable connection already predicts Renata's collapse later on in the novel.

Not only is the connection between the traumas of the past and the trauma of the present portrayed in analogies between the relationship of twins to the Twin Towers, but Renata's traumas are also linked in the sense that they seem to be repeated or come back to her when the towers are attacked. Renata relives her previous trauma when she finds twenty dollars on the street and when she is left to care for Julio, the child of Jack's assistant, who died when the towers collapsed. Firstly, the loss of a twenty-dollar bill represents Claudia's estrangement from her twin sister. The same amount of money was saved by Renata, Claudia,

and some of their friends, so that they could go into the city one day. Renata was the one safekeeping the money until the twenty-dollar bill was lost and presumably stolen by Claudia. However, Renata, being the treasurer, was blamed for the lost money. When finding a twenty-dollar bill on 9/11, Renata says that “[s]he had the absurd notion that it might be the same twenty dollars that went missing when she was eleven years old, causing the estrangement from her now-dead twin sister and lasting grief. Changing the course of her life” (Schwartz 47). Reliving the memory of her sister and admitting to her grief over her sister’s death by finding the twenty-dollar bill shows that the 9/11 attacks are a sort of trigger for Renata, catapulting her back into the stages of grief as described by Karin Jordan. Renata has apparently never made it to the third stage, and remained stuck in the second stage, trying to repress her memories. Now that she has found the twenty-dollar bill in the rubble on the streets, right after the attack, she is triggered to remember the event and to link the loss of the money to the estrangement of her sister, which in turn relates to the collapse of the towers and the loss of the people in the buildings and planes.

When Renata meets Jack after the collapse of the towers, he asks her to take care of the son of his assistant, bringing back memories of her abducted niece, Gianna. Renata breaks down after the 9/11 attacks when she sees the bookman in his usual spot on the side of the street and bursts into tears. Her breakdown upon seeing the bookman was triggered because she remembered giving him directions to the court buildings on the day of the attack. She saw him make a wrong turn, but did not go after him. After the attack she did not know whether or not the bookman had found his way to the court buildings and if he ended up on the site of the attacks. The ambiguous loss resulting from this experience is finally resolved when she meets him a few days later in his usual spot, triggering her tears. She explains that “[h]e understands that the tears are the accumulation of the last two days; maybe in his wisdom, he suspects they’ve been accumulation for the last two decades” (Schwartz 93). Contrary to the previous linking of trauma, this way of connecting trauma seems to suggest that she moves up in the stages of grief rather than down, because she starts to deal with the traumas in her past. However, when Jack tells Renata that he has found Julio’s grandmother and aunt, and that they will come to collect him a few days later, Renata again regresses. She seems to dissociate herself from the situation and says “[w]ell, I don’t want to be here when they come” (Schwartz 166). In this way she isolates herself from the people she loves, avoids meeting Julio’s family, and represses the memory and corresponding emotions when a child is taken from her, which would put her back somewhere between the first and second stage of grief. Renata’s lack of emotion therefore also fits in with Michelle Balaev’s theory that during

traumatic or emotional experiences, characters seem to double or split themselves or show signs of dissociation (xvi).

Another significant theme in the novel is the use of language and its connection to the representation of trauma. Before the towers come down, Renata is obsessed with collecting news clippings of people whose lives have changed dramatically when they decide to take their lives in their own hands and change directions accordingly. Renata is aware of the fact that she can neither change the future nor the past, but she figures that “she could change the way she told them to herself – different words, different emphases. Would that make a new story? Would it make her someone else?” (11). Hence, if she relives her past traumatic experiences, she might be able to manipulate the painful memories. In this way, she touches upon two of the grief stages. Firstly, her obsession with people changing lives might stem from an intrinsic and unconscious desire to change her own past, even though she consciously knows that this is not possible. She can only mentally rewrite the story of her past so that it might be easier to let go of these traumas. However, she chooses to make life-changing decisions after the death of her sister. She moves to the city, starts working at a bar, and picks up men to take them to her apartment. These changes adhere to the second stage of grief, in which many people make life-changing decisions; they change jobs or move to another city, state, or country. Secondly, the questions that Renata poses about changing her life story and thereby changing herself or her identity raises another interesting question when connecting it to the third stage of grief in which people come to terms with their traumatic experiences by changing their beliefs or values about themselves and the world. As Renata has clearly changed many facets of her life during the second stage of grief, it is to be expected that she also changes her worldview. However, changing the story of her past and her worldview, does not mean that she is moving on. In transforming her life, she becomes more like her sister, who “had always been the restless and impetuous one” (Schwartz 13). As Renata gets more rebellious and explores her sexuality, she seems to move through the stages of grief, but actually she is holding on to the traumas which hinder her in finding the closure that she seeks.

The use of language is not only connected to Renata’s view of herself and of her life, but it can also be connected to the way in which the media present the 9/11 trauma. Renata is a librarian who seems to be able to learn foreign languages within a few days or weeks, depending on the grammatical and syntactic difficulty of the language. When she watches the news for days on end right after 9/11, she is intrigued by the function of language and the way in which the language used to describe something often excludes people’s own visions or

reactions. In his dissertation, David Cockley mentions that “[t]he media...does not allow for critical reflection or shifting the terms of the discussion to provide new modes of thought” (Cockley 179). Moreover, he states that the media use the loudest or most important voice that can explain what has happened in the simplest way (Cockley 179). In Schwartz’s novel, this is illustrated by using only the words that the President speaks on TV, and by leaving out other, more personal voices. However, this voice often contradicts the actual event or the experience that people who actually saw the event or were part of the event believe to be true; thereby setting up a dichotomy (Cockley 179-180). Cockley goes on by saying:

[c]ouple the definitive language with the repetition of images, mostly shown in fragments, and new, confusing formats to news shows, and the media aesthetic functions as a mechanism of foreclosure in the post-9/11 environment. It capitalizes on shock and fear, the way terror reinstitutes itself in the media, to capture an audience that is confused and without a language to define what has occurred. The dramatic footage draws the gaze and imposes a single vision upon it. (179-180)

Thus, the way in which the media represent the traumatic event of 9/11 is so seductive and addictive that people are drawn in by the story as told on TV, thereby abandoning their own stories, because they have no language to explain the event.

That the media draw in the people and feed them one story to which they are unable to react, can be seen from Renata’s responses. She says that “[w]atching the thing happen over and over feels ghoulish. Even so, she tapes it, more ghoulish still. But if Jack is still alive he’ll want to see. He’s the sort who’ll definitely want to see and hear everything” (Schwartz 49). In this way she suggests that what the media say is “everything there is to say,” leading to the conclusion that there is no need for any personal ideas about or responses to the event. Everything is collected into that one story and those few images that the media show. Moreover, Renata claims that “she didn’t see it happen, although she’s seen it so many times since that it feels like she saw it” (Schwartz 45). The media thus force their story of what has happened on the viewer, or as Cockley explains it: “[t]he footage substitutes for her experience in shaping reality to the point where it becomes her perception of reality” (181). At the same time, this one particular story is not only covered by the local or even national media, but it is broadcasted into the homes of people all over the world. Renata says that “[i]n a coffee shop on the boardwalk the TV was on, no escape even at the edge of the sea,” suggesting that nobody can escape the force of the media or the traumas that are presented in

the news (Schwartz 172). By not being able to escape the news and the trauma of 9/11, the trauma becomes globalised and the viewers will all see the same story, the one that was constructed by the media; the master narrative, which is defined as “a big story that makes smaller stories intelligible...a master narrative is often partly hidden, lying in the background to be deployed selectively” (Cox 15).

It is then interesting to see that the novel, in contrast with the media, is more concerned with ordinary people and their 9/11 experiences, and that the loudest voice broadcasted on TV is deemed to speak untruths or incomplete truths. The focus on the personal stories might stem from the fact that most characters have foreign roots; Renata and her family are of Italian descent, Julio has a Puerto Rican family, the bookman’s heritage is unknown, but he speaks Spanish, and a few people living in Renata’s building are Polish and Greek. Their foreign roots seem to give a counter narrative to the speeches of the President. President Bush being a white Anglo-Saxon protestant, or WASP, seems to include everyone by saying “[m]ake no mistake, the United States will hunt down and punish” and later on “[t]his is a wake-up call for America. Make no mistake, we will win” (Schwartz 78). However, Renata seems to question his speeches and motives as she asks “who’s likely to make a mistake?” (Schwartz 86).

Moreover, after 9/11 there was also a crisis in multiculturalism as the people became suspicious of people from foreign countries, especially of people with a Muslim background (Khan and Ecklund 1-2). Furthermore, the debate about immigration altered drastically and changes to the immigration system were destined to happen. Ted Hesson claims that there were five ways in which the system changed, namely: the Homeland Security Act was passed, which led to increased federal funding; the removal and deportation of immigrants doubled; the removal of criminals multiplied four times; local police officers were retrained to increase the amount of immigration agents; and immigration enforcement was tied to corporate profits (“Five Ways Immigration System Changed After 9/11”). Hence, even though the roots of the characters are not commented on explicitly, and the crisis in the multicultural society and immigration debate is not focused on in the novel, it is interesting to see that the greater part of the characters have foreign roots and that their thoughts and beliefs about 9/11 seem to differ from the ideas voiced by WASPs, such as President Bush.

In the novel, there is room for the personal and the private. Gregory Cowles states that “the novel’s most provocative aspect is its questioning of the ways public tragedy can inform and amplify private grief” (qtd. in Cockley 183). Furthermore, Cockley claims that “Schwartz focuses on domestic life and the restructuring of priorities at home in order to demonstrate

how the media trauma infiltrates everyday life” (183). Indeed, the media does have a significant influence on the private life, but the novel’s focus lies on the personal experiences of the characters. Jack in particular personifies the idea of survivor guilt as described by Hutson et al., which becomes apparent in the following quote:

Jack started to cry. “She was in there. Remember, I send her? ... I asked her to go. I did it. She wouldn’t be there if I hadn’t – ... I tried to go look for her,” he said, “but there was no way, I couldn’t get near ... Carmen. She’s under there, Renata. It wasn’t so urgent, just some papers. Why did I even pick up, when she called? Then she wouldn’t be under there. Why didn’t I go myself? Why did I have to send her?”
(Schwartz 76)

In this passage, Jack is talking about his assistant, Carmen, who called him just before the attacks and whom he send into one of the towers to collect some papers that he needed that day. He is heavily afflicted by his decision to send his assistant in early, resulting in her death during the attacks on the Twin Towers. He is showing great distress and blames himself for her death. Jack first tries to atone for the sin by going to Ground Zero to find her. However, when he cannot get near the site of the attacks, he remembers Carmen’s son, Julio. His desperation and survivor guilt then lead him to pick up Julio from day care to take him into his house, and by working tirelessly, pushing the limits of his body, to help the people who have lost someone in the attack and the people who are looking for survivors and bodies at the site. He stays near Ground Zero to bring the men working there whatever they might need because “he has to be there doing something,” to resolve his guilt (Schwartz 87).

Renata’s trauma about her sister’s death, sustained before 9/11, suggests an opposite form of survivor guilt. Speaking about the time just after her sister’s suspicious drowning, the omniscient narrator says

Did Renata imagine it, or did her parents really wince when they looked at her face, the image of Claudia’s before it underwent its sea change? Well, let them wince. If that’s how they feel, let them go to hell, was Renata’s mantra. Let the house tumble down around them. She’d be getting out, going away to college. She’d arranged it all on her own. (Schwartz 121)

As survivor guilt is processed very differently by different people, her way is not to limit herself, but to start living for two. In contrast with Jack's way of overcoming his pain at losing his assistant, Renata does not seem to experience survivor guilt intrinsically. On the contrary, it seems as if she does not experience survivor guilt at all, and that it is simply projected upon her by her parents. Renata is more driven to make it on her own, and to live her own life, just like her sister had done before she died. Trying to internalise her sister's strength and rebellion is Renata's form of maintaining a relationship with her now-dead sister. This is also underscored when Renata talks about her life after she has moved out, describing her sexual escapades as follows: "[t]he man inside her was like a cork holding her together. She did it because Claudia had done it, to keep something of Claudia close by, though she wouldn't have admitted that" (Schwartz 124-5). Hence, Renata tries to maintain a relationship with her sister by taking on some of her characteristics, such as the more rebellious, restless, and sexually experienced nature that her sister possessed but Renata lacked. Moreover, this description again shows a lack of emotion as the character is splitting into "the one that does" and "the one that thinks," relating to Balaev's literary technique of depicting trauma in literature. "The one that does" is the part of Renata that has taken over her sister's ways of life, having flighty sexual encounters with multiple men; and "the one that thinks" is the part of Renata as she was before her sister died, the person who was quiet and "a loner" (Schwartz 36). The man about whom Renata speaks holds the two parts of her personality together.

Renata is also the character that experiences ambiguous loss most, and she defines ambiguous loss in line with Pauline Boss when she thinks "[p]eople can still say 'lost' or 'missing' for their loved ones,...implying that they might be found" (Schwartz 136). The first time Renata experiences ambiguous loss is when her sister walks out of the house late at night and does not return. Three days later, when they drag the river where Renata and Claudia used to go, they find her body and Renata says: "She was found, but she would forever be among the missing. She and the child she bore, the child Renata made her own, both missing" (Schwartz 101). In saying that her sister will forever be among the missing, she seems to defy the idea of ambiguous loss, because there is now a body to mourn, which should help in the grieving process. Moreover, as the body is produced, her sister is not technically 'missing' anymore, but because of the strong connection between the twin sisters, there might be some middle ground between life and death that should be termed as 'missing.' The previous quote, however, prefigures the ambiguous loss that Renata later experiences when her niece, Claudia's daughter Gianna, gets abducted.

Renata's confusion about the loss of her niece is explained when she notes "[d]isappeared – kidnapped, lost, evaporated into thin air, transformed? how do such things happen?" (Schwartz 217). Her confusion about what has happened to Gianna later on transforms into the belief that she is still alive. When a girl about the same age as Gianna would have been after 9/11 starts to follow Renata, she becomes convinced that she is the long-lost niece, and she takes her into her home, caring for her, and telling the people around her that this girl is her niece. However, she confuses the ambiguous loss of another family for her own, as it turns out that the girl is named Jenny and that her adoptive parents are looking for her. The bookman is the first to draw her attention to the fact that Jenny is not Gianna and tries to coax her into returning the girl to her family, because they will be suffering not knowing where their daughter is. The similar sounds of the names Jenny and Gianna, hint to the doubling or splitting that is suggested by Michelle Balaev and underscores Renata's confusion.

Renata's discussion with Jack about returning Jenny to her parents reveals the connection of her experience with ambiguous loss and the trauma of 9/11 when Renata says that "[f]ive thousand people are gone, turned to ashes, and one is found. And you don't want to let me save that one. I let her down once, I can never make up for that, but at least... She's mine" (Schwartz 267). The anxiety of having to lose what she has just recovered clearly seems too much for Renata, and she is willing to let another family suffer ambiguous loss to make up for her own short-comings in taking care of Gianna and her failure to resolve her own ambiguous loss in this sense. Moreover, this quote does not only depict her personal losses, but it also signifies those lost during 9/11. Furthermore, 'her' can be Gianna as well as Claudia. It is unclear whom Renata, according to herself, let down. Did she let Claudia down by not taking care of Gianna as she was supposed to? Or did she let Gianna down by not keeping her safe? Jenny seems to compensate for both losses, and Renata wants to keep her to resolve the double loss of her sister and niece, and the people that died during the attacks.

Renata's healing process seems to be quite slow at first, as she debates writing a letter to the President about the speech he has given on TV three days after the attack. In the fictitious letter she says:

Dear Mr. President, With all due respect, I must point out that your phrase, "the middle hour of our grief," is inaccurate. This is the third day after the attack. If this is "the middle hour of our grief," and if the stages of our grief will be roughly equal, it logically follows that the end of our grief would fall somewhere around the sixth or

seventh day after. You know as well as I do that this is not true, and that our grief will last much longer. Granted, the beginning, middle, and end stages of our grief (assuming it has an end) may not be equal. The middle may last longer than the beginning, which your words suggest is now over. (Schwartz 141)

Connecting this passage to the stages of grief as presented by Karin Jordan, the President seems to believe that, three days after the attack, the people are already in stage two; the stage of denial and outward adjustment. However, Renata disagrees with the President's claim; the definition of the stages of grief are, hence, interpreted differently by Renata and the President. Renata believes that grief takes longer than one week, as the President claims. However, a few pages, in the novel a few days, later she comes back to this letter and says that "[s]he is not yet ready to agree that we are in the middle hour of our grief, but it is not as bad as it was two days ago, or three. The shock on awakening is not quite as great" (Schwartz 175). In this sense, Renata finds a form of closure.

Time seems to heal Renata's traumas, as they disappear into the background, and she is not reminded of it every day. Even though she does not believe that she is already in the middle hour of her grief, she seems to come to terms with the events that have happened in her life. The events of 9/11 seem to have helped her to distance herself from the traumatic events sustained in the past and have helped her move on. And although she does not feel like she has properly healed yet, it can be concluded that she is actually further into the stages of grief than she realises. In the closing pages of the novel, it is stated that

[t]here is a connection between the public and private life, but Renata knows that that connection, just now, is merely a distraction...Something else is working its way through her, a creeping vibration in her cells, and uneasy humming, but one that may lead her out of paralysis. It concerns what is finished and what is not...There's more they have to find out, more common life to partake of, more to relish or suffer at each other's hands. As for the rest, the past, there's nothing more there. (Schwartz 294).

Hence the public life, referring to 9/11, and the private life, referring to Renata's past life and her current debate on whether or not she will continue her relationship with Jack, are connected. However, she claims that the past is the past, and that there is nothing more there, implying that she will leave it behind her and that she will make room for a happier future with Jack. In this sense, the public life and thus the 9/11 trauma, has influenced her private

life and her private traumas. This influence has subsequently enabled her to move on and to shift her focus from the unhappy and traumatic past to a future. Thus, she has obtained a form of closure, and letting go of the past allows her to open herself up to Jack, which gives their relationship a chance to survive.

3.3 *Falling Man*

Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* was published in 2007, and has since been researched by scholars on several subjects, most of them related to the novel's position as a 9/11 novel or in relation to DeLillo's novel *Mao II* (1991) that seems to predict 9/11 and even identifies the Twin Towers as the target. The plot of the novel centres on a man, later on identified as Keith Neudecker, who survives the attack on the Twin Towers and wanders around on the street until the towers collapse. After his escape, he does not go to the hospital but goes straight to the house where his estranged wife, Lianne, and his son live. The novel focuses on the aftermath of the attacks on the Twin Towers and shifts back and forth between the past and the present of the characters' lives. Moreover, the novel is divided into three parts concerned with Keith and Lianne, but each part ends with an intermission in which the life of Hammad is narrated, starting with his education in the Islam, to his training in how to fly a plane, and finally to his attack of the south tower. Hence, this novel stands out because of its concern with the story of one of the hijackers, who are supposed "to go unseen" to make sure that they will not draw the attention and endanger the plans, but are hereby given a face, a name, and a story (DeLillo 172). Moreover, Hammad is presented as one of the falling men, connecting the victims to the terrorist, which will be explained later on.

The names attached to the different parts of the novel, Bill Lawton, Ernst Hechinger, and David Janiak suggest existing people, but are in some way misleading. Bill Lawton, is the Americanised version of Osama Bin Laden, which Keith and Lianne's son, Justin, and his friends made up because they misheard the name. Ernst Herchinger is the supposed real name of Martin Ridnour, with whom Lianne's mother has a relationship. Moreover, David Janiak refers to the performance artist who re-enacts the people falling from the Towers (Randall 122). The names or the actions of the people are thus different from how they are presented in the novel, which implies that people or their appearances or actions might be deceiving, and that trust in times of traumatic events, such as 9/11, is an illusion. The story is presented in fragmented paragraphs and ends in the same way as it began, with Keith wandering through the streets of New York just after the attack. This indicates that there is no closure to the trauma. The trauma of 9/11 is represented by focusing on the collective traumas by discussing

organic shrapnel and the function of the media, which is connected to the role of the performance artist David Janiak, and the function of art in general. Moreover, there is a focus on the personal traumas as well; this is discussed by centring on Hammad's storyline, and Keith and Lianne's lives, their mental and physical traumas, ambiguous loss, survivor guilt, and Keith's failure to resolve his traumas.

The collective trauma is represented through what is called organic shrapnel. When Keith goes to the hospital after the attack, the doctor fixing his face and collecting pieces of glass from his skin tells him that when you are close to a suicide bomber,

the survivors, the people nearby who are injured, sometimes, months later, they develop bumps, for lack of a better term, and it turns out this is caused by small fragments, tiny fragments of the suicide bomber's body...They call this organic shrapnel. (DeLillo 16)

This explanation of the condition named organic shrapnel suggests, as Linda Kauffman explains, that "[w]e are all...the walking wounded, living with organic shrapnel; the very skin of those driven by desperation and violence is seared into our own" (372). Moreover, DeLillo implies that not only the people who were at the site are at risk of sharing the physical trauma of organic shrapnel. It is said that "[t]he dead were everywhere, in the air, in the rubble, on rooftops nearby, in the breezes that carried from the river. They were settled in ash and drizzled on windows all along the streets, in his hair and on his clothes" (DeLillo 25). Hence, the whole of New York becomes what Kauffman calls 'the walking wounded;' its inhabitants might not be wounded literally, but the bodies of the dead are all over the city, implying that the traumas are collective and that everyone is scarred by the trauma and involved in the mourning of the victims.

The link between art and the media in DeLillo's novel is clearly established by Anne Longmuir in her article "'This was the World Now': *Falling Man* and the Role of the Artist after 9/11." She argues that

DeLillo offers Janiak's performance art as a locus of genuine political opposition, not least because it deals directly and explicitly with "history," but because it depicts an aspect of 9/11 that was, by and large, not allowed to appear in the public sphere in the United States: the photograph and footage of the people who fell, or jumped, from the Twin Towers. (44)

Hence, the title of the novel and mentioning David Janiak and his act several times defies the media in the sense that the novel, as well as the artist, go against the censoring of the media. Janiak's performance art in this sense tries to uncover the things about the 9/11 trauma that were so painful that they were swept under the carpet by the media. The death of the people falling from the towers was regarded as too traumatic to recall and too distasteful to publish. Randall claims that the photographs of the falling man were denounced for "exploitation and bad taste" and were therefore left out of the media (127). However, Janiak as well as DeLillo seem to disagree with this censoring and therefore the novel and the artist re-tell and re-present the images and narratives that were shown by the media during and directly after the attacks on 9/11.

The aesthetics of Janiak and his falls are depicted by Lianne as "burn[ing] a hole in her mind and heart, dear God, he was a falling angel and his beauty was horrific," implying the impact of the act on the New Yorkers after 9/11 (DeLillo 222). Just like the media, Janiak's act imprints the trauma of 9/11 into the minds of everybody that watches his performance, and it haunts them. However, on the same page David Janiak dies an untimely death, and his art is said to have played a part in his death: "His falls were said to be painful and highly dangerous due to the rudimentary equipment he used" (DeLillo 222). Just like the historical people, falling to their death during the attacks on the Twin Towers, the same fate befalls Janiak. On the other hand, it is mentioned that "[p]lans for his final jump...did not include a harness," implying that Janiak did not live to finish his work and failed to reach his own and his art's final goal (DeLillo 223). He does not literally fall to his death, but the complications sustained from the fall unmistakably lead to his death. Longmuir argues that "Janiak's untimely death may suggest that, for DeLillo, the cultural impact of 9/11 may have undermined the very possibility of political effective art," because Janiak failed to meet the aesthetics of his art and is therefore an unsuccessful artist (49). However, he performed his act many times and his act was seen, willingly or not, by many people, which might indicate that the art did have a political effect because its repetition imprinted the traumatic image that they were shielded from by the media into the minds of the people.

Another artwork that is mentioned a few times in the novel, and that is connected to 9/11, is *Natura Morta* by the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi. The painting hangs in the house of Lianne's mother and after the attacks, Lianne and Martin discuss the painting in the light of the recent events. The painting shows "objects, kitchen objects but removed from the kitchen, free of the kitchen, the house, everything practical and functioning," but it is impossible for

Martin to see the objects as just the objects, as he continues by saying “I keep seeing the towers in this still life” (DeLillo 49). Looking at the painting together, Lianne goes on by describing the painting saying that

[t]wo of the taller items were dark and somber, with smoky marks and smudges, and one of them was partly concealed by a long-necked bottle. The bottle was a bottle, white. The two dark objects, too obscure to name, were the things that Martin was referring to. (DeLillo 49)

The fact that two items in a still life painting, made by an Italian painter, years before the 9/11 attacks can become the towers in the minds of the characters, serves to show how the event has influenced people and how the media has indoctrinated the people by repeating the same footage over and over again. In the aftermath of 9/11, art seems to trigger the people into re-experiencing the event, or to remember the event. As Longmuir argues; “Martin’s and Lianne’s response to Morandi’s painting thus demonstrates the way in which the images associated with 9/11 alter even the most apparently ahistoric aesthetic objects and our reaction to them” (46). This ties in with Caruth’s trauma theory, in which she explains that traumas can be re-experienced through flashbacks, which can be invoked or triggered because the traumatised person is possessed by an image or event. The image that the characters in this novel are possessed by is the footage of the two smoking towers on TV, which, according to Lianne and Martin, is represented in the painting by the two obscure items.

The personal traumas in the novel, starting with the physical trauma, become clear when looking at the injuries that Keith sustained during his escape from the towers. Apart from the glass shatters in his face Keith mentions that he was

barely aware that he wasn’t using his left arm, that he’d had to put down the briefcase before he could take the bottle...He closed his eyes and drank, feeling the water pass into his body taking dust and soot down with it...There was an aftertaste of blood in the long draft of water. (DeLillo 5)

Hence, part of the physical traumas seem to become internalised traumas, as the blood, dust, and soot representing the outside trauma become lodged inside his body. Moreover, the blood is later said to be somebody else’s, which alludes to the organic shrapnel that was discussed earlier and makes this personal trauma again collective (DeLillo 88). In this sense, the

physical traumas are also linked to the mental traumas, which can also be concluded by looking at what is said about his arm. Keith being unable to use his arm in the beginning of the novel is linked to him not being able to think clearly. He is not fully aware of himself nor of the events or his surroundings. Like the style of the novel, his memory and the workings of his brain are fragmented and dissociated from reality.

Later on, when he is in the hospital he talks about his arm again and says that “[t]hey told him things he could not absorb about a ligament or cartilage, a tear or sprain” (DeLillo 15). It turns out that he has sprained his wrist and is asked to do exercises about which he says:

He found these sessions restorative, four times a day, the wrist extensions, the ulnar deviations. These were the true countermeasures to the damage he’d suffered in the tower, in the descending chaos. It was not the MRI and not the surgery that brought him closer to well-being. It was this modest home program, the counting of seconds, the counting of repetitions, the times of day he reserved for the exercises, the ice applied following each set of exercises. (DeLillo 40)

Thus, the physical traumas and the exercises that he has to do are actually not only beneficial for his wrist, but to his well-being in general. As Caruth mentions in her theory, the repetitive actions of survivors enable them to grasp the trauma, which they did not do when they experienced the trauma (*Unclaimed Experience* 3). In Keith’s case, the trauma to his wrist is connected to the mental trauma of the sufferings in the towers. In doing the exercises repetitively, he not only seem to heal his wrist, but his mental trauma as well.

The mental traumas become clear when looking at the relationship between Keith and Lianne. After his escape from the site of the attack, Keith goes to the home of his estranged wife and son, probably because, as Arin Keeble suggests, the impact of trauma can result in “a reversion to patterns of pre-9/11 normality” (361). Kristiaan Versluys underscores this by saying that

[i]n instinctively, in the rush of events, [Keith] goes back to Lianne, looking for the shelter of the family. Soon he finds out, however, that the family idyll cannot be restored and the home does not function anymore as a safe haven...They reconnect sexually but otherwise remain strangely aloof. (24)

The traumatised person thus needs familiarity, but at the same time the trauma can cause a person to change or to lash out. According to Arin Keeble one way of lashing out was what the media termed ‘terror sex,’ which is defined as “the idea that New York, gripped by collective trauma, was experiencing heightened sexual activity through a desperate need for human contact and intimacy in the immediate aftermath of the attacks” (358). Indeed, the second chapter of *Falling Man* starts off with Lianne musing over ordinary things, objects or events, such as books, a flight of stairs, or the sound of the sea, which are highly sexually charged after the events of 9/11 (DeLillo 7-8). In Caruth’s *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Kai Erikson notes that surviving a traumatic event, or reconnecting with a loved one after a traumatic event, makes the characters feel so relieved or euphoric that life is celebrated with “an outpouring of communal feeling, an urgent need to make contact with and even touch others by way of renewing old pledges of fellowship” (189).

On the other hand, Keeble explains that

[a]nother important facet of the sex scenes...is a certain self-reflexivity. These relationship narratives, which shift or unsettle markedly with the advent of 9/11, carry a distinct knowingness or inevitability regarding the post-traumatic re-evaluation of core values. (359)

The self-reflection and re-evaluation of core values ties in with the third stage of terrorist grief, as described by Karin Jordan. During the last stage of the healing process, people start to re-evaluate themselves, their lives, and their beliefs and values, which in the case of *Falling Man*, and the characters of Keith and Lianne in particular, is done by returning to familiarity while at the same time lashing out sexually. When Keith moves back into Lianne’s house, they return to their familiar way of dealing with each other, resembling the way in which they used to live. Lianne claims that “[s]he wanted him here, nearby...it’s interesting, isn’t it,...the respect you show the past” (DeLillo 35). However, the past is re-evaluated after the worst shock of the attacks is behind them and Lianne says:

My husband. He wasn’t a husband. The word spouse had seemed comical, applied to him, and husband simply didn’t fit. He was something else somewhere else. But now she uses the term. She believes he is growing into it, a husbandman, even though she knows this is another word completely. (DeLillo 70)

In this passage, Lianne re-evaluates Keith and realises that he has changed and that their relationship has changed with it. Hence, there is a shift noticeable in Keith as well as Lianne, which causes a shift in their core values and their relationship.

The fact that things change as the past is receding from us and the future is not to be imagined is also underscored by Linda Kauffman's analysis of the Alzheimer's group with whom Lianne meets every week. Lianne's sessions with people in the early stages of Alzheimer serve to "retrieve shards of personal memory, history, and identity through the act of writing" (Kauffman 367). In the weeks after the attack on the Twin Towers the group wants to write about the attacks instead of their personal memories about the past. However – although there is no clear explanation to be found in the novel, it is probably because of his Arabic name and heritage – Omar H. seems to have his doubts about writing about the attacks, but in the end agrees with the rest of the group. The stories of the Alzheimer's group resemble the people themselves as their stories contain a "spatial void, or a visual gap, a rift in [its] field of vision" (DeLillo 95). In this sense the Alzheimer's group symbolises the traumatised post 9/11 society. Their difficulty in making the connections and links between the memories and the untrustworthiness of their memories resemble the memories and struggles of the entire nation. As Kauffman explains, the post-9/11 condition that everybody is suffering from is progressing exponentially, people are unable to link their memories, history, or identity to anything familiar since the attacks, and the future becomes more and more difficult to imagine (368). Moreover, she claims that "*Falling Man* portrays the contradictions between present and past; life and death; time and eternity" (368). The Alzheimer's group functions similarly; it presents the middle ground in which the past and present seem to meet, and in which the line between life and death is blurred.

Furthermore, Pauline Boss determines that people suffering from Alzheimer's disease are among the 'psychologically missing.' Hence, family members or friends of Alzheimer's patients often experience a form of ambiguous loss. Lianne's Alzheimer's group is then connected to both the events of 9/11 and a trauma in Lianne's past, namely the death of her father (551). Lianne's father was also in the early stages of Alzheimer's, but committed suicide to stop the disease from progressing any further. Boss states that

[t]he two types of ambiguous loss frequently overlap for individuals and families. After 9/11, for example, a woman we worked with had a physically missing husband, and at the same time, a psychologically missing mother with Alzheimer's disease. With ambiguous losses of both types, she felt doubly confused and abandoned. (554)

This double ambiguous loss also affects Lianne. Before Keith showed up at her doorstep, she experienced ambiguous loss, and the experiences with her father and the Alzheimer's group are connected to 9/11 in several ways. Lianne claims several times that she needs the Alzheimer's group. For example, she says that

[s]he needed these people. It was possible that the group meant more to her than it did to the members. There was something precious here, something that seeps and bleeds. These people were the living breath of the thing that killed her father. (DeLillo 61-2)

Sharing the life stories of these people and with these people, make her feel connected to her father. Her father's death resulted in a personal trauma for Lianne, because it was so sudden and unexpected. By seeing and grasping what the disease does to people, she tries to resolve this old trauma. Moreover, because the Alzheimer's group writes about the attacks, and functions as a metaphor of the traumatised society, she is also working through the trauma of 9/11 in this way.

There are also two instances in which Lianne connects the death of her father to the attacks on 9/11 and the way in which the media convey the trauma to the public. The first instance is when she lies awake in bed and she says that "[s]he read everything they wrote about the attacks. She thought of her father. She saw him coming down an escalator, in an airport maybe" (DeLillo 67). Even though there is no specification as to where this airport might be, it is clearly linked to 9/11 and the attacks caused by planes. The suicide attacks of the hijackers remind her of her father committing suicide. The ambiguous loss that she experienced when her father suffered from Alzheimer's and after his death are connected to the events of 9/11, and Lianne responds in similar ways to the traumas. In trying to work through the trauma and resolve the ambiguous loss of her father, she starts working with the Alzheimer's group to gain more knowledge on the disease and to see what she has missed out on with her father. Similar to this, she tries to gain more knowledge about the events on 9/11 by reading everything there is to read about the attacks. Hence, she tries to resolve her traumas by gathering as much information as she can about the experiences.

The second instance in which the two traumas are linked occurs when Lianne and Keith are at home in front of the TV and it is said that "[t]hey were watching TV without the sound. 'My father shot himself so I would never have to face the day when he failed to know who I was.' 'You believe this.' 'Yes.' 'Then I believe it too,' he said" (DeLillo 130). Again

Lianne connects the trauma of the loss of her father to 9/11 and the media. The fact that they are watching the TV without sound might be interpreted as the logical reaction to trauma. Traumatic experiences are often commemorated by a few minutes of silence. It might also be interpreted as sound making the trauma ‘too loud;’ since the images on TV are already traumatising and haunting the people, watching them with sound might be unbearable. In this instance, however, the focus seems to be more on the why than on the how. Lianne seems to be working through the traumas by imagining why traumatic events happen and the reasons people have to commit suicide. De suicide of her father is thus linked to the suicide attacks of the hijackers, and even though she can imagine the reason her father had for committing suicide, it seems impossible for her to imagine why the hijackers would. According to Lianne, her father shot himself to protect himself and Lianne from the harm that might be done when he would regress too far due to his illness. However, Lianne gives no reason for why she thinks the hijackers committed suicide, which implies that the trauma is so encompassing that the reason why is not imaginable.

While ambiguous loss is clearly connected to Lianne, Keith is the character that impersonates the idea of survivor guilt most evidently. After his stormy marriage to Lianne, Keith tries to fill up the void in his life by devoting himself to the poker games with a few of his friends who also work in the World Trade Center (Kauffman 368). Chance, luck, and gambling seems to be the way to cheat the contradictions between past and present for Keith. Kauffman even suggest that Keith’s last name, Neudecker, “seems to auger a new deck of cards, a fresh start” (368). Right after the plane hits the tower in which Keith works, he starts to make his way down and stops at the floor of his colleague and poker friend, Rumsey. However, Keith is unable to help Rumsey out of the building because of his sprained wrist and because of Rumsey’s critical injuries. Eventually Rumsey dies in Keith’s arms. After the attack, Keith seems to experience survivor guilt, because he was unable to safe Rumsey. Kauffman claims that “[w]ith the reckless ferocity of someone who cheated death, Keith devotes himself to tournament gambling” after the attack (369).

The need for chance, luck, and gambling seems to be of even greater importance after 9/11, and in partaking in the gambling tournaments he tries to remember as well as escape the traumatic events. At one point Keith mentions that he was looking for “crucial anonymity” and that he enjoyed the “mingling of countless lives that had no stories attached” (DeLillo 204). In this sense, he clearly seems to distance himself from the people and from his history, and he tries to escape the attack once again. Subsequently, he meets his former poker friend Terry Cheng at one of the gambling tournaments and is thus reunited with someone from the

past, someone from pre-9/11 times. Together with Terry, Keith remembers the event of 9/11 and the stories that were told about the missing or dead afterwards. Terry mentions that he “used to tell people. People talked about where they were, where they worked. I said midtown. The word sounded naked. It sounded neutral, like it was nowhere. I heard he went out a window, Rumsey.” (DeLillo 205). This quote is significant, because Rumsey is believed to be one of the people who jumped or fell from the Twin Towers, even though Keith and the reader knows this is not true. Right after Terry’s explanation it is said that “Keith looked into the waterfall. This was better than closing his eyes. If he closed his eyes, he’d see something” (DeLillo 205). These two quotes prove that the memories and the stories that were told about 9/11 were not always reliable. Moreover, it shows that Keith still tries to distance himself from the traumatic experience, for he is scared to re-live the attack as well as his failure to save Rumsey. This shows his inability to resolve his survivor guilt.

Another instance in which Keith’s survivor guilt is portrayed is when he realises that he, in the chaos of the attack, has taken the wrong briefcase home. Throughout the story, Keith is portrayed as a falling man; he failed his wife, is not happy with his job, and has almost no contact with his son. Following Karin Jordan’s notion that working through terror grief might lead to people re-evaluating their lives, beliefs, and values, might suggest that Keith will change his life after the attack. However, as Kristiaan Versluys mentions that “[t]he endless re-enactment of trauma presented in *Falling Man* allows for no accommodation or resolution” (20). This is exactly the case for Keith; as he finds the woman to whom the briefcase belongs and returns it to her, they start an affair. The woman, Florence, confides in Keith and talks about 9/11 to him. It is said that

[s]he wanted to tell him everything. This was clear to him. Maybe she’d forgotten he was there, in the tower, or maybe he was the one she needed to tell for precisely that reason. He knew she hadn’t talked about this, not so intensely, to anyone else.
(DeLillo 55)

Florence thus seems to find pleasure in telling the story to someone that has experienced the same event and in this way she is working through her trauma. However, Keith seems to want to make contact, but is somehow unable, keeping her at bay, as it is said that “[s]he was going through it again and he was ready to listen again. He listened carefully, noting every detail, trying to find himself in the crowd” (DeLillo 59). Even though repeating the story over and

over seems to comfort Florence, Keith is focusing on the details and on himself, not on the event itself which seems to hold him back in the healing process.

The failure to resolve traumas is also depicted in the way in which the novel ends. The novel comes full cycle and starts in the same way as it begun, with the Tower being hit and Keith wandering through the streets right after the attack. However, this time it is more presented like a flashback, and the ‘original’ story in the beginning of the novel seems to merge and fuse with the things Florence has told Keith about her experience. The idea that he is speaking in flashbacks is underscored when it is said that “[t]hings came back to him in hazy visions, like half an eye staring. These were moments he’d lost as they were happening and he had to stop walking in order to stop seeing them. He stood looking into nothing” (DeLillo 243-4). However, this quote also underscores the fact that he is held back in his healing process. He again seems to distance himself from the traumatic experience, by blocking out the flashbacks and images, which prevents him from working through the trauma by reliving it and thereby grasping the trauma. Hence, he is stuck in the second stage of terrorist grief, trying to repress the memories, denying the event, and keeping his distance from people that he deems connected to the event, such as Terry Cheng.

Keith’s storyline is connected to the storyline of Hammad in the way in which Keith tries to keep his distance and alienates himself from his life before 9/11. The title of the novel not only refers to the picture that was censored in the media, or Janiak’s performance art, but it also relates to the characters of Hammad and Keith, who are both portrayed as falling men and whose falling even merges. In the first intermission, Hammad’s story about becoming a jihadist is told. It is said that “[h]e had to fight against the need to be normal” (DeLillo 83). Moreover, it is said that he would like to trim his beard, and that he has had relationships with women (DeLillo 83). It becomes clear that in the course of these intermissions, he is indoctrinated by Amir, who is “the true believer” (Kauffman 355). Hammad in this sense, is portrayed as someone who learns how to be a believer, but was not born that way. Throughout his storyline, Hammad seems to shed pieces of his identity to become a true jihadist. Losing his identity and individuality are then a form of regression, which is easily connected to retrogenesis, which is what the people in the Alzheimer’s Group experience. They are also prone to lose their sense of self and their identity because they cannot remember their past. Moreover, Hammad’s loss of identity is connected to Keith’s alienation and isolation after the attack as the characters of Hammad and Keith seem to become one during the attack.

While Hammad’s story first seems to be some kind of counter narrative to the master narrative, the two narratives and the two characters merge in the final pages of the novel.

Robert A. Ferguson says that “Hammad and Neudecker merg[e] in midsentence: the first man’s reactions on the airplane become the second man’s reactions inside the tower without missing a grammatical beat” (217). Indeed, the merging of the two characters in the novel can be seen in the following passage:

A bottle fell off the counter in the galley, on the other side of the aisle, and he 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 the wall. He found himself walking into a wall. He didn’t drop the telephone until he hit the wall. The floor began to slide beneath him and he lost his balance and eased along the wall to the floor. (DeLillo 239)

Halfway through the paragraph, at the exact time the plane hits the tower, DeLillo shifts from Hammad’s experiences to Keith’s experiences. Hence, as Hammad literally falls out of the sky his ‘falling’ is transferred to Keith, who then becomes a falling man because he distances and alienates himself from the trauma and his pre-9/11 life, thereby losing himself and his identity, just like Hammad did. The alienated and dehumanised ‘robot’ that Hammad became before the attack seems to predict Keith’s post-9/11 life, as he loses himself in gambling tournaments, ignores his trauma, and becomes a “self-operating mechanism, like a humanoid robot that understands two hundred voice commands, far-seeing, touch-sensitive but totally, rigidly controllable” (DeLillo 226).

3.4 General Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the two novels discussed in this chapter overlap on certain themes, but differ on others. The overlapping themes are terrorist grief, ambiguous loss, and survivor guilt. However, while in *The Writing on the Wall* terrorist grief is resolved, or at least the characters are clearly working towards resolution, Keith in *Falling Man* seems to be stuck within the resolution process. As he is unable to move from the second stage of terrorist grief towards the third stage, he is unable to resolve his trauma, which is also linked to his survivor guilt. The fact that Keith is not able to work through his traumas and resolve his survivor guilt can be concluded from the cycle in which the story is told. Ending the novel the same way as it begun clearly indicates that the characters in *Falling Man* are stuck and will remain in the

traumatic cycle without any chance of resolution. Jack, however, physically and mentally deals with his survivor guilt in straining his mind and his body to help the rescue workers and the people who have survived the attack, which seems to help him to move on.

On the other hand, both women in the story, Renata and Lianne, are connecting their previously sustained traumas to the trauma they suffer after 9/11. In both instances a close family member is ambiguously lost and many things they see, hear, find or do after 9/11 is, in their minds, linked to the traumas in the past. In *The Writing on the Wall*, it is a twenty-dollar bill and a girl who looks similar to Gianna that remind Renata of her dead sister and her abducted niece. In *Falling Man* it is the Alzheimer's group and the media that remind Lianne of her father and makes her link this trauma to 9/11.

Furthermore, what is entirely different in both novels is that *The Writing on the Wall* seems to predominantly deal with personal traumas, while *Falling Man* quite often focuses on collective traumas as well. The collective traumas in *Falling Man* are, for example, represented in the media, which is connected to the function of art and the role of the artist, and by discussing organic shrapnel. The role of the media in *The Writing on the Wall* merely focuses on the speeches that President Bush gives in the wake of 9/11, the language that he uses in particular, and seems to leave out all individual voices because they are not loud and important enough. In *Falling Man*, however, the individual voices are heard and portrayed by means of art, such as Martin and Lianne's discussion of *Natura Morta* and Janiak's controversial performance art, which defies the censorship of the media.

Organic shrapnel not only represents the collective trauma, but also the physical traumas. The physical traumas are predominantly featured in *Falling Man* and do not get attention in *The Writing on the Wall*, where no-one actually sustains any physical injuries from the 9/11 attack. In *Falling Man*, the physical injuries are mainly sustained by Keith, for example his wrist and the shattered glass in his face. However, the organic shrapnel is to be found everywhere and signifies that the trauma is not only personal, but also collective as everyone near the site might have been injured by small human particles and the whole of New York is covered in the dust and the smell of the buildings and the victims.

Another overlap in the novels is the importance of a communal life after a collective trauma. In both *The Writing on the Wall* and *Falling Man*, the families have broken up. In *The Writing on the Wall*, Renata moves away from her family, she rarely visits her mother and is unable to form any real or deep connections with people, which is why she also keeps Jack at bay. In *Falling Man*, Keith and Lianne have broken up and Keith does not seem to try hard to keep his place in the family. After 9/11, however, Keith returns to his wife and son and

Renata seems to become more family oriented again as she visits her mother more often and finally lets Jack into her life. Hence, while life before 9/11 seems to be polarised and focused on individuality, it becomes more communal after 9/11 as the family becomes more important.

4. Novels Published after 2011

4.1 General Introduction

This chapter will discuss two novels published after 2011, namely *The Submission* (2011) and *Bleeding Edge* (2013). Both novels are among the most recent works of fiction that deal with the event of 9/11. It is expected that these two novels will deal with the 9/11 trauma in similar ways, focusing on the influence that the 9/11 attacks had on society and the way in which the event is commemorated. Themes such as memorialising the trauma, the conspiracies connected to the event, and the fear of and anger towards Muslims will be expected to play a big role in these two novels as the scope of the trauma will be expected to broaden and a multitude of traumas resulting from the original trauma of 9/11 may become more important.

4.2 *The Submission*

The Submission was written by Amy Waldman and was first published in 2011, right around the tenth anniversary of 9/11. The novel focuses on a jury that has to decide on a memorial that will be placed on the site of the attack. However, there is a disagreement between the jury, which is assembled of experts on art, New York citizens, and a family member of one of the victims. Claire Burwell, who represents the families of the victims, chooses ‘the Garden’ while most other jurors choose ‘the Void’ as “[t]hey believe that it recreates the destruction of the attacks in its design, and have suggested anger in response, whereas the Garden...indicates America’s deep longing for healing by introducing joy instead” (Jabarouti and Mani 34). Eventually, Claire persuades the jury to vote for the Garden. However, all submissions are anonymous and the jury, in choosing the Garden, ends up voting for a design made by the American Muslim Mohammad Khan. When the news of this controversial selection leaks to the press, many people are outraged and the jury finds itself under pressure and unable to decide how to proceed. While the selection outrages many family members of the victims, the talk about withdrawing the design angers the Muslim characters in the novel, implying that a monument that is satisfying for all people suffering from the collective trauma is impossible. Hence, the 9/11 trauma in this novel is represented by focusing on the memorial, collective versus personal trauma as irreconcilable oppositions, the aftermath of 9/11 for the Muslim community, and the resolution of the trauma.

In the beginning of the novel the jury is still debating which design to choose, as both the Void and the Garden are still in the running. It should be noted, however, that the Void as described in the novel bears a remarkable resemblance to the actual memorial, ‘Reflecting Absence,’ by Michael Arad. Lindsay Tuggle explains that

Michael Arad's architectural design permanently inscribes the twin tower's 'footprints' as 'voids' in the landscape, creating vacant monuments to the fallen structures...Arad's anthropomorphic understanding of the tower's ghostly footprints recalls Freud's assertion that melancholia 'behaves like an open wound' that seeks to fill itself entirely with absence...the 9/11 Memorial mimics the magnetic void of melancholia on a national scale. (132)

In the novel, the Void is described as a memorial that is "visceral, angry, dark, raw, because there was no joy on that day. You can't tell if that slab is rising or falling, which is honest – it speaks exactly to this moment in history. It's created destruction, which robs the real destruction of its power, dialectically speaking" (Waldman 6). Hence, the two memorials, the actual historical one and the fictional one, closely resemble one another as they are both described as voids reflecting on the open wound and destruction that 9/11 left behind.

The Garden, however, is Claire Burwell's first choice. She explains that "'[t]he Void is too dark for us,' ...Us: the families of the dead. Only she, on the jury, stood for Us. She loathed the Void...and Claire was sure the other families would, too" (Waldman 5). Thus, she believes that the Void only reflects on the negative feelings, instead of depicting the 9/11 grief in a more positive way, stimulating healing. She continues by saying that "'[t]he Garden,' ...'will be a place where we – where the widows, their children, anyone – can stumble on joy" (Waldman 6). On the other hand, Ariana, another juror, disagrees with this way of healing, as she believes that healing trauma should be brought about by confronting the pain and wallowing in grief (Waldman 6). The jury's concern with picking the right memorial, that reflects the right emotions and persuades the people to heal, implies that ten years after the event, the trauma still seems very immediate. The people have not yet found closure, and taking a step back and looking at the event, or the way in which it should be memorialised objectively, still seems impossible. This is also underscored by Paul, the jury's chairman, who voices the concerns and says "that it was too soon for a memorial, the ground barely cleared; that the country hadn't yet won or lost the war, couldn't even agree, exactly, on who or what it was fighting" (Waldman 10). However, waiting for society to choose rationally instead of emotionally is not an option as "[t]he longer that space stayed clear, the more it became a symbol of defeat, of surrender, something for 'them,' whoever they were, to mock. A memorial only to America's diminished greatness, its new vulnerability to attack by

a fanatic band, mediocrities in all but murder...the blank space was embarrassing” (Waldman 10).

As can be seen from the passages quoted in the previous paragraph, the collective and the personal traumas are presented as total opposites and as irreconcilable. Whereas the jury is assembled of people with political and artistic backgrounds, Claire is a victim’s family member, and their ideas of and wishes for the memorial are so different that reaching a consensus proves to be very difficult. The jury is, in fact, impersonating society on a micro-level, because, once the news of the selected design and its designer gets out, the public faces the same binary oppositions resulting in a polarised society with no sense of communality. As a collective, everybody wants a memorial that is satisfying, but the personal opinions are greatly different. This is proven by the way in which the novel represents the aftermath of the selection. Margarita Estévez-Saá and Noemí Pereira-Ares explain that

The problems arise when the members of the jury as well as many American citizens discover the identity of the author behind the chosen project, an alleged Muslim named Mohammad Khan. The jury as well as the society of New York is immediately divided between those who favor the rights of the winner and those who consider his Muslim ascendancy to represent an affront to the victims. In this way, *The Submission* reflects the difficulty of even knowing who the enemy is. (270)

Hence, the designer, Mohammad Khan, represents Islam, and thus the enemy for many people, and his design is therefore deemed disrespectful to the victims and survivors of 9/11. Even though Mohammad is born and raised in America, and more agnostic than Muslim, his name and outer features resemble the Other, or the Terrorist for many people.

Mohammad’s identity is formed by other people on the basis of his name, which is the most obviously Muslim name, and in the minds of the people, is “connected to a religion of violence, of the sword” (Waldman 294). Peter Ferry notes that not only Mohammad’s name is problematic, but that

it is Waldman’s shrewd engagement with the beard, as well as her protagonist’s awareness of the sensibilities and sensitivities surrounding the beard in the public and private performances of his masculinity, that underlines the continuing importance of the beard in the literary exploration of the incongruities in the ideas of identity, masculinity, and individuality in a globalized and globalizing American society. (15)

The fear that Mohammad's beard evokes in white American society is depicted in a scene where Paul Rubin meets Mohammad Khan in a bistro and it is said that

he spotted a dark-bearded man watching him from a table at the back...Khan stood. He had a good three inches on Paul. He had taken the seat with the view of the restaurant and the door, which was Paul's preferred seat; sitting with his back to a room unsettled him. Once they sat, Paul sipped water, hoping to imbibe a sense of equilibrium.

(Waldman 77-8)

From this passage, it becomes clear that society is on edge after 9/11 and that even ten years after the fact, people with a Muslim appearance are still believed to be threatening to white American people. Mohammad Khan is here presented as a predator, as someone whose face is obscured by his beard. Moreover, he is tall and he is believed to show his upper hand or dominance by taking the seat in which he can observe the whole room, leaving Paul vulnerable and unsettled with his back to the room.

Mohammad proves to have difficulties with his identity as well and he begins to split or double himself. It is said that

Mo began to put psychological distance between himself and the Mohammad Khan who was written and talked about, as if that were another man altogether. It often was. Facts were not found but made, alive, defying anyone to tell them from truth. Strangers analysed, judged, and invented him...By training his face not to show feeling, he could receive the attention of the strangers who stopped him on the street...

(Waldman 161-2)

The pressure of white American society and the firestorm of the media takes his toll and becomes a traumatic experience for Mohammad. As he only entered the competition to contribute to the healing of the trauma and to find "the right balance between remembering and recovering," he never seemed to have thought about the reaction of the public when he would win (Waldman 79). The negativity that the design evokes clearly has an influence on Mohammad and the media, and the strangers that he meets seem to have the same effect on him as his presence and words have on the public. While he feels threatened by the public because they analyse, judge, and invent him; the public feels threatened by him because of his

Muslim identity, whether this identity is invented or not. The vicious cycle or repetition that is closely related to trauma is thus also applicable in this case.

Moreover, the other Muslim characters in the novel are threatened by white American society as well, which becomes clear when the novel mentions the violence against Muslim women. During a protest rally against the monument, a few Muslim women attend with signs saying that they had also lost people that day and that they are also Americans (Waldman 195). Sean, who is against building the Garden, gets into a heated discussion with one of the Muslim women, which angers him so much that he pulls her headscarf off her head. Later on in the novel it is said that “[t]he second headscarf pulling occurred less than a week after the rally...The next took place in Boston...More men copied him, and copycats copied the copycats, so within a week there had been more than a dozen incidents around the country” (Waldman 209-210). Moreover, the fear of and anger towards Muslims forces them to react with violence too, as they are threatened and Muslim women are scared to leave their house or their neighbourhoods. When Asma, a Muslim woman who has lost her husband in the attack, gets out of the house, she is followed by a group of Bangladeshi boys carrying sticks so that they can beat up anyone coming close to her (Waldman 218). Asma comments that “[s]he no longer knew who was imprisoning her, only that the prison was well sealed” (Waldman 219). Hence, the vicious cycle of being scared of one another resulting in violence against one another is clearly established.

Mohammad Khan himself, however, is not the only person who is threatening to white American society. Khan’s design, the Garden, also forms a threat, as it is connected to the Islam as well. People claim that the garden has Islamic features that are believed to represent paradise. Debbie Dawson, a character in the novel, who is a member of Save America from Islam, claims that

’[t]wo decades of multicultural appeasement have led to this: we’ve invited the enemy into our home to decorate.’...’Look at the history: Muslims build mosques wherever they’ve conquered. They could never get away with putting a mosque at this site, so they’ve come up with something sneakier: an Islamic garden, this martyr’s paradise, it’s like a code to jihadis. And they’ve smuggled it in our memorial – it’s the Trojan horse’ (Waldman 149).

The crisis in multiculturalism is a hot topic after 9/11, as people with an Islamic background are now watched with suspicion. This passage underscores the traumatised white American’s

reaction to Muslims and to the memorial design, as the Garden is believed to encourage more terrorist attacks instead of the mourning of 9/11. The characters that are members of Save America from Islam believe that the Garden resembles the promised paradise. It is said that “Islamic extremists would fatten their fantasies of eternity beneath the same trees, along the same paths, that she and other family members walked for consolation” (Waldman 150).

As the group against Mohammad Khan and his design gains more body, and the information that is spread about Khan and the Garden turns more sour, Claire’s values and beliefs start to crumble. While Claire vouched for Khan’s design, she starts to doubt her own integrity and morals once the press comes up with more dirt. She had wanted to focus on the design and to leave the designer out of the matter; however, this turns out to be problematic. In the novel, the editor of *The New Yorker* writes that

Khan’s opponents judge him by his fellow Muslims – not just those who brought down the towers but the significant number who believe that America brought the attack on itself, or that it was an inside job by the American government. This is unfair, even reprehensible. We should judge him only by his design. But this is where matters get tricky. In venturing into public space, the private imagination contracts to serve the nation and should necessarily abandon its own ideologies and beliefs. This memorial is not an exercise in self-expression, nor should it be a display of religious symbolism, however benign. (Waldman 159).

Hence, only judging Khan’s design proves to be impossible, because the collective and personal cannot be separated. The collective should stand above the personal, but the people’s own beliefs and ideologies, as well as the beliefs and the ideologies of Khan, cannot be rooted out. In this sense it becomes impossible to make the memorial, or any memorial for that matter, work; the collective is simply too diverse.

The character of Claire even proves that the convictions of one person can become unstable in the chaos of choosing the memorial and the aftermath of the selection. While Claire starts off by defending the design, not knowing who the architect is, she simply chooses it because it is the design that she thinks all family members of the victims would like. Moreover, when the jury finds out that the designer is an American Muslim, she stands by her decision, believing that tolerance is important and one of the pillars of American society. Claire claims that a 9/11-memorial designed by a Muslim “will send a message, a good message, that in America, it doesn’t matter what your name is...that your name is no bar

to entering a competition like this, or winning it” (Waldman 22). However, later on in the novel she starts to doubt her morals and the defence of the design. Still, she does not have problems with Khan’s beliefs, but her own morals and ideologies are problematic. Amir Khadem says that “[i]n this post-9/11 chaos, the discrepancy between what Claire as the civil defender of social values wants and what the grieving widow of a 9/11 victim is obliged to want marks the inadequacy of the ideological discourse in the midst of grief, panic, and hatred” (75). Hence, once again, the personal traumas and the collective trauma are strongly connected. Claire’s personal trauma of losing her husband relates to strongly to the trauma of the many widows that have lost their husband or wife in the attacks, making it impossible for Claire to make a decision or follow the path that is truly hers.

An organisation that also tries to defend Khan and his design is the Muslim American Coordinating Council. Its abbreviation MACC, according to Amir Khadem, serves as a wordplay on Mac, as in one of the most American businesses, McDonald’s, but also subtly refers to Mecca, thereby combining the two cultures (70). As the corporation tries to unite the American and Islamic culture, they will help to defend Khan’s design in exchange for Khan’s support and promotion of the American Muslim. When he refuses to do so, however, he gets into a heated argument about his beard with the lawyer that is appointed to him by the MACC. This again relates to the struggle that Khan has with his own identity, and the sensitivity of the American public concerning Muslim features. In the beginning of the novel, Khan already mentions that he changed after 9/11. As he says “he realised that the difference wasn’t in how he was being treated but in how he was behaving...He didn’t like this new, more cautious avatar, whose efforts at accommodation hinted at some feeling of guilt” (Waldman 30). His behaviour, however, is still maintained many years later, as he submitted his memorial design with a picture of him without a beard, even though at the time of the submission he had a beard. Clearly he has made an effort to be seen as a ‘safe Muslim’ by avoiding features that might scare the public or that might harm or work against him in any way. This also shows that the personal and the collective cannot be seen as two separate entities; however, there is no way to unite them either. Claire’s situation, the MACC’s situation, and Khan’s behaviour all prove that it is impossible to unite the binary oppositions that they face: Claire cannot reconcile her personal feelings with those of the public; the MACC cannot unite Americans and Muslims; and Khan cannot resolve the conflict between the way in which he is seen by the public and the way in which he wants the public to see him.

The different backgrounds of the people that suffer from the terrorist attacks and their struggles with their identity are not only personified by Mohammad Khan, but also by numerous other characters in the novel; the most important one being Asma. Amir Khadem claims that the novel

is among the first politically engaging post-9/11 novels that not only avoid the faulty head-on approach in the depiction of the Muslim terrorists but also counter the general reduction of public life to private affairs by creating a narrative of the American moral panic in the encounter with its Muslim minority. (68)

Her struggles after the attack are significant as she is an illegal immigrant, and therefore she has no voice in American society and remains invisible during the larger part of the novel. However, near the end of the novel, Asma breaks the silence and decides to speak up for all the people with a Muslim background that have lost a loved one when the towers were hit. At the hearing, she listens to the people, and after hearing only from Muslims and sympathisers supporting Khan's design or family members of the victims who oppose the design, she says:

My husband was a man of peace because he was a Muslim. That is our tradition. That is what our prophet, peace be upon him, taught...You have mixed up these bad Muslims, these bad people, and Islam...There are so many more Muslims who would never think of taking a life. You talk about paradise as a place for bad people. But that is not what we believe. That is not what the garden is for. The gardens of paradise are for men like my husband, who never hurt anyone...How can you pretend we and our traditions are not part of this place? Does my husband matter less than all of your relatives? (Waldman 296)

Her outrage during the hearing reflects on the panic of the white American people, who are so threatened by American Muslims that they feel as if they should not be part of society anymore unless they adhere to all the rules and traditions of white American society. The white Americans see the losses that the American Muslims suffer as a secular problem, one that is not as important or significant as their own losses and traumas. Asma's story in this sense, reprimands white American society and provides a counter narrative to 9/11 and its aftermath.

Asma's counter narrative does not stop at her finding her voice and proclaiming her experiences and view on the treatment of the American Muslims. Khadem mentions that "Asma's appearance does not resolve the problem and, in fact, extends it to another level" (76). By speaking at the hearing and denouncing herself as an illegal immigrant, she inadvertently sets in motion her own deportation as well as the deportation of many other illegal immigrants. At the end of the novel it is said that

[i]t was her choice to go, and yet not. In the days since her exposure as an alien, politicians had whipped the public into a frenzy of fear over the thousands of untracked Bangladeshi Muslims in New York, starting with Asma's own husband...[The governor] demanded that the federal government comb the Bangladeshi community for illegals and for terrorist links. (Waldman 322)

Asma decides that if it was her doing that so many immigrants would be deported, she herself could not stay. On her way back to Bangladesh, she is met by hundreds of people wanting to say goodbye. However, an anonymous person makes use of the chaos and the many faces present and stabs Asma. She dies on the pavement, and her assassin remains unknown; the case unsolved. Khadem then claims that "[h]er death, instead of her public defense, provides a resolution for the story, as Mo, heartbroken by the news, decides to voluntarily withdraw from the competition to simply end the calamitous chain of events that has progressed much too far" (76).

Asma's death indeed sets in motion the resolution of the story, and in many ways also the resolution of the 9/11-trauma. In the epilogue of the novel, all storylines come together and the characters once again try to atone for, apologise for, and explain their acts. Mohammad left America and went to the country of his roots, India, after he withdrew his design. In this last chapter he meets with a young documentary maker, Molly, and her cameraman, William. Molly believes that "the process of creating a memorial [is] itself part of the memorial," and she wants to revisit the process and the people involved in the process to see how they think about the memorial design twenty years later (Waldman 368). Mohammad says that America "had moved on, self-corrected, as it always did, that feverish time mostly forgotten," implying that the people have progressed, that white Americans and Muslims live together in peace thirty years after 9/11 and that most Americans would now have agreed with Mohammad's memorial design. Mohammad claims that he has also moved on, that "[f]rom catastrophe – from failure – had come his true path, his life calling, as if all

was meant to happen this way” (Waldman 377). The traumatic experience of 9/11 and the debacle of the memorial have thus had a great influence on his life, but eventually changed it for the better. His memorial became built, not as the 9/11 memorial in New York City, but as a private garden in India.

Claire, on the other hand, seems to have regretted the memorial debacle greatly, and believes that she should never have turned on the design like she did. When she’s asked if she ever went to see the memorial that was built instead of the Garden, she says:

Never. I went to the dedication, then never returned. A Garden of Flags? Hideous. As ugly as the whole process...by the time it got built I’m not sure anyone cared. I was sick of the whole thing, and it was my husband’s memorial! And so many more Americans ended up dying in the wars the attack prompted than in the attack itself that by the time they finished the memorial it seemed wrong to have expended so much effort and money. But it’s almost like we fight over what we can’t settle in real life through these symbols. They’re our nation’s afterlife. (Waldman 380)

Hence, she claims that the aftermath and afterlife of the attack and the people that were lost that day and the days following, are just as important as the event itself was. The memorial that was eventually built, according to Claire, never grasped the full concept of the trauma; it only commemorated the attacks, while the trauma of 9/11, that sustained much longer, was forgotten.

The symbolic memorial that comes closer to the trauma is then created by her son William, the cameraman of the documentary. As he goes to see the garden in India, he manages to make a signpost out of pebbles. In the beginning of the novel William is still a little boy and he suffers from nightmares in which his father, who has died on 9/11, cannot find his way home. Claire remembers her husband teaching their children to make cairns on their hikes so that they would always find their way back home. She decides to make a similar kind of trail with the children, so that their father might find his way home (Waldman 105-106). Now that William is grown up and in India interviewing and filming Mohammad Khan and his garden, he decides to honour their own self-designed memorial by making a cairn in Khan’s garden. In the last lines of the novel, William shows the footage of the garden and cairn to his mother. It is said that “[t]hat day flooded back, the shade of every stone, the shape of every mound they left for Cal to find his way, even as she lost hers. In Khan’s garden, her son had laid his hand. With a pile of stones, he had written a name” (Waldman 385). Hence,

thirty years after 9/11, Claire, as well as Mohammad, can find their closure. Mohammad has found his way and has received an apology from Claire for her behaviour, and Claire has finally found the right memorial for her husband, not in New York but in India. As her son has placed his personal memorial in the original design of the public memorial, the novel comes full circle and Claire's traumas seem to have healed in the process. Hence, in the end, the novel seems to suggest that different ideologies or private versus public ideas about memorialisation will forever remain separate, but can come together to resolve the trauma.

4.3 *Bleeding Edge*

Bleeding Edge was written by Thomas Pynchon and published in 2013. The novel is one of the most recent works of fiction that deal with 9/11. The novel follows Maxine Tarnow, who has lost her license as a fraud investigator, but nonetheless goes to look into the dealings of an internet company named hashslingrz, which is owned and run by the novel's villain Gabriel Ice. Albert Rolls claims in his review of the novel that

Bleeding Edge is not simply the tale of Maxine's investigation but an examination of the cultural direction America is headed in – has been headed in for over half a century – and of the effect the Internet and the 11 September, 2001, terrorist attacks have had on the pace with which we continue in that direction or find reasons to resist doing so. (“Review of *Bleeding Edge*, by Thomas Pynchon”)

Hence, there is a clear examination of American society, which is built on the idea of consumerism and capitalism and loses itself in the process. The novel has a highly apocalyptic undertone, as it begins on the first day of spring in 2001 and lives up to the moment the towers collapse in September of the same year, while the last few chapters of the novel are concerned with the immediate aftermath of the attack. Moreover, *Bleeding Edge* suggests there were signs that society had missed, but that could have predicted the attacks; thereby the novel comments on the mistakes that society keeps making, resulting in a continuous cycle of traumatic events and its influence on the daily lives of the people. Thus, the novel represents the trauma of 9/11 by focusing mainly on pre-9/11 times; the connection between 9/11 and previous traumatic experiences, such as the Cold War; binary oppositions, such as communal society versus polarised society; and the contrast between physical life versus virtual life.

The connection that this novel makes between 9/11 and previous traumatic events, such as the Cold War and Pearl Harbor, can be explained by using Michael Rothberg's theory

on multidirectional memory. Rothberg proposes to “consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative” (3). Hence, there is an interaction between memories and these memories enable societies to build themselves up after traumatic events by using references to pasts, for example, memories of previous traumatic experiences (Rothberg 5). Moreover, Rothberg observes that “today the Holocaust is frequently set against global histories of racism, slavery, and colonialism in an ugly contest of comparative victimization” (7). Hence, Rothberg believes that all histories and memories are connected. This can also be seen when looking at *Bleeding Edge* as the novel links traumatic events to each other, using the internet as a container of collective memory.

When Maxine is looking into the hashslingrz company, she gets caught up in the Deep Web hoping to find answers there. The Deep Web, however, is greatly different from the Surface Web as there is no order and any kind of information can be found by hacking into the sites. All collective memory thus seems to be stored in the Deep Web, and many links between the past and the present are visible there. Moreover, the Deep Web, and especially the project that is called DeepArcher – a wordplay on ‘departure’ – is portrayed as a utopian world in which earthly time and space do not exist, which becomes clear from the following quote:

The Archer, has journeyed to the edge of a great abyss. Down the road behind, in forced perspective, recede the sunlit distances of the surface world, wild country, farmland, suburbs, expressways, misted city towers. The rest of the screen is claimed by the abyss—far from an absence, it is a darkness pulsing with whatever light was before light was invented (Pynchon 75).

Joseph Darlington claims that with this quote “Pynchon posits the existence of an Internet ‘still pure’ – free from post-9/11 government surveillance and corporate data harvesting” (248). After, ‘departure,’ or 9/11, however, this pure form of internet will no longer exist.

While the Deep Web seems unaffected at the beginning of the novel, halfway through the utopian world is faltering as 9/11 gets closer. The Deep Web is slowly invaded and controlled by the Surface Web as it is said that

once they get down here, everything’ll be suburbanized faster than you can say ‘late capitalism.’ Then it’ll be just like up there in the shallows. Link by link, they’ll bring it

all under control, safe and respectable...Anybody still wants his freedom'll have to saddle up and head somewhere else. "If you're looking for bargains," advises Sandwichgrl, "there are some nice ones around the Cold War sites, but prices may not stay reasonable for long." (Pynchon 241)

The unlimited freedom and the disappearance from earthly time and space of the Deep Web is destroyed by the need for power and control, as the Surface Web is conquering more and more space. The Surface Web, in this respect, seems to be a metaphor for American society; and its government because it only focuses on having power and control and because it stimulates capitalism.

Moreover, the novel suggests that it is the American government and their capitalist values that brought on the destruction of American society. In the novel the blame of the attacks on 9/11 is laid on the American government, and the event is linked to Pearl Harbor as it is said that

"Those fucking Nazis in Washington needed a pretext for a coup, now they've got it. This country is headed up shit's creek, and it isn't rugriders we should worry about, it's Bush and the gang." Maxine isn't so sure. "It seems like none of them know what they're doing right now, just caught by surprise, more like Pearl Harbor." "That's what they want you to believe. And who says Pearl Harbor wasn't a setup?" They're actually discussing this? "Forget doing it to your own people, why would anybody do this to their own economy?" "You never heard of 'You've got to spend money to make money'? Tithing back to the dark gods of capitalism." (Pynchon 317-18)

Hence, the American government is linked to the Second World War in portraying them as Nazis, and the attacks on the Twin Towers are linked to the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The novel thus seems to suggest that 9/11 was the pretext for a coup that they had been planning to gain more power on society. The conspiracy theory that is then implied is that the government is to blame for the attacks on 9/11 and that American society needed to be destroyed in order to gain power and to justify all the new security measures, such as checking and surveying everybody on the internet and taking over the Deep Web with the Surface Web to make society more inclined to spend money. Again, the need for power and control, and stimulating capitalism seems to result in a polarised society that in turn leads to radical actions to save the country.

Furthermore, the previous traumatic events seems to suggest that America is a self-destructive country in many ways as it has become too postmodernist. In the novel there is a Deep Web conversation that describes how the world has evolved and how it has brought danger upon itself:

“There is a terrible prison, most informants believe it’s located here in the U.S., though we also have Russian input comparing it unfavorably to the worst parts of the gulag. With classic reluctance they will not name it. Wherever it is, brutal is too kind a description. They kill you but keep you alive. Mercy is unknown. “It’s supposed to be a kind of boot camp for military time travellers...navigating Time is an unforgiving discipline. It requires years of pain, hard labor, and loss, and there is no redemption – of, or from, anything. (Pynchon 242-43)

Hence, the apocalyptic character of the novel again predicts another upcoming traumatic event. Even though it does not suggest what kind of event it is, it warns Maxine for the terrible things that are happening in America and within the society. It serves to show that no one is to be trusted and suggests that when the event happens there is no chance of going back in time; there will be no redemption for what is about to happen.

The destruction of the nation and American society is brought on by the binary opposition of the physical versus the virtual. Pynchon suggests that the boundary between the physical world and the virtual world is constantly trespassed by something that he calls the posthuman being (Collado-Rodríguez 229). According to Francisco Collado-Rodríguez, “Pynchon describes the posthuman individual as heavily traumatized, thus becoming easy prey for the unknown rulers of a social system whose aim has become the control of the new virtual sites of information” (230). He goes on by saying that the virtual reality that we live in is not only politically dangerous, but also biologically. Virtual reality gives people the feeling of power, which results in internet addictions and a polarised society in which everybody lives in their own bubble of individuality. Virtual reality and a polarised society then result in destructive behaviour. However, as American society gets severely traumatised after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the need for emotions and human affection becomes more apparent and is the only way to heal the trauma (Collado-Rodríguez 230). Hence, it works the same way as the quote about spending money to get money; in this case, the government is assumed to have killed in order to re-establish life. The only way then to recover from the loss and the trauma is thus by re-entering the physical world and leaving the virtual world, which has

become so important to modern life, behind. The virtual world in the novel is metaphorically left behind when the novel's villain, Gabriel Ice, "has gone silent" (Pynchon 468). When his company goes silent, there is no need for Maxine to keep tracking Gabriel and hashslingrz and thus no reason to remain in the virtual world. Hence, in the last few chapters of the novel, Maxine indeed returns to the physical world and spends her time focusing on her family.

After the attacks of 9/11, it can indeed be seen that family life and friendships become more important in society. The main character, Maxine, fills her house with friends and family right after 9/11. Two of her friends come to stay with her, because they cannot get into their houses. In the novel, it is said that "[i]t's been happening all over the neighbourhood. Refugees, prevented from entering their apartments in Lower Manhattan, whether fancy-schmancy or modest, have been showing up at the doors of friends farther uptown" (Pynchon 332). Hence, instead of finding a room in a hotel until the site is cleaned up enough to move back into their apartments, they choose to be with friends. Moreover, the relationship between Maxine and her estranged husband also gets better after the attacks. Their marriage flares up, and it is said that

Horst shortly after 11 September having shifted his sleeping arrangements into Maxine's room, to the inconvenience of neither and to what, if in fact she ever went into it with anybody, would be the surprise of very few. On the other hand, whose business is it? It's still too much for her to get her own head around, how much she's missed him. (Pynchon 332)

Hence, before 9/11, Maxine was living in an individual, polarised, and virtual society but now that the towers have collapsed, it seems as if the walls that she has built around her have collapsed with them. As it is only after the attacks that she realises how much she has missed her husband, it becomes clear that a traumatised society builds itself up through re-establishing communities to share the experience and to heal together.

Moreover, the novel also comments on the polarised society before 9/11 as the marriage of Cornelia and Rocky Slagiatt is explained. Rockwell Slagiatt is an Italian-American capitalist and alleged member of the mafia, whom Maxine meets because he has just invested in a company named hwgaahwgh, which might be connected to hashslingrz. Rolls states that Slagiatt is an acronym for 'seemed like a good idea at the time,' which fits perfectly to his lifestyle ("Review of *Bleeding Edge*, by Thomas Pynchon"). His status as an immigrant and his marriage to Cornelia is commented on as it is said that

she, charmed at the notion of marrying into an Immigrant Family, expecting Mediterranean Soul, matchless cooking, an uninhibited embrace of life including not-quite-imaginable Italian sex activities, he meanwhile looking forward to initiation into the Mysteries of Class...plus a limitless supply of old money...Imagine their mutual dismay on learning the real situation. (Pynchon 278-79)

Hence, there are many differences between the stereotypes that Rocky and Cornelia thought they would personify and reality. Rocky's immigrant family seems to have given up the greater part of their heritage to conform to the American lifestyle in which "the closest thing to an Italian feast was to order in from Pizza Hut," while Cornelia's family is not as wealthy and classy as Rocky had presumed them to be and are more like "a tribe of nose-picking vulgarians with the fashion sense and conversational skills of children raised by wolves" (Pynchon 279). Hence, the stereotypes of immigrants are just as wrong as the stereotypical American society, which might lead to the conclusion that the Americans are more savage than immigrants are imagined to be.

Going back to the times before the attacks, another important theme that is used in the novel is the flow of information that society deals with on a daily basis. The novel comments on this flow of information in several ways; before 9/11 there is a constant flow of information that can be found on the Deep Web and Maxine gets sent information by the hackers helping her with her investigation into hashslings. There are two instances in which it is hinted that, if the information had been interpreted in the right way and if action had been undertaken, 9/11 could have been prevented. However, the constant flow of information seems to make it difficult to make the distinction between information that is significant and information that is useless. Moreover, society seems to be confused as how to interpret information or how to act when they possess important information. Collado-Rodríguez says that

in the fictional world of Pynchon's novel the DVD given to Maxine serves the purpose to know March Kelleher's political interpretation of the terrorist attacks, who openly blames Bush and the Mossad for them and for the political use they did of the events. In September 2013, when *Bleeding Edge* was released, similar interpretations of the attacks were anything but new, but the association of terrorism to bleeding-edge

technology points to Pynchon's conviction that the new ways through which information is transmitted represent a permanent danger for democratic values. (235)

The information flow and the source of this information is one of the most important themes in the novel, as it reflects on the danger of information, and the manipulation that is involved. Collado-Rodríguez mentions that *Bleeding Edge* also hints to the manipulation of information in the posthuman world. He says that the manipulation of information is done by terrorist networks, so that they can control society and in that way use information as a terrorist weapon (235). Thus, the posthuman society is hungry for every kind of information; however, the information flow is often manipulated for the benefit of terrorists. The information that is not manipulated and finds its way into the hands of the story's protagonist Maxine does not mean that 9/11 could have been prevented; it merely serves to show that the overload of information only confuses posthuman society. Even though society craves for more information, it does not mean that people know what to do with this information or that they act on their knowledge.

An instance in which Maxine has knowledge, but does not know what to do with it, is when she gets the before mentioned DVD, that is allegedly filmed by Reg, and shows three unidentified men up on the roof of an undefined building aiming at a passenger jet and preparing to fire. The DVD hence predicts the attack of 9/11, but nothing is done with this information because the characters are too unsure of the truth behind the DVD. When Maxine first receives the DVD, it is said that

His only targets appear to be the Stinger guys. Even more interesting, he is making no efforts at concealment, as if the Stinger guys know he's there, all right, and aren't doing anything about it. A short while later, the guy with the mobile points into the sky and everything tightens into action, the crew aiming at and acquiring their target, which looks like a Boeing 767, heading south. They track the plane and go through motions like they're preparing to fire, but they don't fire. (Pynchon 266)

This passage hence prefigures the planned 9/11 attacks. However, the information is manipulated, as the terrorists seem to be hiding in plain sight. Therefore, the characters do not do anything with the information except for talking about it in their own circle. It is not until after the attacks that March Kelleher, Maxine's friend, posts the video on her weblog and even then it serves no other purpose than to blame Bush.

The few weeks right after the attack are depicted quite thoroughly. The differences between the story that is told and what some people believe has actually happened is explained when Maxine says:

If you read nothing but the Newspaper of Record, you might believe that New York City, like the nation, united in sorrow and shock, has risen to the challenge of global jihadism, joining a righteous crusade Bush's people are now calling the War on Terror. If you go to other sources – the Internet, for example – you might get a different picture. Out in the vast undefined anarchism of cyberspace, among the billions of self-resonant fantasies, dark possibilities are beginning to emerge. (Pynchon 327).

Hence, the manipulation of information is still something that happens even after the event. It is thus not only used as a weapon for terrorist networks, but it is also employed by the American government and presumably the press. If this American government manipulates the information that they bring out into the public space, they do this for the same reason as the terrorist networks have done; to keep society subdued and stable.

Moreover, the site of the attack, Ground Zero, is linked to the Cold War as it is said that the term was “taken from the scenarios of nuclear war so popular in the sixties” (Pynchon 328). Right after the purpose of this analogy is revealed when Maxine says:

This was nowhere near a Soviet nuclear strike on downtown Manhattan, yet those who repeat “Ground Zero” over and over do so without shame or concern for etymology. The purpose is to get people cranked up in a certain way. Cranked up, scared, and helpless. (Pynchon 328)

This relates back to the Rothberg's theory of multidirectional memory as a term that would have been used during the Cold War is now used for an attack that in fact has little to do with Russia, communism, or the Cold War. The only reason it is used is that the term covers the same feeling of a threatening situation and a fear for a certain group of people.

Furthermore, the atmosphere in and view on the city as well as the results of 9/11 are portrayed in several ways. The city is described as follows:

The plume of smoke and finely divided structural and human debris has been blowing southwest...but you can smell it all the way uptown. A bitter chemical smell of death and burning that no one in memory has ever in this city smelled before and which lingers for weeks. Though everybody south of 14th Street has been directly touched one way or another, for much of the city the experience has come to them mediated, mostly by television – the farther uptown, the more secondhand the moment. (Pynchon 327)

The city is thus portrayed as the site of a traumatic event of great proportions. Even though not everyone in New York City has seen the event happening, they are influenced by the event, just like the people who have experienced it first-hand. However, as the quote just above suggests, the people who have been touched by the event secondhandedly might have been influenced by a manipulated story that is not necessarily the right or most truthful story. Moreover, irony and humour have no place in society anymore and has become collateral damage of 9/11. It is said that “[e]verything has to be literal now” (Pynchon 335). There is no room for anything funny or make-believe as reality – in the way that is acceptable according to the American government and the media – has to come first. Taking things seriously and literally seems the way to accomplish some kind of healing, because everything that society had thought to be truthful before did not seem to be right after 9/11. As society entirely changed after the event, the values that they used to have changed, too.

Not only does society blame the American government, there are also two instances in which the American society blames itself and its reliance on capitalism. The first instance in which this happens is when Maxine has a conversation with her guru and they say:

“You remember those twin statues of the Buddha that I told you about? Carved out of a mountain in Afghanistan, that got dynamited by the Taliban back in the spring? Notice anything familiar?” “Twin Buddhas, twin towers, interesting coincidence, so what.” “The Trade Center towers were religious too. They stood for what this country worships above anything else, the market, always the holy fuckin market.” (Pynchon 338)

The trauma of 9/11 is thus connected to the bombing of the Twin Buddhas in Afghanistan because it is a religious war, at least that is how it is seen from the side of the Taliban. As the national American religion seems to be capitalism or the market, the Taliban believe that the

Twin Towers were the prime target, as they reflect on this American religion. The second instance in which the American society gets the blame is when Maxine talks to Vyrva, another friend, who believes that Americans were attacked because al-Qaeda did not agree with their lifestyle. When Maxine asks “American neglect of family values brings al-Qaeda in on the airplanes and takes the Trade Center down?,” Vyrva responds by saying that “[t]hey saw how we are, what we’ve become. How soft, how neglectful. Self-indulgent. They figured us for an easy target, and they were right” (Pynchon 363). Hence, the American values of capitalism, self-indulgence, and loss of family life are represented as the cause for the attacks on 9/11.

4.4 General Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the two novels that are written after 2011 are very different from each other. The only overlap between the two novels is the opposition between communal versus polarised or collective versus personal that they both convey. While in *The Submission* collective ideas about the trauma do not match with the personal memories of the trauma, preventing the people to agree on a way to memorialise the trauma; in *Bleeding Edge* the communal life of the family does not seem to be compatible with the individualistic, polarised society. Hence, in *Bleeding Edge*, the communal lifestyle is completely forgotten before the attacks and is only re-established after 9/11. On the other hand, *The Submission* keeps struggling with the differences between collective and personal until the very end of the novel in which the two come together when Claire’s son, William, places his own personal memorial in the Garden that should have been the communal memorial.

It is difficult to compare the novels in any other way, because they are so different. *The Submission* is about the memorialisation of 9/11 and reflects on the traumas that happened as a result of 9/11, such as the difficulties in forming an identity or belonging to a group, the struggles of memorialising 9/11, and the hatred and violence towards Muslims after the attack. In this sense, the scope of the novel is quite broad, as it focuses on different subgroups within American society. On the other hand, *Bleeding Edge* does not focus on any of these subjects and is mainly concerned with the times before 9/11, as only a small portion of the novel deals with the attacks itself and the aftermath. Hence, it centres on traumatic experiences of the past, such as the Cold War and Pearl Harbor and connects these national past experiences to 9/11. Moreover, the internet and the influence of the virtual world on the physical world is explained and serves to show the dangers of the twenty-first century in which everybody is individualistic and not oriented towards family life.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it appears that Keniston and Quinn were right when they said that “[e]arly works often attempt to directly capture and convey the events of 9/11 and emotional responses to the events; as time has passed, the approach to the attacks has become more nuanced” (3). Looking back at the four novels that have been analysed, it has indeed become clear that the first two novels, written before 2011, deal with the events on 9/11 itself and the direct aftermath, which makes for stories full of personal emotions in relation to the event. The two novels that were written after 2011 are more nuanced in the sense that the emotional responses to the event of 9/11 are, for the greater part, left out. The novels do not simply deal with the event and the direct aftermath, but broaden their scope by explaining the traumas that were caused after or by the attacks and by commenting on the year before 9/11.

It seems that in *The Writing on the Wall* and *Falling Man* the focus lies on the personal responses to the attack, and the traumas are not fully resolved during the course of the novel, which suggests that the 9/11 trauma is so overwhelming and all-absorbing that the characters in these novels cannot find closure. Furthermore, the novels both connect personal traumas to the trauma that they suffered after 9/11 and physical traumas are portrayed in detail in *Falling Man*. The themes of ambiguous loss and survivor guilt, as explained by Pauline Boss and Hutson et al., are clearly visible in both novels. However, as the trauma moves further into the distance, it appears that these themes are not present in *The Submission* and *Bleeding Edge*. The personal responses are merely left out of the stories as the novels only note the personal responses by fleetingly mentioning that William misses his father and that Maxine has missed her husband, Horst. Moreover, there are no references to any physical traumas in the latter two novels and ambiguous loss and survivor guilt are not as important for the story as it was in the first two novels.

Furthermore, one of the subquestions of this thesis was whether there would be any form of objectivity or distance. In the first two novels, as said, there is no affirmative closure and thus the trauma remains like an open wound to the characters. In the latter two novels, however, the distance and objectivity are created by focusing on the commemoration of 9/11 or the year leading up to 9/11. In *The Submission* there is a form of objectivity because the novel not only focuses on the WASP society, but centres on the Muslim society for a large part of the novel. It is interesting to see how this novel uses Muslim characters to provide a counter narrative to the white American story, thereby creating a form of objectivity. The distance in the novel is created by focusing on the memorialisation, instead of the event itself. People are healing from their 9/11 trauma, but are often hindered in this process because of all

the other traumas connected to 9/11. In the epilogue of the novel it becomes clear that only thirty years after 9/11 it is possible to fully heal the trauma and to find closure. In other words, it takes a whole generation to move out of the stages of grief, as explained by Karin Jordan, as it only ends when William places his personal memorial in Mohammad Khan's garden. In *Bleeding Edge* a sense of distance from the events is created by depicting the year before it all happened. In this way the novel only gets to the actual trauma near the end, and it is only discussed in a few chapters. *Bleeding Edge* mainly focuses on the (trans)national traumas that have preceded 9/11, and finds ways in which these traumas are similar to or in a sense predict 9/11. It seems that society is already highly traumatised and that this results in the polarised society as it is portrayed at the beginning of the novel. It hence suggests that the trauma of 9/11 needed to happen to shock society out of the traumatised stage that they had lived in since previous traumatic experiences, such as the Second World War, Pearl Harbor, and the Cold War. Shocking society out of this traumatic stages and into another form of grief, namely terrorist grief, results in the building of a communal society that is orientated towards friendship and family.

The role of the media is also an interesting theme to follow in 9/11 fiction throughout the years. In the novels written before 2011, the media are clearly visible in relation to 9/11. In *The Writing on the Wall* the role of the media is quite substantial, as the footage of the collapsing towers is used frequently and the speeches that the President gave after the attack are mentioned several times. It is even hinted that the media influenced the day after the attack so much that even if a person had not seen it in real life, one could feel like he or she had witnessed the event because the same footage is shown over and over again, thereby making it not only a national trauma, but even a transnational trauma. In *Falling Man* the media also have a prominent role in relation to Lianne, who follows the news and often reads about the attacks. Furthermore, the media play a role in connection to David Janiak, who tries to reverse the decision of the media to censor the pictures of the falling man by doing his performance art.

In the latter two novels, however, the role of the media is less substantial. In *The Submission* the media comment on the memorial's designer and in *Bleeding Edge* it is not so much the traditional media that have a role as the internet. The only comment that is made on the media in this novel is that the information that is brought out in the papers is not necessarily the truth, but more likely to be manipulated by the government to subdue society. The internet, on the other hand, seems to give out information that is not quite objective and might contain extremities, but might eventually come closer to the truth.

Thus, in answer to the main question, to what extent and in which ways does the representation of the 9/11 trauma change in fiction published between 2005 and 2015, it can be argued that there is a clear shift between the novels written before 2011 and those that were written after 2011. There is an evident change in the way in which the trauma is represented and the novels seem to evolve from a focus on personal responses to the trauma and the immediate aftermath to the inclusion of the traumas prior to or resulting from the 9/11 trauma. The novels published after 2011 are hence more distant. They place the event in the great order of things, of history, which suggests that society has changed and is in the process of resolving the trauma. There is no undisputed closure in the two literary works written after 2011 but, as *The Submission* predicts, it might take about thirty years, or a whole new generation, to resolve a trauma completely.

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