

**9/11 Trauma and Function of Literary Devices in DeLillo's *Falling Man*  
and Walter's *The Zero***



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## **Abstract**

This thesis will examine the function of literary techniques in first *Falling Man* by Don DeLillo (2007) and then *The Zero* by Jess Walter (2006) and relate it to the classic trauma theory approach by Caruth and contemporary approaches of contextualisation. The manner in which literary devices reflect trauma symptoms will be discussed in this thesis. This analysis will be done through close reading and then this thesis will contextualise these findings within the circumstances and setting of 9/11, and the response of the then Bush administration and media. This thesis answers the question how literary techniques function in 9/11 trauma theory.

Key words: 9/11, trauma fiction, trauma theory, trauma, *The Zero*, Jess Walter, *Falling Man*, Don DeLillo

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## Introduction

This thesis will analyse 9/11 trauma fiction and the function of the novel's prevalent literary devices and form in the portrayal of trauma. This thesis anticipates that the novels' tone of voice, narrative perspective, and point of view reflect the symptoms of 9/11 trauma. The question this thesis will answer is how the literary devices used in the novels function in portraying the 9/11 trauma symptoms. The novels *Falling Man* (2008) by Don DeLillo and *The Zero* (2006) by James Walter shall be discussed.

The reason for choosing 9/11 trauma fiction lies not only in the significant impact it had on American and Western culture, but also in the “prevalent and enduring” post-9/11 mentality in America (Keeble 190). This means that the event is still visible in the culture of America. The terrorist attack has happened over a decade ago and the attack is still a subject for literature, film, and scholarly articles and books. Some publications in 2016 include *Towers Falling* by Jewell Parker Rhodes, *The Memory of Things* by Gae Polisner, and *All We Have Left* by Wendy Mills. However, the genre also includes films; this year a blockbuster film named *Nine Eleven* by director Martin Guigui will be released, starring A-list stars Charlie Sheen and Whoopi Goldberg. The genre is still developing in literature, film, and other media; the post-9/11 mentality is still prevalent in American culture and media.

In order to analyse trauma fiction, this thesis is based on the works rooted in (literary) trauma theory, which will be explained further in “Chapter 1, “Methodology”. Trauma theory and trauma fiction are of the contemporary age; in fact, trauma in its contemporary meaning, “a kind of harm caused by witnessing violence or abuse has picked up considerable legal and popular currency especially since the 1960s and onward” (Trimaco and Depret 33). The word used to mean a physical wound instead of a mental one. Trauma and related mental conditions were first established with shell-shocked Great War veterans. Contemporary trauma theory has seen a rise in discourse since the publication by Cathy Caruth in 1996, because the analysis model proposed in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* lays the focus of the trauma on “inherent contradictions of experience and language” (Michelle Balaev 1). Thus “the unspeakable void became the dominant concept in criticism for imagining trauma’s function in literature” (1); this idea of the thing one cannot say due the trauma became the classic model in trauma theory. As the definition of trauma changed, so developed the models in trauma theory, laying the focus on memory and defining the trauma within frameworks of “social psychology theories in addition to neurobiological

theories”, thus the focus of trauma changed from the concept of the unspeakable to other variables which contextualise the trauma. This contextualisation is of explained further in an earlier essay by Balaev, *Trends in Literary Trauma*, in which she discusses the concepts of trauma theory. According to the text "literary trauma theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless fright that destroys identity" and "[n]ovels represent this disruption between the self and others by carefully describing the place of trauma because the physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural history imbedded in landscapes that define the character's identity and the meaning of the traumatic experience” (149). Here she explains that place is central to analysing a trauma novel. In the case of this thesis, the cultural and social ideology, values, and culture of the United States and New York are essential to analysing 9/11 trauma novels. In other words, a 9/11 trauma novel should be analysed in a context that embodies 9/11, for example the American views on the Twin Towers. Further discussion of methodology and theory will follow in “Chapter 1: Methodology”, but I would like to assert the relationship between trauma and location in the introduction already.

As trauma theory is still developing, so is the field of 9/11 literary criticism and theory. At first, there was the crisis of representation: authors and other people did not know how to express and explain what happened to them in words, which can be seen by the first wave of novels that played with visual elements, lacking or seeking the vocabulary to describe the event. Another wave of literature consisted of several works focussing on domestic relationships; these novels portraying issues in marriage, family, and other relationships were followed by fierce criticism and debate. The rise of novels focussing on these domestic issues with seemingly 9/11 as a setting has been topic of debate, as they were seemed to put 9/11 on the background instead of the foreground (Keeble 2-8).

The American government, the Bush administration at the time, and media tried to explain the matter and advocate heroism and unyielding courage. They proposed a heroic narrative, trying to make heroes out of policemen and firemen, focussing on the masculine to provide care and support through this attack and its aftermath. The heroes of 9/11 were those who helped during the attacks, which were policemen, firemen, and even regular people. Furthermore, new anti-terrorist agencies arose while the government launched the state of exceptionalism, which means that the state and its laws do not operate as usual and certain government agencies are allowed to arrest people on suspicion alone. There were novels that

provided a “counter-narrative” against this heroic ideology in order to critique the Bush administration and their actions after 9/11.

There is a relation between trauma fiction and the literary devices used to portray the trauma. When discussing trauma fiction, these literary devices, stylistic and formal elements are usually examined, because these support the portrayal of trauma. For example, Kristine A. Miller compares interviews of traumatised police officers with *The Zero* in her essay “Reading and Writing the Post-9/11 Cop: Trauma, Personal Testimony, and Jess Walter’s *The Zero*”. When reading trauma novels in general, the approach to some fiction is non-realist, the fiction is not chronological; the style is very visual using photographs or distorted typography, or other elements to portray the main character's trauma symptoms. As stated above, the traumatic event and the symptoms following the trauma are linked, meaning that the trauma has to be contextualised. So, when analysing 9/11 trauma fiction, it is relevant to analyse how the style functions in the trauma of 9/11. When analysing the earlier mentioned novels, how do the literary devices function in the portrayal of trauma symptoms?

The two novels chosen for this thesis were written in the wake of the attack and the following novels seem concern themselves with representing the trauma after the attack and are relevant texts to the research question of this thesis. Because the two chapters will provide analyses, this introduction will provide a summary of the novels. *Falling Man* by Don DeLillo published in 2007 revolves around Keith, the main character who walked out of the Twin Towers right after the attack. The focus lays on how Keith Neudecker and his relationships changed after the attack. Despite instinctively going to his estranged wife’s, named Lianne, they never seem to reconnect and he begins an affair with Florence, another 9/11 survivor. At the end of the novel Keith flees to Las Vegas to become a professional poker player and Lianne becomes obsessed with religion. Prevalent in this novel seems to be the shifting perspectives and point of views. The novel portrays the effect of the 9/11 trauma on the domestic sphere, while rejecting the hero-narrative the American government and media tried to impose. Set a few days after the attack, *The Zero* by Jess Walter follows Brian Remy, a cop, who experienced the attack and now gives tours around Ground Zero with his colleague Paul Guterak. The novel deals with the aftershocks of the attack through his eyes. Brian Remy’s personal and professional life and his memory are disrupted and the novel’s structure reflects on this. Remy has an ex-wife and a son, who pretends he died in 9/11. Furthermore, Remy has developed a split personality due to 9/11 and the other personality has accepted anti-terrorist missions by a new anti-terrorist agency. His mission is to identify



the whereabouts of a woman named March, who is suspected of having relations to terrorists. The other Remy tries to find her through establishing contact with March's sister named April. During this mission the other Remy pretends to be a terrorist to catch others, but people from other agencies also pretend to be a terrorist and his mission turns out to be a wild-goose chase as he goes from one fake terrorist to another and from one futile lead to another. The other Remy is made clear in the novel by use of irony, so the reader never reads through his point of view.

To interpret these novels, this thesis refers to several other works on 9/11 fiction. The use of literary devices in trauma theory is discussed in *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* (2012) by Michelle Balaev, in which she relates literary devices to symptoms of trauma. One is Arin Keeble's *The 9/11 Novel: Trauma, Politics and Identity*, which analyses several 9/11 novels to trauma theory and 9/11. Arin Keeble has written about 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. This text is a response to the debate on domestic novels on 9/11, attempts to mediate between the criticism of the domestic novel and politicising and contextualising the trend of the domestic 9/11 novel between trauma and politics. Another example the framework of this thesis is built on is Jesse Kavadlo's *American Popular Culture in the Era of Terror*, which analyses popular but also acclaimed American film and literature in relation to the post-9/11 mentality and theory. This thesis follows their leads and will analyse the novels in a similar manner by relating the characters' trauma and symptoms to the form of the text; this manner and approach shall be explained in the methodology chapter.

This bachelor thesis is structured as follows; first, I explain the methodology used to analyse the novels, and then will analyse the novels, one novel per chapter. The thesis employs a chronology of the novel's narratives, starting with the novel closest to the event (despite being published last in 2008) and ending with the novel furthest way (published in 2006). The second chapter of the thesis will analyse *Falling Man*, because the novel begins right after the terror attack. The third chapter will analyse *The Zero*, because this novel starts five days after the attack, right after the main character wakes up after a psychotic episode. The actual publication dates range from 2006 to 2008, and the two year difference seems irrelevant, thus opting for a fictional chronology to structure this thesis. By focussing on, amongst others, the narrative perspective, tone of voice, and imagery, this thesis seeks to answer the question how these literary devices function with the subject of 9/11 and trauma.

## Methodology

This thesis uses texts that find the cultural and social ideology, values, and culture of The United States and New York essential to analysing 9/11 trauma novels. They attempt to contextualise the literature while including classic approaches of trauma theory by, amongst others, Caruth. This thesis utilises a similar approach and builds on the methodology of Arin Keeble and other 9/11 trauma texts, which will be introduced and explained in this chapter. While these authors find contextualisation of trauma important to 9/11 fiction, early trauma theory remains central to trauma fiction and thus this thesis relies on *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (2008) by Michelle Balaev and *Trauma Fiction* (2004) by Anne Whitehead to provide a theoretical base to support interpretations. Trauma theory and close reading will be applied to make said interpretations.

Over the last two decades, trauma theory gained popularity with literary scholars; this was first established by the works of Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996) and Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (1996). Tal and Caruth view the trauma as belonging to the field of pathology; while Tal seems to rely on structuralism, Caruth relies on psychoanalysis to provide a base for literary analysis. While both works have led to an increase of other texts in trauma theories, this thesis relies on Caruth's approach, because her approach is referred to as the classic model by the trauma theory critics. The classic model is an approach that treats trauma as a psychological paradox in which people experience the trauma in a daze and get the symptoms later. As result they are unable to discuss the cause of the trauma and its effects. The classic model derives from the concept of trauma as an "unrepresentable" event—or as Caruth named it in *Unclaimed Experience*, "an unspeakable void", which she defines as "an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language". This approach is based on Jacques Lacan's concept of lacking and Freud's psychoanalytic concept of experience as something that predates language. In short, this approach or model describes trauma as "intense personal suffering" (Caruth vii); this suffering cripples the Self, because the trauma disables the sufferer to discuss it. This mental wound disables the self to function as it normally would; the person becomes "possessed by an image or event" (Caruth 4-5), meaning the person suffering from the trauma does not experience the event at the time, but the effects of the trauma manifest belated. This manifestation of possession means that the person relives or avoids the trauma, and the same event might not affect everyone similarly (as will be discussed in *Falling Man*). A trauma creates a gap, wherein "a force of the event"

lies, which means that there is a gap between the person and the trauma that is caused by the trauma. This gap is followed by impairments or ailments, both physical and mental, which are caused by the trauma and are its symptoms (though these differ for each person). Freud writes that “it may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident [...]. [H]owever, he develops a series of grave psychical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed only to his shock” (109). Yet, these symptoms of the trauma are not immediate and the person traumatised seems to be unable to discuss the trauma fully, because during and right after the traumatic event, nothing seems to be wrong with the Self. This is known as, amongst others, the unspeakable void, inexpressible event, and other synonyms that try to describe this paradox that try to define or constitute trauma.

The focus on psychoanalysis, experience, and language enabled linguists and literary critics to use this concept in literature, despite its contradictory nature. As a reaction to this model, multiple models based on different values concerning trauma theory followed; as discussed in the introduction, the trauma theory developed along with developments in psychology and the definition of trauma. These alternative models provide different answers for the influence of trauma on language; these models depend on social psychology and neurobiological theories. Baleav supports these alternative models that provide a different answer to Caruth’s model and therefore are “dubious the assertion of trauma’s intrinsic dissociation” (Baleav 2). Contemporary trauma critics now see trauma theory as more than the “unspeakable” model and combine trauma theory with, amongst others, postcolonial theory. Trauma theory is now more often combined with different frameworks in order to create a meaning with social and cultural contexts. These new theoretical approaches invoke different questions compared to the classic model and the new models allow for broader discussions with regards to trauma and trauma theory; approaches that discuss the “harm caused by a traumatic experience, but also the many sources that inform the definitions, representations, and consequences of traumatic experience” (Balaev 1-6). Thus contemporary trauma theory intersects with multiple other fields, for example feminism or post-colonialism. Contemporary trauma theory also contextualises the trauma to the event instead of the person, and such are the works that discuss 9/11 trauma fiction. The following examples include texts referred to in this thesis. *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* (2011) by Martin Randall argues that “the images of 9/11 did not ‘obliterate’ language with its stunning visual symbolism but the terrorist attacks do pose significant and hugely complex challenges for writers of fiction”

(18). This trend of images and the inability to put in words the feelings of trauma is resonant through the novels subject of this thesis. *Literature After 9/11* (2008) edited by Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn examines “the ways that literature has participated in the larger cultural process of representing and interpreting the events of September 11, 2001” (2). This text provides multiple views on 9/11 fiction, but trauma theory is a frequent approach and method; the chapter “Witnessing 9/11: Art Spiegelman and the Persistence of Trauma” by Richard Glejzer is based on Caruth’s idea of trauma and “Foer, Spiegelman, and 9/11’s Timely Traumas” by Mitchum Huehls is based on the idea of Freud’s idea of the temporal trauma, which is one of the base concepts for Caruth’s trauma theory models. However, the text also features chapters based on other theories, which allows for a multifaceted view on 9/11 fiction, rather than only trauma fiction. *Portraying 9/11* (2011) is similar to *Literature After 9/11* and tries to “seek to understand culture after 9/11” (5), but this book extends its essays to include essays on performance as well as literature and comics. Trauma theory can also be found in texts that place themselves further away from 9/11 trauma fiction. For example, trauma theory is used in *The Selling of 9/11 How A National Tragedy Became a Commodity* (2005). The introduction relies on trauma theory to discuss national trauma as cause for the increase of sales of patriotic commodities. *American Popular Culture in the Era of Terror* (2015) by Jesse Kavadlo discusses the impact of 9/11 on popular media, including *Falling Man*. While the focus on the unspeakable experience remains important, the cultural and social context of 9/11 and its impact on the US and the Western world and media have been too significant to ignore. For this reason, this thesis tries to mediate between the classic psychoanalytic approaches and contemporary approaches.

To combine trauma theory and contextualisation of trauma in trauma fiction in the following chapter, Balaev relates traumatic experience and symptoms with literary devices. She explains that “certain novels demonstrate through different narrative techniques that an extreme experience can elicit a disruption in perception or a transformation of consciousness that illuminates the dynamics of memory and identity” (xvi). The first strategy she names is “narrative dissociation” and defines it as a “literary representation of an altered state of consciousness that disrupts and reorients a character’s perceptions” and this is done through “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”. Furthermore, she relates narrative dissociation to the stream of consciousness as both “attempt to express how the mind works”, but narrative

dissociation shows difference and disjunction (xvii). While dissociation is a key symptom in trauma, other symptoms such as re-experiencing (through flashbacks or nightmares), isolation, repression, hyperarousal (irritability and mood swings), depression, and anxiety should not be forgotten as they are often featured in novels.

If the methodology and technique were to be expanded to other literature, for example Iraq war veteran literature, it would be necessary to analyse the event and the symptoms of the trauma, despite most trauma symptoms being similar, and then analyse the function of the most prevalent literary devices which seem to represent the trauma. The methodology of trauma theory and close reading used can be applied to other trauma and terror literature as well, but since the relationship between the traumatic event, the trauma, and the literature remains intertwined, the generalisations drawn from this thesis are best applied to 9/11 novels. In the case of 9/11, there was a wave of literature and texts focussing on the visual; novels such as *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer (2005) and graphics novels like *In the Shadow of No Towers* by Art Spiegelman (2004) seemed to represent the feeling of the unspeakable. In a similar sense, to interpret other trauma literature, waves of literature have to be analysed to find trends in stylistic elements and form.

This thesis examines and interprets literary devices to provide the basis for argumentation of the claim. While the examination and interpretation of style and form in novels is not a novelty, the approach to trauma theory and trauma literature that this thesis employs is still a newly developing field that has seen rapid alterations and additions to the theory. As explained in the overview of trauma theory, this thesis uses an approach that combines the classic model of the “unspeakable” or “unrepresentable” with contemporary approaches that focus on social and cultural context. While these contemporary approaches often intersect with fields such as postcolonialism or feminism, this thesis relies on close reading, because the focus is the function of literary devices of the novel. These elements will be related to the trauma depicted in the novels, for example *Falling Man*'s depiction of trauma is dismal. In the following chapters about *Falling Man* and *The Zero* will be analysed concentrating on elements such as point of view, focalising, and formal and narrative structure; other elements that will be discussed are made explicit in the respective chapters of the novels.

### ***Falling Man*, the unrecoverable trauma**

“DeLillo’s oddly original phrasings hauntingly evoke the high tension, distorted emotions and unexpected juxtapositions of those awful days just after 9/11” – Dan Cryer, *San Francisco Chronicle*

This small review is featured in the Scribner edition of *Falling Man* (2007) and accurately describes how the literary devices used in the novel portray the traumatic events of 9/11 as distorted and awful. However, the novel also portrays trauma as unrepresentable and offers a counter-narrative of the government’s and media’s heroic-narrative; it portrays the events of 9/11 as an unrecoverable trauma; the novel is un-heroic, the narrative is unpatriotic, and the characters never redeem themselves or recover their lost identities and relationships. As M. C. Michael explains in “Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*: Countering Post-9/11 Narratives of Heroic Masculinity”, the American media and Bush administration tried to constitute a narrative “which overly asserted and championed traditional notions of heroic, militarized masculinity that privilege physical strength and power accorded by such strength” (74). The main characters in *Falling Man* possess quite the opposite of these traits; they are severely traumatised and cannot deal with their trauma. Kristiaan Versluys describes *Falling Man* as “without a doubt, the darkest and the starkest [...] [I]t describes a trauma with no exit, a drift toward death with hardly a glimpse of redemption. [...] The endless re-enactment of trauma presented in *Falling Man* allows for no accommodation or resolution” (1). Kavadlo agrees as well: “Thus DeLillo presents the reader with an utterly changed, collapsed, ‘fallen’ dystopian city and establishes a mood of uncanny sadness that permeates the novel” (120). This novel is indeed a hopeless narrative and it begins with one of the main characters and focalisers: Keith Neudecker, who barely escapes death when exiting one of the towers, moments before the plane hits the second tower. The other main character is Keith’s wife, Lianne; she engrosses herself in 9/11 by watching the news nonstop and collecting newspaper articles, despite not being an immediate survivor. They have a son named Justin, who seems to deal with the events as badly as his parents, by searching for the planes in the sky with his friends. Keith also becomes involved in a sexual relationship with another 9/11 survivor named Florence. However, the relationships with Lianne and Florence do not work out and Keith decides to move to Vegas and attempt a professional poker-player career (poker being a part of his old hobby and pastime with friends). In the beginning of the novel, right after the attacks, Keith goes to Lianne’s home—his previous home, while being in a daze: “it wasn’t until he got in the truck and shut the door that he understood where he’d been going all along” (DeLillo 7).

Instinctively, Keith returns to his estranged wife and child; while this could be the set-up to become a narrative in which a relationship is restored through the trauma and horror of 9/11, the relationship is never redeemed nor the trauma overcome.

There are several literary devices that function to support the tone of ultimate downfall. The first is the unchronological structure of the novel; flashbacks and jumps in narrative occur seemingly randomly in the sense that the paragraphs are seemingly unrelated, going from one subject to another. Another prominent technique demonstrated is the point of view, which is third person, but the characters are hardly ever mentioned by name. For example, Keith is not named when he is the focaliser and he is not introduced as a character in the first chapter nor any other chapter—he simply is there like the rest of the characters; “he wore a suit and carried a briefcase” (3) is the only description of Keith given in the first chapter, which creates the “everyperson” effect that will be discussed in this chapter. In effect, it is difficult for the reader to comprehend when Keith is the focaliser, until his name is mentioned in the chapter. In addition to the confusing point of view, direct speech dialogue is another technique to create confusion, because the dialogues are direct quotations without often indicating who says what that the reader loses track of who is who. More confusion arises when taking in account the lack of descriptive passages; the only passages which are descriptive are reminiscing flashbacks or engaging poker games, which serve to escape reality and 9/11 trauma. The paragraphs change so often that it hinders any attempt at coherent reading. In the book *Out of the Blue* (2009), Kristiaan Versluys discusses a similar view of the novel:

[T]he gamble DeLillo took with this book is that he tries stylistically and narratively to suggest the enervating effect of this multiple fall. In order to evoke the sense of attrition and lassitude that characterizes clinical melancholia, he has gutted his style sentence by sentence, has continuously broken the narrative momentum, has tethered his characters either to their murderous, humanity-denying beliefs or, more prominently, to their future-denying traumas. (47)

These literary techniques replicate the symptoms of trauma of which, according to the NHS' webpage “Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – Symptoms”, the relevant symptoms portrayed in *Falling Man* are concentration issues, irritability, mood swings, feeling disconnected or unable to form close relationships, and re-enacting the event (NHS Choices). While some of these literary devices function to portray this unheroic, unrecoverable type of

trauma, other devices portray the classic trauma theory approach of the unrepresentable and unspeakable which was reflected in the first wave of 9/11 trauma literature (as explained in the previous chapter). In this chapter, first the use of novel's structure will be discussed related to dissociation. Secondly, the use of language will be discussed and will be related to dissociation and coping mechanisms. Finally, the use of dialogue and white space is discussed, related to the need of intimacy and broken relationships.

The novel is unchronological, because there are flashbacks to events of the character's childhood, but also to September 11<sup>th</sup>, when the main character is reliving the attacks. Through this unchronological structure, the effect of the 9/11 trauma is reinforced. The last chapter of the novel features the events of the traumatic day. This return to the beginning of the novel signifies an inescapable circle of trauma. Kavadlo discusses that "*Falling Man* undermines its linearity, which both begins and ends with the towers' fall, and the individuality of its characters, who are nearly impossible to visualize, seldom described, and routinely introduced by referenceless pronouns" (Kavadlo 48). This linearity is undermined to emphasise the effect of the counter-narrative, because linearity and chronology suggest structure. However, this novel disregards all of these to emphasise trauma (the use of pronouns Kavadlo states will be discussed later in this chapter). In addition to the introduction and the conclusion of the novel, 9/11 is revisited twice again in chapters three and six. As McNally, Professor in Psychology at Harvard University, explains in his work *Remembering Trauma* (2003), "Rather than merely remembering the trauma, sufferers seemed to relive it again and again as if it were happening in the present" (8). Through the structure of the novel, it becomes evident that Keith is reliving these events and cannot escape or recover from his trauma: "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (Caruth 4-5). This means that the trauma victim relives the event over and over again, whether through nightmares, flashbacks, or compulsive tendencies, like Lianne who collects obituaries of the victims. Kavadlo agrees, but also contextualises this fictional experience of Keith to 9/11 itself; he writes that "the novel's harrowing opening, the recurring narration of the same events, written and rewritten, becomes analogous to the repeated footage of the planes destroying the towers on television, and the way in which the trauma victim relives his pain endlessly" (48). There is a parallel between the novel's structure and the repeated footage, and so in extent the American audience watching the footage, which suggests the reach of *Falling Man* as novel. It is primarily accessible and readable for a 9/11 trauma victim, meaning that the novel itself is also a way to relive the



trauma, like the footage on television. The return to the day at the conclusion resembles the classic approach of trauma theory, where trauma is treated as a latent disease that has an “incubation period” before it hits, which was discussed in the methodology chapter as the “latency” effect in classic approach to trauma theory. Indeed, “the end of *Falling Man* returns to its narrative beginning, suggesting that we must return to the traumatic moment in order to know it” (Kavadlo 53), which means that the novel’s structure reflects Caruth’s theory. If the novel is treated with such an approach, then it would make sense that the trauma is revisited at the conclusion, and that in this narrative the trauma is unrecoverable.

Keith then symbolises the 9/11 trauma victim who was unable to recover from his trauma. Balaev explains that trauma fiction “provides a picture of the individual who suffers, but paints it in such a way as to suggest that this protagonist is an “everyperson” figure (*The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* 17). This is done in *Falling Man* by excessively using pronouns, but in a way that “leaves its pronouns without antecedents, in a way that challenges what we think of characterizations” (Kavadlo 48). Keith embodies any traumatised American man through the use of pronouns. Versluys notices that “throughout the novel, the use of “he” and “she” is abundant. Few times is the main character referred to by his name and chapters and paragraphs usually begin with “he” and “she”.

The use of narrative point of view has two effects, namely creating a sense of dissociation and “aloofness” (Versluys 24). Firstly, this pronoun use serves to portray Keith’s dissociation with his surroundings. People are not described, they are simply referred to as “they”; for example, in chapter one,

He was walking north [...]. They had handkerchiefs pressed to their mounts. They had shoes in their hands, a woman with a shoe in each hand, running past him. They ran and fell, some of them, confused and ungainly, with debris coming down around them, and there were people taking shelter under cars. (DeLillo 3)

The first chapter fails to introduce or describe the main character, but sets the tone for the rest of the novel. Keith is simply there just like the woman with a shoe in each hand in the quote above. While the image of New York after 9/11 is bleak and full of terror, the chapter reads as a dissociated daze. Obviously, this is the signifying traumatic moment, and the use of pronouns supports that. The phrasing also supports this dissociation and traumatic moment, but this will be discussed later in this chapter. This effect of dissociation and aloofness is a distance between the reader and the novel and creates a sense of isolation. However, keeping

the Bush administration in mind, which wanted to make the everyday man a hero, the referenceless pronouns and lack of descriptions fit the counter-narrative this novel tries to set. This “everyperson” is no hero—he is a victim.

While the structure and point of view in the novel function to emphasise dissociation and to provide a counter-narrative to the heroic narrative, other literary devices in the novel represent the unspeakable and unrepresentable of the trauma. The novel fails to describe the actions of characters or events of the narrative. The chapters do not seem connected, the paragraphs do not seem coherent, and even the dialogues do not seem to respond to each other. While there are some passages that seem descriptive and long, most are short, abrupt, and more often than not contain complete sentences; and so, “like the novel itself, Keith’s story presents a series of abstractions, sensations, descriptions and vignettes” (Kavadlo 48). This might contradict each other, but both phrasing styles support the symptoms of trauma, dissociation and isolation. This places the novel within the early wave of 9/11 literature of being unable to express 9/11 in words.

The chapters of *Falling Man* are filled with long dwindling descriptive or introspective passages, yet they do not reveal the interiority of Keith, of which examples will be discussed later in this discussion. They cause quite the opposite effect of distance. As explained in Chapter 1, Balaev describes the use of such a style is to create a dissociating effect. The language in DeLillo, the author of the novel, uses a stream of consciousness to describe the traumatic experience. Kavadlo claims that

DeLillo’s language straddles the line between reader and character, creating a particular kind of stream of consciousness—not a Modernist, subjective interior, as much as liminal, linguistic space where reader and character, men and women, violence and redemption, prose and poetry exist simultaneously as possibilities (51).

He proposes that the language is on the boundary of poetry: “This description, with its inevitable refrain of falling, presents the paradox of beautiful yet elegiac language, and lends itself more to poetic than narrative analysis” (54) and even goes as far to claim that “*Falling Man* presents a novel in the form of poetry, or maybe a poem in the form of a novel” (55). This poetic style emphasises the characters’ inability to articulate as they “search for coordinates and for a language to articulate this changed world but struggle to achieve mastery over the accumulating signs and symbols” (Randal 125). This poetic form reflects the trauma theory that postulates the concept of the unspeakable, because poetry is not prose. This means

that the trauma cannot be described in comprehensible language and employs a different writing technique to describe the 9/11 trauma. However, DeLillo This can be seen with Keith's son Justin, as he decides to speak in monosyllabic words only, but also with Keith himself as he thinks of "something out of nowhere, a phrase, *organic shrapnel*"; this phrase "felt familiar but meant nothing to him" (DeLillo 83). As 9/11 changed New York literally and conceptually, Americans struggled to reshape the manner in which they viewed New York and America. Therefore, this poetic tendency of the novel fits the trend of the unrepresentable theme in the early 9/11 novels, where the trauma was so significant that it cannot be said, which reflects the theory of Caruth.

This style of writing evokes a mood of detachment during the entire novel, because the reader is put at a distance from the narrative and from the characters, which reflects on Keith's traumatised psyche. We, as readers, do not gain insight in what Keith is going through from his actions; they simply happen. This coincides with Freud's concept of traumatic latency, meaning that the trauma symptoms are belated. There is a gap between the character and his action, and there is a gap between the reader and the character. Keith does not discuss the trauma he goes through, nor does it become clear from the narrative, until the end where the event itself is described in detail. This coincides with an example of Caruth's theory of trauma; she explains that trauma victims suffer from "the inability fully to witness the event as it occurs, or the ability to witness the *event* fully at the cost of witnessing oneself. Central to the very immediacy of this experience, that is, is a gap that carries the force of the event" (7). Keith, hardly hurt, exits the scene of trauma. He is not aware of the events himself; he is not even aware where he is going until he has escaped ground zero. In his daily life, Keith seems to have become detached: "nothing seemed familiar, being here, in a family again, and he felt strange to himself, or always had, but it was different now because he was watching" (DeLillo 82). His personal life has become disrupted, which makes him detached from himself and distorts his reaction to things such as a woman riding a horse to the park (130):

It was something that belonged to another landscape, something inserted, a conjuring that resembled for the briefest second some half-seen image only half believed in the seeing, when the witness wonders what has happened to the meaning of things, to tree, street, stone, wind, simple words lost in the falling ash (DeLillo 130).

This sentence, which seems like a poetic passage, reveals such a disrupted reaction to something rather ordinary. Keith understood only after “a long moment” that the woman “had to come out of a stable somewhere nearby” (130). The manner in which Keith’s brain works has become different, as is the case with many trauma victims; Keith has certainly not become less intelligent per se, because he becomes a professional poker player as “he studied the cards and knew the tendencies” and he can even read the poker players and their distinguish tics from genuine reactions to the cards; “the blinking was not a tell” (252), but he cannot remember their names and refers to one woman as “the blinking woman” (252). Poker has been important to Keith and he is “deeply nostalgic when he recalls the men’s camaraderie – he associates this with a kind of innocence before the ‘fall’ – but also, crucially, he admires the seriousness of purpose and the necessary discipline required to play” (Randal 121). For Keith, especially after the attacks, poker becomes his means of escape and his way to cope—so much so that he decides to move to Las Vegas to become a professional poker player. In Las Vegas he feels at peace, “hemmed in all the same, enclosed by the dimness and low ceiling and by the thick residue of smoke that adhered to his skin and carried decades of crowd and action”, and he even stays there until eight o’clock in the morning, losing himself between the “acres of neon slots” (DeLillo 241). In the casino “this was never over” and “that was the point”, because “there was nothing outside the game but faded space” (243); here he can lose himself and at the same time he “was never more than himself” whilst playing poker (286). Playing poker, Keith “enters a kind of trance” (Randal 123), while focusing on these poker games, because they represent the structure and fun he had playing. This structure and “necessary discipline” is something he needs in order to cope with his trauma. The passages that describe these poker games have a poetic sense of rhythm:

The chips were there. Behind the ambient noise and stray voices, there was the sound of tossed chips, raked chips forty or fifty tables stacking chips, fingers reading and counting, balancing the stacks, clay chips with smooth edges, rubbing, sliding, clicking, days and nights of distant hiss like insect friction. (DeLillo 286)

The repetition of the word “chips” seems to distort the word, as if staring at a word for too long, and by repeating the word so often it replicates the sound a chip makes when hitting a surface or when being tossed. The background noise of the chips nearly seems to become a self-meditating mantra. Escaping into poker and this sense of structure and repetition he wonders if “he was becoming a self-operating mechanism, like a humanoid robot” (287) and he finally feels like he “was becoming the air he breathed” (293); as if he has escaped his

trauma. However, he has disrupted himself even more as he feels like a robot, pretending to be something else, and not recovering from his trauma at all, merely hiding from it at the other side of America far away from 9/11 and New York. The use of language described here emphasises his dissociation and escapism—the trauma from which he does not recover.

Despite making another attempt at their relationship, Keith and Lianne never reconnect and their relationship fails at the end of the novel, because their traumatised minds prohibit impedes them. The use of white space and dialogue imply that there is still a distance between them by literally creating space on the pages of the novel. While instinctively, Keith returns to Lianne, their relationship becomes a sexual one, not a romantic or emotional one. The reason for their sexual relationship can be attributed to a phenomenon caused by 9/11. Keeble describes that 9/11 was followed by this and named “terror sex” and explains it 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” (Keeble 358). Despite the desire and desperate search for intimacy, Keith and Lianne never seem to reconnect and the distance created by the trauma remains. Terror sex is “everywhere” in *Falling Man*:

A flight of stairs was sex, the way she moved close to the wall with him just behind, to touch or not, brush lightly or press tight, feeling him crowd her from below, his hand moving around her thigh, stopping her, the way he eased up and around, the way she gripped his wrist .(8)

The need for intimacy is made clear in the third chapter of the novel, between two paragraphs concerning the aftermath of the attacks: one paragraph concerns the children, which are acting weirdly as they “talk in code” and “spend a lot of time at the window” (DeLillo 19); the other paragraph concerns Keith’s radiology session. The placement of the intimate paragraph seems to lack correlation; it seems to be a piece of their lives that is the same as any other, simply a part of the aftermath. The desire for intimacy is described as the following, “she liked having him here next to her”, but on the other hand a distance is still between them as “she didn’t need to know a man’s feeling about everything, not anymore and not this man. She liked the spaces he made” (DeLillo 21). The part leading up to intercourse is described as “she knew the time was coming when he’d press her to the wall before she finished dressing. He’d get out of bed and look at her and she’d stop what she was doing and wait for him to come and press her to the wall” (21). Later in the novel, after having sexual intercourse,

Lianne decides to cool down her body against a mirror; in other words she presses her body against the image of herself. She feels the need come to her senses and back to herself. In fact, “The only moment of true intimacy occurs when the spouses jointly watch a rerun of the events of September 11 on television” (Versluys 24). This shows that they can only connect through 9/11, through the collective trauma. However, at the end of the novel, they do not find recover through the trauma together.

The dialogue between Keith and Lianne is often not actual interactions with each other, but it seems like they talk at cross purposes:

“You’re one of those madwomen running in the street. Run around the reservoir.”

“You think we look crazier than men.”

“Only in the streets.”

“I like the streets. This time of morning, there’s something about the city, down by the river streets nearly empty, cars blasting by on the Drive.”

“Breathe deeply.”

“I like running alongside the cars on the Drive.”

“Take deep breaths,” he said. “Let the fumes swirl into your lungs.”

“I like the fumes. I like the breeze from the river.”

“Run naked,” he said. (DeLillo 90).

Here it seems that Keith is trying to initiate or hint at sex, but Lianne is seemingly oblivious to this. They often speak at crossed purposes, or without interest for each other. Their relationship is purely sexual, despite needing intimacy in their trauma. In this case, Keith’s short answers create a white space on the pages that emphasises the distance between the characters. This point is also made by Versluys and he refers to James Wood to make this point: “it is certainly the case that the novel is riddled with interruptions” and that, as a result, the reader ends up feeling, in the words of James Wood again, “a lot of white space on the page is glaring at him [the reader] beseechingly” (Wood qtd. in Versluys 40). While the technique is not apparent, the effect is implied. The short dialogues and the white space combined emphasise the fast pace and distance of the dialogues. On pages 156 and 157 there is a dialogue that spans exactly two pages, with so much white space on the pages that it seems as if there are two towers. While this seems farfetched, Kavadlo shares a similar view on Keith and Lianne, “here, as always in DeLillo’s work, the towers are a marriage, two functioning as one” (51) and “despite their, admittedly muted, efforts to rekindle conjugal

intimacy they drift further apart in the following months” (Randal 121). While the narrative itself describes the inevitable parting in their relationship, the distance in their relationship is emphasised by use of dialogue and white space.

Further study of these devices will reveal more about the trauma portrayal in *Falling Man*; for example by going into the relationship of Keith and Florence, discussing Lianne in more depth, or by going into the reliving of the trauma of Justin. Furthermore, several characters who have not been introduced in this thesis could also be discussed due the scope of the thesis. This chapter has shown that the use of literary devices in *Falling Man* is used to emphasise the dismal 9/11 trauma, while also representing the unspeakable aspect of the trauma. This is done through use of the novel’s structure, which is unchronological. The trauma is relived throughout the novel and in the conclusion of the novel. This implies that the trauma is unrecoverable, as it is relived until the end. It also follows the trauma theory of Caruth, based on Freud, that the trauma is latent, which means that the trauma symptoms and the trauma itself become evident much later in the victim’s life. Furthermore, the use of pronouns strips the main characters from their characterizations and identity, while also countering the heroic narrative of the American government and media by presenting this identity-less victim as severely traumatised. The technique of stream-of-consciousness and poetic passages emphasises traumatic dissociation instead of revealing more interiority. Another device is the use of dialogue, which creates white space and implies distance between the characters by presenting this distance in literary form to the reader. Therefore, *Falling Man* provides a view on the traumatic as disruption of the self that disorients and destroys the victim.

### ***The Zero, the cop-hero trauma and satire***

A deliriously mordant political satire... Walter's Hellenesque take on a traumatic time... carries off his dark and hilarious narrative with a grandly grotesque imagination. –*Publishers Weekly*

This review is featured as a paratextual element within the first pages of *The Zero* (2006) and accurately describes the novel's absurd portrayal of 9/11, the reaction of the Bush administration to 9/11, and the personal trauma from which the character cannot escape. The literary devices that emphasize these aspects will be discussed in this chapter. The review compares the novel to Joseph Heller's satirical novel *Catch-22* published in 1961 and other reviews have compared the novel to satirist and surrealist writer Franz Kafka. John N. Duvall agrees with the reviewers. He states that "although it has received surprisingly little attention, Walter's *The Zero* brilliantly satirizes a moment in recent American history when any chance for reasoned political or ethical debate fell prey to the initiation of a state of emergency" (281). Kristine Miller notices the lack of scholarly work too. She states that "although no sustained scholarship on *The Zero* has yet been published, reviewers have focused on how the troubled, inarticulate Remy symbolically represents America's post-9/11 trauma" (30). She also observes that "*The Zero* satirizes this nationalistic allegory by contrasting 'what happens when a nation becomes a public relations firm' with what happens to Brian Remy, an ex-NYPD cop whose post-9/11 psychological collapse is far more traumatic than heroic" (29). It is clear that *The Zero* satirises the state of the United States after the attacks. In the previous chapter, *Falling Man* as a counter narrative was discussed; *The Zero* offers another counter-narrative to the Bush administration in the form of a satirical novel. Duval states in "Homeland Security and the State of (American) Exception(alism): Jess Walter's *The Zero* and the Ethical Possibilities of Postmodern Irony":

Both using and repurposing the genre of the detective/spy thriller, Walter satirizes the hero narrative to examine the conflation of personal and collective grieving that emerges at a time when the forces of nationalism, media, and capital work in concert to mobilize public support for the notion of just wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and for curtailed civil rights at home (281).

This novel juxtaposes the public state of affairs with Brian Remy, the lonesome man who is unable to deal with his trauma. Remy, who previously was a police officer, now works for another counterterrorism agency while also giving tours at Ground Zero. This



counterterrorism mission becomes a focus in the novel. He has a difficult relationship with his son Edgar and tries a romantic relationship with April, a girl he has to investigate on suspicion on terrorist relations. Remy is the focaliser and narrator of the novel, which means that “[he] controls what readers see and know. To the best of his ability, he aspires to be a reliable angle of vision” (Duval 284), because he is a man of the law. However, he witnessed the attacks first hand and suffers from memory loss, loss of hand-eye-coordination, and speech issues. The memory loss actually prevents Remy from remembering his counterterrorist mission, though this turns out to be a wild-goose chase, because April does not have relations to terrorist and everyone else Remy investigates is pretending to be a terrorist while being part of another anti-terrorist agency. The novel is a parody on the state of exceptionalism just after 9/11.

Important to this mission and the parody thereof is the contextualisation of the Bush administration and the policies that were put in order after the attacks, which Duval describes in his essay: “*The Zero* turns these domestic situations inside out in a way that comments critically on America’s post-9/11 state of exception” (Duval 281). The “domestic situations” Duval states allude to the personal relations of Remy. His son pretends Remy died in 9/11, and Remy tries to form a relationship with April Kraft while she is in grief over the death of her husband and sister. The state of exception he explains is when “President Bush’s executive order of November 13, authorized the ‘indefinite detention’ and trial by ‘military commissions’ of noncitizens suspected of involvement in terrorist activities, which” is a paradigmatic example of the “immediately biopolitical significance of the state of exception,” wherein the law operates “by its own suspension” (Giorgio Agamben qtd. in Duval 281-2). He explains further that “the Office of Homeland Security, then, endows Bush’s rhetorical refashioning with a full bureaucratic weight that has allowed an expansion of state power in a way that challenges any attempt to keep the spheres of the domestic and the foreign separate” (282). This means that new agencies were built to fight terrorism and that immediately after the attacks, anyone who could be a terrorist should be immediately dealt with by the agencies. This is reflected in the novel through the wild-goose chases after people who are suspected of being terrorists. The other Remy makes decisions on the spot which have severe consequences for the people involved. These decisions are part of the literary irony, which satirises the American government and its policies. This will be discussed in this chapter.

There was a feeling of paranoia in America where anyone and everyone could be a terrorist or related to one. The novel “recounts Remy’s selected experiences as he leaves the

NYPD to take a position in a new counterterrorism agency” in this post-9/11 era of terror (281). *The Zero* also takes in account and satirises the public increasing patriotism and public grief. The novel portrays the days after 9/11 where the American people “stood on roadblocks and behind barricades on the street, in flag T-shirts and stiff-brimmed all caps. [...] And still they all cheered and called out [...] They cried. Saluted” (Walter 10). They did this all to support the policemen and fire fighters who were searching and working on Ground Zero, the destroyed World Trade Center site. While the Bush administration and American media celebrated this patriotic reaction of the American people, the novel criticises it by portraying it as having a concerning effect on the Remy and Guterack. The novel also takes into account the real-life reactions of the police officers in 9/11. The novel’s depiction of the police trauma victims is quite accurate. As discussed earlier, Miller compares *The Zero* to interviews with police officers and she finds that there are noteworthy similarities between the novel and the interviewees: “both the novel and the testimonies initially seem to support the conventional opposition between incoherent, authentic trauma and coherent, fabricated media stories about the cop-hero” (31). This is relevant because these experiences of the cops can be compared to this fiction and the trauma depicted in this novel can be compared to real life traumatic experiences, and the literary devices used in novels seem to represent these real life reactions and trauma. Speech issues, discussed above, as well as the use of metaphors, can be related to the lives of real life police officers: “interviews with NYPD cops suggest how widespread was this need to describe 9/11 figuratively” (Miller 35). Another phenomenon Miller observes is the patriotic public. Apparent from those interviews is that *The Zero* comes close to describing the feeling of the officers after 9/11 when the public treated them as heroes. They often felt embarrassed with all the attention. Remy represents such reactions. His reaction to “they all cheered and called out” is to hide behind his coffee (Walter 10-2). In contrast with Remy, “his former NYPD partner, Paul Guterak, serves as Remy’s foil, one who understands the need for America to identify heroes” (Duval 285). As such, he has been affected differently by the trauma, because Paul “lost whatever filter used to separate his mind from his mouth. He said whatever came into his head now” (Walter 16). Despite his frequent talking throughout the novel, Paul often struggles with finding the right words and his utterances resemble blabbering. It becomes apparent that Paul actually has speech issues as well, a point that will be discussed later in this chapter. Furthermore, Remy seems to dislike all the media and public attention, while Guterak basks in it and tells Remy that “that ain’t it the best feeling, them people treating us so good like that” (Walter 11). This media attention derive the concept of the cop-hero. As discussed in this thesis before, the idea

of heroes changed in 9/11 as New York needed heroes and the government and media turned the focus to police officers and firemen. As Duval explains, “America’s state of exception requires exceptional heroes, which means that people who might be otherwise identified as victims or even cowards are pressed to wear the mantle of hero” (285). This means that the government and media turned victims like police officers and men who had helped into heroes, for some against their will. While Guterak accepts this, Remy rejects this and yet he “is nevertheless repeatedly commended for his heroism. The hero is by definition exceptional, which leads to one of the issues of identification in post-9/11 America” (285). This concept is satirized in the novel. Guterak complains about firemen and calls them “sons-of-bitches” (16). However, he is also resentful “they can get all the blow jobs, all the cooked meals. Half of ‘em off duty” (16). Though Guterak’s crude language is one of the ways the novel works to satirise the trauma of the police officer in 9/11 by bluntly treating the need for heroes as a celebrity status, this chapter will discuss the ways in which literary devices emphasise the portrayal of this satirical trauma in relation to Remy’s trauma, but also to the state of New York in the age of terror. The following paragraphs will first discuss use of structure to portray Remy’s memory gaps, which turn out to be a “red herring” (Duval 283). Secondly, use of imagery will be discussed. Thirdly, use of alliteration and other poetic devices will be discussed. Then, the chapter turns to use of ellipses and dialogue. Finally, this chapter will discuss the use of irony to create the counter-narrative.

The structure of the novel represents Remy’s memory gaps; while these gaps are a result of trauma, the gaps are also a way to criticise the state of exception. The novel features paragraphs ending with dashes. As Duval notes, “formally, the novel’s impaired angle of vision results in most scenes ending without resolution so that the reader is forced to immediately start another in medias res” (284). These disruptions are represented by ending the paragraph with an open dialogue, just after a question, “Mrs. Lubach opened her mouth to answer but—” (Walter 7) or after setting an expectation “He opened the door and passed through—” (101), leaving the reader to wonder what comes next after passing through. The chapter of this quote continues with Remy suddenly sitting at the hospital or being with his girlfriend April. The dashes signify the disruption in memory, because there are cases where no such dash is used and the paragraph is completed. It is a “technique that Walter has called both ‘devicey’ and ‘freeing’” (Ehrwald 100, 107). These breaks represent leaps in time or space that simulates the “dissociative episodes” of the “textbook PTSD” with which Remy’s psychiatrist diagnoses him after 9/11” (Ehrwald qtd. in Miller 35). During the novel it seems

that these disruptions signify the traumatised mind, but then it becomes clear that Remy has a split personality. Remy has literally become disrupted with himself by the 9/11 trauma. Balaev explains that a trauma “leads to a fractured pathological self and memory” (*The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* 6). In this case, this can be taken quite literally, because the gaps in memory that he experiences, are in fact when the other personality occupies his body. One Remy is ignorant and innocent, while the other is a brutal agent of a counter terrorist agency, who has to pretend to be a terrorist in order to catch one. Duval states that “Walter’s novel reminds us that the victim himself may easily become the terrorist” (284). Through abrupt endings of paragraphs and gaps in the plot, the “fractured self” is emphasised.

The imagery in the novel presents the World Trade Center site, Ground Zero, as a living object. Because Remy cannot cope with the destruction of the towers, he uses metaphors of living things to describe the site. Early in the novel, Ground Zero is described to be “humming” (Walter 15). Later Remy describes Ground Zero as the following,

Water was being pumped from three angles, from ladder trucks on the fringe of the massive smoldering jungle, while fire raged in its roots and hot shoots jutted from the pile. Up close, you didn’t really get any better idea what the smoking leaves and vines were made of, except a few things like windows blinds (18)

Another example is when Remy describes the wreckage as a “shattered steel exoskeleton” (19) and machines pulling at this wreckage as “horses grazing at deep-rooted grass” (17). These examples illustrate a reaction that Miller has described as well. Remy is unable to accurately describe the events of what happened, so he seems to treat Ground Zero as an organism, because he tries to make sense of what had occurred. Similarly, actual cops repeatedly claim that “the destruction of the World Trade Center (WTC) was “unbelievable” (*Reminiscences of Scott P. Strauss* 9), “hard to imagine” (*Reminiscences of John Lambkin* 20), and therefore impossibly “hard to describe” (*Reminiscences of Thomas B. Vinton* 18 qtd. in Miller 31-2). Therefore these cops rely on metaphors to describe the event. Remy cannot process what has happened and he has to relive the trauma by working at Ground Zero every day.

Another prominent use of imagery is the comparison of the destruction of the towers with paper, which refers to the image of the destruction of the towers. The opening of the novel makes this metaphor. “They burst into the sky, every bird in creation, angry and

agitated [...] and then close enough to see that it wasn't a flock of birds at all—it was paper. Burning scraps of paper. All the little birds were paper" (Walter 3). The metaphor is recurring. Later Remy wonders the following: "what would the rain do to the dust and ash? And the paper, the snow banks of résumés and reports and bills of lading—what would to all the paper?" and "the vast paper recovery efforts would be complicated by rainfall" (11). Paper is an important motif in the novel, because Remy is hired by a new counterterrorist agency, the Documents Department of the Office of Liberty and Recovery, which is "a government organization with the supposedly benign mission of recovering and interpreting the fragments of paper that blanketed the city when the twin towers fell" (Duval 283). Paper is a metaphor for the information that America has lost during the attacks and Remy has trouble distinguishing the dead from the paper,

That would help, somehow, knowing what percentage of the pile was paper. And People. Most of the pile was steel and concrete and window blinds and you became grateful for these because they mostly stayed put. You could figure out how much steel and how many window blinds; you could account. It was a simple problem. But the people were different. And the paper. The people and the paper burned up or flew away or ran off (19)

Here Remy tries to make sense of the wreckage and categorises it: countable and uncountable damage. Remy cannot think of people and paper separately. Both the paper and people burnt, flew, or ran. Even after Remy admits to not remembering 9/11, he admits to remember "standing alone while a billion sheets of paper fluttered to the ground" (Walter 306). With the image of paper and people blurring, it seems as if Remy has also seen the people falling to the ground and mistaking it for paper.

Alliteration is related to the imagery in the novel, as it emphasises the metaphor the novel sets for the World Trade Center site. Remy describes people and paper as "they were bellowed and blown" (Walter 19), evoking the image of loud wind. Remy also describes 9/11 as "silent fireworks, the lining of his eyes splintering and sparking and flaking into the soup behind his eyes—flashers and floaters that danced like scraps of paper blown into the world" (9), which seems to evoke the image of "silent fireworks" through the repetition of the sibilant and non-sibilant fricatives. Another example of this is when Remy wonders that "it was amazing what could burn. We forgot that, Remy thought, in our fear of fission and fusion, radiation, infection, concussion and fragmentation. We forgot fire" (15). The repetition of the

fricative sounds seems to evoke the image of the sound of fire. These sounds emphasise the image of the day that traumatised Remy, which would be why it is so often repeated, because Remy is “possessed by an image or event” (Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 4-5) of the destruction of the World Trade Center. This shows how prominent the image of paper is in Remy’s traumatised mind.

Dialogue, and especially use of ellipses, is used to emphasize the “speechless void, unrepresentable” of the traumatised mind (Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* 3). Remy seems unable to articulate his sentences properly. For example, in this excerpt from the beginning, “‘No. I was just cleaning my gun and...’ She stared at him as if he knew how to finish the sentence. ‘*Et cetera,*’ he said” (Walter 6). In this example, Remy, being the third person focaliser, comments on his inability to form coherent sentences, while feeling pressured to be able to. He cannot finish his sentence because the words elude him. In another example, Remy is at a loss for words again: “‘I don’t know,’ Remy said. ‘But there’s something happening... and I should probably be...’ Be what? Remy was stumped” (Walter 299). Here, Remy is literally stumped by his own fragmented and forgetful mind. These ellipses represent the disruptions in the mind where it fails to form coherent sentences or remember what was going to be said. The 9/11 trauma has caused his mind to be interrupted with blanks. Guterak as well seems affected by this. As examined before, he seems to have lost the filter between his thoughts and his speech. However, there are often instances where he does not know what to say. For example, when discussing a head they found in the wreckage, “can you imagine it just ... showing up”, but he follows immediately with “what kind of look would you have on your face, do you think?” (Walter 45). It is as Miller states, “in Columbia’s interviews, cops and civilians demonstrate a similar inability or unwillingness to describe their 9/11 experiences (31). She gives the following examples of stammering, “Not—the whole ex— you know, you’re—it’s so incomprehensible what had happened” (Reminiscences of Ruth Sergel 16 qtd. in Miller 32). Balaev explains this: “traumatic experience is unrepresentable due to the inability of the brain, understood as the carrier of coherent cognitive schematas, to properly encode and process the event” (Balaev *The Nature of Trauma Theory* 7). Remy, and the police officers cannot describe 9/11, they stammer, cannot find the right vocabulary and thus resort to imagery. In this novel, the frequent use of ellipses reflects the actual state of the New York police interviewee and reflects the unspeakable of Caruth’s trauma theory approach.

The humour in *The Zero* invokes an atmosphere of absurdity that satirises the administration, conduct, and state of New York right after the attacks. As observed in the introduction, the novel proposes a counter-narrative to the administration and the need for a hero. The organisation Remy works for hires him to track a woman named April. She is suspected of being related to a terrorist on account of a paper containing a pecan recipe. Remy receives a briefing of the matter, though having no previous knowledge of accepting the job, because his aforementioned other personality had accepted it. Remy tries to make this clear, but fails:

Markham was still talking. “Of course, your work must be treated with the utmost discretion. I will be your primary contact. I trust you haven’t told anyone about your negotiations with us to this point.”

“With—“

“With us,” Markham said.

“Yeah.” Remy laughed nervously. “Well I don’t think that’s going to be a problem.”

Half of Markham’s young face smiled. “That’s good.”

“Hell, I don’t even know who you are.”

Markham seemed momentarily startled, then smiled. “Wow Yeah. That’s good. You could be in one of our training videos.” (Walter 56).

Here, the irony is that Markham is under the belief that Remy is playing along. So, Markham believes that Remy is using verbal irony. This happens again when interrogating an Arabian man. Duval uses this example to illustrate that the novel has four levels of irony. One is that Markham “interprets Remy’s comments as simple verbal irony”, the second is that “the reader simultaneously understands that Remy does not intend his comments to be verbal irony”, the third is that Remy’s other personality “must use verbal irony” and the fourth is that “Remy’s self-proclaimed innocence in no way disrupts the Homeland Security State; his actions consistently support the state of exception” (287). Using this irony, *The Zero* satirises this state and this attitude, because both personalities sustain this state of exception.

Another example of the humour in this novel, from the same scene, shows how absurd the agency is, and thus satirises the agencies’ method of conduct in 9/11. They discuss the

recipe found that somehow survived the attacks, suggesting April left the building and took the recipe with her. An elderly lady found the recipe stuck between two bus seats.

“She says she picked it up because... *she thought it would taste good*. She thought her husband would like it. He *likes pecans*.”

“But you...don’t believe her?”

Markham looked stung. “Yes, we believe her. Of course, just to be sure, we polygraphed her.” (60).

While polygraphing an elderly lady over a recipe already seems absurd and demonstrates the paranoia of this agency, the absurdity continues:

“But why would anyone lie about liking pecans? Who doesn’t like pecans? Especially in a good fish recipe, a tender filet? No, the pecans give it some substance, some crunch. Some weight. They’re soaked in honey. I think you could substitute corn syrup. But it specifically calls for honey. A hint of cayenne. Sea salt. You bake it for twenty minutes on low heat. Some chives. No, it’s a good little fish for a summer meal. Tasty. Light. We had the lab make it, just to be sure it was, you know... good.”

Markham leaned back. “We’ll probably make it again; I’ll let you know.” (60)

This long passage indicates the level of absurdity of this bureau and satirises the Homeland Security State early in the novel. The irony of the novel “makes clear that the most significant work of the Homeland Security State has been to produce the simulacrum of security by constructing plots” (Duval 295). The construction of these terrorist plots is futile as “it turns out, however, that every member of the supposed terrorist cell is actually an informant for one government intelligence agency or another” (Duval 284). This leads to absurd actions like polygraphing an elderly lady. This irony and the absurd passages of irrelevant information create a surreal feeling, which coincides with the feeling the New York police officers felt: “the feeling shared by many cops that the scene at Ground Zero “was just kind of surreal” (Reminiscences of Strauss qtd. in Miller 35). *The Zero* employs this surreal effect and satirises it to the level which Duval describes it as postmodern in his essay.

In conclusion, *The Zero* satirises the state of New York right after the attacks and does this by ridiculing the method of the actions and protocols set after 9/11. *The Zero* takes the concept of trauma and, while not reducing the severity of its effects, uses it to satirise the



need of a hero, the atmosphere of the public, and the Bush administration's actions. The satire of the public response in need of a hero is further embodied by Guterak, but due to the scope of this thesis, it cannot be delved into further, but could be a topic for further research.

Furthermore, this chapter has not touched upon the satirical issue of the private and public grief of Edgar, Remy's son who pretends that his father died in 9/11. This chapter has focussed on Remy. The imagery and dialogue evoke the feeling of the severity of Remy's trauma and the accuracy of the police trauma, as described by Miller. The structure seems to emphasise the traumatic rupture of the self, but the novel turns it into a device to show the severe rupture of Remy's "Self". While his split personality is a severe symptom, this device is also used to assist the irony of the novel which satirises the Homeland State of Security. *The Zero* provides a satirical account of a traumatised New York police officer in relation to the state and public. The novel makes satire of the government's response to 9/11 without devaluing and ignoring the severity of 9/11's aftermaths and consequences.

## Conclusion

The theme of the unrepresentable in the first wave of 9/11 trauma fiction can be seen in *Falling Man* and *The Zero* through literary devices, suggesting that words and prose alone are not sufficient enough to describe 9/11. A relevant matter in 9/11 trauma fiction is the response to the Bush administration and governmental actions regarding 9/11; this is needed to contextualise the trauma fiction as 9/11 trauma fiction as it is criticised or otherwise responded to in the novels. While *Falling Man* focuses on the effect of 9/11 on the domestic sphere, *The Zero* focuses on the effect of 9/11 on the public and private spheres. The main characters of the novels both experienced the attack first hand and are consequently deeply traumatised by the event. The chapter on *Falling Man* has shown that literary devices can be used to portray dissociation and the collapse of family relationships. The novel's theme of the unrecoverable trauma is portrayed through the structure, which is unchronological and repeats the day of the attack four times. It opens right after the attack and closes the novel with the events during the attack, suggesting that there is no escape from the trauma. It also reflects on Freud's approach of the belated trauma, where traumatic event is not processed or experienced fully and the impact of the trauma reveals itself later. The reliving of the trauma was also an American experience, because the attack was all the media discussed for days, which is reflected in the novel through the use of structure as well as Lianne's obsession with 9/11 media reports. The use of third-person narrative point of view creates the "everyperson" effect, meaning that the main character becomes any 9/11 trauma victim and that 9/11 trauma victims can relate to the novel through Keith. The American government tried to create a sense of heroic identity after 9/11 to counter fear of terrorism, but this novel rejects this notion and portrays trauma as the mental health issue it is instead of an opportunity to be an American hero. This mental illness, which causes emotional disconnection and personal isolation, is emphasised through the use of language that resembles stream-of-consciousness, except this technique creates distance instead of revealing interiority. The technique is also used to emphasise the inability to express trauma in words; the meaning of words becomes distorted and other words suddenly gain meaning, such as "organic shrapnel" (DeLillo 83). Stream-of-consciousness is also used when Keith plays poker to resemble a trance for example, something that Keith uses to escape reality. Another technique to portray distance is the use of white space during dialogues: this technique uses the white space on the pages to create a sense of distance between the characters on the pages. This is done to show that

Keith has become unable to reconnect with his wife Lianne by showing the space between them.

*The Zero*, in contrast to *Falling Man*, uses literary techniques to critique and satire the Bush administration and government more explicitly, while also demonstrating the gravity and danger of trauma. Remy, the main character, experiences memory gaps, which are reflected by the structure. At the start of the novel, this seems to portray the disruption of the mind due to trauma; the abruptness of the memory loss is indicated by the use of dashes. However, it becomes clear that Remy has formed another personality as a result of the trauma and this structure seems to represent this. Both personalities embody a reaction to 9/11. The Remy the readers have access to is the one that is portrayed as a victim of trauma and a kind man, while the other is a ruthless agent of an American anti-terror agency. Yet, the combination of the two is the hero the Bush administration and American media advocated. Imagery is used to portray the inability to express trauma, which seems to be based on the true accounts of New York police officers and Remy sees Ground Zero as an organism to make sense of the terror and destruction. Another prominent image is the one of paper and people blowing and falling during 9/11. Motif of paper is important in the novel as it links it to a counterterrorist agency, which hopes to recover all paper and therefore valuable information. Alliteration is also used as a poetic device in the novel to emphasise the imagery, for example, when discussing fire and burning to emphasise the image of destruction. The inexpressible of trauma is also emphasised through use of ellipses, which break many sentences into smaller pieces, reflecting the inability to articulate and remember utterances. Literary irony is used to satirise the American government's response to 9/11 by using the split personality of Remy to comment on the need of a hero.

The similarity between the novels suggests that the unspeakable approach of trauma theory should not be neglected. The main characters of both novels have issues with expressing themselves. However, both novels respond to 9/11 in their own manner and contextualisation should not be disregarded. *Falling Man* responds in by showing that 9/11 has disrupted a family and portrays the main character as a broken man unable to recover from trauma. *The Zero* portrays the post-9/11 anti-terrorist atmosphere and shows that the main character's traumatised mind and split personality are an asset to being an anti-terrorist agent. In order to fully comprehend the depth of the novels and their reactions to 9/11, classic trauma theory and contemporary theory of contextualisation is used in this thesis.

Due to the scope of this thesis, other literary devices or the effect of these devices on other characters have not been analysed. This thesis focused on the main characters of the novels, but *The Zero* also has another cop-hero, Guterak, who portrays another aspect of the cop-hero phenomenon, which could have been the subject for analysing trauma and the 9/11 cop-hero response. It would also be interesting, for example, to analyse the effect on female characters and intersect trauma theory, 9/11 discourse, and feminism. *Falling Man*'s Lianne shows a different reaction to 9/11 compared to Keith. Lianne immerses herself in the event and then religion to make sense of the trauma. Furthermore, the novels also contain middle-eastern characters, which could be subject for analysis on intersecting trauma theory and post-colonial theory or immigrant discussion. This would provide a thorough analysis of the novel and its implications on 9/11 and trauma. While it is shown that literary devices can function in a text to portray trauma, it still remains of significant importance to contextualise the trauma in order to accurately analyse the literary techniques of each novel. *The Zero* has shown that memory gaps are a grave symptom of trauma, but also contextualises this trauma to criticise the American government. Context and knowledge of the event is needed in order to fully comprehend the function of the technique. The function of literary techniques remains significant in analysing trauma fiction and should not be neglected in analysing trauma fiction. The analyses of this thesis have shown that both approaches are vital to analysing the literary devices of the novels and perhaps also other 9/11 trauma fiction.

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