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**Fiction as Resistance:  
The post-9/11 novel as an alternative to  
the dominant narrative**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores three post-9/11 novels, namely Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, in terms of their resistance to the dominant narrative that overtook the media and political rhetoric in the days after September 11, 2001. I demonstrate how, through this resistance, the novels create spaces for the reader to re-examine and re-imagine the causes for, consequences of, and responses to 9/11. There are three aspects of this dominant narrative: America the Brave – although Americans suffered huge loss of life and significant trauma, the media and government agencies focused firmly on the heroics of the days surrounding the events rather than the more uncomfortable or tragic elements. The second aspect is one that was clearly stated by President Bush when he said “You are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” The third aspect is that of America as innocent victim and the terrorists as evil perpetrator.

DeLillo's *Falling Man* principally disrupts the dominant narrative by reinstating Richard Drew's censored photograph, the Falling Man, thereby rectifying the undemocratic editing of what was to be included in the photographic history of 9/11. Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* gives centre stage to Changez, a Pakistani male who represents those of Middle Eastern descent whose voices were elided from the dominant narrative. Ian McEwan's *Saturday* troubles the conceptualisation of invasion through the characters of Perowne and Baxter. Perowne represents Western privilege and Baxter, despite being English, stands for the evil outsider. This notion of invasion is troubled through questioning who is at fault for the invasion of the Perowne household by Baxter and his friends and through the invasion of Baxter when Perowne operates on him after throwing him down the stairs.

By reinstating the suppressed images, giving voice to silenced sections of society and questioning of the motives and intentions of those in power, these three novels work to resist the dominant narrative's powerful hold over the general public and provide the imaginative space for new possibilities, new perspectives and critical engagement with 9/11 and the responses to it.

## Acknowledgments

Virginia Woolf states in her essay, *A Room of One's Own*, that for a woman to be able to write, she requires only two things: Money of her own and a room with a lock on the door. Whilst these things have been an excellent starting point, I am not nearly half the woman that Ms. Woolf was and so I required rather a lot more for this thesis to become a reality. I would like to thank the people without whom this would not have been possible.

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*“I am empty, but not in a monkish way.  
I am just kind of dumb. Also, without the  
pleasing empathy that comes from  
engaging with new ideas, places, and  
characters, I am afraid of foreigners  
and easily manipulated by politicians  
and advertisements.”*

*Jonathon Gourley  
In the Land of the Non-Reader*



# Introduction

## 9/11

The terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 were a worldwide media event. Footage captured by ordinary people who happened to have cameras trained in the right direction at the right time were shown on an endless loop on the news channels across the globe and photographs taken by both amateurs and professionals were splashed across the front pages of news publications in countries everywhere. The event itself caused a ripple effect, one that touched everyone with access to media coverage of global news. The term '9/11' is widely used to refer to this date, this event, and most specifically the impact of the planes hitting the Twin Towers in New York city and their subsequent collapse in front of a horrified audience of millions. Although there are other ways to refer to this day, 9/11 is the term that I have chosen to use throughout this thesis.

More than ten years later it is hard to remember the whole picture of 9/11. The images of the impact and subsequent collapse of the Twin Towers were so overwhelmingly the focus of our attention that what happened at the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia rural Pennsylvania are nearly forgotten. Even the collapse of 7 World Trade Center, a building next to the towers, is not included in the narratives about this day, bar those formulated by conspiracy theorists who doubt that Islamist terrorists were to blame for 9/11. These events at the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania were covered by the media, but it is fair to say that they were rather eclipsed by the collapse of the two towers that had come to stand for capitalism, progress and domination. As a result, the vast majority of my analysis focuses on New York and the Towers.

The first issue I wish to address is whether 9/11 was a traumatic event and what effect this label has on how we understand and talk about this day. In his book *Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories, Images* Allen Meek calls for a critical engagement with

the representations of historical trauma, as assumptions that certain events are traumatic for “large collectives, such as nations, or specific ethnic groups” (1) may not be the case. It is important to note here that, as Antonio Traverso and Mick Broderick also point out, critical engagement with 9/11 (or indeed any other event) is not about trying to “relativize the past and continuing [the] suffering” (4) of any one group. In this case it is the attempt to place some context around the event of 9/11 and really dig through the highly charged politics and emotions which surround it with the aim of seeing things a little more clearly. Looking back at earlier theorists in the field of trauma, Meek notes that their work gave a more “comprehensive philosophical and historical” (3) context to the events they wrote about than is typically found in more recent formulations. More recent work done in this area has been concerned “primarily with visual evidence, testimony and commemoration” (2). This has had the effect of narrowing the focus of study to people who are affected by the events, which potentially places any event that is deemed traumatic out of the reach of critical engagement due to the perceived taboo of questioning the victims, lest this questioning lead to further damage or distress. In this vein, Meek claims that the response of the media and many academics to label 9/11 as a traumatic event “did more to reconstitute national identity than to consider the larger significance of the annihilation of civilian populations through terrorist violence” (3). Labelling the event of 9/11 as traumatic put it out of reach from critical engagement and united the United States through the identification of common injury. This response only served to categorize the event, not only refusing to critically engage with it but deeming it inappropriate to do so.

It was not only the label of “traumatic”, applied by the media and political rhetoric, that put 9/11 in the category of traumatic events. Meek suggests that the experience of collective trauma is more a function of its representation through the mass

media than it is a function of the event itself. This echoes Susannah Radstone who claims that “the traumatization effect does not appear to reside in the nature of the event” (17). What Radstone is referring to is that the same event will not necessarily create trauma symptoms in every single person. What one person finds traumatic will not necessarily affect another person as badly. Meek's idea is an expansion on this point – that the representation of the event through the media caused more traumatic effect than the event by itself would have. Had 9/11 not been broadcast in the way that it was, with the emphasis on it being named as traumatic for “both Americans and the Western world in general” (4) would it have been perceived as a collective trauma? Or would the trauma have been limited to those who directly experienced it at the locations in which it occurred?

Traverso and Broderick's analysis of the generalisability of visual representations of trauma are instructive to include at this point. They claim that these sorts of images “possess the capacity to generate abstract meaning” and as a result “the visual and narrative pain of individual characters is interpreted as a synecdoche for the suffering of a people, culture or nation” (4). This certainly happened with the media coverage of 9/11. The images of the suffering of New Yorkers in particular came to stand for the pain of Americans in general. However, as I will discuss later in this thesis, the selection of images for publication was carefully managed so as to elicit the correct emotional response from those viewing them. Traverso and Broderick go on to state that cultural trauma is not the inevitable response of a group of people to a cataclysmic event. Adding to the point that Meek makes about the trauma originating not from the event itself but from the representations thereof, they state “a culture of trauma is activated by symbolic and imaginative work and therefore, is separate from the event that caused it” (8). They put forth that cultural trauma is separate from individual trauma and should be

analysed in terms of the “materials and symbolic manifestations [of it] in social processes and structures” (8) such as mass media representations and creative responses to it such as literature and film.

The arguments of Frederic Jameson in “Dialectics of Disaster” (2003) focus on critiquing the role of the media and public figures in constructing 9/11 as a national trauma. Jameson argues that two key things are memorable when one thinks of September 11<sup>th</sup> – the image of the planes flying into the side of the towers, and the seemingly insincere emotional and sentimental hysteria in the media. To get to the truth of an historical event, argues Jameson, it is necessary to cut through the “media orchestration and amplification” of it (55). He is quick to point out that this is a difficult thing to achieve as individuals are often sensitive to having the sincerity of their emotions investigated. However, where there is such an outpouring of strong emotion that is being encouraged and intensified by the media it becomes critical to question the point of all emotion, especially when this emotion is being manipulated to leverage political advantage.

September 11 came to be seen as instantly recognisable as a traumatic event. It was portrayed as the worst thing that had ever happened to America but as Jameson points out “it is instructive to step away for a moment and to deny that it is natural and self-explanatory for masses of people to be devastated by a catastrophe in which they have lost no-one in a place with which they have no particular connection” (56). While one can certainly understand the mourning of a person who has lost a loved one in the attacks or the traumatising of someone who narrowly escaped death in the shadows of the collapsing towers, how can we explain the traumatising of someone who lives hundreds of miles away from the locations affected by the attacks when they did not lose anybody? It is doubtful, Jameson thinks, that it can be explained away as an

humanitarian response. Surely these feelings that may have started out as pity for those involved have been stoked into flames of 'it could have been me' fear by the media. Jameson argues that once this “nameless and spontaneous reaction” (56) was identified by public figures as something that everyone should be feeling, this reaction became something separate from authentic experience, something external to individual emotion.

Meek points out that 9/11 has become an “iconic cultural trauma – relived and retold in numerous documentaries and dramatizations” (6) and given that the media representations of 9/11 seem to have become “events in their own right, displacing access to any original content” (11) it is critical to find other ways of accessing the event. Through the analysis of three post-9/11 novels this thesis seeks to open up new perspectives of 9/11 as well as critiquing the dominant narrative about it.

## ***The Dominant Narrative***

The first step in understanding the dominant narrative about 9/11 is to investigate the underlying cultural assumptions. In his discussion of Americanism, Richard Crockatt describes a cultural and political ideology which has been in development as long as the nation of America has. The very term Americanism suggests that there is “an identifiable essence of America” (Crockatt 95) which of course cannot exist in reality given the vast diversity of the nation. However, there is an identifiable construction, “the projection of Americanism which we can define as the cultural form in which American nationalism expresses itself” (96). Although Crockatt holds that what constitutes Americanism “depends on how it is defined and who manages to dictate the definition” (120), there are recurrent ideas associated with the concept. The first of these is individualism. What started out in America's early history as an expression of self-reliance and lack of desire for the government's interference in the daily functioning of society continued to be considered equivalent to Americanism even when attitudes about the role of government in society changed dramatically. This concept is responsible for the pervasive idea within American society that one's success is due entirely to one's own efforts, irrespective of any other outside factors. The focus remains on the individual rather than the whole.

The second aspect of Americanism revolves around debates about immigration. As Crockatt notes, “nothing gets closer to the heart of nationhood than ideas about who should be admitted as members of the nation and on what terms” (106). In the late 1800s Theodore Roosevelt's response to this debate set out that Americanism should be “allegiance to the nation rather than a section or local area” (107), a willingness to “embrace patriotism and eschew cosmopolitanism” (107) and the complete assimilation of immigrants through a “deliberate cutting off of themselves from the language,



customs and way of life” (108) of their home country. In short, a 'true' American should be loyal to the country as a whole rather than only their own local area, which is certainly a factor in understanding why what happened in the localities of New York and Washington were considered to have happened to the entire nation. Furthermore, Roosevelt suggests that all people moving to America from other countries across the world should shed their previous identities, ideas and cultural mores and adopt the language and customs of their new home country. This version of Americanism is intolerant of what is perceived to be outside influences, as the edict from Roosevelt to “eschew cosmopolitanism” suggests. In these terms, those who come into America must work very hard to remake themselves in the image of what is considered to be a good American citizen, one that blends in and does not deviate from the expected norm.

Even though these ideals were articulated more than one hundred years ago, Crockatt points out that “the presidency of George W. Bush is living proof of the continuity of Americanism” (123). In fact, Carl Schurz's 1896 warning against the militarism and jingoism of Roosevelt's rhetoric that America should not “swagger among the nations of the world, with a chip on its shoulder, shaking its fist in everyone's face” would not have gone amiss in during the Bush presidency. Indeed, Crockatt puts forth that George W. Bush seems to hold “a conviction that America stands for something much larger than the nation, that America is indeed an 'ism” (125). From this basis of understanding, we can pick out and clarify some of the key ideas from within the cloud of patriotic fervour that enveloped America post-9/11 that made up the dominant narrative being spun by the mass media and political interests in America.

The first is the idea of America the Brave – the idea that despite America suffering huge loss of life and significant trauma, the focus of the media and government agencies was firmly on the heroics of the days surrounding the events

rather than the more uncomfortable, inconvenient or tragic elements. This might seem at odds with the construction of 9/11 as a national trauma however by constructing the event as traumatic it puts it beyond the reach of being able to be fixed. James Trimarco and Molly Hurley Dupret pick up on this point when they highlight that in the aftermath of the First World War, there was a significant amount of research into the concept of trauma. For someone to present with traumatic symptoms, the research agreed on one point – that “the traumatic event had to be so extreme as to be located permanently outside of normal memory, time, and experience” (33). Following this definition, labelling 9/11 as traumatic meant that the wound inflicted on the nation was irreparable, and so those in power took the opportunity to manipulate national sentiment to focus on the heroic aspects of the event. The effect of this manipulation was that it drew on the underlying belief that America was strong and, although she was wounded, would not be defeated. It was under this edict that the Falling Man photograph taken by Richard Drew and other images and footage of the people who fell from the towers before their collapse were removed from view and replaced with triumphant images of fire fighters and American flags across New York City.

The second key idea is one that was clearly stated by George W. Bush when he said “You are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” This ethos denied the possibility of dissenting voices or of questioning the actions of the government as those who were critical of the government or the circumstances surrounding the 9/11 attacks were accused of being unpatriotic and un-American. This created an oppressive atmosphere of conformation and fear of reprisal which went against the very ideals of democracy and freedom of speech that are ostensibly held in such high regard in America. It is ironic that during this time, then-President Bush claimed in a speech given to the joint session of Congress on the 20<sup>th</sup> September that America was a “country called to defend

freedom” (*AmericanRhetoric.com*). There was no middle ground and the media, particularly television and print media, were critical in the execution of the suppression or ridicule of those who wanted to speak out.

The third key idea is that of America as innocent victim and the terrorists as evil perpetrator. This refers to the refusal to acknowledge the idea that America was in any way culpable for the attacks. Possible culpability could have been attributed to their foreign policy, interference with the issues of other nations or other issues that had created tension on the international stage. The elite groups controlling the production of this narrative, however, maintained the America’s innocence, claiming that that the terrorists attacked because of a blind and irrational hatred for their country.

These three key strains of the dominant narrative are not mutually exclusive and in many ways overlap and feed into each other. I have chosen to separate them out like this to enable a clearer analysis of my chosen texts and to develop a clearer critique of the complex issue of the dominant narrative that was created. How these three key ideas were developed and conveyed within the media is discussed in detail below. Also, as a note, I would like to point out that although the majority of the time these narratives focus on America there are times where “The West” could be and has been substituted in place of “America”. This is particularly important regarding my analysis of Ian McEwan's *Saturday*.

In her book, *The Terror Dream*, Susan Faludi (2008) offers a biting critique of what she views as the underlying causes of the creation of the dominant narrative about 9/11. Focussing on the America the Brave idea, she claims that the “media categorizing of the heroes and the helpless, the masculine rescuers and the feminine cringers, was eclipsing what actual people had thought, seen, done” (288). In other words, the media sought to replace people's initial impressions and actual memories of this event through

manipulation of the images that were repeatedly shown in the days after 9/11. She notes that Ruth Sergel attempted to create an archive of real people's stories, to capture the true voice of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the stories that were already being “edged out” (288). Sergel erected a soundproof recording booth for people to enter and record their stories in not only in New York City but at all locations that had been involved in the attacks. The placement of these booths at these particular locations is interesting as it seeks to capture the stories that were somewhat overshadowed, or even forgotten, outside of New York City. Furthermore, it is interesting that she only set up the booths at the locations where the events actually happened. This indicates a desire to capture the stories of those who were personally involved, rather than the stories of those who experienced these events through the media. However, despite her hopes to make this an online, publicly available archive, to this day only eight of the hundreds of testimonial videos have been uploaded to the “Voices of 9.11” website. This suggests an unwillingness to dilute the narrative that was in place, and has been in place, argues Faludi, from the very day after the attacks when “our culture was already reworking a national tragedy into a national fantasy of might and triumph” (289).

This fantasy of triumphalism was further extended by the elevation of the fire fighters that attended the scene on September 11<sup>th</sup> to the status of national heroes in line with the creation of the America the Brave narrative. These fire fighters were no doubt brave and did their job of attempting to save lives magnificently, however problems with communication equipment caused many unnecessary fire fighter deaths due to them being unable to hear the evacuation orders. This failure of equipment and communication was quickly revised to fit the narrative of heroism – instead the story told to the public was that these fire fighters had heard the evacuation orders but had chosen to remain within the building anyway. It is interesting that this kind of behaviour,

which some might consider to be verging on suicidal, was not only glorified but held up as a shining example of heroism, yet the people who leapt from the upper floors of the towers to escape the fires were ignored and marginalised. The idea that the fire fighters chose certain death over retreat, chose to continue a hopeless mission rather than give in, was certainly more palatable and in line with the narrative of heroism and triumph than the truth that they died unnecessarily due to technical failures. Far better to hold up New York's finest as heroes rather than admit to the shameful truth that they were doing a dangerous job ill-equipped and under resourced and were let down by those in power.

As discussed earlier, Jameson is critical of the construction of 9/11 as a national trauma, claiming that the effect of naming it as such to create an externalised group, the terrorists, onto which the blame could be firmly placed for this tragedy. He notes that Sartre often claimed that “a collectivity is unified only by an external threat or danger, an external enemy” (58). By emphasising that this attack that had been carried out by non-American terrorists, the media and government succeeded in not only making people fearful and therefore compliant but also getting Americans to see themselves as a unified group who must strike back at this external enemy who had caused them all so much pain. This performance of trauma required there to be an 'other' which was clearly marked: the face of Muslim men with beards became synonymous with the concept of terrorist. This reinforced two of the key strains of the dominant narrative: Firstly “You are with us or with the terrorist” by creating a very clear idea of exactly who the 'othered' group was and secondly America as Innocent victim by creating a sense of collective trauma caused by the terrorist attacks.

This emphasis on collective traumatisation and America as innocent served to amplify the effect and reach of the attacks. This in turn created both a political and media climate in which there was absolutely no room for critique or reflection on

America's role in precipitating these attacks. Zelizer and Allan further expand on this line of thinking by pointing out how journalistic responses to September 11<sup>th</sup> contributed to the dominant ideology of the time. They suggest that the repetition of the images the planes hitting the towers “somehow authenticated” (4) the experiences and trauma of those who were not directly involved. The line between one's personal experience and the vivid images seen numerous times on the television screen became blurred within the atmosphere of panic and fear that was created. This blurring of the real-time experience of trauma and the mediated experience of trauma was capitalised upon to create a more cohesive national identity: you are with us. Additionally, the memorial section in the *New York Times* called “Portraits of Grief” became “a source of consolation for many readers” (9) despite the fact that most of these readers had not lost anyone they knew. Usually, the *New York Times* only provides obituary spaces for people of status, wealth and celebrity. However in the aftermath of the attacks, all those who perished were given a space for the publication of their photograph and a short write-up about their life. This presentation of the victims of 9/11 as being socially equal had the effect of stressing the togetherness of the country, whilst also giving greater meaning to their deaths. Showing the faces of those who had died gave readers a false sense of having known them, playing on the emotional buy in from the readers. This reading about and mourning for people that they did not know had the same effect as watching repeated footage of the planes flying into the towers and the towers later collapsing – it validated the experience of this event as traumatic for all Americans.

In addition, there was the matter of the ongoing tug of war between impartiality and patriotism in the American reportage of the events. Zelizer and Allan point out that for some time prior to the attacks, American news networks had reduced their number of overseas correspondents, and therefore their focus, on news outside of America. This

inward focus became more pronounced once the attacks occurred as the “convergence of professionalism and patriotism... decisively curtailed” (15) the possibility of debate and critique. The vast majority of the reportage related to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> became excessively patriotic and nationalistic. Those who dared to raise questions were outed as traitors and considered treasonous, with not only criticism publicly heaped upon them but economic campaigns carried out against them and their sponsors as punishment. The message was that if you were not one hundred percent, unconditionally supportive of America then you were as good as a terrorist. This environment of fear and intimidation meant that very few questions were raised and those that were quickly silenced or ridiculed.

James Trimarco and Molly Hurley Dupret offer further insight into the correlation between the media reportage, traumatisation and national identity. They point out that previously held notions that one must be physically present and witness events with one's own eyes to be affected and have any claim to “victim status” (30) has been problematised by the media's treatment of September 11<sup>th</sup> footage as “most newspapers and television stations labelled this event a national trauma without hesitation or explanation” (30). This created a powerful “underlying narrative” which, according to Trimarco and Dupret, translated basically into “the nation is wounded, the enemy is evil, history is irrelevant” (35). This is the third key aspect of the dominant narrative that I have identified for the purposes of this thesis – that America was the innocent victim of the evil terrorists' actions and that nothing in history could be called upon to refute this supposed fact. Further echoing Jameson's and Zelizer and Allan's comments, Trimarco and Dupret affirm that any attempt to critically reflect upon whether or not the whole of America was truly traumatised would be seen to be unpatriotic (35). Trimarco and Dupret, however, take an additional step in their analysis

that Jameson only hinted at in his. They point out that these feelings of trauma were not simply projected onto Americans by the media but that these feelings were readily accepted and incorporated into people's emotional reality due to the immense “emotional draw” (36) that the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> had for people. They suggest it is important to remember whilst conducting a critique of these events that even though the media may have constructed the sense of national traumatisation which ultimately served political agendas, these feelings of trauma were indeed genuinely felt by people throughout America and beyond. They are at pains to point out that their critique is not aimed at denying the authenticity of people's emotions and experiences but at pointing out the worrying and insidious influence that politics and mass media have on them. While it is certainly a wise idea to clarify a position to avoid misrepresentation, it does rather seem that Trimarco and Dupret take a step beyond clarification and step into the territory of being slightly defensive. This betrays the sentiment that to question is to be unpatriotic and cruel that still abounded in 2005 when their work was published.

The media's reorganization of the footage captured on that day is the focus of Allen Feldman's critique. Feldman states that the footage of that day, which was disparate and showed the sense of chaos around the Twin Towers in particular, was swiftly transformed into the “event known as 9/11” (211). Prior to this transformation, “9/11” as it came to be known, did not exist. It was a creation - “an artifice and eminently normative and fictive linear time” (212) was imposed onto the elemental bits and pieces of the chaos. The effect was to create a narrative which “both produced and managed shock as a public emotion” (212). This argument picks up on Jameson's comments about the amplification of public emotion through the manipulation of the media. What this meant in terms of the creation of the dominant narrative was the directing of the public response to this well-edited, linear storyline of the events of



September 11<sup>th</sup> which came to be 9/11, denying the possibility that this event would be seen in its horrifying, chaotic and despairing reality. Feldman points out that there was no way that the viewer of this televisual event could have known that what they were seeing was an edited version of the truth, “the screening of trauma through cinematic repetition” (213). To them, this was the reality of 9/11 and so the manipulation was complete, creating the opportunity for the political powers to take advantage of the situation.

Susan Sontag comments that it suited the political agenda of those in power at the time of the attacks that the dominant narrative told us that September 11<sup>th</sup> was “too horrible, too devastating, too painful, too tragic for words” because this left space for them to “drape themselves in borrowed words voided of content” (121). This comment mirrors DeLillo's comments within “In the Ruins of the Future” that “the writer tries to give memory, tenderness and meaning to all that howling space”. It suggests that the emphasis on the exceptionalism and traumatic nature of the day was intentionally amplified to create a *carte blanche* onto which the desired responses and narrative construction of this day could be projected. Without this intervention, the responses to 9/11 would likely have been far more numerous and varied. It is because of this stifling effect of the dominant narrative that the investigation and analysis of post-9/11 literature is so critical as it is through literature that we are able to find alternative, creative and critical responses to the events.

### ***The Post-9/11 Novel***

There has been much debate about the classification of the grouping of literary responses to 9/11. Some believe that it should be confined strictly to responses that represent the events of that day, whilst others argue for a broader definition. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I define post-9/11 novel as a literary novel written and

published after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 which forms some kind of response to the events of that day and its aftermath, including the Iraq War.

As discussed earlier, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 took place across three states in America – the attacks on the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia; the crash of United Airlines flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania and the collapse of the twin towers in downtown New York City, New York. Each event on this day was a part of a disturbing whole, however within literature it is the attacks on, and the subsequent collapse of, the twin towers in New York that has captured the majority of the imaginations of writers and become the focus of most of post-9/11 novels even when the novels are not set within New York itself. On the surface, it might seem that the reason for this is quite simple – New York was the site at which the largest and most dramatic loss of life occurred – but digging deeper reveals something more complex.

Keniston and Quinn suggest that the twin towers had a presence that was simultaneously both real and imaginary. The concrete fact of the towers prior to their collapse could not be denied. They were two of the tallest buildings in the world, dominated the Manhattan skyline and were also the workplace of thousands of people from all over the world. They had become, since their completion in 1973, an intrinsic part of the Manhattan skyline. But these towers were more than just their impressive physicality – they were symbols of American wealth and dominance, 110 floors of capitalism embodied. Keniston and Quinn argue that it is for this reason their collapse was so overwhelming for not only Americans but many people across the globe. It was not only the fact that watching the towers' demise meant that we were also witnessing the death of thousands of people or that these great feats of architecture and engineering had been brought low in one of the most unimaginable ways possible. The most affecting thing was what the collapse of the towers signified: the vulnerability of a

system that most of the Western world had assumed to be invincible and relied upon for not only their daily existence but their very identity. It is this “tension between the symbolic suggestiveness of the WTC and the fact of its destruction” (1) that is at the centre of much of the post-9/11 literature produced to date.

Richard Gray develops this idea in his book *After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11*. He refers to David Lehman's 1996 poem about the towers that was written after the 1993 incident where a car bomb exploded at the base of the North Tower. Lehman presents the towers as “a powerful *image* of national achievement and inspiration” (5). However, even in this poem, written five years before 9/11 occurred, the “virtual status” (5) of these towers is clearly just as important as their physical reality. This virtual presence of the towers in the minds of New Yorkers, Americans and people around the globe came into painfully sharp focus, Gray claims, once they fell. It was this “iconic dimension” that separated what happened in New York from the other aspects of 9/11 and put it firmly in the focus of writers grappling with these events. Ulrich Baer, editor of *110 Stories: New York Writes After September 11*, takes this idea of the towers as iconographic one step further in his introduction to the book when he describes the projection of emotion into the space the towers left behind. He refers to them as “invisible cenotaphs of loss and anger, of suffering and injustice, terrorism and fear, and the inarticulate grievance and brutal ideology that fuelled the amateur pilots on their path to destruction” (5). The towers, according to Baer, even in their physical absence, remain psychically present and are the focal point for the outpouring of emotion that followed the attacks. It is therefore the symbolic significance of the collapse of the towers that not only made Manhattan the focal point of what happened on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 but produced such a strong reaction both within America and overseas.

From discussing the draw of the events within New York, I turn now to the differentiation of the types of post-9/11 novels. Alex Houen identifies three different types of narrative modes within literary responses to 9/11 from his reading of Baer's "Introduction" in *110 Stories*. The first narrative mode he identifies is a "transformative realism" (421) which he describes as a story which transforms the shock and emotion of the event into a story of traditional form – something that has a beginning, middle and end – that readers can identify with and process. However, such stories achieve this result without, both Houen and Baer are careful to point out, "glossing over its shocking singularity" (Baer 2). Houen refers to this narrative mode as a sort of "therapeutic absorption" (421) – the seemingly unmanageable reality of the event is absorbed through a fiction which is a realistic and truthful presentation of the facts of that day but one that has been filtered through the cohesion of narrative. The overwhelming facts have been selected and streamlined into a form that can be made sense of. In this way, Baer claims, the rebuilding of the shattered city of New York can commence.

The second narrative mode that Houen identifies is the "seismographic registering of events" (421) - the type of fiction which measures the changes in a society after a major event has taken place but before these changes can be fully understood or recognised by those living through them. Baer calls this the "unconscious history-writing of the world" (5). This narrative mode signals another key role that fiction plays post-9/11. It goes beyond assisting those affected by the event to make sense of it and starts to create the cultural record of the days through which we are living. This, surely, is one of the critical functions of literature: to show us who we were and what we were thinking even when we did not completely know it ourselves. At a time when the media and political rhetoric was deafening, fiction provided another voice, another point of view. This alternative voice shows us even now, only ten years after 9/11, that the

dominant media and political narrative was by no means the only narrative. The three novels that I have chosen to include in this thesis fit this category.

The third and final mode that Houen identifies is one that is specific to post-9/11 novels. Contrary to the first narrative mode of transformative realism, this mode is a “departure from the real to the extent that it poses other possible worlds” (421). Houen claims that this mode is an “apotropaic defense” (421), something intended to ward off evil and bad luck. This sort of parallel universe approach to post-9/11 fiction is perhaps best seen in Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark* – where an aging gentleman creates a story in his head of America that never experienced the 9/11 attacks and is instead in the midst of a civil war following the election results of 2000, to escape the brutal facts of his reality. It seems that this narrative mode's function is most closely allied with that of transformative realism, despite their divergent methods. It seeks to create an alternative to reality, a space into which the reader can retreat and discover new possibilities, a safe haven. This sort of fiction restores a sense of security and enables those who read it to see beyond the current problems of their life and wider society. It also provides a powerful antidote to the pervasive media and political rhetoric of fear and revenge.

Other critics have analysed post-9/11 literature in terms of its shifting nature. Keniston and Quinn have characterised this shift as “the *transition* from narratives of rupture to narratives of continuity” (3). Keniston and Quinn's overview of post-9/11 literature includes all forms, from poetry to short story, literary criticism to novels, however their point is that as time passes, the responses to this event become increasingly complex and nuanced – particularly with the publication of novels tackling this topic. The focus of this fiction is not purely on the events of 9/11 – 9/11 is an event in the novel but not the focus – which seems to correlate with Houen's concept of the seismographic registering narrative mode of fiction. Kristiaan Versluys comments on

the discursivisation of 9/11 and how this changed over time. He states that the discursivisation drifted from the bald facts, such as the telephone messages that those killed in the towers left on the answering machines of their loved ones and that were published in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, to more reflective responses as time allowed for healing and the space in which to contemplate what had happened. He notes that it is “against the backdrop” (11) of the phone messages, the *Portraits of Grief* and an outpouring of poetry that novelists must launch their own attempts at responding to 9/11.

Another view of post-9/11 literature comes from Richard Gray. He claims that in their attempts to respond to 9/11, American writers showed a tendency to rely on what he refers to as “the myth of the fall” (1). Gray posits that this myth is a common recurrence in American literature which generally occurs once every generation or so when a crisis, usually in the form of a war, is identified as a “descent from innocence to experience” (2). Previous examples of this descent include the War of Independence with Great Britain, the Civil War and the Second World War. Gray characterises this recurring narrative thus: “the story... moves from the presumption of innocence to an encounter with forms of experience that are at once dire and disorienting. Innocence is shattered, paradise is lost, thanks to a bewildering moment, a descent into darkness, the impact of crisis” (3). According to Gray, this kind of narrative response is as old as the American nation and can be seen repeated in the American responses to 9/11. However, there are some key differences between these and previous versions of the fall myth which Gray summarises as “invasion, icons and the intervention of the media” (4). The fact that this attack hit within the America borders on civilian territory, claimed one of the great icons of American power and dominance, and was captured and repeatedly broadcast through the global media, has meant that this iteration of the myth was a

previously unknown version of crisis.

There are several quite different critical approaches to the different literary responses to 9/11 which accurately reflect the variety within the post-9/11 area of interest, as Ulrich Baer notes: “all the stories told here recognise that there will be no single story to contain the event” (5). However, it is Houen's second idea of the “seismographic registering of events” (421) that is most useful in terms of my analysis. My thesis analyses three post-9/11 novels (listed below) that register and react to the dominant narrative within the media in the time in the time after 9/11. Having explored the differing types of literary responses to 9/11, I now turn my attention to the function of these responses. There seem to be three main functions of post-9/11 literature: literature as contextualising; literature as healing; and literature as resistance. When the towers crumbled to the ground in downtown Manhattan in 2001, it seemed to many onlookers at once unimaginable and cannily familiar. This was something that had been imagined only in the movies, reflecting the darkest fears of the American public but it had been reasonably thought that this scenario would remain only on the big screen and would never make it as a news headline. The shock of the attacks left people desperate for explanations, many of them wondering how this could have happened and why the terrorists wanted to attack them. Post-9/11 novels engage with the events of the day and although they do not fully answer these questions, they provide a starting point for discussion. Both Verlsuys and Keniston and Quinn agree that literature in general and novels in particular provide a much needed contextualisation of 9/11, however their reasons for the need for this contextualisation differ vastly.

Versluys argues that 9/11 was a “limit event” (1) – a term which has been used within trauma literature to refer to events such as the holocaust and the enslavement of Africans in America. It connotes a huge loss of life and a turning point in history – the

world can never be the same again after this event has happened. Given this position it would seem that Versluys would argue that contextualisation would be impossible, however he argues that by providing context through novels, authors enable readers to “transcend jingoistic discourse or media insipidities” (14) and fully engage their imaginative capabilities. The result of this engagement is the realisation of the extent of the pain and suffering at the core of this event, which he believes to be “ultimately incommensurate and beyond full comprehension” (15), once all of the noise and distraction of the media and political rhetoric has been stripped away.

It is the critique of this very concept of 9/11 as “incommensurable” (3), however, that lies at the heart of why Keniston and Quinn argue that the context provided by literature is so important. They claim that this idea should be refused and instead 9/11 should be placed within a historical framework – seen as something which has determinable root causes rather than something that seemingly came out of nowhere. It is far easier to claim that the terrorists were motivated by mania and evil than it is to look inwards and question what part in this event America may have played, although this is something that Keniston and Quinn note is happening increasingly as time passes.

Literature also has the function of healing. 9/11 as a traumatic event caused a measure of rupture and schism not only in America but worldwide. The dominant narrative produced by media and political interests that kicked into gear before the dust had time to settle only added to this feeling of rupture. Both Baer and Versluys agree that narrative is the way forward into healing. Versluys argues that trauma is “the collapse of networks of signification” and a limit event such as 9/11 “shatters the symbolic resources of the culture and defeats normal processes of meaning making” (1). Signification is the process by which words are attached to objects and ideas so by implying the collapse of this system is to imply that words can no longer have meaning



when used to describe this event. The “symbolic resources” that are normally employed to make sense out of things are declared null and void, as are the processes by which meaning can be arrived at. This may not sound like a situation from which narrative can be built, however Versluys acknowledges that despite the perceived inadequacy of language in the face of such loss and destruction, language is all that is available to people. In order to cope with the magnitude of 9/11, the symbols that are culturally available to us must be put to use. Versluys' approach is one of integration of trauma and pain into narrative. He posits that narrative, in the form of telling and witnessing the stories of that day, will be the thing that can “restore the broken link” (4) of signification and, given the global broadcast of the event, he claims that this need for telling and witnessing is one that is present worldwide. More specifically, in terms of post-9/11 novels, he notes that the plots of these novels are “informed by the mental mechanism of recovery and repair” (14). The reason for writing, he claims is that “language is the first healer... telling the tale is the first step in getting on with life, integrating what happened into a meaningful narrative” (14).

Ulrich Baer's view of healing focuses on an idea of replacement, a filling in of the physical absence within New York City. He posits that words are the only thing that can fill up the literal and psychic void left by the loss of the towers. The wound inflicted on New York City on that day can be “cauterized” by fiction's “uncomfortable questions and unflinching reflection” (3). Baer's use of the word cauterise implies an urgent need for questioning and reflection, lest the wound become infected and unhealthy. Far better to allow fiction to give perspective and start the process of reconciliation of the event with the collective consciousness than to let the event become co-opted for political use. Baer also suggests that fictional narrative is reconstitutive. When the towers fell, he claims, many stories were cut short but with the telling of new stories the rebuilding of

New York City, and by extension, the rest of America and the world, can begin again. From the dust and ashes of Ground Zero come the narratives that will question, explore and, ultimately, heal the wound inflicted by the attacks.

Literature has also been identified as a process of resistance. The critics that I have reviewed above also agree that the key function of post-9/11 literature is the resistance of the dominant narrative. Shock quickly gave way to a rhetoric of victory and revenge, completely skipping over the need for the processing and questioning of 9/11 and it is these “simple answers” (Baer 2) and the “simplify[ing] or fix[ing] the meaning of 9/11” (Keniston and Quinn 3) that have been taken up by various post-9/11 novels. The prescriptive nature of the dominant discourse as having the supposed right answers and solutions for 9/11 is, Baer claims, “foolish and arrogant” (2). Gray adds to this argument, noting that the language of the dominant discourse was one of opposition: “us and them. West and East, Christian and Muslim” (17). The enemy had been swiftly identified and the battle lines hastily drawn – one was either for America or against it. Gray points out that some 9/11 novels have resisted this simplification of the world into black and white categories by subverting this oppositional language and “deterritorializing America” (17).

Versluys' position on literature as resistance agrees with the above ideas; he notes that many of the novels written after 9/11 were “absolutely inane” (12) and “shamelessly recuperated [the events of the day] for ideological and propaganda purposes” (12). However, there are novels that do not fall into this category and instead resist the tendency to follow the script provided by the media and political sources, to suppress the trauma and turn “tragedy... into triumphalism” (13). These novels resist the dominant discourse's desire for a “premature closure” and instead open up space for reconsideration, re-imagining and critical thinking.

Alex Houen's suggests there is a need for fiction to respond to and resist "postmodernism's terrifying circuitry" (423). He claims that the Real is itself "looped in with a circuit of postmodern, mediating power" (423) – that is, it is very difficult to resist the ability of the media to control and manipulate our perception of reality. To escape from this manipulation, Houen posits that we need to view the novel as a potential "'outer space' of possibility" (429) – a place outside of the mass-media culture that allows much needed critical distance and perspective on the events that have unfolded, both on the day of September 11<sup>th</sup> and in the days after.

The ideas which relate most closely to the direction taken in this thesis are the theories of literature as contextualising and literature as resistance. The novels I have chosen to include in this thesis provide a context for the events of 9/11 as well as offer resistance to the media's focus on heroics, unquestioning patriotism and the belief that America was completely blameless for what happened.

The novels that I have chosen to include for analysis in this thesis are *Falling Man* by Don DeLillo, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and *Saturday* by Ian McEwan. These were chosen from a range of novels which fit the aforementioned definition of what a post-9/11 novel. The novels that I read but chose not to include were *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* by Ken Kalfus, *Man in the Dark* by Paul Auster, *The Zero* by Jess Walter, *A Gate at the Stairs* by Lorrie Moore, *Ghost Town* by Patrick McGrath and *Relative Strangers* by Emma Neale. These novels were all very interesting pieces of fiction but I wanted to include three different novelistic responses to 9/11: the American response, the non-American Western response and the non-American and non-Western response. I felt that this would offer an interesting range of viewpoints and make for a richer collection of material to analyse in terms of the dominant narrative. The majority of the novels not included for analysis (with the

exception of those written by Patrick McGrath and Emma Neale) were written by American authors. However, even McGrath's response is one that comes from an American perspective as although he was born in London he currently lives in New York. One of the key limitations of my choices is that they are all written by male authors and so the female angle is missing from my analysis, although this does leave open an interesting avenue to pursue at a later date.

I chose Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* as an American Western novel response to the events of 9/11. I chose this particular novel over the other American novels that I considered as it seemed to me to be one of the more critical engagements with the dominant narrative's portrayal of the events of that day and the aftermath. This is especially strongly presented through the motif of the falling man artist who recreates the image of one of the more horrifically memorable images of that day: one man falling from one of the towers before it collapsed. The inclusion of this image, which was widely censored from media outlets shortly after it was published, in the novel contradicts the dominant narrative's focus on heroics. Furthermore the inclusion of the terrorist perspective humanises the men behind the attacks, something which the "terrorist as evil" narrative does not support.

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was initially included for consideration for this thesis as prior to reading it I thought it would provide an insight into the fundamentalist world of terrorism. Upon reading it I discovered that it was not what I had expected which lead me to re-examine my own assumptions about the concepts of fundamentalism and terrorism. This novel allows for the inclusion of dissenting voices through giving centre stage to the voice of the non-American, non-Western, more specifically Pakistani, male protagonist. It also exposes the inherent fundamentalism within the American financial sector through the eyes of young

immigrant, Changez, challenging the reader to re-evaluate the dominant narrative's assertion that the terrorist is evil and America is the innocent victim. It also tests the narrative of "You are with us or you are with the terrorists" through the relationship of Erica and Changez.

The final novel I chose to include in this thesis is Ian McEwan's *Saturday*. This provides the non-American Western perspective which is an important angle to consider as the media portrayed what happened on September 11<sup>th</sup> as not only an attack on America but on the Western way of life. As such, the feelings of shock and trauma extended further than the American borders. On first reading, this novel appears to support the notion that the West has been invaded by an outside force and that the appropriate response is one of punitive action, however upon closer inspection one may see that it includes a critique of this way of thinking. The dominant narrative of "the terrorist is evil, the West is innocent" is challenged through the protagonist Henry Perowne's interactions with Baxter.

These novels function as the "seismographic registering of events" (Houen, 421) in the days after the events of 9/11. They also provide a context for 9/11 and resistance to the dominant narrative that was being fed to the public through the media and political discourse. They each provide a space from which a unique alternative point of view can be adopted and a starting point from which critical thought and discussion about September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 can take place.



## **Resistance through inclusion, disruption and dissent: Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*.**

Don DeLillo's first published response to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> was the article "In the Ruins of the Future", which appeared in *Harper's Magazine* in December, 2001. In this article, DeLillo identifies the two key players in what he sees as a struggle for global influence: the forces of capitalism and the forces of terrorism. He constructs them as two competing narratives, with capitalism standing for all that is technologically advanced, fast-moving and of the future and terrorism being characterised as old, unseeing, inhumane, and of the past. These clearly marked value-judgements are reaffirmed by DeLillo's use of the same rhetoric that abounded in the weeks and months, even years, after the attacks. This rhetoric intentionally created divisions: "Us" versus "Them", the West versus the Islamist East, progress against stagnation. The reproduction of this rhetoric can be clearly seen in DeLillo's writing here: "It was America" DeLillo states, "that drew *their* fury. It was the high gloss of *our* modernity" (emphases my own). It had been "us" (or more specifically, the U.S.) that had held the balance of world power until the planes hit the towers. Now, DeLillo claims, "the world narrative belongs to terrorists" - they had the attention of everyone, especially the nation which they had targeted.

DeLillo claims that for "us" to reclaim the previously held position, to regain the foothold within the world, something must be done. As a result of the collision between these two competing forces of capitalism and terrorism, the narrative "ends in the rubble" of the collapsed towers and now "it is left to us to create the counternarrative." But who, we might ask, is "us" and what exactly is this counternarrative? For the purposes of this argument I have taken the "us" to mean anybody reading DeLillo's

article. What this counternarrative comprises, however, requires a slightly more complex answer. DeLillo writes that there are “100,000 stories criss-crossing New York, Washington and the world” which points to an inclusive rather than exclusive response to the events. The stories which combine to create this counternarrative encompass both “heroism and encounters with dread” and the “improvised memorials” which lined the streets of New York particularly in the days after 9/11. It includes that which goes beyond facts, distortion of truth, myth and fantasy, a “shadow history” made from recollections and witness accounts of people who were not actually there but will claim that they were. This inclusion of stories from people who were not ever there again reinforces the inclusiveness of this counternarrative DeLillo hopes will be created, but it also points to an interesting point for consideration – that people want to be a part of this, they desire to belong to the “Us” who has been hurt, standing alongside each other united. This supports the point that Trimarco and Dupret made that although the idea that 9/11 was a national trauma was thrust upon people by the media, it was readily accepted by many. This desire for inclusion underscores the rhetoric of the inclusive “Us” that DeLillo himself has used throughout the article and suggests that one *should* desire to be a part of this community. DeLillo also points out that “the internet is a counternarrative” but the change in article from 'the' to 'a' suggests that the internet's counternarrative is one that is set apart, already being created separately to the counternarrative he speaks of.

If this response sounds disparate and confused, that is because it is. It has to be, says DeLillo. In the days after the attacks, people watching the media coverage of the day's events were dazzled by the overload of images that were being thrown at them and “We could not catch up with it.” Language, it seemed, was not adequate: there were no verbal comparisons that could be made that could explain or represent what had



happened, but ultimately, DeLillo points out, “language is inseparable from the world that provokes it” and so it is this language with which we must construct our responses. The response that DeLillo seeks to create is one that will navigate the treacherous territory between the two competing narratives of past and future to encompass the experience of now.

In *Falling Man*, however, the counternarrative that he has created is different to the one he speaks of in this article. This is hardly surprising. At the time when he wrote “In the Ruins of the Future” the wound of 9/11 was still fresh, only 3 months old, and many of the things that he responds to in his novel had only just started happening or had not happened at all, such as the actions and reactions of those in political power and the obedient mass media. This is why *Falling Man* does not focus solely on the terrorists as “In the Ruins of the Future” does but rather on resisting the dominant narrative created by politicians and the mass media.

Richard Drew's instantly recognisable photograph, which came to be known as “The Falling Man”, was published in newspapers across the world on September 12<sup>th</sup> 2001 alongside many other photographs depicting 9/11. Within America, however, the public outcry about this particular image was such that all newspapers spontaneously self-issued a blanket censorship of this image – self-censorship being, according to Susan Sontag, “the most important and most successful” (Sontag 115). It was deemed too horrific, too unbearable to look at an image of someone plummeting to their death. The newspapers were accused of “exploitation, stripping a man of his dignity, invasion of privacy and turning tragedy into leering pornography” (Junod 2003). There were, however, many other photographs taken of people's deaths on that day which were neither criticised nor censored. All of the photographs and video footage of the planes slamming into the sides of the towers, of the towers collapsing – all of them depicted

death. We knew as we looked at these images that there were people in the towers as the planes hit and that people were still trapped there when they collapsed. This was part of what made these images so horrifying but the fact that it was sanitised death – death we could not see, death we could not personally recognise – is perhaps what made it acceptable for these images to be viewed and distributed. The images of these deaths did not capture the starkly lonely human forms that the images of those who jumped from the towers did.

The media suppressed images of not only the Falling Man but of anyone who jumped from the towers. News footage that showed falling people was swiftly removed by the networks from American television screens. In addition, subsequent documentaries made about that day, according to Tom Junod, were edited to exclude not only the images of these people but the sounds of their bodies impacting the ground which could be heard even if the camera lens was pointing elsewhere. The most telling exclusion of this image is the one from the “Victims” section of a collection of 9/11 images entitled *Here is New York*. Only one image out of a 175 photographs within this section included falling persons, despite the website for this collection claiming to be a democracy of photographs. Through these exclusions from the pictorial representation of 9/11, the fact of these people's existence is denied – something which seems to be at odds with the proclaimed narrative of inclusion and the reaffirmation of national identity through the experience of this traumatic event.

According to Susan Sontag, in the modern world images are essential to an event being considered real. She claims that these images signify that this event is something to take note of and secures its place in the annals of history (124). Echoing Sontag's sentiments, Junod claims that photographers have a duty to not look away as it is through images that history is made. The suppression of the image of the Falling Man

and other images that showed falling people was an attempt to exclude this from the 'reality' of 9/11 and therefore exclude it from the narrative of the day that would be recorded in history. It was not only that the sight of someone falling to their death was too terrible a thing to observe; it was that that it was unacceptable.

This media self-censorship was followed up by an official denial of the reality of these people's death. Junod notes that when he called the New York Medical Examiner's Office (NYMEO) he was told that "We don't like to say they jumped. They didn't jump. Nobody jumped. They were forced out or blown out". A narrative was in the process of being created that nobody died by their own hand on 9/11. It seems that the spectre of the taboo of suicide looms large, sitting unacknowledged in the corner of everyone's mind. Let us be clear – entering a building with the intent to jump from one of the upper floors as a means to end one's life is a very different thing to jumping from an unsurvivable height to escape a raging fire. The first scenario is choosing death over life while the other is choosing one type of death over another death. At that stage, when life is no longer an available option, can it really be called suicide? The taboo of suicide sticks, nonetheless.

Øyvind Vågnes notes that the key issue when viewing a traumatic event, either as it happens or later on when viewing images of it, is how to translate the experience into language. This issue is clear in the above discussion, from the NYMEO's statement to the title of Richard Drew's photograph: *Falling Man*. The use of the verb 'falling' as opposed to 'jumping' betrays an inability to ascribe active intent to the action as much as it euphemises, hedges and avoids the facts that these people did not fall. They plummeted. They were travelling at 150 miles per hour just before they hit the ground. They did not fall so much as hurtled to their death. The refusal to name this reality can be explained by Marita Sturken's suggestion that our personal memories of an event have

the power to be replaced by film footage and photographs. The image of the Falling Man was suppressed because it was a very visual piece of evidence of loss of hope. This directly contradicted the dominant narrative of America the Brave which focussed on the heroics of 9/11. To suppress this image was the same as suppressing a too traumatic memory. Whether these people jumped, fell, were blown or forced out in the end is a detail nobody will ever be able to know. What is known is that the way in which they died has been all but visually scrubbed from the records of 9/11. They were, at best, under-represented and at worst denied and ignored – refused a place in the narrative of that day.

DeLillo, however, has refused to accept the marginalisation of this image. Using the same title for his novel as that of the photograph, he has taken a step towards bringing this image back from the forgotten edges of the dominant narrative. Within DeLillo's novel, the photograph is replaced by a performance artist who recreates the image by 'falling' from various structures around New York City. A safety harness, concealed under a business suit, breaks his fall where he poses as in the photograph "one leg bent up, arms at his sides" (DeLillo 33). Despite the title of the novel, the artist only appears twice within the novel, three times if you count the discussion of his obituary.

The first appearance of the artist Falling Man in the text is brief but informative. The language Lianne uses to describe him here "He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people *fell* or were *forced to jump*" (33, emphasis my own) betrays her own position on the fate of the people who jumped. She also states that despite the crowds around her at Grand Central Station watching it being "outraged at the spectacle" of the performance, it "held the gaze of the world" (33). However, it is unclear here whether she is talking about the performance or the original

sight of people falling from the towers on the day of 9/11. The sight of the performance artist disturbs her so much that she returns to the train station to wait for her mother. This repulsion is significant given her otherwise incessant consumption of everything to do with 9/11 – at other points of the novel she is seen compulsively reading the newspaper coverage about the attacks. The depiction of that image, that invoked the “single falling figure that trails a collective dread” (33) was too much even for her. Lianne is like the majority of Americans who also rejected the image of the Falling Man after the attacks in New York. Her frenzied media consumption mirrors that of the general public but this frenzied consumption is not complete nor is it honest. Neglecting to acknowledge the image of Falling Man and therefore disavowing those who died by falling from the Towers on 9/11 results in the misrepresentation of not only the dead but the entire event. The result of this misrepresentation is instructive – although the media coverage of the event touted 9/11 as a national trauma it sought to strike a fine balance between presenting America as wounded and America as defeated. Images of people with no other option available to them besides death encapsulates helplessness and despair. Presenting America as wounded had the effect of bringing the nation together, of solidifying the national identity. It enabled the rhetoric of revenge and retaliation; that America may be hurt but she is not defeated. A defeated America would mean that the terrorists had been successful and might result in fracturing the national identity. Removing evidence of falling people from the record of 9/11 ensured that the narrative of America the Brave – wounded but not defeated – was perpetuated.

The second appearance of the Falling Man performance artist in the novel occurs 130 pages later in the final third of the novel. Lianne is walking home from her Alzheimer's group when her aimless wandering brings her to the Greater Highway Deliverance Temple. She realises that she recognises the name of this place as it is

where one of her Alzheimer's group, Rosellen S., found shelter when she was lost in the midst of a memory lapse. However, instead of being a place of safety or deliverance for Lianne, she finds that she has unwittingly stumbled into the latest scene that the Falling Man performance artist is setting up. Her first reaction is to attempt to “share a look” with somebody to “see what she herself was feeling” (163). Lianne, the narrator suggests, in her insecurity needs to see the emotion of the moment reflected back to her in another person's eyes before she can be sure that this is the emotion that she too is feeling, or know which emotion is appropriate. But she is unable to catch anyone's eye and so must look on with all of the other bewildered people who are gathering below and around him. DeLillo provides the context for Falling Man the artist through the utterances of the onlookers. One woman hangs out of her window, yelling “You don't be here” (164). This ambiguous statement could be read as 'We don't want you here' or 'You're not really here'. Both options reflect the fate of the Falling Man in the photograph. Suppressed and censored, his existence and subsequent death is denied. The reaction of the general public to the appearance of the photograph of Falling Man can also be seen here: “Kids called out, they shouted inevitably “*Jump,*” but only two or three times and then it stopped...” (164). Children, typically known for their innocence and propensity to state the facts of a situation baldly are here called upon to state the obvious. Falling Man and all of the other people who 'fell' from the towers in fact 'jumped'. But societal pressure is an imposing thing and soon even those few voices are quieted.

Just before he jumps, Lianne realises that she and the others gathered around are not the intended audience for this performance – it is intended for those travelling on the train that will soon pass by. But these people will only see part of the story, they have no way of knowing that he has a safety harness attached and it is not a real jumper. Lianne

imagines their reactions, their attempts to describe the indescribable and she wonders if this is the performance artist's intention: "to spread the word this way, by cell phone, intimately, as in the towers and the hijacked planes" (165). Since the photograph of the Falling Man was expunged from the media after being published once, the only way that knowledge of this photographic image could be spread was by word of mouth. The truth of the image, the fact of one man's death that came to represent all those who jumped on that day, was publicly denied. As such DeLillo uses the character of the performance artist here to portray the idea that despite the suppression of this image, its reality and the fact of people's experiences cannot be denied or eclipsed by the overwhelming dominant narrative which denied anything that troubled the ideal of America as a nation of heroes and fighters.

Lianne retreats around the corner of a building but continues to watch him, compelled "Because she saw her husband somewhere near. She saw his friend, the one she'd met, or the other, maybe" (166). Here it is clear that not only is Lianne being forced to confront this image and the reality of the deaths of those people who fell from the Towers but they have become personalised to her. She is not watching the simulated death of a stranger but something which could have happened to any person within the Towers. This twist is a key component of DeLillo's strategy to rescue the Falling Man from the margin of the dominant narrative of 9/11. He is no longer excluded and denied – he has become everyman, he has become personalised to Lianne.

Upon seeing this jump, then, Lianne is far more affected than in the previous episode at Grand Central Station where she turned away, disturbed but not obviously moved. This time, her body goes limp in a kind of hysterical identification as she claims that "the fall was not the worst of it" but the "jolting end of the fall" and the "stillness itself" (168) – the jolting end where death would have normally occurred had the

performance artist not stayed his fall with the wire. As her senses return to her, she turns and flees in a dissociative haze within which she “could not think beyond” (169) what she has just seen.

Lianne's final encounter with the falling man performance artist, who the reader now knows as David Janiak, is when she learns of his death in a six day-old newspaper. She reads the obituary, but then lets the newspaper slide off the bed and turns off the light. In a portrayal of magical thinking, she listens to a car alarm outside of the apartment. The cessation of the car alarm is a kind of signal that prompts her to get out of bed, leave her state of denial and search for more information on Janiak. Lianne's obsessive-compulsive actions suggest a desire to avoid knowing about the man behind the performance she had witnessed twice in the two months following the 9/11 attacks – as if allowing the newspaper to fall to the floor and turning off the light, erasing her ability to see, will also erase her ability to know. This mirrors the suppression of Drew's photograph within the media: that which is not seen does not exist. Furthering this reading of the situation is the unexplained absence of the edition of the newspaper from a pile of newspapers which would contain the extended piece on Janiak's life and actions as the falling man performance artist. The narrator suggests that Lianne seems to wait for a sign, something to indicate she is permitted to search for more information about Janiak: “She sat in the chair next to the basket waiting for something to happen or stop happening, a noise, a drone, an appliance, before she went to the computer in the next room” (219).

As was the case in the days after the 9/11 attacks, Lianne finds the internet is overflowing with information about Janiak. Given that the internet as a whole is not controlled by any one media corporation, government or country, it is the most uncensored source of information. It is the dark underbelly of the mainstream media, the



place where even those things which have been deemed inappropriate for public viewing can be found. It is through the internet that Lianne comes to know more about Janiak and as a result comes to face the photograph which he sought to reproduce in his performances – the one of “a particular man...falling from the north tower of the World Trade Center, headfirst, arms at his sides, one leg bent, a man set forever in free fall” (221). Although DeLillo never makes specific reference to the Richard Drew photograph, this is as close as he comes to doing so. Lianne's reaction is interesting. The narrator suggests that she had not previously made a connection between Janiak's performances and this photograph but when she does “she knows at once which photograph the account referred to. It hit her hard when she first saw it, the day after, in the newspaper” (221). Her delayed connection reminds us that although the image itself may have been physically removed from the sight of the public in the mainstream media, it could not be removed from the memories of all those who saw it: “This picture burned a hole in her mind and heart, dear God, he was a falling angel and his beauty was horrific” (222).

Finally Lianne comes to realise that her role was to see, to witness. There were no pictures of the performed fall by Janiak which she witnessed on the railway track but that does not mean it did not happen. She, as the “photograph, the photosensitive surface” (223) has recorded this happening – “The nameless body coming down, this was hers to record and absorb” (223). It does not matter who or what tries to censor the flow of information, DeLillo seems to be saying. Ultimately, that which has been seen can never be unseen and so the images of those who fell on 9/11 are ours to record and absorb. Their memory lives on through those who saw them even as the dominant narrative attempts to delete their existence.

Extending this resistance to the invisibility of the people who died by falling

from the Towers, DeLillo gives Janiak an identity, something which the falling man in the photograph never had. Janiak shuns all media attention and refuses scheduled performances or speaking engagements. The work he was doing in bringing the photograph back to life is done from the edges, in unexpected places to shock, to confront and remind people of how they felt when they first saw the images, whether in real life or through the media, of people falling. He denies access to the media that denied the public access to the photograph.

Through the creation of David Janiak, the man who performed the suppressed image of the falling man around New York City, DeLillo resists the dominant narrative's exclusion of the people who died by jumping from the Twin Towers in New York on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. Although these people were not committing suicide in the true sense of the word, their complete lack of options for the continuation of their lives represented a helplessness and despair that troubled the dominant narrative's creation of an image of an America that was wounded but not defeated. DeLillo's inclusion of Janiak recalls the images of these people and brings them back into the collective memory of this event, enabling a more accurate and honest history of this event. He also provides an alternative perspective to the media depiction of 9/11, a space from which those who read this novel can come to their own conclusions what 9/11 was and continues to be.

Within minutes of the first plane hitting the World Trade Centre on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the world media was in attendance. What followed was an onslaught of images, commentary and opinion about what is the most covered event in history so far. The speed with which this coverage, specifically the images of the event, appeared and were quickly woven into a coherent, linear narrative format was astonishing. Feldman comments that from "the chaotic temporal debris" (211) a narrative that followed an

imposed “artificial and eminently normative and fictive linear” (212) timeline was produced through the use of cinematic editing techniques. What was viewed by those watching the televisual coverage was not an accurate representation of the reality of the day but rather “the event known as 9/11” (211) - a carefully managed version of events. However this was necessary for those who were in political power at that time to ensure they created the desired emotional response from the public. The dominant narrative being created was absolutely dependent on the mass media – as Susan Sontag noted on the day of the attacks, it seemed that “The voices licensed to follow the event seem to have joined forces to infantilize the public” (105). The dominant narrative required cohesion, not chaos; a wounded America that would fight back, not an America who needed time to recover; a righteous America who had been wrongfully hurt, not a reflective America considering its part in this situation. To achieve this effect, these sentiments needed to be broadcast into all of the homes across America, as soon as possible. They were.

DeLillo, in his representation of the events of that day, refuses the path of speed or of flashing the well-worn images across the pages of his novel. Instead, he chooses a far quieter, slower and, at that time, undiscovered way of representing 9/11. Marie-Christine Leps notes in her analysis of DeLillo's use of imagery within *Falling Man* that DeLillo's choice of this path has the effect of “interrupt[ing] the global spin narrative” (187) and providing a new perspective on the events – a resistance to the dominant narrative being created. The purpose of this resistance, I believe, is to provide an alternative space from which the reader can view the events and reach their own conclusions without being told what they should think. There are several ways through which DeLillo achieves the creation of this resistance: through the form of the novel, Justin's insistence on speaking in monosyllables, and the echoing of familiar imagery

from the coverage of 9/11 through artwork within Nina's apartment.

The traditional arc of a fictional narrative follows the well-worn beginning, middle and an end route but *Falling Man* deviates from this form. The form of the novel is temporally disjointed, starting in the middle, as Keith walks away from the collapsing towers, and ends at the beginning as Hammad and Keith's storylines violently merge as Hammad crashes with the plane into the tower in which Keith and Rumsey are working. Between these two narrated events lies the bulk of the novel, split into three parts with three separate sections following each part. Parts one, two and three are named Bill Lawton, Ernst Hechinger and David Janiak respectively. On the first reading, the reader has no idea who these men are until they have finished reading at least the section for which he is named as these names are not the primary identities of these men as they appear in the novel. Bill Lawton is the re-imagining of the name of Osama Bin Laden by Justin and his friends as they struggle to come to terms with this event as children. Ernst Hechinger is the alias of Martin Ridnour, Nina's lover of uncertain identity: “[he] was an art dealer, a collector, an investor, perhaps. She wasn't sure what he did exactly or how he did it... He did or did not have a wife in Berlin” (42) – who is also revealed to have connections with terrorist dealings in his past. Finally, David Janiak is the name of the Falling Man performance artist that Lianne encounters twice, although she only comes to know his true identity once he dies. The significance of these sections being named thus is not immediately clear upon first reading. The reader must finish the novel and then search back through the story to place these characters, who all have two different names within this novel – it requires a desire to understand and the drive to piece it all together. This novel resists the media framework of reorganising the chaotic events of 9/11 into a structured linear narrative that resembles a movie. Instead it intentionally displaces the reader, making them unsure of what is happening or who a

character is, requiring the reader to question what is going on and search through the pages for answers. This resistance of unquestioning consumption of the media narrative encourages the reader to think critically about 9/11.

There are three subsections which contain the storyline of Hammad, a terrorist involved in the cell that will fly the planes into the side of the Towers. These are named for the geographic locations he inhabits, which move ever closer to New York and the World Trade Center, from Marienstrasse (Germany) to Nokomis (Florida, USA) to the Hudson Corridor (New York City). The narrative of Hammad is the only one which moves forward in time and develops coherently and logically. His story is the one which will trigger the responses of the media and the resistance to that media response that DeLillo creates within *Falling Man*.

The experience of reading this novel is disorientating. There is no clear timeline, the text jumps back and forth in time, and scenes that would normally be self-contained are split into sections arbitrarily and dispersed amongst the rest of the novel. The text is formed through fragments of “memories and stories” that “overlap, repeat, interrupt and vary each other” (Leps 186). Time is never really clearly stated, the best indications are at the times when we told how many 'days after the planes' in time we are but this still requires the reader to pause and work this out. The most unusual reference to a specific date is when the reader is informed that the anti-war protest that Lianne and Justin attend at the end of the novel is being held on Charlie Parker's birthday. This requires either a great knowledge of jazz musicians or a quick search on the Internet to ascertain that this date is in fact August 29<sup>th</sup>. The disorienting feel of the novel means that it is not a quick read, even for those would normally read quickly, despite being a relatively short novel with at 246 pages. As a result, the reader must read more carefully and slowly, engaging with the details provided within the text. This has the opposite effect

to watching the mass media coverage of 9/11 where the images were supplied in a quick-fire, easily-consumed manner with commentary to direct those watching it on what to think and what was considered an appropriate reaction.

Another example of disruption to the dominant narrative's linear, easily consumed from within *Falling Man* is Justin's exclusive use of monosyllables. Justin is an unusual child who seems deeply affected by the events of 9/11 – he and his close friends search the skies for 'Bill Lawton' (Bin Laden) and are convinced that the towers have not yet fallen as his mother turned off the television before he could see them fall and so he fears they will be attacked again. Justin speaking in monosyllables is introduced on page 66 of the novel as a kind of school project aimed at teaching the children “the structure of words and the discipline required to frame clear thoughts” (66) but it seems to have some soothing effect on Justin also. He explains this feeling to his father: “It helps me go slow when I think” (66). Later it becomes unclear whether this was indeed a school-designated project or if it has evolved from a kind of magical-thinking ritual Justin created to protect himself against the imagined threat of Bill Lawton. Whatever the genesis, using this device to help himself “go slow when [he] think[s]” also makes the reader more aware of the language being used – especially when Justin breaks from monosyllables into normal speech.

DeLillo's *Falling Man* evidences a “near-total absence” (Apitzsch 96) of the images that most of the world was exposed to in the mass media account of 9/11. DeLillo offers a fresh perspective, a reconsideration of the visual reality of that day by presenting the images in very different ways. One of the ways he does this is through the use of Morandi's paintings that Martin has given to Nina as a gift during their 20-year relationship. As Martin and Lianne stand in front of one of these paintings, which depicts a collection of household items such as bottles and biscuit tins, they can imagine

they both see the Twin Towers in the form of “two dark objects, too obscure to name” (49). Even the name of the painting; “Natura Morta”, or 'still life', directs us to silence and stillness. Julia Apitzsch notes that showing the reader a familiar image in this unexpected way “opens up new perspectives beyond the exhausted mainstream comparisons” (96). It forces the reader to imagine this painting, or perhaps even to stop reading the novel as I did the first time I read it, and search for a picture of it on the Internet. It provides a pause, room to imagine – something that the unrelenting presentation of images through the mass media did not allow for.

Another set of images from the novel is the collection of old passport photos, another piece of art that Martin has bestowed upon Nina. This collection of photographs echoes the collection of pictures of those who lost their lives in the 9/11 attacks, the published collection of which became known as *Portraits of Grief*. Although she does not know the people in the photographs, Lianne finds “innocence and vulnerability, in the nature of old passports, in the deep texture of the past itself, people on long journeys, people now dead” (142). Her feelings for this collection of photographs might reflect the feelings many people had when they observed the missing persons posters in the days after the attacks. However, DeLillo chose this piece of art to bring this image from the days after 9/11 into the novel rather than directly mentioning it. Again, this roundabout way of introducing images that were so exposed adds a new dimension of consideration and thoughtfulness that perhaps had been missed upon the initial viewings through the mass media.

One of the more startling features of the dominant narrative that was created by the political powers and the mass media in the days after 9/11 was its absolute intolerance of dissenting voices. The rhetoric of “You are with us, or you are with the terrorists” was one that insisted on unquestioning patriotism. Susan Sontag claims that

speaking out with even the “mildest of critical observations” could see you fired or publicly reprimanded (115). Furthermore the media employed “intimidation” tactics against those that they branded “unpatriotic non-mourners” (Jameson 57). This “fiercely conformist” atmosphere created a “furore of vindictiveness against dissenting intellectuals” (Sontag 116) and ensured that the clear message from the government was that there was “no legitimate room for American doubts or opposition” (Falk 327) to their policies, even policies which removed civil liberties from American citizens. This message of conformity was pushed beyond the national boundaries when then-President Bush declared in his address to Congress that “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”

In his initial response to the attacks, “In the Ruins of the Future”, DeLillo seemed to be conforming to the majority opinion of the time. His point then was that a counternarrative must be created against the “death plot” that the terrorists had masterminded and successfully brought to fruition. However, within his novelistic response to 9/11, the strictly conformist ideals have changed somewhat. Through the character of Martin Ridnour, an art collector from Germany, DeLillo introduces a dissenting voice, a political opinion which was not welcomed within America in the time after the attacks. This dissenting voice comes through in Ridnour's arguments with Nina. It is indicated within the text that they have disagreed about these issues for a long time, but the events of 9/11 have given this disagreement far more emotional gravity. The argument portrayed on pages 113 to 116 is their final one and the reason for their estrangement.

Martin speaks out about two topics that were considered taboo – the fault that could be laid at the feet of America for the attacks and the provocative nature of the World Trade Center towers. He speaks of “lost lands, failed states, foreign interventions,



money, empire, oil, the narcissistic heart of the West” (113) but it is his parting shot that really drives home:

“But that's why you built the towers, isn't it? Weren't the towers built as fantasies of wealth and power that would one day become fantasies of destruction? You build a thing like that so you can see it come down.

The provocation is obvious. What other reason would there be to go so high and then double it, do it twice?

You are saying, Here it is, bring it down.” (113)

After this, he leaves abruptly, only to reappear after Nina's funeral.

The inclusion of this opinion within the novel expands the reach of DeLillo's resistance to the dominant narrative. He has included a voice of dissent that was not allowed to be heard however it is interesting to note that the voice he has chosen to include is not an American voice. That Martin is European and has a dubious past involvement with questionable political alliances does dull the effect somewhat. Indeed, that he is European is pointed out clearly in his exchange with a colleague of Lianne's after her mother's funeral, three years after the attacks: “Despite everything, we're still America, you're still Europe” (193) says the colleague. Martin merely responds that he “doesn't know this America anymore... There's an empty space where America used to be” (193). The fact that DeLillo uses a European character to voice this dissent is interesting. It would have been far more powerful and risky had this level of dissent come from an American character. This choice indicates the power of the dominant narrative perhaps, that even within a novel that offers resistance to the dominant narrative it still conforms in this sense to its edicts.

Ridnour's was not the only dissenting voice that was included in this novel,

however. Hammad, one of the terrorists on board one of the planes that flew into the Twin Towers in New York, is included as a character within the novel. Post-9/11, the terrorist became the evil 'other' within the American psyche. It was the dark shadowy figure, poised to strike at any time from any direction. DeLillo's characterisation of Hammad has been charged with being “stereotypical” by David Martin Jones and M.L.R. Smith and “Westernized” by John Carlos Rowe. My reading of the character of Hammad is of a young, impressionable young man who is seeking a place of belonging in the world. When we meet Hammad in the novel, he is living in Hamburg. He is listening distractedly to an older gentleman, who prays at the same mosque as him, speak of his war experiences. Hammad, despite his distraction is “grateful to the man” (DeLillo 78) for providing him with some form of contact even while he “kept thinking that another woman would come by on a bike, someone to look at, hair wet, legs pumping” (78). Within the house where the terrorist cell is living, we are shown a timid, eager-to-learn Hammad who “sat crouched, eating and listening” (79). He is unsure about the things that are said but he listens to “everything they said, intently” (79). When he tries to voice his own opinion, he is quickly disciplined: “They stared him down, they talked him down” (80) – he is very much the pupil who is being taught how to think, how to act.

Hammad struggles throughout the sections set in Hamburg and in Florida against the “need to be normal” (83). In Hamburg he has a girlfriend whom “sometimes he wanted to marry and have babies [with]” (82) but these feelings are fleeting. However his sexual relationship with this girl and his physical desires are like those of many young men the world over: “late one night he had to step over the prone form of a brother in prayer as he made his way to the toilet to jerk off” (80). The universality of sexual desire brings the reader one step closer to Hammad – he is someone the reader

can understand and identify with. The force fighting against this in the narrative is Amir. Amir is the name DeLillo gives to the real-life terrorist Mohammed Atta, and he is the inspirational leader of this group. When Amir finds out about Hammad's "base self" (83) he asks Hammad "What is the difference between you and all the others, outside our space?" (83). The message is clear – if you want to belong here, you must conform. This triggers Hammad to fight his needs and wants: "There were rules now and he was determined to follow them... He was becoming one of them now, learning to look like them and think like them" (83). The key word in the previous quote, I think, is 'learn'. This means that Hammad's behaviours were learned through contact with the others in the group not something he did as a matter of course. It feels like this group is something he has fallen into almost by accident rather than joined because of a passionate identification with them or any shared belief systems. This further normalises Hammad, makes him someone that the reader can identify with and see as a person rather than the paragon of evil who harbours what seems to be an insatiable hate for the Western world, particularly America.

Once the story of Hammad moves from Marienstrasse, Hamburg to Nokomis, Florida, Hammad has for the most part assimilated with the group. However his thoughts are split – some sound like repeats of the pronouncements of Amir but others are clearly those of Hammad. He questions the need for their intended actions: "But does a man have to kill himself in order to achieve something in the world" (174), and "What about the others, those who will die?" (176). In response to the latter question, Amir assures him that he should not worry about these people, they only fulfill the roles that have been ascribed to them by their group. He speaks of fate and destiny and Hammad is "impressed by this. It sounded like philosophy" (176). This again signals Hammad's easily-lead and impressionable nature. Further to Hammad's questioning of

the purpose, there is also an element of disbelief that this plot will ever happen: “He liked to imagine himself appearing on the screen, a videotaped figure walking through the gate-like detector on his way to the plane. Not that they would ever get that far” (173).

The placement of the Hammad storyline within the novel is a small section at the end of every main part. This suggests that even though DeLillo has included the voice and struggles of Hammad, he is still a marginalised voice within the structure of what is, after all, an American novel responding to the terror attacks instigated by Hammad and his group. Given this, it seems impossible to integrate these two diametrically opposed storylines which only intersect in a meaningful way when the plane that is carrying Hammad crashes into the tower that Keith is working in. Rowe claims that this marginalised format and the fact that only 18 out of 246 pages are given within the novel to Hammad's story “trivialises the terrorists” (123). However, it seems to me that DeLillo has created a space through which to imagine an alternative terrorist, one which is not the media-hyped Amir-style of individual who very clearly hates America and fits perfectly into the idea of 'fanatical evil lunatic' which abounded in the mass media after the towers fell. In response to the oft-asked question “Why do they hate us?” he is providing an alternative response through the portrayal of Hammad. Hammad does not necessarily hate America or the West without being trained to do so but he undertakes this training in order to belong, to fit in somewhere. Perhaps for some of the terrorists involved in this plot it was nothing to do with the Western world and more about brotherhood, belonging to something and finding a purpose.

This novel offers resistance to the dominant narrative in three ways. The first is the resistance to the exclusion of Richard Drew's “Falling Man” photograph from the record of 9/11 through including it as a central motif within this novel through the

portrayal of David Janiak, the performance artist who recreated this image across New York. The exclusion of this image, and other depictions of people who fell from the towers, rendered these people invisible and their deaths unacknowledged. This was because they represented a helplessness and despair that troubled the dominant narrative's creation of an image of a strong, indomitable America. DeLillo's inclusion of Janiak recalls the images of these people and brings them back into the collective memory of this event, enabling a more accurate and honest history of this event. He has also provided an alternative perspective to the media depiction of 9/11, a space from which those who read this novel can come to their own conclusions about what 9/11 was and continues to be. The second way in which DeLillo resists the dominant narrative within this novel is through the resistance to media, particularly the television media, construction of 9/11. The media took all of the elements of 9/11 and re-made it into a linear, easily-consumed narrative which directed those watching it where to look and what to think. DeLillo resists this through the form of the novel, the monosyllabic utterances of Justin and the presentation of the events through alternative images. The form of this novel is a far more accurate representation of the experienced reality of 9/11, however. It is temporally disrupted and confusing, leaving the reader feeling displaced and unsure what is happening. Justin, who speaks only in monosyllables for a large portion of the novel encourages slower, more considered speech patterns and responses to the events surrounding himself and other characters as they deal with the aftermath of the attacks. DeLillo does not rely on the images of 9/11 that were used so much within the media's coverage of this event. Instead he uses alternative images, specifically Morandi's painting "Natura Morta" ('Still Life') to depict the Twin Towers before they fell. The use of these elements of form, character's speech patterns and alternative imagery has the effect of disrupting the media's easily consumed narrative.

Finally DeLillo resists the dominant narrative's exclusion of dissenting voices through the inclusion of Martin Ridnour and Hammad. Although both voices of dissent are non-American, their inclusion offers an alternative viewpoint on 9/11, specifically around the discussion of the motivations of those who carried out the attacks. DeLillo's resistance to the exclusion of images of falling people, the media's construction of 9/11 and the exclusion of dissenting voices provides the reader with an alternative perspective on 9/11. This novel challenges the reader to view this event from a different, more critical standpoint to that offered within the media.

## **Clash of fundamentals? Challenging America's self-image in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.**

Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an important addition to post-9/11 literature. Although Don DeLillo is, as Margaret Scanlan points out, “at pains to suggest that the Islamic terrorist is a human being with whom we may have some sympathy” (267) his focus is purely on the terrorist which does not allow for the voices and perspectives of “ordinary Muslims” (267) to come through. Scanlan points out that Hamid, among others, finds himself writing along a “treacherous fault-line between the binaries of terrorist discourse” (267). The most prominent fault-line in this discourse within the dominant narrative that I seek to critique is the line between Islamic and Western civilisations. It is because of this split's prominence within the dominant narrative that I have chosen to commence my analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* with a discussion of Samuel P. Huntington's “Clash of Civilizations” thesis.

Huntington started a revolution in the debate in international politics when he published “The Clash of Civilizations?” in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in 1993. He went on to expand on this initial article when he published a book on the subject in 1996. His argument was, according to Richard Crockatt, “both simple and provocative” (10). Huntington stated that his hypothesis was “the great divisions among mankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural” (22). What Huntington meant by the word civilisation is critical to the understanding of this hypothesis. He points out that a civilization is “a cultural entity” (23) which can be as small as a village, but able to be expanded to include large numbers of people who share similar cultural beliefs and ideals - “the broadest level of cultural identity people have, short of that which distinguishes humans from other species” (24). He named eight civilisations: Western,

Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin-American and African. He noted that these civilisations were “differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition, and, most important, religion” (25). Critically, he put forth that once people start to define themselves in terms of religious and ethnic identities, there is an increased chance that concepts of 'us' versus 'them' will start to emerge. This conceptualisation of someone as essentially different, as belonging to the group seen as outsiders is the starting point of conflict.

In his analysis of Huntington's hypothesis in relation to the political and media rhetoric in the time after the 9/11 attacks, Crockatt notes that even though the Bush Administration took the time to clarify that they did not consider the war on terrorism to be a clash of civilisations, George W. Bush himself used the concept of civilisation repeatedly in his speeches about the war on terrorism. Huntington claims that when there is a conflict between nations, groups or states of differing civilisations, civilisation rallying will occur, something which he terms the “kin-country syndrome” (35). In what sounds like an eerily accurate prediction of George W. Bush's statements post-9/11, he states that “populist politicians, religious leaders and the media have found [civilisation rallying] a potent means of arousing mass support and of pressuring hesitant governments” (38). Crockatt lists examples of Bush's use of this rhetoric such as “the civilised world is rallying to America's side” and “the allies of terror are the enemies of civilisation” (35). These are just two examples and Crockatt points out that Bush's rhetoric at this time was peppered with much more talk of civilisations and the civilised world.

The key problem with Bush's use of the terms 'civilisation' and 'the civilised world' in his civilisation rallying, however, is that they are not the same as the terms that Huntington employs. Here, Bush is employing the use of 'civilisation' to imply



“superiority over 'savages' or 'barbarians’” (Crockatt, 12). This slip in usage is subtle but critical as it lowers the status of those America is in conflict with from an independent and legitimate civilisation to something outside of the bounds of civility. This instantly elevates the moral superiority of America, hence going beyond the idea of civilisation rallying that Huntington spoke of and taking it to a new level. This idea that the terrorists and those who were seen to be associated with them were uncivilised and therefore barbarians, savages and ruffians informed the dominant narrative's portrayal of them as such. This in turn supported the idea within the dominant narrative that America was the innocent party in this conflict and had the superior moral ground.

Huntington also makes a point that is relevant in this consideration of the dominant narrative and political rhetoric of post-9/11 America. He claims that use of the phrase 'the world community' or similar phrases which encompass the entirety of world have “become a euphemistic collective noun ... to give global legitimacy to actions reflecting the interests of the United States and other Western powers” (39). This is precisely what Bush was doing when he claimed that the war on terror was “the world's fight” - a claim which not only euphemises the intention of military actions against Afghanistan and Iraq but also has the effect of placing these states and the terrorists outside of the global community. He is, in effect, claiming that they are not fit to be a part of this world and that the entire globe should strive to eliminate their presence. This both dehumanises the terrorists and further supports the dominant narrative's ideology that America is the righteous actor in this conflict. As Crockatt notes, this kind of rhetoric “betrays... a potentially coercive and illiberal insistence that America's values are or should be those of all nations” (25).

Through the story of Changez, a young Ivy League-educated Pakistani, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid challenges the ideas of the dominant

narrative of post-9/11 America that the nation was innocent and righteous in its military actions. Furthermore, this novel transforms the fault-line between the West and the Islamic world into a “living, breathing space in which the human consequences of the rigid and lethal polarities become visible” (Scanlan 267).

The structure of this novel is that of a story within a story. The framing narrative takes place over the course of one afternoon and evening in a marketplace in Lahore, Pakistan. It takes the form of a one-sided conversation between Changez and an unidentified American man, who may be an undercover military agent. Through this conversation – although calling it a conversation is really stretching the definitions of communication, in fact calling it a monologue would be far more accurate – we hear the inner narrative of the novel. This inner narrative is the story of Changez's life in New York, his work for a financial company and his relationship with Erica, a young American woman he meets during his time at Princeton. His story takes place during the months prior to and just after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in 2001. The framing narrative gives the reader a view of America from the outside, offering a critical perspective on how America appears to those who are not only non-American but from a differing civilisation. The inner narrative offers a critique of what is going on within post-9/11 America, exploring the idea of a nation split by the dominant political narrative.

The recent iteration of the conflict between Western and Islamic civilisations is nothing new and has, in fact, been ongoing in various ways and formats over the last 1300 years (Huntington 31). However after 9/11 there was an increase in racially motivated attacks on both Arab Americans and members of other ethnic groups who were mistaken for Muslims by “hostile Americans wanting to display their ostensible patriotism” (Anna Hartnell 338). This individual racism was seemingly countered by the production of the “I am an American” advertising campaign in which displayed people

of various ages, ethnicities and religions stating 'I am an American'.

However this message was over-shadowed by the institutional racism being practiced by the state in the form of racially profiling the same groups of people who were being subjected to individual racism. Scanlan points out how the manipulation of the media and the rhetoric of politicians has led to the representation of Islam as “a religion of violent fanatics” (267). As a result of this, the message encoded in the dominant narrative is that terrorists are evil, uncivilised and barbaric. It does not stop there, however. The ire evident within the dominant narrative is also aimed squarely at those who are seen to be supporting the terrorists, which America has defined as not only direct support but also the failure to support the United States in the war on terror which is seen to be an indirect support of terrorism.

Within this narrative those who are slated as terrorists or supporters of terrorists have no voice, no space in which to protest or tell their story. The framing narrative of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* turns this on its head by giving Changez exclusive speaking rights and requiring the American addressee to remain silent throughout the entire novel. It is left to Changez to report and interpret all of the American's words and actions, putting a distinct spin on any intentions he might have. Within the first paragraph of the novel the reader is immediately introduced to the American as someone who is wary and guilty of racial profiling: “Do not be frightened of my beard: I am a lover of America,” says Changez (Hamid 1). Hamid goes on to characterise the American further as Changez notes that it was the his “bearing” that enabled him to identify him as American to which the American apparently takes offense: “I do not mean that as an insult, for I see your face has hardened” (2). When Changez successfully convinces the American to sit with him at a local cafe, his choice of seat and refusal to remove his jacket is commented on: “You prefer that seat, with your back

so close to the wall?... And will you not remove your jacket? So formal!” (2). This intimation of the edginess of the American is reinforced further when the waiter approaches to take their order. Changez exclaims that “there is no need to reach into your jacket, I assume to grasp your wallet” (6) – a deflection of the portrayed probable intention of the American to grab a weapon. These sorts of exchanges abound throughout the novel, bringing the reader to a knife point of tension with the expectation that at any moment the American will either unleash, or be the target of some sort of violence. The reader is entirely unsure whether, as Changez points out, if the American “is predator or prey” (35). Changez, by contrast, remains until the very last page, the perfect gentleman. His jovial, self-deprecating patter both staves off any ill-will from the American as well as disguising his at times rather blunt criticisms of America.

Changez's uninterrupted monologue affords him the opportunity to challenge the third aspect of the dominant narrative that I identified in the Introduction – the construction of the terrorist as evil perpetrator and America as the innocent victim – in two respects. The first is his rebuttal of the idea that the people and countries in the areas where the 9/11 terrorists originated are uncivilised and barbaric. He offers, interwoven throughout his re-telling of his time in America, an eloquent defence of Pakistan, explaining to the American that not only was Pakistan once prosperous and politically powerful, it was this way long before the nation of America even existed. The second is his criticism of America and her citizens and their behaviours and attitudes towards the rest of the world.

Changez, by virtue of his captive audience and his uninterrupted and unchallenged voice is able to take the opportunity to present to both the American and the reader his version of Pakistan. He is “from Lahore, the second largest city of Pakistan... home to nearly as many people as New York” (8). This is not the only time

he compares his home city to the city in which he stayed during his most critical time in America: “Lahore is more democratically *urban*. Indeed in these places it is the man with four wheels who is forced to dismount and become a part of the crowd. Like Manhattan? Yes, precisely!” (36). These comparisons are key in building his argument that not only is Pakistan not the destitute dusty place it might be portrayed as in the Western media but it is similar to New York in many ways. Which is not to say Lahore or Pakistan is similar to America; moreover something Changez brings up on at least two separate occasions is the difference between New York and the rest of America. He also takes time to build the picture of Pakistan as a diverse and interesting place: “Pakistan was many things, from seaside to desert to farmland stretched between rivers and canals” (30).

He also takes aim at ideas that he and other Pakistani citizens are poor and lacking in education: “I am not poor, far from it: my great-grandfather, for example, was a barrister with the means to endow a school for the Muslims of the Punjab. Like him, my grandfather and father attended university in England” (10). Indeed, although times in Pakistan are now tough, Changez claims that “Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus Basin had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonise America were still illiterate barbarians” (38). Pakistan was once a proud country “not always burdened by debt, dependent on foreign aid and handouts,” and the people are not only “the crazed, destitute radicals you see on your television screen” (116). The point that once upon a time people living in the are now known as Pakistan were at the cutting edge of 'civilisation' and enjoyed all of its trappings whereas not only did America not yet exist, but those from who the leaders of today's America would descend were themselves considered barbarians. This puts significant historical context around the dominant

narrative's ideas. It not only turns the 'America versus the uncivilised world' idea within the dominant narrative upside down but it goes a long way to providing some historic context for the conflict between America and Islamic civilisations, as Changez himself tells the American: “we have acquired a certain familiarity with the recent history of our surroundings, and that – in my humble opinion – allows us to put the present into much better perspective” (52). Changez pointedly adds that the American should not “imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists” (209).

Changez also points out the lack of assistance that America afforded Pakistan when India was threatening military action. Even though Pakistan had provided full cooperation with the American military action in Afghanistan, allowing them to set up military bases within Pakistani borders “America would not fight by our side” (144) nor would it “inform India that any attack on Pakistan would be treated as an attack on any American ally” (162). This shows all of America's rallying of other nations to their side and claims of 'you are with us or with the terrorists' to be entirely self-interested. It would seem that even though Pakistan was providing the assistance required of it by America, the more powerful nation would not return the same favour. Further to this, he claims that not only did America refuse not to take action but “India was acting with America's connivance, both countries seeking through the threat of force to coerce our government to change its policies” (169). Changez thus shines a very unforgiving light on America's righteousness, throwing into sharp relief the fact that for all the morally superior rhetoric within the dominant narrative, America is no different from any other nation attempting to gain political advantage.

Changez is vocal in his criticisms of America in other ways as well. Compared to the dissenting voice of Martin in *Falling Man*, the voice of Changez provides a non-American and non-Western voice of dissent rallying against the dominant narrative that

was built up after 9/11. Changez's criticisms of America fall into two basic categories: a criticism of American culture and international politics and a criticism of post-9/11 America. The two are not mutually exclusive, as the reader is given an indication that Changez believes that the first is a necessary pre-condition for the resulting latter, therefore I will expand on both categories.

Changez's criticisms of American culture are that he finds it to be based upon an assumption of superiority over others. He notes this when he relates details of his holiday with his Princeton classmates in Greece, remarking that he finds their interactions with others, especially those who were older than they were, to be rude and "self-righteous" (23). He recalls wondering to himself "by what quirk of human history my companions... were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class" (24). It is worth noting that of course the material advantages these young people would have had coming from wealthy families and being educated in Ivy League schools will have impacted their behaviour. However, as noted by Jamie Chandler, professor of Political Science at Hunter College, New York, those who attend Ivy League schools are far more likely to gain important jobs within government (qtd. in Ghosh) and are therefore more likely to be involved in shaping the policies and attitudes of the everyday American, making the attitudes of these young people relevant. Changez also recalls noting this air of superiority in other people, including Erica's father whose observations about Pakistan needles Changez not for its content so much as its delivery with "its typically *American* undercurrent of condescension" (63). Most crucially, perhaps, he notes this sense of superiority within himself upon his return home to Pakistan for a visit. He tells his listener that he realised that his gaze had shifted and that he was viewing his home with "the eyes of a foreigner, and not just any foreigner but that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American" (141). On a

scale wider than just interpersonal relationships, he finds that this sense of superiority carries through into international politics. He accuses America of “constant interference in the affairs of others” (177) and worse, claims that “no country inflicts death so readily on the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America” (207). This is a direct criticism of America's belief that it is a world leader with the mandate to intervene in the business of other countries and, to paraphrase George W. Bush's words, to lead the way in the world's fight against America's selected enemies. It also questions the belief of righteousness and innocence that America holds.

The critique that Changez offers of post-9/11 America deals with both the feeling within the country after the event and the specific military actions taken as a result. Speaking about the feeling within America he comments that America was “gripped by a self-righteous rage” (106) and increasingly “[gave] itself over to a dangerous nostalgia” (130). These two observations point to the 'America as innocent victim' theme within the dominant narrative: the rage coming from being attacked without apparent provocation and the nostalgia for an easier time before this current crisis, as explained by Richard Gray's theory the 'fall from innocence' in American literature. Changez's feelings about the legitimacy of this feeling as well as the dominant narrative that is the driving force behind the propagation of these ideas is summed up here: “But surely it is the *gist* that matters; I am, after all, telling you a history, and I suspect you – an American – will agree, it is the thrust of one's narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one's details” (135). This bald statement skates close to directly accusing the dominant narrative of being an out and out lie, rather than merely providing a dissenting voice.

Just as the framing narrative provides a context for the political climate of post-9/11 America, the inner narrative of Changez's life in America provides an analysis of



the inner workings of a country divided. Changez himself has a fluctuating relationship with the country in which he gained his tertiary education and found his first full-time job. On the first page of the novel he declares himself a “lover of America” (1) yet goes on, as discussed above, to point out all of the flaws of that same country. He describes the process of leaving America as being like the “break up of a romantic relationship that involved great love” (179), with the anger that leads to the rift followed by a feeling of release, the fear and doubt at having done the wrong thing and finally the calm after the emotional storm when one can “view with equanimity the journey through which one has passed” (179). The reason for his divided feelings about America is his perception of the split nature of the nation. This split nature is represented in this novel through the character of Erica and the company Underwood Samson: Erica signifies the vulnerability and openness that exists within American society whereas Underwood Samson represents the bullish, invasive, militaristic force of the United States. This split within America is not only indicative of Changez's experience but the way the country was in the time after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.

My reading of the character of Erica focuses on three aspects in particular: her traumatisation, her openness to Changez's past and Changez's relationship with her. Arguably, these parts of Erica represent the vulnerability and questioning within America that was present before being quashed by the strength and bluster of the dominant narrative. I also question whether the ultimately unsuccessful relationship between Erica and Changez is evidence that Mohsin Hamid agrees with the premise of the clash of civilisations theory that Western and Islamic societies are, in the end, incompatible.

Erica reveals to Changez very soon after they meet in Greece that she has suffered a significant personal loss: her first boyfriend Chris, died of lung cancer despite

having never smoked a cigarette. This loss means more to Erica than just the death of a loved one, as Chris represented so much to her. She refers to him as her “home” and Changez notes that they had a co-dependent relationship – a “commingling of identities” – which meant that “when Chris died, Erica felt she had lost herself ...[and] she did not know if she could be found” (104). Changez notices early on that “some part of her... was out of reach” (25), realising as time progresses and she reveals more details to him that there is a “crack inside her” (68) and that even though her body was strong, it “belonged to someone so wounded” (69). This previous traumatising becomes significant when her mental health status is affected by the attacks. Even though she was functional in the times before the attacks, she viewed herself as not really solid – an indication that although the visible signs of her personal trauma had disappeared, she was still susceptible to another downfall. Indeed, the trauma she suffered previously when she lost Chris comes flooding back when the attacks occur - she claims that they have “churned up old thoughts in my head” (91) – and she starts to decline from “vivid, confident woman” Changez first met to a “pale, nervous creature who could almost have been a stranger” (91). As the result of the representation of her previous trauma and her reaction to the 9/11 attacks, Erica can be seen to represent the vulnerable, traumatised side of America, the one which was knocked reeling in the aftermath of the towers falling. That she has suffered a loss of innocence before recalls Gray's idea of the myth of the fall within American literature as discussed in the Introduction, but it is also important as it acknowledges that this is not the first time that America has suffered a loss. In fact, that Erica is brought to her knees by the revival of pain that the attack on her home city induces suggests that she was weakened by the fact that she had not been able to recover properly from this prior injury. In fact, instead of being allowed time to work through her initial pain, she was instructed “not to think about it so much” (68)

and was medicated.

Changez narrates that Erica used writing to deal with her loss of Chris. In discussions with him she likens it to being an oyster with a “sharp speck inside” (59) - her writing was the attempt to make the pain more bearable and by that very process it turned into a pearl, an object of beauty. She notes that her resulting manuscript is “more a novella than a novel” which “leaves space for your thoughts to echo” (58). Her use of writing to deal with her trauma allows the reader to draw parallels with the literature being produced in response to 9/11. Her comment that it leaves space for your thoughts to echo is worthy of attention – Hamid seems to be signalling here what he supposes good post-9/11 literature should do in the face of a dominant narrative which leaves absolutely no space for any thought or dissent. Ultimately, however, Erica's manuscript is unpublished. Her mother gives a copy of it to Changez to read but he cannot find anything within it that reminds him of her. He finds it “resolute” and “purposeful” and it leaves him “powerfully affected” (189) but beyond Changez and her immediate family, her voice remains unheard. The unpublished status of Erica's novella indicates a victory of the dominant narrative in suppressing the voice of vulnerability in its striving to maintain the ideal of America as heroic and brave. As Judith Butler comments “to begin to tell the story a different way, to ask how things came to this, is already to complicate the question of agency, which leads, no doubt, to fear of moral equivocation” (6).

Her vulnerability is something which, Changez recalls, was not welcomed, not embraced as a correct solution to grief. When she starts to decline again, she is institutionalised which has the effect of both silencing her voice as one who belongs to the mentally unsound and at the same time ejecting her from the society she was reacting to. In the same way that the image of the Falling Man was suppressed within the media and banned to the shadowy edges of the narrative, so too are the stories and

voices that do not support the ideal of America the Brave put forth by the dominant narrative. Her disappearance as narrated by Changez towards the end of the novel suggests suicide: “Her clothes had been found on a rocky bluff overlooking the Hudson, neatly folded in a pile” and she had been “saying goodbye to everyone” (185). However the lack of a body leaves this disappearance open to interpretation. Has Erica's voice been driven to extinction or has it merely been marginalised, with the possibility of it being able to return? Changez's undying hope that she will return leads me to believe that this is the intended meaning – the dominant narrative may have initially succeeded in driving out the alternative view points and non-conforming voices but that this will not be the final answer. These points of view continue to exist, outside of the social margins, and will one day be able to return.

As discussed in the Introduction and the chapter on *Falling Man*, after 9/11 there was widespread disapproval and subsequent suppression of voices that, among other things, questioned the possible reasons for the 9/11 attacks or sought to understand the historical context of the relationship between America and the countries from which the terrorists originated. Erica, however, goes against this edict of the dominant narrative, representing perhaps what we might think of as the “best of America” (Scanlan 274). She not only befriends a person whose race accorded him special attention from both racist elements of society as well as the immigration section of her government, but she shows a genuine interest in learning more about his culture, lifestyle and family in Pakistan. Her interest in his background starts even before the attacks occur, when they are in Greece together. She asks him what Pakistan is like and wishes to see a sample of written Urdu, which she proclaims to be “beautiful” (31). Back in New York, her interest continues, even after the attacks happen. She claims to “love it” (31) when Changez talks about his life and family in Pakistan and even after their unsuccessful

attempt at love-making, she wishes to understand more about “the nature of sex and relationships for teenagers in Pakistan” (104).

Erica's openness to not only a relationship with Changez but getting to know him and his background suggests the possibility for the opening of the lines of communication between America and the Middle East. This mirrors Changez's attempts to educate the silent American in the framing narrative of this novel about his beloved country to which we can sense, via Changez's comments, the American is resistant. Erica's interest is in contrast to this resistance. However, Hamid's writing of Erica and Changez's relationship undercuts this potential for true communication and mutual understanding. Their relationship is characterised by Erica retaining the large portion of control and power: she is the one who takes the initiative when it comes to their meetings and there are periods of time where she refuses to return his calls or emails without good reason. In addition, it is Erica that is his entrance ticket to New York society, her that has to “vouch for [his] worthiness” (97) when Changez finds himself as “her official escort at the events of New York society” (97). In effect, it is only with her word that he is allowed into these inner sanctums of New York society. Thus the relationship occurs almost entirely on her terms, reflecting the dominant role America has in its relationship with Pakistan, which cycles, Changez comments, through alternating periods of aid and sanctions. So too does Erica's relationship with Changez cycle through these periods, the most striking similarity being the sanctions Erica imposes on him when she does not return his calls or emails, cutting him off without reason or recourse.

The critical turning point in their doomed relationship is when they attempt to make love. Erica suggests the purchase of champagne and the return to Changez's apartment to celebrate her finding an agent to publish her novel. Once inside, she

removes her shirt to show him a bruise she sustained whilst practising tae kwon do. These two actions suggest that she is inviting closer physical intimacy but when Changez initiates contact she seems wary – “she returned my gaze watchfully” but gives no sign that he should stop. When he moves to undress her she “did not respond; she did not resist; she merely acceded” and she remains “silent and unmoving” (102). Erica's lack of response hurts Changez but he chooses to “overlook the growing wound this inflicted on [his] pride” (102) and continues on. When Changez tries to penetrate her, however, her complete lack of arousal becomes evident and so penetration is not only difficult for him but also causes her discomfort. Finally, he admits defeat and ceases. He feels that her body has “rejected” (103) him, despite her apologies and claim that the fault lies with her: “I don't know what's wrong with me” (103). The next time they attempt to make love, however, the result is very different but the conditions under which it happens are also vastly different. Changez, driven by his desire to get closer to Erica, tells her to pretend that he is Chris. “In darkness and in silence” they have sex, although Changez notes that the rigidity of her body and the odour of blood, despite there being no physical evidence of it, gave their sex “a violent undertone” (120). Finally, he describes her orgasm as happening “grievously, almost mortally” (120) – suggesting that something between them has died, even as they have finally reached the pinnacle of human intimacy.

Both Changez's failed penetration of Erica, and his subsequent success only under the assumed identity of somebody else, suggests that perhaps Hamid agrees with the premise of the clash of civilisations: that the possibility of an open, connected relationship between the two cultures that Erica and Changez represent are just too great, especially at this point in history. Their sexual incompatibility underlines the cultural incompatibility that this act dramatises. An alternative reading, one which I favour, is

that the failure of their relationship is due to the diminished strength of the open, vulnerable side of America that Erica represents in the face of the dominant narrative. Her weakened physical state indicates the suppressive effect the dominant narrative has had on her as the embodiment of the voices of dissent and the voices which do not fit the ideals of the dominant narrative. Hamid is suggesting that the dominant narrative is winning the struggle not only for power but for absolute supremacy. This narrative is dictating that you are with us, or you are with them, this is not the time for asking questions or forming relationships with the perceived enemy, and as a result the true consummation of Changez and Erica's connection is impossible.

The other side of America within this novel is represented by the valuation firm that Changez works for in New York: Underwood Samson. Just as Erica's name phonetically recalls America, the initials of Underwood Samson echo those of the United States. However Underwood Samson represents a very different side of America to the side which Erica represents: it is the inhumane institutional side in contrast to Erica's thoughtfulness and vulnerability. This is the side of America that took hold of the country in the aftermath of the attacks on the Twin Towers. Underwood Samson represents three key elements of one of the "You are with us, or you are with the terrorists" aspect of the dominant narrative. This is shown through the actions of the government of that time and its expectation of conformity and obedience from its citizens; the fundamentalist, inflexible element which denied questioning or dissent; and the militaristic element of America, evident in the rallying of support for the War on Terror. The tool that is used to disrupt and critique these elements of America is the character of Changez, who initially embraces the benefits afforded him by being an employee of this company but who comes to recognise the less attractive underbelly of the organisation in which he is involved.

The institutional element that Underwood Samson represents emphasises the expected conformity that was prevalent within the dominant narrative of “you are with us or you are with the terrorists” which carries the constant threat that those who step outside of the expectations of conformity will be swiftly removed from the inner confines. When Changez arrives for his first day of work in the company he and his fellow trainees are told that “We're a meritocracy... If you do well, you'll be rewarded. If you don't, you'll be out the door. It's that simple” (39). Looking around at his fellow trainees later on that day, Changez also notes that they all seem to fit very specific criteria, despite their apparent diversity: they have all attended Ivy League schools, all are self-assured and physically attractive. It seems to him that “shorn of hair and dressed in battle fatigues we would have been virtually indistinguishable” (43). Despite their myriad talents and skills, the feeling is given that they are all small cogs which will aid the running of a much larger machine and to ensure their continuation within this machine, conformity is essential.

Initially, Changez is very successful in conforming to the ideals and expectations of Underwood Samson. He works hard and comes top in his class. However, Jim, Managing Director of Underwood Samson, paints Changez as an outsider from the very beginning. At the interview, he deduces Changez is not like most of the other Ivy League students who have never experienced financial difficulties, and intimates that he too has come from tough beginnings and worked hard to rise to the top. Later, he tells Changez at a company social function that Changez is “a watchful guy” and that this comes from “feeling out of place” (80) – a feeling Jim is apparently also familiar with. These feelings of difference move from being a mild source of discomfort to a marked issue for Changez when he observes the collapse of the Twin Towers on news coverage from his hotel whilst he is on a business trip overseas. His reaction surprises even



himself as he finds that he is “remarkably pleased” (83) about the attacks. It is not, he hurriedly explains, that he was pleased with the loss of human life, rather it was “the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees” (83).

This unexpected reaction to these events triggers a crisis of identity within Changez. He is, after all, a graduate of the American tertiary system and an employee of the finance sector in the city that has been attacked. Has he not himself bought into the American dream? Upon his return to America, this point of difference is made even clearer. It is as if he no longer belongs, no longer fits the requirements previously specified for conformity. On the flight he is “uncomfortable in my own face” and aware of “being under suspicion” (85) and when he encounters issues at immigration, he finds that once he has cleared customs, his colleagues have left without him and he is left to ride back to New York alone. He attempts to disguise his inner conflict, noting that even at Underwood Samson, there was a “growing importance of *tribe*” (133) and he did not want to compromise his position within this company, particularly in a working environment that was becoming increasingly hostile towards people like him who fit a certain racial profile.

He does a good job of suppressing his inner turmoil until he returns to Pakistan to visit his family in December. Realising how much he has changed and seeing the problems facing his family and his country, his Pakistani side begins to speak up more clearly. When he returns to New York and to Underwood Samson sporting a two-week-old beard, he is greeted with “consternation” (147) from his colleagues. This beard becomes a symbol for Changez, a sort of protest and physical expression of identity and allegiance. Cara Cilano notes that “US anti-terror discourses code a bearded Muslim man as a threat” (211), something which both Changez and his colleagues are well

aware of. This is highlighted when his friend and colleague, Wainwright, tries to talk to him into shaving it off. The only person who does not seem to take issue with Changez's facial hair is Jim, who dismisses the beard as irrelevant, saying to Changez that his "performance is what counts" (136). The significance placed on the beard is repeated throughout this novel, reinforcing the notion that the dominant discourse has coded it as synonymous with terrorist intent. Changez comments that "it is remarkable... the impact a beard worn by a man of my complexion has on your fellow countrymen" (148).

The fundamentalism of Underwood Samson is one of the key critiques that Hamid offers of the United States within this novel. On initial viewing, the title, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, together with the fact that the author is originally from Pakistan might have lead many, including myself, to suppose that this is an inside look at the fundamentalist world of the terrorists. However, it is instead an insider's look at the fundamentalist world of the financial terrorists of Underwood Samson. The New Oxford American Dictionary defines fundamentalism as the "strict maintenance of ancient fundamental doctrines of any religion or ideology" - the fundamentals that Changez and his fellow trainees at Underwood Samson are taught are not religious but do follow an exacting ideology that emphasises "systematic pragmatism" and "efficiency" (41). The goal is "maximum return" (41) and it does not account for any human cost involved in the valuation process. Erica's father comments to Changez that Pakistan has "got some serious problems with fundamentalism" (63) but in actual fact, the implication within this novel appears to be that more global issues are caused by America's financial fundamentalism. Changez recalls noting that "finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power" (177).

Changez arrives at this realisation whilst he is working on an assignment in Valparaiso, Chile. Already deeply divided about his allegiances and angry that America

is using the threat of war from India to manipulate Pakistan into further political compliance, his feelings are crystallised into action when he meets Juan-Bautista. Juan-Bautista is the Director of the publishing company that Changez and another employee of Underwood Samson have been sent to evaluate. Immediately Changez feels a connection to Juan-Bautista, who reminds him of his maternal grandfather. Moreover, Valparaiso reminds him of Lahore and so this setting provides the perfect environment for the seeds of his discontent about America's politics and Underwood Samson's financial fundamentalism to blossom. He pretends to work but is in fact doing nothing. He views his colleague's devotion to his work, something he too had once shown, with contempt – “I could not respect how he functioned so completely immersed in the structures of his professional micro-universe” (165) – how can he so thoroughly commit himself, he wonders, to an endeavour that brings harm to people? Changez has a revelation, “the blinders were coming off” (165) and he feels “dazzled” by the sudden “broadening of my arc of vision” (165). He feels that the whole thrust of Underwood Samson's relentless financial fundamentalism gives no thought “to the critical personal and political issues that affect one's emotional present” (165). Under these emotional circumstances, Juan-Bautista tells Changez that he is unlike his colleague – a comment that carries substantial weight given Changez's feeling of connection to Juan-Bautista. Indeed, Changez notes that “Juan-Bautista added considerable momentum to my inflective journey” (166).

As Changez reflects further on the methods and results of Underwood Samson, Hamid draws strong parallels between them and the militaristic ethos of the United States. Again, Juan-Bautista is a key influence when he asks Changez over lunch whether he has heard of the janissaries. He explains that the janissaries were Christian boys who were kidnapped at a young age by the Ottoman Empire and trained to be

warriors in the Muslim army. They were used to fight against and “erase their own civilizations so they had nothing to turn to” (172). Although the similarities between Changez and these boys are striking, Juan-Bautista points out that they were “fiercely loyal” to their adopted identities, whereas Changez remains conflicted. Juan-Bautista attributes this to the age at which Changez went to America, saying that it would be “far more difficult” to devote oneself entirely to a new identity if one still had “memories [you] could not forget” (172) about your childhood home. This conversation with Juan-Bautista makes the reason for his own malcontent all very clear to Changez. He comes to understand his confusion and internal conflict: “I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war... Of course I felt torn!” (173). When he refuses to work any longer for Underwood Samson, even Jim's reasoning employs military imagery, he says “In wartime soldiers don't really fight for their flags, Changez. They fight for their buddies. Their team” (174). But it is too late. With the cold, heartless motives of his company made clear to him, Changez knows that he can no longer align himself with this team: “All I knew was that my days of focusing on the fundamentals were done” (175).

The ambiguous conclusion of this novel brings together the thrust of what it seeks to achieve. As readers we have been introduced to the inner world of one who has been cast as 'other' within the dominant narrative in the post-9/11 world. Through the manipulation of narrative structure, the representative voice of the dominant American narrative, the American male, is forced to remain silent and listen. Changez, a Pakistani male who, as a result of 9/11, changed overnight from being a successful immigrant to a suspect in the country which he thought of as home, is given centre stage to air his grievances with America, thus allowing for a space in which dissent is not only able to

be heard but must be heard. As a result of the representation of the inner narrative of Changez's life in America, the self-conflicting nature of America is revealed. Through the portrayal of the character of Erica and the company Underwood Samson as allegories for aspects of America, this novel brings into question the statements that the dominant narrative claims as fact. It is the inconclusive nature of the ending of this novel, however, that is surely the most instructive and revealing for those who read it. It is the conclusions that the reader might draw upon closing the pages that reveal the effects of the dominant narrative or the ability of this novel among others to enable us to question it. As Scanlan notes, this narrative is “a Rorschach inkblot test” which exposes to us our interpretations of the post-9/11 world – can novels like these be enough to break the spell of the dominant narrative?



## **Troubling the notion of the invading terrorist in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*.**

Ian McEwan's 2005 novel *Saturday* offers the confluence of the main ideas that have been discussed in the previous two chapters: the dominance of the news media and the narrative of the invasion of the evil terrorist, the barbaric 'other.' Both *Falling Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are set at least partly within America however *Saturday* is set exclusively in London. The effect of this location is that the geographic distance from America allows for a less emotionally charged consideration of the events of 9/11 while still being within a context where the effects of that day were keenly felt. Michael L. Ross comments on the international relevance of this novel, claiming that despite it fitting the requirements to be considered a "Condition of England novel" (75), a type of novel which tends to concern itself with both "privileged [and]... oppressed members of British society" (75), its reach goes far beyond that. Ross references the ideas of Timothy Garton Ash, a friend and mentor to McEwan who is mentioned in the acknowledgements of this novel, on Britain's relationship with the United States. Ash suggests that Britain has assumed four faces: "The back and the front faces can be labelled Island and World; the face on the left says Europe and that on the right America" (Ash qtd. in Ross, 78). Ross points out that Britain's balancing act of maintaining relations with the world, Europe and America is a "bridge project" (79) which is played out within the novel through Perowne's friendship with American colleague, Jay Strauss and the fact that both his father-in-law and Daisy arrive from France where they live. He goes on to point out that the future of this equilibrium promises to be maintained through the future plans of Theo and Daisy: Theo intends to go to America or his music and Daisy will return to France and be reunited with her

Italian boyfriend and father of her unborn child. The effect of this is that despite its localised setting within London, this novel retains its sense of global relevance and commentary upon the state of the world post-9/11.

The novel's exploration of the dominance of the news media and the narrative of the barbaric other is framed within a time period of 24 hours, following the activities of its protagonist, Henry Perowne, on the day of Saturday 15 February, 2003. This was the day when hundreds of thousands of people gathered in Hyde Park to protest the impending invasion of Iraq by America and its allies, which included Great Britain. The critical turning point of this day, however, is when Perowne's daughter Daisy recites the well-known poem by Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach". As many critics have pointed out, this signals a wider reliance on the philosophy of Arnold, so I will take the time to address the significance of this influence and how it relates to my reading of this novel.

It is interesting to note that at the time Arnold was writing in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century there was political upheaval in Great Britain, most notably the Reform League riots in Hyde Park which were both held in the same place as the protests within the novel and were an example of the public speaking out against the government. However, Arnold claimed he preferred to "work indirectly by literature rather than directly by politics" (Arnold qtd. in Basil Willey 255). Using this as a jumping off point we can reasonably extrapolate that, given his inclusion of one of Arnold's poems, McEwan may have been influenced by this idea, although in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, McEwan's politics did not seem so reticent. McEwan was quoted in a *Guardian* article on September 15, 2001 as claiming the terrorists had a "failure of imagination" as they had not permitted themselves to "enter the mind of [their] victim". McEwan goes on to say that "Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and the beginning of morality." Although



these reactionary comments are understandable in the context of the global shock in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, what I find most telling is that they describe precisely what McEwan has done within the novel. He has taken this idea of imagining what it is like to be someone else and how life seems from his perspective and through this has opened up pathways allowing us to see a multitude of perspectives within this novel. Matthew Arnold sought to be a “healing and reconciling influence” (Arnold qtd. in Basil Willey 255) but I believe that McEwan's *Saturday* has different intentions. By bringing into question all three of the key components of the dominant narrative that I have identified and discussed already within this thesis: the focus on the heroic actions of America and by extension, the West; the “You are with us, or you are with the terrorists” ethos that denied the possibility of dissenting voices or questioning of the actions of the government and the Western world as innocent victim and the terrorist as evil, this novel provides an alternative perspective on these ideas. It also critiques the influence of the news media which played a role in the creation and dissemination of the dominant narrative. To argue this I will read this novel as an allegory in that it relies on the implicit and sustained analogy of the protagonist Henry Perowne as representing the West, and Baxter, although he is English, as representing the forces of terrorist invasion. This is an approach that other critics including Magali Cornier Michael and Molly Clark Hillard have taken, both of whom point out the parallels between Baxter's invasion of the Perowne household with the terrorist invasion of America on 9/11 (as well as the subsequent attacks on London). However, I take this analogy one step further by suggesting that the parallels of invasion do not stop here. If we are to draw a parallel between Baxter's invasion of the Perowne household then might we not also draw a parallel between Perowne's invasion of Baxter's brain and the Imperialist invasion of Iraq?

*Saturday* is based around the daily activities of Henry Perowne on the day of Saturday 15 February, 2003. Perowne is a successful neurosurgeon, happily married with two exceptional adult children, living in a large house on Fitzrovia Square in London. His life is one of wealth, ease and comfort, the very epitome of Western privilege. Our introduction to Perowne paints him in god-like terms “standing there in the darkness, he's materialised out of nothing, fully formed and unencumbered” (1) as he stands at the window of his palace and oversees the activities of the square below. This sense of well-being and authority is soon disrupted, however, when a burning shape comes into view on the horizon.

Perowne's reaction when he identifies this burning shape as a plane triggers an emotional response which links this plane with those that crashed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the field in Pennsylvania “almost eighteen months since” (15). The immediate association signals the extent of the effect that this event has had on people around the world. Indeed, Perowne notes that “everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed” (15). The use of the collective “everyone” indicates that this feeling is not one that only he feels but is widespread throughout Great Britain. Unable to do anything and unable to look away, Perowne again re-lives the role of helpless spectator that so many people were thrust into on that day in September 2001.

As Kristiaan Versluys notes “9/11 is not exclusively an American tragedy, but a condition shared by all of the advanced nations” (75). This points to the immense role that the news media has had in disseminating this story to devastating effect but it also points to the fact that for all their differences, these two nations divided by the Atlantic ocean identify with each other on some level. The suggestion is that it was not only the American way of life that was under attack but the Western way of life. As a result, a

general uneasiness has settled over London and its inhabitants with the unspoken question on their lips being 'When is it our turn?'

This sense of traumatisation seems to haunt Perowne throughout his day. At home he begins to cook the family dinner that will serve as the backdrop for the reconciliation of Daisy and her grandfather later that night. Even here, within his own home, thoughts of the threat of invasion occupy his mind. As he is pulled towards the television news to “be joined to the generality, the community of anxiety” (180) he ponders the likelihood of the occurrence of terrorist attacks within London. The government advice is that an attack within Europe or America is “an inevitability” (180) but Perowne acknowledges that there is something far darker lurking behind the fear of these attacks. It is a “darker longing in the collective mind, a sickening for self-punishment and a blasphemous curiosity” (180) that echoes the feelings of those in the audience of a horror movie – “Please don't let it happen. But let me see it all the same, as it is happening and from every angle” (180). It is this intertwining of fear with desire to see the moment of impact that is particular to the media's coverage of the 9/11 attacks and other terrible events. The pull of the media is ever-present throughout Perowne's day as discussed later in this chapter.

Within this novel, McEwan cleverly creates, utilises and contrasts different types of space. As mentioned in the previous section, our introduction to Perowne sees him overlooking the public space of a city square in London from his window. In the clear light of morning, his observation of a young couple arguing leads him to ponder the attraction of using public spaces for the acting out of private dramas. “Passions need room, the attentive spaciousness of a theatre” (59) – is the same true for the imminent war within Iraq? Perowne draws a parallel between the square and the space of the Iraqi desert. The space of the desert is both public and private – it is accessible to all who

are granted entrance to Iraq's borders but for those who enter by force, it takes on the dimension of a private space being invaded. In the same way he acknowledges that the square is the “private equivalent” (59) of the desert. This contrasting idea of what is considered public or private creates the tone for the novel within which this war is debated – it is an issue of perceived moral right to access a space. This debate of access is also carried out both in the public spaces of the streets of London and Hyde Park and within the private spaces of the home, when Perowne and Daisy argue about it. The slippage between public and private seems to suggest to the reader that all is not as it might seem and perspectives change depending on personal standpoint – as Carol Hanisch first said in 1969: the personal is political, but also the political is personal. The significance of personal space will be expanded on later in the chapter as the instances of invasion of these spaces are discussed, from the invasion of Perowne's mental space and his daily activities by the news media to the invasion of Baxter's privacy and dignity by Perowne which leads to the crisis point of the novel: Baxter's invasion of the Perowne family home. This is not the final instance of invasion, however – that comes when Perowne operates on Baxter to fix the very damage he inflicted on him.

Another contrast of space within this novel is that of the spaces that literature and science occupy. Literature, especially within this novel, is presented as a space for imagination and fantasy, something which runs right up against Perowne's personal preference for the rational, factual space of science. Derryn Rees Jones comments that this novel “sets poetry and science up against each other as ways of knowing the world” (334) through the contrasting of Perowne and Daisy. Richard Brown takes this point one step further by commenting that this novel becomes a political critique through the “setting up of a generational dialogue that is also a dialogue between scientific and artistic states of mind” (90). It is not so much the battle of the arts and the sciences as it

is a battle to ignite the imagination. Daisy's crusade to educate her father with her literary reading lists is an attempt to broaden his horizons. His rejection of the magical realist genre she attempts to introduce him to is a case in point. He claimed that “the supernatural was the recourse of an insufficient imagination, a dereliction of duty, a childish evasion of the difficulties and wonders of the real” (66). Daisy's reaction to this charge is that Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is a “warning the world against people *just like you*” (67) – the implication is that these people among whom she is counting her father are the ones who truly lack the imagination, the creative capacity to see the world outside of the physical limits presented to them in their daily lives. Perowne himself acknowledges this lack later in the novel when he admits that “he can't feel his way past the iron weight of the actual to see beyond... he's a realist, and can never escape” (172-3). The importance of imagination, especially the ability to imagine what it is like to be someone else, is discussed further in this chapter. However, the point McEwan is trying to make appears to be clear: imagined spaces and spaces in which to be able to imagine are just as important and vital as is the space of scientific fact and reality.

As discussed above, beneath the veneer of wealth, status and education necessary for his chosen profession Perowne is a quagmire of insecurities and lack of literary knowledge. This is shown through his almost slavish reliance on the news media for information about the plane crash he has claimed as his own, his almost constant internal dialogue of self-doubt, suspicion and caution, and through his daughter's ongoing crusade to educate him in literature. This section seeks to analyse the constant invasion of the news media into the daily activities of Perowne in this novel.

Perowne's reliance on the news media to corroborate his version of reality is signalled even before he realises what the flaming ball in the night sky actually is. One of his initial thoughts is that it must be a “meteor burning out in the London sky... They

must have missed the media coverage” (13). Once he realises what it is, a plane that is on fire and heading in to Heathrow airport, the facade of euphoria and invincibility disappears, leaving him helpless as he looks on knowing he is unable to do anything. “Feeling unhinged and unreasonable” (24) and in need of some sort of confirmation of what he has seen, Perowne heads downstairs to the kitchen “to turn on the radio” (25).

The prominence of the news media within this household is suggested through the placement of a small television screen in the kitchen, kept specifically “for moments like this, breaking stories” (29). The importance of this media is further emphasised through the description of the “grandiose preamble” (29) to the news programme which “suggests urgency, technology, global coverage” (29). He finds himself disappointed, however – the story has yet to be reported on and so “remains an unreliable subjective event” (29) – without the news media's confirmation of this event it is as if it has not officially happened yet despite having seen it with his own eyes. When his 18 year-old son, Theo, asks him what this event might mean, Perowne replies “I don't know what I think... Let's wait for the news” (34). Extrapolated beyond the confines of this family kitchen, we can see a conversation that is all too familiar, which points to the near dictatorial grip that the news media has over society's perceptions of both local and global events especially in the post-9/11 world which was discussed in the Introduction.

Furthermore, there is a sense of the invasion of the news media into Perowne's daily events. News, notably television news coverage, of not only 'his' plane crash but also items relating to the imminent war with Iraq, seep into various aspects of his daily activities all across London. He sees television news in the changing rooms at his squash game with American colleague Jay Strauss; at a television shop next to his car at a traffic light; whilst he prepares the family dinner at home; even whilst he is visiting his elderly mother in her rest home facility.

As the reader follows Perowne through his day, we are also party to the various updates about the plane crash story. There are dramatic twists, cliff hangers and dark suggestions akin to a thriller movie. The coverage keeps Perowne on tenterhooks – were these pilots reckless to bring a burning plane into an airport so close to a metropolitan area? Was it a mechanical failure? Or are they in fact radical Islamists, intent on doing to London what was done to New York two years prior? This sensationalised nature of the coverage induces emotional responses from Perowne, who is completely caught up in the suggestion and intrigue of this story. This coverage reflects, on a much smaller scale, the news media coverage of the 9/11 attacks, thus inviting the reader to take a fresh look at this phenomenon without the emotional sensitivity that comes attached to 9/11. Perowne claims that he is “living proof” (67) that people can live without the stories created through fiction and literature but as we can see – this is clearly not the case. He seems to be unable to see that the news media is, at times, just as much of a fiction, if not more, as the novels Daisy has been directing him to read.

On first reading, this novel seems to endorse the dominant narrative that I have expanded on in the previous chapters. However, upon closer reading, the subtle disruptions of this dominant narrative become clearer. Perowne's reliance on the media is something that, throughout the day, he becomes increasingly aware of. The first indication of this is when he comments that his desire to watch the news over listening to music whilst preparing dinner is “a condition of the times, [a] compulsion to hear how it stands with the world, and to be joined to the generality, to a community of anxiety” (180). This desire to be a part of a larger community, the pull of collective trauma, is discussed by Trimarco and Dupret. As I mentioned in the Introduction, they point out that although the media are certainly partially responsible for the manipulation of public sentiment, we must also consider people's willingness to be manipulated. They

point out that there is a significant “emotional draw” (Trimarco and Dupret 36) and need for identification with those who have been involved in a traumatic event. So it is seen here, in Perowne, in his desire to join this “community of anxiety” (McEwan 180). This suggestion of the self-awareness of his reliance on the media is expanded further when he seems to reach a sort of epiphany when the truth of the matter about the plane crash that he has been so attached to is announced. His lack of relief that it is a simple matter of mechanical failure rather than a terrorist attack gives him pause for thought. Has he been had? Is the news media starting to control the pathway of his thoughts which “Not so long ago... ranged more unpredictably, over a longer list of subjects” (184)? He “suspects that he's becoming a dupe, the willing febrile consumer of news fodder, opinion, speculation and of all the crumbs that the authorities let fall. He's a docile citizen, watching Leviathan grow stronger while he creeps under its shadow for protection” (184). This is a strong denouncement and recognition of the dominance of the joined forces of the media and those in power. Perowne's characterisation of the state as Leviathan evokes imagery of both a monstrous presence and the ideals of Thomas Hobbes who believed that social chaos could only be avoided by the rule of a strong central government. Perowne's realisation of the manipulative power of the news media over his thoughts and his emotions counters the suppression of dissenting voices dominant narrative. The magic spell is broken and the once placid consumer has awoken to the truth of his situation – the realisation that independent, critical thought is of paramount importance.

The ever-present nature of the media throughout Perowne's day is also countered within the novel by the presence of the anti-war protestors who have converged upon London. The constant presence of the protestors is disruptive: they force the closure of roads and cause delays and variations in plans for the Perowne family. This force of



disruption intersects with Perowne's day as much as the media does, yet it does not cause a negative reaction in him despite the fact that he does not necessarily agree with the protestors' stance. Structurally, the inclusion of the protestors suggests that despite the power of the media, the power of the voice of the people is equally as strong. The inclusion of the protests against the war in Iraq mirrors the inclusion of anti-war protests in DeLillo's *Falling Man*, although the protest referenced in *Falling Man* is one that took place on "Charlie Parker's birthday" (DeLillo, 182) which was August 29, 2004. This march was said to be the largest in United States history just as the march depicted in *Saturday* was thought to be the largest England had seen.

The effect of the central character of this novel, Perowne, being surrounded by this protest activity rather than being directly involved in it has the effect of the conflict between the forces of public opinion and those of the media being played out within him. Although most of the time Perowne leans towards support of the war thanks to his interactions with an Iraqi colleague who had suffered at the hands of the Hussein regime, he finds himself "tending towards the anti-war camp" (102) when he talks to his American colleague, staunch supporter of action over diplomacy, Jay Strauss. Through this portrayal of the internal conflict of the central character, the novel opens up the possibility for discussion about whether or not militaristic action is a good idea. Voices of dissent are presented alongside the influences of the media and voices of support, allowing a space for the working out of challenging questions that the dominant narrative dismisses as irrelevant.

This dissent is also further explored through the argument that Perowne has with his daughter Daisy upon her return home. Daisy is a recent graduate of Literature from Oxford University and an up-and-coming young poet. She lives in Paris, France but has returned home for a visit to celebrate the publication of her first book of poems and,

more importantly, to reconcile with her estranged grandfather. After a joyful reunion with her much-loved father, they embark upon a discussion of the protest that quickly becomes heated. The framework of their opinions is quickly established within the first statement each makes within the discussion. Daisy's firm anti-war stance is obvious: "But it's completely barbaric, what they're about to do. Everyone knows that" so too is Perowne's ambivalence: "It might be. It might not be. I honestly don't know" (190). Although of course father and daughter are arguing about the advantages and disadvantages of this war in this exchange, mixed in amongst this is a far more weighted issue: that Perowne does not really know what he thinks. This apathetic reaction is what really causes Daisy to become angry and so becomes the target of her criticism: "You're saying let the war go ahead, and in five years' time if it works out, you're for it, and if it doesn't, you're not responsible. You're an educated person living in a mature democracy and our government's taking us to war. If you think that's a good idea, fine, say so, make your argument, but don't hedge your bets" (193). This call to form a clear opinion takes aim at those who allow themselves, like Perowne, to be too easily led by the influence of the media and the government, and drift along without engaging in critical thought about this issue. She also provides possibly the strongest words of dissent against the Bush administration out of all three novels considered within this thesis: "You know very well these extremists, the neocons, have taken over America. Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz. Iraq was always their pet project. Nine eleven was their big chance to talk Bush around" (196). These are the kind of words that would invite a firestorm of controversy within the United States however, within the context of a novel written by a British author, they find a safe place to be expressed.

Baxter is set up as the antithesis to Perowne, the underprivileged, under-educated presence that threatens to turn Perowne's day upside down. His

characterisation within the novel commences before we are properly introduced to him, as Perowne observes three young men who later turn out to be Baxter and his associates, “hurrying out of a lap-dancing club” (79). Although, as Perowne points out, “lap-dancing is a lawful pursuit” (83) the implication of base, unsavoury behaviour is there. After all, if he had seen “three men hurrying, even furtively from the Wellcome Trust or the British Library” (83), he would not have thought much of it. This juxtaposition of the location of a lap-dancing club with two places strongly associated with learning, and therefore refinement, further emphasises Baxter's characterisation as someone certainly ill-bred, uneducated and potentially criminal.

The characterisation of Baxter as someone barbaric is continued in the descriptions of his physical appearance. The reader is at once given the impression of animalism and deficiency. The reader's attention is drawn to the “black hair, coiled on the back” of Baxter's hands and the way his mouth is set bulbously, with the smooth shaved shadow of a strong beard adding to the effect of a muzzle” (88). His overall impression is a “general simian air” (88). The descriptions of excessive body hair, and use of the words “muzzle” and “simian” evoke ideas of savagery and being less evolved which hark to nineteenth-century theories of Social Darwinism. Furthermore, the physical manifestations of Baxter's Huntington's disease plays a lead role in how Perowne sizes him up. He notes the “persistent tremor” (87) and his “distinctive” gait and assesses that he has Huntington's disease - “Chromosome Four. The misfortune lies within a single gene... Here's biological determinism in its purest form” (94). The phrase “biological determinism” also invites the idea that the man standing in front of Perowne is fundamentally flawed and that their respective positions within society were pre-determined. It is also obliquely used to account for the violent impulses within Baxter, his “impression of fretful impatience, of destructive energy waiting to be released”, his

*“false sense of superiority”* (91), his volatility and *“savagely carefree”* (221) facade.

This characterisation of Baxter enables the reading of his invasion of the Perowne household as a kind of re-enactment of 9/11 – barbaric forces have breached the Western bounds of civilisation. But although this scenario at first glance seems to support the dominant narrative's conceptualisation of the terrorist as evil, it in fact lends itself to a rather provocative disruption of it. Specifically, it disrupts both the dominant narrative of the West as Innocent victim and the Heroics narrative. Within the West as Innocent narrative, the idea is that the Western world, or more accurately, America, bore no responsibility for the 9/11 attacks. To suggest otherwise in terms of critiquing their foreign policy, is portrayed as a traitorous offense. However, when Baxter invades the Perowne family home, the reader is able to see that this action is not random but was precipitated at least partially, if not entirely, by the actions of Perowne during their conflict on the street earlier in the day.

Looking firstly at this initial confrontation between Baxter and Perowne, we can deduce that it is debatable who exactly is at fault for the car accident which brings Perowne and Baxter into contact. While it is true that Baxter pulled out without looking, he rightly points out that he should not have had to, as the road was closed and he could therefore have reasonably expected that there would be no other traffic. Despite this, Perowne is self-righteously infuriated at the thought that his car, his pride and joy, may have been damaged. Approaching the inevitable conflict the script of how it will play out seems set in his mind, expected to *“render the matter insincere... pure artifice”* (86). The structure of the conflict will revolve around the central idea that *“someone is going to have to impose his will and win, and the other is going to give way”* (87). The expectation of there being a winner and a loser is apparently a given.

When Perowne's expectations of Baxter's violent tendencies are realised, he takes the only pathway he can see for escape and exploits his professional knowledge of Baxter's condition. The introduction of the facts of Baxter's illness halts the violence against Perowne and swings the balance of power back in his direction. Perowne changes his role from potential victim of a physical assault to that of a medical professional, consulting with a patient. Baxter is no longer the swaggering leader of a three man show but a "sulky child waiting to be coaxed" (96), answering personal questions posed to him by a complete stranger upon whom only minutes before he had intended to inflict violence. Surprisingly, now that Perowne holds the balance of power his perception of Baxter also shifts – "He's an intelligent man, and gives the impression that, illness apart, he's missed his chances, made some big mistakes and ended up in the wrong company" (99). Now that he is no longer a threat, Perowne can more readily perceive Baxter's humanity although Perowne seems to feel very little pity for him or have any sincere intention of helping this young man as "a part of him never ceases to calculate how soon he can safely end this encounter" (99). Eventually, Baxter realises the trick, but by that stage it is too late. His associates are disenchanted by their leader's lack of action and this allows Perowne to escape, leaving Baxter humiliated and angry.

Perowne goes on to his squash game but he is troubled by his own actions. In the changing rooms, the sight of the bruise on his chest prompts him to consider how his own actions and approach may have determined the path that the situation took. He acknowledges that he acted "unprofessionally, using his medical knowledge to undermine a man suffering from a neurodegenerative disorder" (113) but he is unsure whether this abuse of power was justified since he "allowed himself to be placed in that position" (114). Reflecting on his approach, Perowne knows that "his attitude was wrong from the start" (114) and that it was "pompous", "disdainful", "indignant and

combative” (114) but knows that potentially the violence was inevitable. His questioning of his actions does not seek to settle the moral dilemma of whether what he did was wrong, rather it seeks to explore the possibility. It is this exploration of this possibility of culpability of the West that was absent from the dominant narrative about the 9/11 attacks.

This initial encounter and the actions and attitude of Perowne lead to the second, more dangerous confrontation with Baxter when he invades the family home. The invasion is foreshadowed when Theo warns his father that his humiliation of Baxter may lead to some form of retribution. When Baxter arrives, holding a knife to Perowne's wife, Rosalind, he again questions his earlier actions and how they have led to his entire family now being in danger. Although he acknowledges the part that Baxter's medical condition is playing, “for all the reductive arguments, Perowne can't convince himself that molecules and faulty genes alone are terrorising his family... Perowne himself is also responsible” (218). Desperate, Perowne again attempts to regain power by using the same trick as earlier that day, trying to convince Baxter that he has been looking into his case and has found some promising leads. This time, however, he is met with failure.

What works to diffuse the situation is surprising – the reading of a poem by Perowne's daughter Daisy. Baxter and his associate, with the unstated but obvious intent of raping her, direct Daisy to take her clothes off. Her nakedness reveals to all in the room that she is in the early stages of pregnancy. Her pregnancy suggests that she holds within her new possibilities for the future, which lends weight to the effect that her poetry reading has on Baxter. The implications of this idea will be explored later in this chapter.

Disarmed by Daisy's poetry reading, Baxter's mood shifts dramatically from “lord of terror to amazed admirer” (232) and he announces to Perowne that he would like to go on the drug trial that he had mentioned earlier. The balance of power has shifted back into Perowne's hands and this time he takes advantage of it to near deadly effect. In a joint effort, both he and Theo take hold of Baxter and throw him down the stairs. As he falls, Perowne sees Baxter “looking directly at [him] with an expression, not so much of terror, as dismay”. He also sees in the Baxter's eyes a “sorrowful accusation of betrayal” (236). The juxtaposition of the promise of a cure from the good doctor and the reality of his actions which only further Baxter's neurological damage cannot be ignored. It parallels the promises made about the good that would be done in Iraq as a result of Western invasion such as the democracy that would be installed, which were overshadowed by the deaths of civilians and the destruction of homes and livelihoods, euphemistically referred to as 'collateral damage'. With Baxter no longer posing a direct threat to any member of his family at the point at which he inflicted the violence upon him, Perowne's actions become difficult to justify. If the reader is not already uncomfortable with this turn of events, then Perowne's agreement to operate on Baxter surely rankles. As Magali Cornier Michael points out, it is through the donning of his surgical gloves that he most “fully reasserts his position of power... asserting a god-like power over Baxter” (46). In this way, the dominant narrative that support the actions of America and their allies as heroic and paint the intruders as 'evil' whilst they remain the champions of righteousness is firmly opened to scrutiny. The reader is provided with the chance to view this global conflict in a miniaturised format, with Perowne representing the powers of the West and Baxter standing in for the the nations of Afghanistan and Iraq. Who has invaded whom? Michael sums it up well when he says “the novel offers a stark portrait of the difficulties Western citizens will have in

making headway towards imagining and resonating with the *other*” (48). Nonetheless, this point in the novel offers a very good start for exploring the humanity of the othered form of not only terrorist but any person who originates from this area of the world. As Changez points out in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, not all people in this part of the world match the Western media's conceptualisation of them as terrorists or extremists.

The critical point of the novel is when Daisy reads out the poem that disarms Baxter. Baxter's response to the poem functions to both humanise him and reveal the similarities between Perowne and Baxter. McEwan's choice of the well-known Matthew Arnold poem “Dover Beach” is something which deserves attention. Matthew Arnold was a man who believed in the transformative powers of literature. Elaine Hadley points out that this poem details the very essence of the Victorian liberal beliefs that Arnold held that an individual might be able to “seek out a private space of thoughtful emotion, of human intimacy, where subjects alienated in mind or body can become fully authentic and intentional in relation to themselves and to each other, in spite of the chaotic world without” (93). However, Hadley does not fall into the trap of the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. She deftly points out that perhaps a reliance on high culture might force a further separation between those who have access to it and those who do not, however it does offer a position from which to consider how the conflicts of today's world are conceptualised. True, to fall into that dichotomy might lead the reader to assume that McEwan is reinforcing the dominant narrative's position that those who invade the West are barbaric and uncivilised. However, through Daisy's reading of this poem we learn something critical about both Baxter and Perowne, two men supposedly as different as they could be. Both do not realise that this poem is not Daisy's own original work and furthermore, Baxter is more moved by the poem than Perowne, who we already know has been hounded by his super literate daughter Daisy for his lack of



literary knowledge or sensibility.

To take up the first point for examination, Molly Clark Hillard brings the idea of “misprision” to the event of both Baxter and Perowne mistaking Arnold's poem for the work of Daisy. At one level we come to see that Baxter and Perowne are not so very different after all – that the divides between them perhaps are not so wide that some sort of common ground cannot be found. This mutual mistake has put them, for a brief moment, on an even footing within the novel. The balance of power has leveled, signalling the possibility for these two opposing forces to be able to be equals. Adding another level to this discussion, Hillard connects the practice of misprision with the practice of re-reading. Re-reading is something which this novel lends itself to particularly well – as I have mentioned earlier, at first this novel might appear to support and reproduce the power dynamics and politics of the post-9/11 Western world, however, upon re-reading and reconsideration, new perspectives are revealed. Prior to the reading of this poem, it was Baxter who had been cast in the role of wrongdoer, but in the aftermath it is Perowne and Theo who show themselves as violent deceivers. But for a few moments during Daisy's recital, they agree on something: that Daisy is the author of this poem. It is this shared misunderstanding that briefly, unwittingly, binds them and it is this bond that makes the violence done to Baxter later on all the more awful.

The fact that Baxter “heard what Henry never has, and probably never will” (288) within the Matthew Arnold poem is another blow to the 'barbaric invader' narrative. Baxter's ability to connect with this poem and have an emotional response to it suggests Baxter has a more finely tuned sensibility than Perowne. McEwan thus casts aspersions on his protagonist through Perowne's slavish reliance on media, his underhanded tactics when dealing with Baxter both on the street and within his own home, and finally his admission that by saving Baxter's life in surgery he has

“committed Baxter to his torture” which he calls “Revenge enough” (288). Who, then, is the barbaric invader? This question remains unanswered – the novel does not directly indict Perowne for his wrong doings – but that the question has been asked is enough to loosen the dominant narrative's stranglehold. McEwan provides the reader with a chance to form their own intelligent opinions, away from media influence, away from the overwhelming emotion attached to the events of 9/11 and consider the role that the West has had in shaping what came to pass and what has happened since.

Initially McEwan's *Saturday* appears to be a reiteration of the dominant narrative's key concepts, however closer reading of this novel provides new perspectives on what proves to be a subtle but effective disruption thereof. This novel provides a key disruption of the dominant narrative through the questioning of the terrorist as evil and the West as innocent victim concept, and the heroics narratives, respectively. This novel provides a wider context for the after-effects of 9/11 and the dominant narrative that followed in its wake. Set in London, England and written by British author Ian McEwan, this novel tackles the same issues as *Falling Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* from a British perspective. It acknowledges the traumatic effects 9/11 had on Western societies outside of the United States, and enables us to see that the dominant narrative was not exclusively an American construct.

The disruption of the dominant narrative occurs through the portrayal of the protagonist, Perowne, who is a wealthy, upper middle class neurosurgeon. Perowne's day starts when he sees an aircraft on fire heading into Heathrow airport. He immediately makes the connection to the images seen on the news eighteen months prior when the planes hit the World Trade Center. The effect that this association has on him is instructive. He moves from a position of control and power, overlooking the square outside of his house with the manner of a lord, to a helpless and uncertain older

gentleman in his dressing gown rushing to turn on the television news to confirm what he has just seen with his own eyes.

A key concept within this novel is invasion. This concept is troubled on two different levels. The first is the portrayal of the invasion of the news media into the daily life of the protagonist, Perowne and the effect that this invasion has on his capacity for critical thinking. The second is the questions raised by the invasion of the Perowne family home by Baxter, who in my reading of this text represents an outside or othered identity despite being English. Baxter invades the Perowne family home as retribution for Perowne humiliating him and using his medical condition against him. This troubles the idea that the West is innocent – the idea that the 9/11 attacks were entirely unprovoked and that no blame could be apportioned to either America or any other Western nation. Furthermore, this idea of invasion is taken one step further when Perowne and his son, Theo, throw Baxter down the stairs causing major neurological damage. The invasion comes when, later that evening, Perowne is called in to operate on the very man he has injured. This invasion parallels the invasion of Iraq by America and her allies – retribution disguised as being the right thing to do – calling into question the heroic narrative which exemplifies America and her allies as morally righteous.

Furthermore, McEwan uses the poetry of Matthew Arnold to point out that the dichotomy of “us” and “them” is not a productive one. The mutual misunderstanding that Baxter and Perowne share regarding Daisy's reading of “Dover Beach” points to their common ground, a moment of identification. This moment disrupts the dominant narrative's construction of the terrorist as other by suggesting common ground between two people who seem to be so utterly different. The only way forward, it would seem, in this post-9/11 world, is with an open mind, looking at everything critically and not accepting anything at face value. McEwan provides the reader with a space from which

to do this within the novel.

## Conclusion

The argument that this thesis seeks to put forth boils down to is one of the fundamental questions asked of the literary arts: why does literature matter? What does literature teach us that we do not already know or can easily find out in this age of readily accessible information? What can fiction tell us about our everyday lived realities? Through the analysis of three post-9/11 novels, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, some of the answers to these questions become a little clearer. When faced with an event like 9/11, people turn to the news media to try and make sense of their world and the things that are happening whilst also looking to their national leaders for guidance. Whilst this is an entirely understandable response it is also dangerous. The news media and those in positions of political power have certain vested interests and so the information, images and ideas that are fed to people is designed to create a required response from the audience.

This collection of information, images and ideas are what I refer to as the dominant narrative. Although this narrative was mainly created by the American news media and directed at the American public, worldwide access to international news channels means that the impact of this narrative was not strictly limited to America alone, in fact it reached, to a greater or lesser extent, the majority of the Western world. There are three key areas of the dominant narrative to which I chose to pay particular attention. The first is America the Brave – the idea that despite suffering huge loss of life and significant trauma, the focus was firmly on the heroics of the days surrounding the events rather than the more tragic elements. The second key idea is one that was clearly stated by President Bush when he said “You are with us, or you are with the

terrorists.” The third key idea is that of America as innocent victim and the terrorists as evil perpetrator. The problem with this collection of ideas was that it ignored or denied some of the uncomfortable realities of the events of 9/11; created an environment within America and beyond where voices of dissent were ignored, ridiculed or punished; and fostered intolerance towards people who looked ethnically similar to those who were involved in the terrorist attacks whilst blatantly ignoring the role American international politics might have played in 9/11. This narrative sought to short-circuit the critical capabilities of the general public, creating a fearful and docile populace which did not question the motives or actions of their government.

The novels discussed within this thesis offer resistance to the dominant narrative and provide an alternative space from which 9/11 and the responses to it can be reconsidered and critiqued. They also offers the opportunity to imagine new possibilities beyond the prescribed edicts of the dominant narrative. The main source of resistance to the dominant narrative in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* is through his reinstatement of the image of the Falling Man and the use of Morandi's painting to depict the Twin Towers. The reinstatement of a censored image and the use of a painting to describe the towers has the effect of forcing the reader to see beyond the imagery of the media representation of 9/11. This is important as the media reduced 9/11 down to a slick set of images, edited together to depict that day from all angles – more like 9/11 the movie than a true representation of what really happened. The new imagery provided by DeLillo allows us the fresh perspective from which to really engage with, critique and re-imagine this day from outside of what we were all directed to look at.

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* offers its main resistance through the awarding of voice to Changez, a Pakistani man who had studied at Princeton University in America and subsequently took a job in the financial sector of

New York. This novel renders the American male with whom Changez is conversing silent, effectively refusing his voice. This silencing of the voice of the American is a provocative move which essentially turns the dominant narrative upside down. This allows the reader to hear the perspectives of someone who not only understands American culture and politics, having lived there for a number of years, but who is very critical of this culture and politics. This cuts to the heart of the concept of freedom of speech. The dominant narrative branded questioning or dissenting voices unpatriotic and sought to silence them. As with DeLillo's reinstatement of Richard Drew's Falling Man photograph, Hamid's insistence that the voice of one who was considered an outsider and a potential threat be heard restores the principles of democracy and natural justice to the representation of 9/11.

Ian McEwan's *Saturday* takes us across the Atlantic to London, England where the West's fear of evil outsider forces invading their inner sanctums is troubled by the actions of the protagonist, Henry Perowne, against Baxter. The troubling of this notion of the invasion occurs in two ways. The first is that when Baxter invades the Perowne family home, he does so in retaliation for the humiliation that Perowne inflicted on him earlier through his manipulation of his medical knowledge. If read allegorically, this upsets the notion that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were unprovoked and that America was an innocent victim of the irrational hatred of a group of extremists. The second way in which this notion of invasion is troubled is the portrayal of Perowne operating on Baxter after he was the one who threw him down the stairs and caused the damage. It makes for an uncomfortable reading experience as the ostensible good deed is laced with malice and undertones of revenge. The parallel to this operation is the invasion of Iraq – although the political rhetoric about this invasion spoke of aiding the Iraqi people by removing Saddam Hussein and installing a system of democracy, the reality was that

this invasion killed many innocent civilians, destroyed homes and wrecked infrastructure. As Perowne sentences Baxter to the suffering of Huntington's so too the invading forces sentenced Iraq to further problems and suffering.

But which novel has managed this act of resistance the most effectively? I personally believe that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is the more effective at resisting the dominant narrative. This is due to the authenticity of the outside perspective that Changez provides; he, like Mohsin Hamid, has seen both sides through their connection to their homeland Pakistan and the time they have spent within America. Mohsin Hamid comments in his essay "My Reluctant Fundamentalist" that a novel is often "a divided man's conversation with himself." As eloquent and thought-provoking as their novels are, McEwan and DeLillo are bound by the constraints of their own histories and perspectives, as their initial responses to the 9/11 attacks showed. Hamid, however, has lived both sides which enables his novel to strike a better balance between understanding America and her culture and the ability to stand back and critique it from the non-American, non-Western perspective. The ability of this novel to not only resist the dominant narrative but to also expose within the reader their own internalised narratives, biases and beliefs is what makes it the most effective of the three.

Through the use of imagery, giving voice to silenced sections of society and the questioning of the motives and intentions of those in positions of power in the West, these three novels work to resist the dominant narrative's powerful hold over the general public. These novels open up new possibilities, new imaginings and allow for critical engagement with 9/11 and the responses to it. This function of literature is of critical importance as what the dominant narrative threatened is the principles of democracy, namely the right to say and write what we think, to seek out different sources of information and ideas and the right to disagree with the actions of our governments.



Without resistance to suppression and silencing, we all lose our voice and risk living in fear. 9/11 was an significant historical event. History is created through photographs, testimony and our responses to it. If some of these elements are compromised through the exclusion of that which does not fit with the agenda of those in positions of power then history becomes compromised. We are our history. If this history is compromised then so are we.



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