**UNIVERSIDAD DE ALCALÁ – INSTITUTO FRANKLIN**

**UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID**

**FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA**

**MÁSTER EN ESTUDIOS NORTEAMERICANOS**

**CURSO 2019/2020**

Of Mirages and Falling People: Healing Trauma and Addressing the Unrepresentable in Post-9/11 Literature

De espejismos y personas que caen: Superando el trauma y abordando lo irrepresentable en la literatura post-11S

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Convocatoria: Julio 2020

Calificación: 9,9 (Matrícula de Honor)

**Abstract:**

Post-9/11 literature provided a space for authors and readers to engage in a process of healing shortly after the traumatic events of September 11th, 2001. Most of the works included within this new field also helped to promote an official narrative of the day, created and spread by the Bush administration and the media which for years remained uncontested. Only as the 10th year anniversary of the attacks approached did some critical voices raise. Either directly questioning the veracity of the dominant narrative through the search of the real historical and personal meaning of 9/11—as in Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark* (2008) and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) 9/11 family-centered fictions—or turning away from reality in order to bring the public closer to the forgotten other through a re-telling of the terrorist attacks placing them out of the U.S.—as in Matt Ruff's *The Mirage* (2012) and David Danson's *Faultline 49* (2012)—literary works began to reflect the growing public discontent with the "us vs. them" view of 9/11 and the War on Terror, while also bringing to the front previously silenced voices, especially those belonging to the daunting non-American "*Other.*"

Keywords: 9/11; Counterfactual; Ruff; Danson; DeLillo; Auster.

**Resumen:**

La literatura post-11S proporcionó, tanto a autores como lectores, un espacio en el que procesar y recuperarse del trauma ocasionado por los ataques terroristas del 11 de septiembre de 2001. Muchos de los textos que se engloban dentro de esta nueva categoría literaria contribuyeron, al mismo tiempo, a reforzar el discurso oficial sobre los ataques que había sido creado y difundido por la administración Bush y los medios de comunicación norteamericanos prácticamente sin oposición en los primeros años tras la catástrofe. No fue sino hasta 10 años después de los ataques que las primeras voces críticas comenzaron a alzarse contra la visión establecida como oficial e indiscutible. Esta resistencia a la versión oficial sobre los ataques y las circunstancias que llevaron a ellos se manifestó en la literatura sobre el 11-S mediante la búsqueda del significado y los puntos de vista que habían sido mayormente ignorados en los primeros años. Las nuevas obras de ficción englobadas dentro de la literatura post-11S empezaron, en consecuencia, a reflejar el creciente descontento de la sociedad norteamericana, en creciente desacuerdo con el discurso del "nosotros contra vosotros" impulsado por la administración Bush tras el 11 de septiembre y durante los conflictos con Iraq y Afganistán, pero también a dar voz a aquellos que habían sido mayormente ignorados en los primeros años tras los ataques. En este sentido, autores como Paul Auster con *Man in the Dark* y Don DeLillo con *Falling Man* pusieron el foco en la búsqueda del verdadero significado histórico y personal de aquel 11 de septiembre, mientras otros como Matt Ruff con su *The Mirage* y David Danson con *Faultline 49* llevaron sus historias más allá de la realidad conocida mediante la reescritura de los ataques terroristas del 11 de septiembre de 2001, trasladando los mismos fuera de los EE. UU. dando, así, protagonismo a la ignorada figura del "Otro".

**Palabras Clave:** 11-S; Guerra al terror; el Otro; trauma; contrafactual; Ruff; Danson; DeLillo; Auster; versión oficial.

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# 1. Introduction.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, nineteen men belonging to the Al Qaeda terrorist organization hijacked four commercial airplanes with the intention to crash these in a number of strategic locations. The aircrafts, which are normally used as means of transportation, became, this way, enormous and extremely damaging weapons in the hands of the terrorist whose acts resulted in the death of nearly three thousand people. New York City and Washington D.C. were the cities where most of the casualties occurred, as three of the hijacked planes reached their objectives in said locations—The Twin Towers and the Pentagon—at a highly consequential time—at the start of a workday. Only the fourth plane—the United Airlines Flight 93—failed to reach its intended destination, as the aircraft ended up crashing into a clear field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Although it was believed that their final objective had been the White House, the hypothesis was never entirely confirmed as the alleged intervention of the flight's passengers put an end to the terrorists' plans. Nevertheless, the large amount of personal loss and the visually significant material damage within the three crash sites were undeniable, as was the trauma they caused.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks became a pivotal moment in the U.S. history as well as for the stablished global order (Mihăilă 287). It was conceived as the first attack of such magnitude in American continental soil and it also surpassed the Pearl Harbor 1941 aerial bombardment in terms of casualties and damage—not forgetting that the former took place in the midst of a world conflict, even if the U.S. had yet to intervene—as well as the most violent attack within the whole American territory. This way, the intrusion of the terrorists into American life marked, at the same time, the entrance of the nation into the world's history of violence and, consequently, the end of the U.S exceptionalism—as perceived by Americans themselves (Cvek 19).

The exceptional character of the United States had occupied a great part of the American ideological, political and economic discourses ever since its men and women raised up against the British repression, and it has only increased its significance ever since, especially with the allies' victory in World War II and the non-violent resolution of the Cold War. The alleged superiority of the American nation was, thus, closely related to historical events such as the American Revolution—posing the U.S. as the oldest modern democracy in the world—or the military and ideological victories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—which opened the door to its large geographical and

ideological global expansion. This way, the United States' own and divergent history with respect to other first world countries promoted its conception as a superior nation with the important mission to make the world a better and more advance place and, in this sense, shaped the country's exceptional character. At least until the terrorists' intervention on that fateful September morning.

The attacks were perceived as an act of war—the first to occur within the nation's soil since its foundation—which, as Sven Cvek explains, marked the entrance of the U.S. into the world's history of violence (20). The U.S. was, thus, not exceptional anymore, as it now shared its history with other nations—mainly European ones—, from which the U.S. had always considered itself different and superior. The American nation had been struck at its economic, political and military centers (Mihăilă 287)—symbolized by the locations chosen by the terrorist in New York City and Washington D.C.—without warning, shaking its sense of invincibility and the Americans' sense of security, while the anxieties and shock it caused favored the growth of fear of new attacks within the American society.

This was what defined the official dominant narrative of 9/11, shaped by authorities, and spread by mass media in the aftermath of the attacks with only one purpose:

> The dominant interpretation of 9/11 as an exceptional national catastrophe played a significant role in the manipulation of the event for the furthering of authoritarian domestic policies and its use as a justification for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. (Cvek 21)

As the terrorists' actions had exposed a number of important breaches regarding the nation's security, and with fear dominating most of the country's public and private life, the Bush administration saw the need to promote a series of legislative moves, both in terms of domestic and foreign policy, destined to repair those flaws. The passing of the PATRIOT Act (2001), which expanded the government's surveillance powers and eased the process to authorize said practices; the creation of the Homeland Security Department to guarantee a higher protection from possible attacks; or the increasing restrictions regarding immigration were just a few of the domestic legislations implemented by the government in the months and years after the attacks. Although the new regulations significantly restricted individuals' rights and freedoms, they were greatly

supported by most of the bureaucrats at Washington D.C. and the general public, mostly due to the intense promotion of 9/11 as a moment of historical rupture that needed to be repaired (Cord 225).

In this sense, the events of the morning of September 11, 2001, became an "exceptional national catastrophe" (21) that exposed, for the first time in the nation's history, the flaws of the alleged American exceptionalism. The Americans' perception of their country's superiority to the rest of the world had historically led the U.S. administrations to the engagement in various 'missionary' campaigns abroad, with the intention to bring peace, democracy and modernity to those territories where tyranny and violence were common. What was conceived as part of America's humanitarianism had, however, been exposed as the result of the country's self-serving goals, not only before but also after 9/11:

> There is another face to exceptionalism, one that became more visible especially after the outbreak of the "war on terror" with its "us vs. them" ideology, when the escalation of the exceptionalist logic by the neo-conservatism of the Bush administration, the failure of the New Economy, and the combination of arrogance and narcissism that led to the country's blindness to its own history, have been diagnosed by many as signs of exceptionalism's self-destructiveness. (Mihăilă 288)

The terrorist attacks of 2001 broke the illusion of American exceptionalism by exposing its darker side, finally unveiling the country's false humanitarianism as actions that responded more to the egotistical interests of the American nation and corporations and less to the alleged benefits they offered to the world. The exposure of this "other" American exceptionalism—that had remained mostly hidden until then—threatened the government's messages and goals, which prompted the need to create a manipulated and nationally shared narrative of 9/11 in order to guarantee the support for its decisions. This prompted a new retreat into the domestic sphere, "lapsing into isolationist, 'go it alone,' or revenge tactics" (Kaplan 18) that defined both the national imaginary and the government's decisions in the wake of 9/11 with only one objective: to recover the lost sense of exceptionality.

The first step towards the recovery of American exceptionalism was to, as has been repeatedly mentioned, shape a picture of the terrorist attacks of 2001 that supported and not tainted the nation's traditional and exceptional conception of itself. This way, 9/11 became a "watershed moment" (Cvek 18) for which the nation had been unprepared, but which also provided the state apparatus with a glimpse at the fissures to be repaired in order to bring back the outdated national security. The message was clear: the nation had been wounded but not defeated and it would come out of this tragedy stronger and safer (Lee 35).

This "historical contingency" of 9/11 was defined by the "strengthening of the ideological and institutional presence of the state" in the U.S. public life—specially through mass media and popular culture—which helped to contain the shock and anxieties provoked by the attacks (Cvek 24). The U.S. government needed to provide a picture of 9/11 that was traumatic enough to shake Americans out of their bubble of security and commodities, but that still left a space for hope and confidence in the country's resilience. From the instant replay of the towers on fire and collapsing, to the censored pictures of the falling people, the media coverage of the attacks on the day and weeks after these focused on the creation of the narrative of America as a wounded, but not defeated nation. It was mandatory, for instance, that the images of people falling from the buildings were silenced, not only because of the shock they produced in the public, but also because they symbolized a loss of hope that contested the picture of solidity that authorities were promoting. Instead, the U.S. media exploited the narrative of "America the Brave" by centering the attention on the members of the emergency services and law enforcement, many of whom had also lost their lives that day (35).

This portrayal of 9/11—more prominent in the weeks after the attacks, but still present in the following years, as exemplified, for instance, in the film *United 93* (2006) which praises the passengers' courage and determination (Wegner 87)—put the emphasis on the heroism of the American people and the country's endurance even after a catastrophe as damaging as 9/11 was, thus, adopting the government's message entirely:

> In the shaky days following the attacks, reporters presumably felt they had to stick to what United States and other leaders were doing and saying as they tried to calm and to unify the nation as they desperately figured out how to respond. (Kaplan 13)

Indeed, the media's audiovisual discourse in the weeks after 9/11 did not differ much from the words spoken by Bush in the evening of September 11, 2001, which drew the attention to the "steel of American resolve" and how they had responded with "the best of America—with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could" (Bush, "September 11"). It was essential that the message offered by media conformed with the one from the authorities, not only because the world—and, most importantly, Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda—was watching (Kaplan 13), but because it guaranteed the cohesion in the nation's response to the attacks, and so the necessary support by Americans of the legislation that the government had already in progress. In this sense, there was a need to build up a national consensus in the picturing and memorialization of 9/11 which was achieved through the nationalization of the event and its induced trauma.

Cvek affirms that "the event is nationalized only for the nation to be able to survive it" as only the shared trauma of the day can lead to the "reconstitution of national identity" (28)—that of American exceptionalism—that it had shattered. This way, trauma—as a consequence of the attacks and a tool for its memorialization—becomes central in the construction of the day's narrative as a tragedy equally shared by all Americans. In order to keep that trauma alive, mainly to guarantee the public's support for the government's future interventions, the shock and anxieties of the day needed to also remain present in the American imaginary. For that, while the authorities at Washington D.C. continued with their discourse about the country's resilience and the Americans' courage, the U.S. media played again and again the images of the burning buildings, the collapse of the towers or citizens covered in ashes. The idea was to keep the wound sufficiently open to help the government's present and future agenda, but not too much so that the resulting picture was not of a defeated nation. However, this path proved problematic for the also needed mourning process that the nation had to go through in the wake of the tragedy.

In his work titled *After the Fall* (2011) on the consequences of 9/11 within American literature, Richard Gray moves to compare the historical moment surrounding the terrorist attacks with another significant one in the history of the United States: the Kennedy assassination. He addresses a key difference in the nation's approach to both events as:

The period of national (and international) mourning that followed his [Kennedy's] death provided, at least, some measure of release, an appropriate catharsis. With 9/11, however, the period of commemoration has been hijacked by a series of events tied to it in rhetoric if not necessarily in reality: the "war on terror," the Patriot Act, extraordinary rendition, the invasion of Afghanistan and then Iraq. (Gray 8)

The use of 9/11 as an instrument for the implementation of the Bush administration's political agenda, with legislative moves as the ones mentioned above, effectively conditioned the process of mourning—or trauma healing—that the American nation should have gone through in the aftermath of the attacks. The discourse of authorities and media focused for most of Bush's presidency—and in a way continues to do so even today—on the pain and damage the terrorist had inflicted on the, nevertheless, innocent nation, extensively forgetting to address the role that the U.S. had played in the circumstances surrounding the attacks—especially considering its past policies in the Middle East (Cvek 20)—or the growing authoritarianism promoted within the domestic realm. All these circumstances widely limited the possibilities of Americans to engage in a process of healing from the trauma caused by the terrorists and, among other things, slowly led the nation towards the failure that was the invasion of Iraq and the grave economic crisis at the end of Bush's second term.

Admittedly, the U.S. had gone through only part of the five stages of the grief and loss[1] process—mostly denial and isolation in its immediate response to the attacks, and anger in the form of revenge through the military interventions in the Middle East—but failed to reach the final ones. In terms of massive trauma, such as the one produced by socially shared events like the Holocaust or 9/11, this five-stage mourning process may be translated into a three-stage process of "trauma therapy": remembrance, search and reveal of the truth about the experience, and rebirth (Mihăilă 287). These three stages are mandatory for the collective's mourning and recovery from the traumatic experiences, but, after 9/11, Americans were kept at stage one for years in order to sustain the political interests of the Bush administration.

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[1] The universal five stages of grief and loss (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance)—firstly formulated in Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's book *On Death and Dying* (1969)—all of which should be completed in order for the individual or collective to mourn and recover from a loss.

This way, although there had been an intense dedication to the remembrance and memorialization of 9/11, there were still some facts about the circumstances surrounding the event that were kept in the dark—from the censorship of some of the images from the day to the few inconsistencies surrounding it which have fed some of the conspiracy theories that have appeared in the years after the attacks—, stopping the nation from the possibility of reinvention and full recovery. In this sense, with the U.S. mass media and popular culture's discourse hijacked by the government's narrative, literature posed as the most suitable field to freely—and completely—engage in the healing from the 9/11 trauma. Thus, while the official narrative focused on the message of unity in the response to the attacks, the so-called "Literature of Terror" challenged said discourse through the attempt to find and expose the hidden truths both in reality and fiction (Randall 5).

The present study analyses some of the literary responses to 9/11 in relation to the process of "trauma healing" and how these texts criticize the official narrative of the day's events constructed by American authorities and mass media. This analysis is based on the information extracted from the main secondary texts consulted, such as Cvek's *Towering Figures: Reading the 9/11 Archive* (2011) and Rodica Mihăilă's article "Healing the Nation, Memorializing Trauma: Ground Zero and the Critique of Exceptionalism in the Recent American Novel" both of which discuss the trauma caused by 9/11 and its memorialization as well as how literature plays a major role in the recovery from said trauma. E. Ann Kaplan's *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (2005) and Linda S. Kauffman's "World Trauma Center" also deal with the shock and anxieties produced by the terrorist attacks, but focusing more on the role of media in the construction of the 9/11 trauma and the personal consequences of such representation. Richard Gray's analysis of 9/11 and its trauma completes the perspective offered by his fellow scholars by going beyond the U.S. domestic sphere with his work *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (2011) in which he engages with the day's events and its responses from the economic, political, military, transnational, and religious perspective.

The dependence on the domestic viewpoint is, precisely, what Catherine Morley criticizes of the majority of post-9/11 literary works in her article "'How Do We Write About This?' the Domestic and the Global in the Post-9/11 Novel." Although the 9/11 attacks have been conceived as a "turning point" in the U.S. history, Morley emphasizes the fact that most of the first literary

responses to 9/11 had, in fact, followed the themes and features of pre-9/11 works—mainly the domestic and individualism themes that has already dominated the late 20<sup>th</sup> century American literature. Ira Nadel, however, offers the opposite view in his article "White Rain: 9/11 and American Fiction," even though he agrees on the prominent presence of the domestic perspective in most of the earliest post-9/11 works. Nadel discusses how, in the attempt to make sense of a tragedy of such magnitude and in a context in which the construction of a dominant narrative to recover the lost sense of security was mandatory, a "blizzard" of texts had been published in the years after the attacks. These variety of texts can, according to Nadel, be divided into two groups: those that look for the psychological, historical and personal meaning of the tragedy; and those that attempt to do the same but by moving away from the event's reality.

Most of the scholars consulted for this study point to the need for authors to distance—both geographically and fictionally—their post-9/11 works from the domestic sphere that dominated the first literary responses. This "estrangement" from the terrorist attacks had the purpose of completing the picture of 9/11 and its meaning through the inclusion of the long-forgotten perspective of the "Other." Mihăilă already emphasizes the importance of the "Other" subject for the better understanding of the event and its consequences and how only through the process of getting to know and take responsibility for the "Other" will the U.S. fully recover from the 9/11 trauma. In this sense, scholars such as Sara Upstone with her essay "9/11, British Muslims, and Popular Literary Fiction" and David L. Altheide's "Fear, Terrorism, and Popular Culture" put the focus on the necessity to offer a more realistic and positive representation of the "Other" subject—as opposed to the more generally present construction of the "Other" figure as the threatening terrorist—as well as his/her own unbiased perspective—needed to confront the "terror discourse" present within the U.S. media and popular culture.

Based on the consulted texts, and more closely on Nadel's division of the post-9/11 texts, the present study will cover the analysis of four texts in two different parts. The first chapter will deal with the first group of post-9/11 texts focusing more on the domestic sphere in their search for psychological, historical and personal meaning of the event—beyond the official dominating narrative offered by the U.S. authorities and media—through the close examination of two of the most representative texts of the first decade after the attacks: Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) and Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark* (2008). The second part of this study will discuss two authors

that offer the needed distance from the event as well as the perspective of the "Other" through the construction of their alternative history novels: David Danson's *Faultline 49* (2012) and Matt Ruff's *The Mirage* (2012).

## 1.1.  Literature in the Wake of 9/11.

The first literary responses to 9/11 adopted the form of reports from witnesses, survivors and commentators that shared those publicly, while others asked fiction writers—especially those living or with a close relation with New York—to offer their "assumed, more objective contemplations" (Randall 2). These first accounts of the event, moving from accurate descriptions of the incident to more personal reflections, mixed journalism with memoir and were:

> written with a self-consciously "historical" register, far from being objective, were actually contributing to, if not to some degree, helping to shape, the hegemonic discourses of tragedy and memorializing. (2)

Contributing to fulfill the first step in the process trauma therapy, the first literary works after 9/11 were, thus, focused on the domestic through the depiction of more personal and subjective accounts of the events of the day. The proximity, both in time and space, to the tragedy helped to keep the first post-9/11 literary works from offering a critique on the U.S. treatment of the event, especially as any form of divergence from the official narrative was seen unpatriotic or even treacherous (Lee 45). Things began to change towards the end of Bush's first term and the start of the second, when new post-9/11 texts, still mostly set on the domestic realm but less subjected to the patriotic enthusiasm of the first years, began to openly "identify and describe the 'wounds' left after the attacks" as well as to "reveal the profound difficulties of representing such visually resonant, globally accessible and historically significant event" (Randall 3). This way, most fiction authors writing about 9/11 commenced to approach the attacks in a different way than their predecessors had done, by dealing with the ways in which the attacks had or had not been represented. This way, as Americans had been previously forced to forget about certain aspects of the history of 9/11—as the unity promoted by the official narrative came directly from the

"recognition of what is left unsaid" or "the silent understanding that 'we' all know what happened and what cannot be said about what happened" (Cvek 27)—authors began to address precisely that which had been left unsaid, to expose those facts that had remained in the dark. Moving forward in the process of trauma healing, most fiction writers went on a quest to find the silenced truths behind the terrorist attacks that authorities and media had refused to address in the wake of 9/11.

Among the scholars who have dealt with the recovery from the trauma caused by 9/11 through literature, Nadel identifies the two ways in which writers engage in the healing process: either by looking for psychological, historical, and personal meanings of the event—thus, presenting works closer to the historical reality—, or by turning away from reality (142). Although most authors mixed a bit of both ways in their works, the latter mostly relates to texts in which the fictitious elements were predominant, while the former is mostly associated with a higher degree of realism. Moreover, the greater or lesser focus on the search for meaning also defined the category of the post-9/11 texts. Thus, if the novel gave more prominence to the exploration of the event's psychological, individual or historical significance than to the development of the story, it usually adopted the literary form of realism, whereas those works that provided more complex or intricate fictions increased the physical, temporal and fictional distance from reality. This sort of categorization of the post-9/11 works, especially from 2003 onwards, is in direct correlation with the date of publication as well as with the themes or aspects that authors chose to emphasize at the time, as will be explored in the following paragraphs.

According to this division, the present study of the literary response to the terrorist attacks of 2001—especially regarding the recovery or healing from the trauma it caused in the American society—offers a critical analysis of four novels published between 2007 and 2012 belonging to the categories defined by Nadel's division and a series of features in relation to the most prominent themes and aspects regarding 9/11 and the War on Terror at the time of the texts' publication.

1.1.1. Realism and the Quest for Meaning.

One of the first obstacles encountered by authors writing about 9/11 was the difficulties in representing such a globally significant and visually stunning event (Randall 17). The crash of the planes and the collapse of the towers had marked the disappearance of the boundaries between the fictional and the real, as the images from the day seemed to most Americans like the footage of a

film. The fictionality of the day's events was amplified due to the fact that most Americans had come into contact with it through the audiovisual medium. The attacks were highly mediated, allowing people all around the country to experience the day's developments as they happened. Indeed, the pictures of the United Airlines Flight 175 crashing into the South Tower at the World Trade Center were broadcasted live in most of the national networks, as were the collapse of both towers or the intervention of emergency services at the incident sites in New York and Washington D.C. The event's media retransmission helped to create a shared experience among Americans— and so contributing to the official narration of the event—but it did not help to address the disparity in the perspectives of those who had directly witnessed the horrors of the day and the one of the mass audiences watching from the commodity and security of their homes (2). This disparity in Americans' experience of the event is one of the main features of the two texts analyzed as part of the first of the two categories mentioned earlier: Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) and Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark* (2008).

As has been mentioned, the literary works written from 2003 onwards began to diverge from the more subjective or journalistic accounts of the Literature of Terror's early pieces to focus more on the challenge that its representation posed, especially considering the disparity between the official account and the real experience of witnesses which included some of the authors writing about it. These circumstances led authors to explore the attacks and its consequences—that is, the War on Terror and everything it entailed—from the domestic perspective.

Mirroring the initial isolationism of the American nation in the wake of 9/11, writers at the time turned the focus of attention to the United States to look for the hidden or not so prominent truths—what many scholars define as "facts"—about the events. This way, the individual experience of those who had witnessed—firsthand or through their TV screens—the attacks or the consequences of the war against Iraq took a major role in the shaping of the literary image of the historic moment. Approaching the event from the individual perspective allowed authors to explore more easily and completely the psychological and historical significance of the event, as well as to address some of the aspects or facets that had been otherwise widely censored by the dominant media.

Addressing these "blank spaces" (Pöhlmann 51), authors like DeLillo and Auster built their realistic fictions to challenge the alleged objectivity of the official narrative, which had attempted

to repair the damaged American identity while intentionally and deceptively ignoring other viewpoints belonging to the full, real narrative—for instance, the perspective of the people who fell or jumped from the towers who were systematically erased from the American accounts of the day, or the possible responsibilities of the U.S. in the circumstances surrounding the events. This, along with the focus on the individual's experience brought to light another key feature of the post-9/11 dominant narrative: the hijacking of individual agency.

The necessity to provide a unified response pressured authorities and media into the construction of a common, shared discourse in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. This narrative limited the possibilities of looking at the event from a different perspective than the officially presented by the government, thus, importantly restricting Americans' freedom of action and thought. Works such as DeLillo and Auster's returned the individual agency to ordinary Americans by giving the power to unveil and construct the truth of 9/11 to their characters. The recovery of the ordinary individual's agency gave voice to those who had been mostly silenced in previous accounts, which included ordinary Americans—even those who had perished in the Towers—but also introduced the controversial perspective of the "Other," especially the *terrorist* "Other."

One of the most prominent critiques with regards to the official account of 9/11 was the omission of the U.S. part on the circumstances surrounding the attacks. Most media chose to ignore the nation's interventions in the Middle East, which were believed to have contributed to feed Al Qaeda's propagandistic strategies (Leuprecht, et al. 26). The consistently forgotten perspective of the "Other" along with the previous tendency towards the domestic were two of the also significant features of this first category of literary works on 9/11 and the War on Terror that, moreover, give way to some of the main characteristics of the texts belonging to the second category of works dealing with 9/11—texts through which authors try to find meaning by moving away from the event's reality.

1.1.2.   Counterfactuals or the Search for the "Other."

The predominance of the domestic in these first post-9/11 novels was identified as one of the most problematic aspects in their challenge to the official 9/11 narrative, as these texts were still too centered on the American perspective of the event and ignored the outsider's. Critics began to demand the inclusion of these silenced viewpoints, as, if—just like DeLillo and Auster

demonstrated with their novels—the experiences of those who witnessed the event firsthand and those who did it through a TV screen differed greatly, then the perspectives of those who did not belong to the American nation and culture had to also be distinctive and relevant for the better and more complete memorialization of the event. In this sense, scholars such as Morley commenced to ask writers to "turn their gaze away from home, away from the peoples and communities which have, up to now, dominated their fictions," thus, calling for the deterritorialization of the post-9/11 literature and stories (719–20).

This new deterritorialization of the Literature of Terror saw its first light towards the end of George W. Bush's presidency and the beginning of the Obama era, when authors began to take their 9/11 stories out of the U.S. and even out of the existing temporal line, turning away from the known reality. Distance—in space, time, and fiction—became key in the new representation of the event, most of which included previously silenced or ignored views on the circumstances surrounding it. In this sense, the alternative history form posed as the most adequate literary genre for the second category of post-9/11 texts defined in the previous pages, giving authors the possibility to achieve the needed physical, temporal and fictional "estrangement" from the terrorist attacks as well as from its dominant discourse, while keeping the event and its significance as the main focus:

> AH is written as if it were historical fiction, containing characters and events partly or totally invented, set against a real historical background, but it is read as absolutely fictional, for even if those persons existed and those events took place, the outcome was undisputedly different from what is narrated. (Spedo 21)

Alternative histories, also called counterfactuals, thus present real events as part of a fiction, altering partly or entirely these past historical occurrences to explore a particular theme or message, adapting plots to the specific historical circumstances. This way, counterfactualism's[2] malleability

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[2] For further reading on counterfactualism, refer to: Edgar V. McKnight's *Alternative History: The Development of a Literary Genre* (1994), Karen Hellekson's *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time* (2001), Hilary P. Dannenberg's *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction* (2008), *Counterfactual Thinking, Counterfactual Writing* (2011) edited by Dorothee Birke et al., and Catherine Gallagher's *Telling It Like It Wasn't: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction* (2018).

of history gave authors the liberty to search for the missing meaning and viewpoints of previous post-9/11 texts—including the forgotten 'other' subject—as exemplified by Matt Ruff's *The Mirage* (2012) and David Danson's *Faultline 49* (2012), the two texts chosen for this second category of works within the Literature of Terror.

Even though counterfactual stories have been present in the realm of literature ever since the first literary creations emerged, the second half of the 20th century saw a flourishing of the "counterfactual thinking" in multiple and diverse disciplines aside from the literary one:

> The 1970s were a starting point for several simultaneous developments: historians began serious debates about new counterfactual methodologies and courts employed counterfactuals to assess remedies for historical wrongs suffered by large groups of people. Soon after, high-school teachers began using classroom computer software that allowed students to vary the outcomes of WWII battles so that they could better understand the options of the historical combatants, and multiplayer gamers also began repeatedly fighting and revising past wars. (Gallagher 1)

This way, counterfactuals officially increased their presence in Americans' ordinary lives through the inclusion of these alternative constructions in the political, historical, and legal realms, among others. Still, the most significant growth of counterfactualism happened in the realm of popular culture, especially in association with various significant events such as the civil rights movement:

> Writers in the civil rights era imagined that under revised circumstances there might have been independent nations of African Americans and Native Americans (…) In the 1980s and 1990s, television shows and movies featured these themes, acquainting viewers with various alternate-history scenarios. (1)

The entertainment market also saw the possibilities counterfactualism offered, especially in such an eventful historical period thanks to the various social revolutions—such as the civil rights movement or the Vietnam War protests among others—as well as the number of scientific and technological innovations—such as the U.S. space program of the 1960s or the emergence of devices like computers and mobile phones—happening at the time. In this context, the counterfactual-history mode also increased its presence in the literary realm, spreading from the science fiction genre, where it had remained since the 1950s, to the mainstream novel, especially in the first decade of the 21$^{st}$ century (1). Thus, the expansion of the counterfactual form out of literature helped to strengthen the presence of the genre in the literary realm, as well as to connect these stories with other genres out of science fiction, such as fantasy or even realism—like in the two examples that will be analyzed later.

Alternative history or counterfactual stories are those in which past events are changed—altered—creating a "nonfactual or false antecedent" that gives way to an "outcome or consequent contrary to reality" (Dannenberg 111). These counterfactual creations are based on the existence of two elements: facts and counterfacts. When history is altered, whether for the sake of entertainment, education or political vindication, the created "counterfact(s)"—that is, the "altered" antecedent result of the changing process—is shaped to counter the "version that is commonly known and accepted" (Widmann 171)—that is, the "real" historical antecedent. This way, the familiar world of readers is, thus, partly or totally rebuilt providing them with a new distinct reality that is, nevertheless, seen as plausible as the real one. The intention, in most cases, is not only to create a work of entertainment for the reader, but to offer ways in which to identify and repair the possible flaws of the "real" world through the construction of a different yet plausible reality. Thus, counterfactuals—whether part of an individual's critical thinking or a work of literature—can "act as judgmental anchors that represent better or worse states of affairs" to provide a critique on those aspects of society or history that prove controversial (Roese 140).

Counterfactuals are, thus, thought experiments through which individuals imagine an alternate history or society to the one they live within, which often relates to the critical role of literature—as these stories point to possible social problems by providing an altered and improved world in which those issues are solved. These are bound to intensify the individual's—in the case of literature, the reader's—emotional response in the midst or after a particularly tragic or

disrupting event (Dannenberg 125). In this sense, the use of the counterfactual form for the literary representation of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 proved essential, especially to conquer the demanded estrangement from the event that scholars saw necessary.

Altering history, in this case, implies reconstructing the terrorist attacks of 9/11 by moving them out of the United States. As the majority of the previous works about the tragedy had been set in the domestic sphere—thus, dealing with Americans' experiences—, the best and easiest way to achieve the distance demanded by critics was to maintain the viewpoint within the domestic but altering its significance by locating the event in a different nation. This way, authors writing about specific aspects regarding 9/11 and the War on Terror had the possibility of taking the American perspective out of the U.S.—by having non-American peoples offering said perspective—and bringing the perspective of the 'other' closer to Americans—by making them become the other. The estrangement of 9/11 in these texts, thus, is executed through the "encounter with the counterfactual self" which becomes an "experience of absolute otherness and strangeness" (Dannenberg 213), effectively accomplishing the goal of expanding the knowledge of the historical period as well as unveiling some of the hidden facts by the dominant narrative. One of these forgotten or silenced aspects of 9/11 are the circumstances surrounding the attacks and the consequent War on Terror, related to the so-called "battle of ideas" (Leuprecht et al. 25).

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the Bush administration's fixation with the construction of a unified and strong narrative responded to the necessity to provide a solid base in which the new future policies would be sustained, but also to the urgency to contest the terrorists' own narrative. Al Qaeda's fundamentalism had constructed a message of hate based on the fear of the consequences of the expansion of the West's beliefs and values that threatened their most traditional religious practices and convictions. For the radicalized terrorists, globalization was the way in which the United States carried out their imperialistic expansion, covering it under the believe that what they were really spreading was civilization (Upstone 37, 38).

The planes and the towers "represented to the terrorists (perhaps schooled in American movies) postmodernity, technology, the city, architectural brilliance, urban landscape, the future high-tech, globalized world" (Kaplan 15) that were little by little gaining ground on their highly traditional and religious view of society, while the Pentagon and the White House symbolized the pain, death and restricted freedoms the past and present military and political interventions had

caused in their regions. Danson and, especially, Ruff venture into this ideological conflict of the West versus the East or Christianism versus Islam through the reconstruction of reality in their fictions, exploring the fundamentalists' views on both sides and the problematics of not considering the other's perspective. Counterfactuals, thus, allow authors to move deeper into the hidden parts of the long-lived ideological war by putting readers—especially American readers—into the 'other' subject's shoes, offering them a look into the viewpoints they had been historically omitting.

The final intention of the texts of both categories of the Literature of Terror is to challenge the official and dominant narrative provided by the U.S. government and mass media in the wake of 9/11, not only by negating some of its facts, but also through the inclusion of other perspectives that also counted as experience even if they were systematically erased from the official view of the events. Recovery from the trauma caused by the terrorist attacks, as Rodica Mihăilă affirms, will not be fully accomplished—or, at least, as full as possible—until the events' memorialization is completed by the "recovery of the traumatic memory" that had been negated—that of the direct witness, the falling people or the victims—as well as the "knowledge of" and "responsibility for the other" (292). In this sense, the two groups of authors—DeLillo and Auster, first, and Danson and Ruff, later—stepped forward to explore these missing viewpoints to finally offer a more detailed and completed account and signification of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the growing authoritarianism of the Bush administration in the domestic sphere, as the present study will attempt to demonstrate.

## 2. Don DeLillo and Paul Auster's Quest for Meaning in the Wake of 9/11.

On September 11, 2001, the United States of America joined the world, that is, the "common history marked by death, suffering and mass violence" (Cvek 18) that the American nation had thus far avoided—at least within the country's borders. The terrorist attacks officially known as "9/11" became one of the greatest turning points in the history of the nation, as they were, not only the largest terrorist attack in history, but the first of such events to occur within the U.S. soil. The circumstances surrounding the event—especially the fact that it had taken place within the U.S. borders—directly clashed with Americans' perception of their nation as invincible—which came from their conception of the country as "exceptional"—mainly due to the favorable geographical, economic and political position it occupied. However, in the nearly two decades since the attacks took place, there have been many dissenting voices that have provided a contrasting view of 9/11 as the event that finally shattered the "national ideological fantasy" (20) that was American exceptionalism.

These critical voices—most of them appearing as the event gained greater temporal distance—supported the notion that the U.S. had never been exceptional or invincible, and that it had just enjoyed a roughly long period of peace within its boundaries mostly as a result of the country's fortunate geographical location. However, the growing spread of the nation's cultural and economic values globally guaranteed an eventual confrontation with other nations and peoples, many of which perceived the U.S. globalization process as intrusive and oppressive.

Consequently, U.S. authorities—aware of this changing view of their nation after 9/11—acknowledged the need to promote an official narrative of 9/11 that, on the one hand, protected and promoted the image of the U.S. as exceptional and, on the other, stopped and discredited the belief that said exceptionality was nothing more than an illusion. This way, the event is said to be nationalized—so that the trauma was equally shared by all Americans—, and a newer and stronger patriotism is promoted in such a way that those diverging from the official narrative are conceived as traitors or unpatriotic, which became the first obstacle in the literary representation of the event.

The second obstacle in the writers' representation of 9/11 was, in the aftermath of the attacks, its proximity, not only in space and time, but also—and mostly—in memory. Even now, nearly 20 years since the planes dived into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, most authors producing fiction were also witnesses of the attacks, whether in situ or through the media live broadcasting on that day. Memory, as a mostly subjective matter, is still today an important conditioning factor in the post-9/11 literary production.

Some of the writers that understood there was a need to write about 9/11 were living or had been born—or both—in New York, something that brought them even closer to the attacks and their consequences. Two of these authors were Paul Auster and Don DeLillo, who has depicted 9/11 in various of their works of fiction ever since. From DeLillo's early essay "In the Ruins of the Future" published on December 2001 to novels such as *Cosmopolis* (2003) and *Falling Man* (2007), as well as Auster's new trilogy *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005), *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2007) and *Man in the Dark* (2008), both authors try to make sense of the new national imaginary they live in, while trying to recover what has been officially and systematically erased from the collective cultural memory of 9/11 and the consequent War on Terror.[3]

September 11, 2001 was a day in which the boundaries between the real and the imagined broke. Pictures of skyscrapers on fire with people trapped on the higher floors of those buildings with no possible escape, or images of hijacked planes being deliberately crashed belonged, prior to 9/11, in movies and TV shows, not in morning news—and, even if they did, such tragedies happened usually at a safe distance and not in a building down the street. Fiction producers—both from the literary and audiovisual world—had to operate within the new blurred boundaries between reality and fiction while trying, at the same time, to find a way to cope with such massive loss of lives and change of scenery. This notion was addressed by DeLillo in his essay in response to the terrorist attacks:

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[3] "War on Terror" is the commonly used phrase to refer to the global war on terrorism launched by the United States in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The international military campaign was "officially" announced in September 22, 2001, during President George W. Bush's address to Congress when he declared "From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime" (Miller Center). Some of the most relevant operations within the War on Terror are the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 ("Operation Enduring Freedom"), the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 ("Operation Iraqi Freedom"), and the official end of combat operations in the area in September 2010 ("Operation New Dawn").

The raw event was one thing, the coverage another. The event dominated the medium. It was bright and totalizing and some of us said it was unreal. When we say a thing is unreal, we mean it is too real, a phenomenon so unaccountable and yet so bound to the power of objective fact that we can't tilt it to the slant of our perceptions. (DeLillo, "Ruins")

Here, DeLillo wonders—like Philip Roth had also done back in the 1960s—"how could fiction possibly compete with the stories authored by real life" (Nadel 130), as real life became more and more like a work of fiction. After 9/11, Auster and DeLillo's literary response was to move fiction to the unrepresentable. In this sense, Auster's *Man in the Dark* and DeLillo's *Falling Man* become a great example of the struggle of fictional representation of the "event that 'changed everything'" (Cvek 18) and the consequent War on Terror.

*Man in the Dark* tells the story of a man, August Brill, who lays awake at night at her daughter's house after a car accident has left him confined to his bed. Unable to sleep, Brill tries to keep the memories of recent painful events at bay by creating stories about an alternative 2007 America where 9/11 never happened, substituted by a new national conflict caused by the controversial 2000 presidential elections[4]. One of his alternate stories ends up somehow merging with Auster's main tale as Owen Brick, the protagonist of the alternate world, is sent back to Brill's reality to kill him, as only by erasing his creator will he be able to stop the war in the alternate reality. This way, Auster merges one fiction with another to portray the broken boundaries between reality and fiction within the new American imaginary: what is real feels imagined and what is imagined wants to be real (Nadel 128).

This blurred unrepresentable space is also where DeLillo chose to develop his realist fiction *Falling Man*. In this case, the action does not confine the novel's family to their home, but it situates them within a disturbed New York City immediately after the planes hit. The novel presents Keith

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[4] Considered the most contested presidential election in the U.S. history, the 2000 U.S. presidential election set Republican George W. Bush against the Democrat—and former vice president—Al Gore in the run for the presidency. The close margin of the returns in Florida required a recount of votes in the state before assigning the state's victory to one or the other candidate. The equally narrow margin by which Bush was declared winner ended up requiring the intervention of the Supreme Court, which finally ruled in favor of Bush. Even today, the results of these elections remain greatly contested, as some Americans still believe Gore won in Florida.
In Auster's novel, the events of the 2000 presidential elections gave way to a series of protests that ended up with the separation of some states—with New York being the first—from George W. Bush' U.S.

Neudecker, a survivor from the North Tower who returns to the family home, which he had left more than a year prior when he separated from his wife Lianne. Divided into three parts, the story moves from one member of the family to another to show how each of them try to recover from the event's consequences, interrupted only by a narrative from the past—before the planes—from the perspective of one of the 9/11 terrorists. DeLillo deals, thus, with the confusion and disruption of the period in two of the most unrepresentable spaces of that day: the planes and the towers.

## 2.1.    Addressing the Blank Spaces: Matters of Memory and Representation.

One of the consequences of a traumatic event are the "blank spaces" left behind. In the case of 9/11, the absence of the towers from the Manhattan skyline they had governed for nearly three decades, with only a "skeletal remnant" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 25) left, became the symbolic blank space standing for the human absences caused by the attacks, that is, the thousands of victims whose remains were never recovered from Ground Zero—or never handed over to the families. It is within these blank spaces that representation fails as the boundary between reality and fiction breaks. These "physical" or "tangible" blank spaces are symbolized in Auster and DeLillo's novels through the question of memory:

> His name is Owen Brick, and he has no idea how he has landed in this spot, no memory of having fallen into this cylindrical hole, which he estimates to be approximately twelve feet in diameter. He sits up. To his surprise, he is dressed in a soldier's uniform (…) That person might be Owen Brick, but the man in the hole whose name is Owen Brick, cannot recall having served in any army or fought in any war at any time in his life. (Auster, *Man in the Dark* 3)

Brick's memory lapse is the result of the broken boundaries between the two realities he lives in, which he crosses multiple times throughout the novel. The sudden change of scenery that Brick experiences echoes Keith's shock of seeing the planes crash into and the subsequent collapse the Twin Towers in *Falling Man*:

Things did not seem charged in the usual ways, the cobbled street, the cast-iron buildings. There was something critically missing from the things around him. They were unfinished, whatever that means. They were unseen, whatever that means. (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 5)

Keith's seeing without seeing echoes the attempts to properly remember an event that was so mediated—being broadcasted live on TV channels all around the globe—that it planted the seed of doubt in our memories of that day. Matters of memory, of what is remembered and forgotten about that fateful day, are central to DeLillo's fiction as he presents through the figure of Lianne.

The trauma Keith's wife is affected by through the novel is not so much 9/11, but rather her father's suicide after being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Her preoccupation with the neurodegenerative disorder pushes her to participate in storyline sessions guiding a group of men and women in the early stages of the disease. The progressive memory loss becomes the allegory of the loss of the person's identity through the progressive extinction of their individual agency:

Sometimes it scared her, the first signs of halting response, the losses and failings, the grim prefigurings that issued now and then from a mind beginning to slide away from the adhesive friction that makes an individual possible. (30)

Lianne's comment on the individual's identity being defined by his/her memory shows DeLillo's intention to question whether the memorialization of 9/11—the official discourse shaped after the tragedy—is an adequate or real definition of the American identity which he had already addressed in "In the Ruins of the Future":

For the next 50 years, people who were not in the area when the attacks occurred will claim to have been there. In time, some of them will believe it. Others will claim to have lost friends or relatives, although they did not. (DeLillo, "Ruins")

The "national tragedy" narrative promoted by authorities and spread through the media proves problematic in that it intrudes and undermines the true memory of the event. Bush's words in the evening of that fateful Tuesday were the foundation in which this narrative of a damaged nation began to be planted in the minds of Americans:

Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve. (Bush, "September 11")

This way, trauma was induced in all Americans through the political and mass media discourses which provided a space in which the pain and anger would lead to the desire for revenge that finally gave way to the War on Terror. Authorities and media shaped a 9/11 dominant narrative which emerged right after the planes crashed, leading to a "shadow history of false memories and imagined loss" (DeLillo, "Ruins") with no space left for challenge or critique. It all began to change around three years after the attacks, when masses of dissenting Americans got out into the streets to show their disagreement with the Bush administration's most controversial decisions in the real America, present also in DeLillo's text:

They walked with five hundred thousand others, a bright swarm of people ranging sidewalk to sidewalk, banners and posters, printed shirts, coffins draped in black, a march against the war, the president, the policies. (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 181)

DeLillo's narrative introduces the critical voices from the 2004 protests in New York—Ground Zero of the War on Terror—in the very first paragraph of the novel's third part to contrast with the conformism seen in the previous two parts, but also to show an older Lianne who continues to be deeply affected by trauma and detached from the post-9/11 world she lives in: "She felt remote from the occasion even as it pressed upon her" (181). While being part of the protesting

mass, Lianne still feels detached from the dissenting voices around her, preferring the security that the dominant national discourse offers. Even though years have passed since the terrorists' intrusion in American life, Lianne remains on edge most of the time, as if waiting for a new and more violent intrusion to shake her and her family's lives again.

> They were at home, she thought, in the wave of bodies, the compressed mass. Being a crowd, this was a religion in itself, apart from the occasion they were there to celebrate. She thought of crowds in panic, surging over riverbanks. These were a white person's thoughts, the processing of white panic data. (185)

For Lianne, still affected by the nationalized trauma of 9/11, being part of a peaceful protest in her "home"—thus, a safe place—is no different than being part of the frightened masses that escaped Manhattan through the bridges on that fateful morning of September 2001. In this sense, the official narrative of bravery and heroism offered by the authorities also reduced both life and the world to the traumatic experience (Cvek 185), leaving no choice but to keep looking at the image of the towers burning like observing a painting in a museum or gallery:

> There was a show of Morandi paintings at a gallery in Chelsey, still lifes, six of them, and a couple of drawings, still lifes, and of course she went. She had mixed feelings about going but went. (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 209)

Although she shows a slight resistance, Lianne is draw to the show of *natura morta* paintings the same way she is lured by the catastrophe that was 9/11. Like the paintings of objects representing the ordinariness of life frozen in time in the vases and bottles, the images of the two smoking towers were burnt into the imaginary of most Americans thanks to the multiple repetitions of those images in the media on 9/11 and the following days.

Fear and panic—promoted in great part by the constant repetition of images of the towers burning or falling, and of the planes crashing into them—are still very much present in Lianne's

mind three years after the attacks, but so is the preoccupation with Alzheimer's disease. Due to her father's illness, Lianne worries the memory lapses she has been suffering might be an early symptom of the neurodegenerative disease. Even when a medical examination turns down the possibility of her being sick, Lianne is reticent to believe the results:

> She told him that the findings were unremarkable. There was no sign of impairment (…) Then she said she wasn't sure she believed the findings. Okay for now but what about later? (206)

This insecurity—which she paints as "skepticism" (206) and not fear—could be understood to be just an allegory of the social instability and paranoia that the U.S. authorities promoted very early in the nation's post-9/11 War on Terror period. However, it can also be seen as a sign of change in Lianne's trauma healing process.

Mirroring New Yorkers marching against the government's distorted discourses, Lianne rejects her medical results as definite, thus, questioning the objectivity of said findings as well as the medical views of the specialists. This becomes her first step towards the final recovery of her individual identity, as by questioning the veracity behind the doctor's alleged objective findings she echoes the dissenting Americans who began to contest the authenticity of the information the authorities had been giving them about 9/11 and the War on Terror. Her transformation is only completed after reading the obituary from a six-day-old newspaper. While reading the paper, she finds out about a man called David Janiak, 39 years old, who had died a few days prior due to the cardiac condition he suffered. The obituary, which had no photographs, identified the man as the controversial artist known as Falling Man who, very early after the attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC), began to perform the famous photograph of a man falling from one of the towers. The image was part of a group of photographs Richard Drew took on 9/11, some of them including men and women who fell—or jumped—from the towers before their collapse. Drew's picture had been published in the cover of the September 12 issue of *The New York Times* but had to be withdraw after multiple complaints were made—in a similar way the images of Janiak's performances were omitted from his obituary.

While the newspaper fails at offering a complete and fair picture of the deceased Falling Man by not mentioning the performances that had defined his life—as well as his identity—in the last few years of his life, the internet proves to be a better and more complete source of information when, after a moment of doubt, Lianne searches for any and all information on Janiak and his artistic performances. Although mostly censored by the media, Janiak's performances had been photographed in various occasions, and had also been part of academic discussions, like in a panel celebrated at New York's New School under the title "Falling Man as Heartless Exhibitionist or Brave New Chronicler of the Age of Terror" (220).

The academic and online openness to Janiak's performance contrasts with the media's censorship of his art, while mirroring the condemnation of Drew's famous photograph. The issue, as Kathryn M. E. Lee discusses, was that the real photographs of the falling people represented the loss of hope in a moment in which the message was that of resistance (32). Because these people most likely jumped trying to escape the flames and smoke, surrendering to death instead of holding onto life, they became the permanent reminder of their hopelessness and challenged the official narrative given by authorities and media, that of bravery and resistance represented by the members of the emergency services—those who survived as well as those who perished—widely depicted as heroes. Consequently, as Lee mentions, the censorship of these photographs translated into an "official denial of the reality of these people's death" (33), and so into their disappearance from the memorialization of 9/11.This last fact is examined by DeLillo in his novel, not only in the silencing of Janiak's performances, but also in Lianne's eventual remembrance of the original photograph.

Throughout the novel's main story, Lianne encounters the Falling Man on various occasions, including one in which she witnesses Janiak jumping to adopt his pose just as a train gets closer to them. In none of those encounters does Lianne show any sign of remembrance of Drew's famous photograph, which gives the impression that she has not, in fact, seen said picture before. It is not until Janiak's death is announced and Lianne's search on the internet fills many of the blanks left by the artist's presence in the story that she confirms she had, in fact, seen the photograph before:

She did not read further but knew at once which photograph the account referred to. It hit her hard when she first saw it, the day after, in the newspaper. The man headlong, the towers behind him. The mass of the towers filled the frame of the picture. The man falling, the towers contiguous, she though, behind him (…) she clicked forward and there was the picture. (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 221)

Lianne's sudden remembrance of the photograph points to the forced amnesia she—among other Americans—suffered when authorities and media provided a view of 9/11 that was disrupted and partly censored. The Falling Man's performance becomes, thus, the door for Lianne's recovery of the 9/11's lost memory.

Just as the writer "tries to give memory, tenderness and meaning to all that howling space" (DeLillo, "Ruins") caused by such a disaster, Janiak's performance gives voice to those who did not have it, taking as a reference the falling man whose final moments were taken from the national imaginary. By taking away those images, whether the real ones or those within the fictional world, what results is an "emptied memory" (Cvek 187) filled with propagandistic messages by the authorities to gain the needed support in their War on Terror.

The passing of disrupting images as memory is also present in Auster's *Man in the Dark*. At the beginning of the novel the reader learns about Titus, Brill's granddaughter's ex-boyfriend, who has recently died. It is not until the end of the story when the gruesome circumstances of Titus's death are revealed in a detailed description of the videotape showing it. The pictures—uncensored—display a confused Titus that is subsequently killed, beheaded, and fervently violated. Although a first video—showing Titus barely a few hours after having been kidnapped—had been broadcasted on the East Coast evening news, the second, more atrocious one is relegated to the internet, the same way images of Drew's falling man and Janiak's performances were only found on the unrestricted virtual medium.

Analogous to Lianne's memory suppression of Drew's picture, August Brill is introduced in the novel as a man trying to avoid the traumatic memories—like the explicit images of Titus' horrible death—that haunt his sleepless nights:

I think about Titus's death often, the horrifying story of that death, the images of that death, the pulverizing consequences of that death on my grieving granddaughter, but I don't want to go there now, I can't go there now, I have to push it as far away from me as possible. (Auster, *Man in the Dark* 2)

For Brill, the past proves too painful to remember during his sleepless nights in the dark as, similarly to how the nightmarish pictures of planes and towers haunted Americans for years, the mental images of Titus's dreadful death become the personal traumatic experience for August and the other members of the home, one that they will need to overcome in order to fully heal. Memories, thus, prove to be too painful for Brill to remember during his nights awake in the dark.

However, little by little August begins to embrace more and more the memories in his mind as the night moves into morning. Somehow forced by Katya's questions about her grandmother, Brill takes a trip down memory lane to some of the key events of their married life to finish, once Katya falls asleep, with the remembrance of Titus's video, which they all had watched together:

I still don't understand why the three of us felt driven to watch the tape—as if it were an obligation, a sacred duty. We all knew it would go on haunting us for the rest of our lives, and yet somehow we felt we had to be there with Titus, to keep our eyes open to the horror for his sake, to breath him into us and hold him there. (175)

All members of the Brill home are, thus, lured to watch the extremely graphic images of Titus's last moments the same way Lianne was towards Janiak's performance. This visualization—like that of the images of 9/11—is simply an act of documentation, of gathering as much information as an individual can in order to conduct its interpretation—both individually and collectively. In this sense, both Auster and DeLillo put the emphasis on the need to embrace all images and memories from the horrors of 9/11 and the War on Terror—rather than just focus on those used by authorities for their propagandistic purposes—and invites readers to think critically about the pictures and messages they transmit.

2.2.    Truths, Pictures, and Trauma: Fiction as an Escape Route.

In his article "Ethics in the Wake of the Image," Lewis S. Gleich develops the idea that, for individuals, pictures do not only bear meaning, but that "in the age of spectacle" images also "count as experience" (168). This aspect of the visual medium made it possible for people all around the world to feel—and even share—the pain and paranoia the terrorist attacks of 9/11 caused in the U.S. population. Not only were the pictures seen beyond the U.S. borders, but the fear of similar attacks happening in other parts of the world, especially in Europe, began to spread out. Yet, because of the physical and cultural distance between the American nation and most of its allies, this shared trauma mostly took the form of "empty empathy," as people were affected by the spectacle but at the same time far enough to be exempted from experiencing "genuine emotion" (Gleich 164). The event was, this way, both nationalized and, at the same time, internationalized through its visual consumption as part of the Bush administration's propaganda machinery as the early steps towards the foundation of the coming War on Terror.

For Americans and citizens all around the world, 9/11 became real the moment they watched the planes flying into the World Trade Center, just as for *Falling Man*'s Katya—and the other Brills—Titus's death is only real after watching its very graphic tape:

> If I hadn't seen it, everything would be different. People go off to war, and sometimes they die. You get a telegram or a phone call, and someone tells you that your son or your husband or your ex-boyfriend has been killed. But you don't see how it happened. You make up pictures in your mind, but you don't know the real facts. Even if you're told the story by someone who was there, what you're left with is words, and words are vague, open to interpretation. (Auster, *Man in the Dark* 166)

What Katya notes here is that, because the individual's attempt at controlling the world is done through "retreating into an imaginary space" (Varvogli 43) and, as memory is mostly visual—as memories are pictures—, being exposed to the unrestrained images of such scenes erases every possibility of escaping the real world:

We saw it. We saw how they murdered him, and unless I blot out that video with other images, it's the only thing I ever see. I can't get rid of it.

We'll never get rid of it. (Auster, *Man in the Dark* 167)

Similar to how Brill attempted to divert the intrusive memories by mentally shaping new stories, Katya tries to replace the intruding "still lifes" of Titus's execution with films. Fiction, thus, becomes the retreat where the individual can make sense of the aggressions from the real world.

In this sense, if being exposed to the event's documented images equals the act of experiencing it—therefore, confirming the event's veracity—, the absence of said images may provoke the individual's negation of the event. In other words, in the absence of the spectacle—that is, the images—the event losses its meaning—or its actuality (Gleich 164).

DeLillo provides an example of this fictional blankness with the character of Justin, Keith and Lianne's son. The child, along with two friends, spends most of the time in the days after the attacks searching the skies with the father's binoculars. They are, apparently, looking for more hijacked planes from one of the upper floors of a Manhattan building where the friends' home is located, as the children have confessed to Justin they saw the first plane crashing into the North Tower from there.

The friends' claim of having witnessed the first plane is proof enough for Justin to believe that the planes did crash into the towers, but not to confirm the fact that the towers collapsed:

Finally she said, "The only thing I got out of Justin. The towers did not collapse."

"I told him they did."

"So did I," she said.

"They were hit but did not collapse. That's what he says." (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 72)

Justin's denial seems to be caused by the age gap between him and the authority figures of his life—parents and grandmother—as he does not question his friends' claim, but he does challenge his father's account—even if his father did witness and survive the collapse, while his friends only saw the plane from their room's window. Lianne's comment a moment later somehow challenges this assumption: "He didn't see it on TV. I didn't want him to see it. But I told him they came down. And he seemed to absorb it" (72).

Confirming Gleich's belief that experience is achieved through the consumption of images—and so the absence of those erases the possibility of the experience—, Justin's imagination has created a reality in which the collapse never happened, a fictional reality that is more bearable than the real one. Maybe to avoid thinking about how close his father was to dying or as a way to deal with his mother's persistent shock, Justin erases the tragedy from his memorialization of 9/11 just like Katya tries to retain as much movie footage in her mind as possible to forget about Titus.

In this sense, and thanks to the broken boundaries between fiction and reality caused by the experience of such trauma, fiction becomes the perfect place to evade from the cruel damaging reality. It is in this context in which real images intrude the imaginary space to bring reality back into the individual's mental world. This is why seeing the photograph of the businessman falling is too much for Lianne, who probably sees what her husband's fate could have been that day. Or how Titus's death videotape is highly meaningful for the Brills in contrast to its signification for other Americans watching said footage—as for an individual with no personal links to the event the pictures would be like a fiction or something happening at a safe distance from their homes. Images here function as "material traces of history" (Gleich 163), but also as the sources that elicit meaning for the traumatized citizens.

The dissolution of the barriers separating reality and fiction in the midst of a catastrophe of such magnitude made fiction a highly attractive place for the individual to retreat, thus presenting fiction as the only place in which the event—and its representation—could be negotiated. Most writers—especially American ones—deeply "overwhelmed by the enormity of the attacks" as well as their "spectacular nature" worked with the "apparent incompatibility of the terrifying images and mere words" (Morley 719) in an attempt to narrate and offer a full view of the unrepresentable

event. This way, the realm of fiction becomes the place in which to take refuge for literary authors in the wake of 9/11 like it is for Katya and Justin.

For the author, as for the reader, fiction becomes the "perfectly safe and protected environment" in which to make contact with "his own fears and inner torments" (Auster, "Prince of Asturias speech"), especially in the midst of such a turbulent period. This is true not only for Auster, but for his novel's protagonist as well:

> That's what I do when sleep refuses to come. I lie in bed and tell myself stories. They might not add up to much, but as long as I'm inside them, they prevent me from thinking about the things I would prefer to forget. (Auster, *Man in the Dark* 2)

August Brill's long nights awake, when the intrusion of ordinariness goes away for a few hours, are the perfect moment for the assault of painful memories and related regrets. Memorialization—as has already been introduced—is a deeply disturbing act when the pain from the traumatic experience is still too recent for the individual. At this moment in the novel, Brill is not prepared to address—even to himself—the consequences that the visualization of Titus's death video has had on him or his granddaughter. However, August's retreat into his fictional, fractured America is but a new step in the process of dealing with his individual trauma.

Whereas fiction allows the individual to take the necessary distance from their traumatic reality in order to carry on with their healing process, this retreat demands the active and willing participation in said process. August addresses this fact when reflecting on Katya's fixation with movies:

> When she started ordering the DVDs through the internet, I took it as a sign of progress, a small step in the right direction. If nothing else, it showed me that she was willing to let herself be distracted, to think about something other than her dead Titus. (14)

At first August identifies her granddaughter's movie marathons with his nightly storytelling, sensing that audiovisual fiction has become a place as safe for Katya to start recovering from her loss as his own imagination has resulted to be for him. However, many DVDs later, the now everyday occurrence is perceived as pathological:

> After a while, though, I began to see his obsessive movie watching as a form of self-medication, a homeopathic drug to anesthetize herself against the need to think about her future. (15)

August concern that Katya's retreat into movies has become a sign of obsession—the result of an attempt on the young woman's part to voluntary evade from her own life—points to the dangers of conceiving fiction only as an escape route.

Katya seems to be suffering from what has been described as a "failure of the imagination" (Morley 718) frequently associated with fiction writing in the wake of 9/11. As she will later explain, Katya continues to be attacked by images of Titus's lifeless body. Unable to substitute those gruesome memories—which she identifies with 'real facts'—with the more bearable products of her own imagination, Katya looks for new frames in her films to survive her trauma. This way, fiction becomes a prison in which individuals may trap themselves in their attempt to escape from a perceived hopeless reality.

What August knows about the possibilities of retreating into fiction, something that Katya has yet to realize, is that it is an active, rather than passive, process:

> Escaping into a film is not like escaping into a book. Books force you to give something back to them, to exercise your intelligence and imagination, whereas you can watch a film—and even enjoy it—in a state of mindless passivity. (Auster, *Man in the Dark* 15)

Similarly to what was discussed previously about the "truth" in the footage of the planes and towers that left no space for dissent, Katya's dive into fiction is audio-visually mediated, which only demands for the subject to be a passive spectator, merely consuming images without giving them meaning. What August—thus, Auster as well—implies here is that the audiovisual medium already offers a message or meaning from the images that the spectator passively consumes, and so it does not demand the subject to be actively involved in the interpretation process.

August, on the contrary, knows all about the virtues of fiction and he points to how, whereas movies do keep the traumatic experience at a distance—all physical, spatial, temporal, and psychological (Nadel 133)—, fiction must become the realm of active healing and not the place where trauma and pain may thrive. This way, literary fiction becomes the first line of defense from the domination and control of the audiovisual medium:

> Literature can act as a counterforce to the spectacle by providing a space where characters and narrators respond to images with sustained dialogue rather than passive spectatorship. (Gleich 163)

Fiction, thus, conforms the space in which individuals can get the distance needed to recover from the harmful reality, but healing will only be fully attained if there is an active search for meaning—signification—within said distanced reality.

In this sense, authoring—as well as reading—is introduced by Auster as the active process through which individuals can regain the control of their lives, as well as the perfect way to critically engage with the horrors of the world around them. This is precisely what August is doing by creating his stories to keep the memories at bay:

> What do you think I've been doing tonight?

> I don't know. Thinking. Remembering.

As little as possible (…) Instead of looking at other people's images, why not make up our own? (Auster, *Man in the Dark* 167)

For August, remembering—like watching movies—means focusing on images others have provided, but in doing so there is no space left to challenge them. On the contrary, the creative process allows individuals to both remember and take control of the response to those memories. And, in doing so, they may begin to heal from the damage produced by the traumatic experience and move forward: "What I'm proposing is a cure, a remedy to ward off the blues" (168). What Auster implies here is that fiction can be both the innocuous homeopathic remedy or the effective healing antibiotic, but only by choosing the latter—through giving it meaning—will the reader or spectator fully heal.

DeLillo points to the responsibility, as well as the necessity, for writers to provide fictions in which to present "the shock and horror as it is" as language must not be "diminished" in the attempt to "understand what this day has done to us" (DeLillo, "Ruins"). For DeLillo, like for Auster, fiction is the means—not the end—of embracing trauma only to be able to move away from its consequences. Fiction—whereas in the written, visual or mental form—proves essential to conform a correct response to the horrors of 9/11 and the War on Terror.

Keith Neudecker—DeLillo's North Tower survivor—finds refuge in the little fictions he constructs in his mind just as Auster's August Brill does with his stories. Keith's perception of the world around him has changed, and so things he would have been certain about before are now full of different, possible interpretations—that is, full of fictions that exist only in his mind:

"Did you ever look at the waterfall? Are you able to convince yourself you're looking at water, real water, and not some special effect?"

"I don't think about it. It's not something we're supposed to think about," Terry said. (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 204)

Three years after tragedy hit America, Keith has learned how to see beyond the apparent true reality to, as seen in this passage, challenge everything around him. In other words, while some people—like Lianne or his friend Terry—still linger in the conforming and indifferent America, Keith has moved to a position of permanent examination and challenge of the world surrounding him.

Part of this confrontation with reality is done through his imagination, as seen in Keith's construction of alternate images from the ones he and others perceive in the final part of the novel—like the false waterfalls that seem real, the belief that people are generally wearing surgical masks after only seeing one person wearing one, or the invention of a woman's secret life just because she is blinking her eyes. In this sense, as DeLillo said, while for many people the "grain of the most routine moment" remains disrupted, others are just trying to "be themselves again" (DeLillo, "Ruins"), which for Keith, means gaining back the sense of control he had before the plane crashed into his workplace.

Keith has moved beyond the confinement of the life he had before the attacks, one in which he was not in control of what he did, believed or perceived. He has finally recovered the individual agency that his corporate job at a real estate in New York's WTC had repressed.

"You can't go back to the job you had. I understand that."

"The job. The job wasn't much different from the job I had before all this happened. But that was before, this is after." (Delillo, *Falling Man* 215)

Lianne—who has yet to discover the truth about Janiak and so remains paralyzed in the time right after the attacks—cannot understand Keith's new view on life. For him, going back to the role of the corporate man means losing the individual agency he had recovered after the towers fell, but for Lianne it means breaking all ties with the world she knows, thus, leaving the protection it offers: "She wanted to be safe in the world and he did not" (216). Keith wants to be in control of his own existence, while Lianne still feels she has to comply with those who owned hers.

In order to take back the lost sense of control, Keith needs to be the owner of his own actions and decisions. This is a process that will not be completed until the end of the novel—as shown by his conversation with Lianne—, three years after the attacks and coinciding with the beginning of the dissenting movements against the Bush administration and the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. This process of healing and recovering the lost individual agency begins, however, soon after the falling of the towers during his recovery from an arm injury:

> He found these sessions restorative, four times a day, the wrist extensions, the ulnar deviations. These were the true countermeasures to the damage he'd suffered in the tower, in the descending chaos. It was not the MRI and not the surgery that brought him closer to well-being. It was this modest home program. (40)

The wrist exercises prove vital to reclaim some of Keith's lost agency as, unlike other medical procedures that will bring his wrist back to normal, he has the complete control. He decides over the amount of time, the repetitions, the moment of day to exercise, even the strength or effort to put into it. Three years after his wrist is healed and he has been cleared from the rehabilitation program, Keith continues to do the exercises, not with the intensity he did back in 2001 but at his own pace and will. The now automatic wrist movements bring him as much peace and are as part of him as playing poker is.

Keith describes his pre-9/11 weekly poker games at his apartment as the "one uncomplicated interval of his week (…) the one anticipation that was not marked by the bloodguilt tracings of severed connections" (27). Poker had already been the place—the fiction—where he could retreat after his separation from Lianne, like her Alzheimer's storytelling group had been for her.

Poker is, thus, the realm of possibilities in which Keith is in complete control of himself and his world:

The cards fell randomly, no assignable cause, but he remained the agent of free choice. Luck, chance, no one knew what these things were. These things were only assumed to affect events. He had memory, judgement, the ability to decide what is true, what is alleged, when to strike, when to fade. He had a measure of calm, of calculated isolation, and there was a certain logic he might draw on. (211)

Although chance holds great sway over the outcome of a poker game, it is up to the player to choose among the different possibilities the cards offer. The game's fixed structure and rules also provides a sense of security by limiting the possibilities. It entitles the creation of a fiction, because it is up to the player to see what is to come, which cards will come his way, or even what the other players' strategy is:

the choice of yes or no. Call or rise, call or fold, the little binary pulse located behind the eyes, the choice that reminds you who you are. It belonged to him, this yes or no, not to a horse running in the mid somewhere in New Jersey. (212)

Poker allows Keith to be in control of the fiction—to choose among the various possibilities of the game—in a way that other games of chance like horse races with its demands for passive watching, or the corporate world with its need to collective effort, do not. Keith is an active participant of the game, in contrast with the passivity of the horses or corporate labor.

In this context, what both Auster and DeLillo's characters are looking for in their search for their lost individual agency is to reclaim the sense of security and the critical capacity that both 9/11 and the War on Terror had erased from the American imaginary. The attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. "altered America's self-identity, sense of security, and belief in its invincibility" which was directly related to the Americans conviction that the violent outside world would "never reach its shores" (Nadel 129). Aside from the 1941 Japanese military strike on Pearl Harbor and the Mexican-American conflict in the late 19th century, the U.S. had never suffered and aggression of such magnitude on continental soil. Or so the official narrative claimed.

Truth was the 9/11 attack had not been the first attempt at harming the American economic center as in 1993 terrorists of Islamic connections detonated a powerful bomb located in the WTC underground parking resulting in six casualties, thousands injured, and severe material damage. Thus, even though 9/11's magnitude cannot be denied, it had been preceded by other attempts to damage the American nation, and it is only the event's catastrophic consequences that confer it a false sense of exclusiveness.

## 2.3.    Violence Meets Violence: The Clash of Cultures.

The attacks of September 11, 2001 "struck at the heart of American exceptionalism" as the terrorists targeted the main economic, political and military symbols which had become the center of the "emerging globalized world" (Mihăilă 287). In order to prevent further damage in the nation's economic and political power, authorities—making use of the country's mass media— successfully spread a conception of the event as a nationalized traumatic experience in which the U.S. was a victim, but certainly not the cause.

As early as that same Tuesday night, President George W. Bush justified that America had been targeted "because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world" (Bush, "September 11"), thus portraying the nation as victim. According to Bush—and embedded in what continues even today to be part of the official narrative of 9/11—the terrorists, Islamic fundamentalists, attacked the United States in name of the "jihad" or "Holy War" against the infidel Christians. Their acts are portrayed as barbaric and senseless as well as a failed attempt to destroy the Western "civilized" way of life to help the spread of their "obsolete" one: "its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world—and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere" (Bush, "September 22").

This conception of the terrorist "other" has been challenged by different literary authors in the years after the attacks in an attempt to understand America's enemies better. DeLillo has been one of the authors who have gotten into the mind of the terrorist in their fiction through the figure of Hammad in *Falling Man*.

DeLillo's fictitious terrorist is part of the group of nineteen men who on September 11 hijacked the four planes that were transformed into deadly weapons. During the three chapters in

which the reader gets a glimpse into Hammad's head, the complete depiction of the terrorists is achieved: "Everything here was twisted, hypocrite, the West corrupt of mind and body, determined to shiver Islam down to bread crumbs for birds" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 79). For Hammad, Westerners have a "twisted" perception of the world, one that goes against Islam, like an illness dominating the mind and body more and more in immediate need for a cure: "Islam is the struggle against the enemy, near enemy and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then the Americans" (80).

Hammad's extremist views soon prove to be the result of the teachings from a man named Amir—the fictional representation of one of the leaders of the 9/11 attacks, Mohamed Atta—whose lessons are easily absorbed by the young man's impressionable mind, especially in their early clandestine encounters in Germany where young Muslims were recruited to join the "jihad": "He listened to everything they said, intently"(79). Terrorists are pictured by DeLillo as men living within the threatening West, that is, within a world that occupies more and more of their lives and their culture. It is this ideological and cultural occupation by the West that pushes them towards more strict customs, thus making them more susceptible to the powerful influence of Islamic extremism:

> They were all growing beards. One of them even told his father to grow a beard. (…) Hammad sat crouched, eating and listening. The talk was fire and light, the emotion contagious. (79)

These men, most of them youngsters like Hammad, fulfill this way the need to fit in somewhere, the necessity to belong to a group with people who thought alike in the midst of a world that did not understand them:

> There was a feeling of lost history. They were too long in isolation. This is what they talked about, being crowded out by other cultures, other futures, the all-enfolding will of capital markets and foreign policies. (80)

Being part of a foreign and misunderstood culture, these young Muslim men feel alienated from the hegemonic western culture. The power of western capitalism is, thus, pictured as a villain in the minds of the impressionable terrorists, whose faith and way of life are threatened by its expansion:

These people jogging in the park, world domination. These old men who sit in beach chairs, veined white bodies and baseball caps, they control our world. He wonders if they think of this, ever. (173)

By picturing the terrorists as struggling individuals whose way of life was being threatened by the expansion of western ideologies—with American ideology portrayed as dominant—, DeLillo is echoing Bush's words in the evening of September 11, 2001 when he addressed that it was "their freedom" which came under attack that morning. The terrorists' actions are, thus, pictured as acts of resistance to this western ideological domination that is, consequently, answered by the U.S.'s own acts of revenge.

Cvek emphasizes the fact that America chose the violent path in their response to the terror attacks instead of taking the opportunity to "establish relations with others and recognize its place in the international community" (34). For him—as well as for DeLillo and other critical intellectuals—America had fallen into the terrorists' trap by responding to their violent message with yet more violence instead of dialogue.

There is, thus, a problem of "intolerance" on the part of both the Islamic fundamentalists and the American nation. DeLillo supports this message through Lianne's overreaction to what she identifies as inappropriate behavior, with her violent reaction to the music she identifies with the culture of the men that destroyed the Twin Towers killing thousands of people—which almost included her husband.

The most notorious example of Lianne's intolerance is temporally mediated, as a consequence of the "ultrasensitive" circumstances the city is under. A few days after the event that

changed everything, sounds of Arabic music began to be heard from an apartment down the stairs from the Neudeckers'. While Keith does not seem to be affected by it, Lianne appears to be deeply troubled by it, so much so that she is finally propelled to take action:

> "The music. All the time, day and night. And loud."
>
> Elena stared into her, radiating a lifetime of alertness to insult.
>
> "Don't you know this? We hear it on the stairs, we hear it in our apartments. All the time, day and fucking night." (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 119)

Like Hammad, Lianne's world is threatened by the music Elena is playing in her apartment as it penetrates the walls and every other barrier that is supposed to protect them from the dangers outside. The intrusion of the Arabic melodies and voices becomes, for Lianne, the constant reminder of the planes' piercing into the towers bringing their destructive consequences of the attacks into the—now disturbed—security of their home. Just as western ideologies threaten Islam's existence for the terrorists, Elena's music threatens Lianne's attempt to rebuild the sense of security that was lost on that fateful September morning. For Elena, however, the music she constantly plays is just her way to relax: "What is it? Music, that's all. I like it. It's beautiful. It gives me peace. I like it, I play it" (119).

This passage mirrors some of the immediate consequences the attacks that emerged within the American society, most of them in the form of racists outbreaks against Muslims, but also affecting other ethnic groups—for instance, Jews as there had been a long-spread claim that the WTC Jewish employees had stayed home on 9/11, thus accusing them of having been complicit of the attacks despite the official public record saying otherwise (Scanlan 507). Keith's comment on the difficulties to locate a taxi when "every cardriver in New York was named Muhammad" (28) days after the attacks and Lianne's reaction to the Arabic melodies are but part of DeLillo's literary critique of the growing prejudices against Islam as well as his way to emphasize the general ignorance about said faith. Like Elena's music, Islam's teachings are of peace, and not violence. It is the radical readings and interpretations of the terrorists that distort the lessons of the Koran, and

it is this distortion of Islam that is used to justify the violence and intolerance of the terrorists' acts, just as American's prejudices corrupt their view of Islam:

"But we can't forget God. They invoke God constantly. This is their oldest source, their oldest word (…) How convenient it is to find a system of belief that justifies these feelings and these killings."

"But the system doesn't justify this. Islam renounces this," He said.

"If you call it God, then it's God. God is whatever God allows." (112)

Thus, what DeLillo is pointing to is that Americans are looking at Islam and its teachings through the same extremist lenses as the terrorists are looking at theirs, contributing to their cause instead of fighting it.

America's reaction to Islam in the wake of the September terrorist attacks is mostly accomplished in the cultural rather than the political realm. As Mihăilă emphasizes, acts such as Lianne's aggression against Elena validate the newly "fractures of democracy in America's multicultural society" (289) which expose American exceptionalism—and Americans themselves—as flawed. Throughout the novel, DeLillo deals with Mihăilă's idea of the ruptured American multiculturalism by prompting the reader to question the Americans vs. terrorists, "us vs. them" duality that George W. Bush and the media draw in the aftermath of 9/11, mostly through the views of Martin and Hammad—an old Western terrorist and the young Muslim one.

During one of her visits to her mother Nina, prior to her clash with Elena, Lianne witnesses an argument over the attackers between Nina and her lover Martin. Although not explicitly referenced, Martin's past as a member of a German extremist group that used to act during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as his present rejection of politics, makes him the most reliable figure to mediate between the American and the terrorist's views. In fact, he sees a link between his past and the current state of affairs/ terrorism:

He thinks these people, these jihadists, he thinks they have something in common with the radicals of the sixties and seventies. He thinks they're all part of the same classical pattern. They have their theorists. They have their visions of world brotherhood. (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 147)

For Martin, extremists—whether now or in the past—and their ideas are merely reacting to a perceived threat that is, later on, spread through the teaching or conditioning of other malleable individuals. The fear of losing what defines them as individuals and as a group is, most of the time, what pushes them to perpetrated violent or extreme acts:

"It's sheer panic. They attack out of panic."

"This much, yes, it may be true. Because they think the world is a disease. This world, this society, ours. A disease that's spreading" He said. (46)

Rejecting the presupposition that the terrorists on those planes attacked the U.S. as part of a Holy War against other faiths, Martin nevertheless points to a conflict of interests in which one part's existence is threatened by the other's expansion.

"Forget God. These are matters of history. This is politics and economics. All the things that shape lives, millions of people, dispossessed, their lives, their consciousness." (47)

While Nina still believes the attacks were a consequence of the terrorists' religious beliefs, there being "no goals they can hope to achieve" as they are not "liberating a people or casting out a dictator" (46), Martin attempts to make Nina understand that, for them, there is a valid reason or goal to commit such acts: "Don't you see what you're denying? You're denying all human grievance against others, every force of history that places people in conflict" (112). In this sense, Martin's words point to a nexus between the terrorists' acts—attacking America because of the

ideological expansion carried out in the previous decades—and the U.S. response to the attacks—promoting the initiation of a military conflict against those who "hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other" (Bush, "September 22").

What Martin believes—and what DeLillo wants to portray—is that these extremists want what America had also looked for: "They want their place in the world, their own global union, not ours. It's an old dead war, you say. But it's everywhere and it's rational" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 116). This is, precisely, what the U.S. has been doing since long before these men began to bomb them:

> You go to our movies, read our books, listen to our music, speak our language. How can you stop thinking about us? You see us and hear us all the time. Ask yourself. What comes after America? (192)

The U.S. colonization of other peoples is cultural, not so much geographical, as it has been carried out by, for instance, Hollywood or the global expansion of English for international communication rather than through the deployment of troops. This idea is also portrayed through the Americanization of Nina's lover, as anarchist Ernst Hechinger becomes art dealer Martin Ridnour, or of bin Laden's name, who becomes Bill Lawton after Justin mishears the terrorist's name. DeLillo presents, thus, both sides as a "viral infection" trying to reproduce "itself outside history" (113).

The issue of cultures being under attack is also portrayed by the representation of the terrorists in DeLillo's novel. Hammad's evolution throughout the three chapters in which the writer introduces the attackers' perspective is contained within the idea of feeling threatened by an external force. As has been seen, his young age makes Hammad a perfect subject to be conditioned, but it is the internal struggle he is suffering that leads him to seek Amir's teaching: "He had to fight against the need to be normal. He had to struggle against himself, first, and then against the injustice that haunted their lives" (83). That need to be normal stands for the calling of the Western culture—mostly of American influence—that lures him to drink, smoke or have sex with other people:

he saw a car with six or seven people crammed in, laughing and smoking, and they were young, maybe college kids, boys and girls. How easy would it be for him to walk out of his car and into theirs? (172)

Instead of being a young man in a world full of possibilities, living to the fullest, Hammad feels forced to defend the faith and the culture that are a big part of him which are being infiltrated and destroyed little by little. Even without the use of violence, the Holy War these terrorists engaged with had begun long before the planes were hijacked. Therefore, as Kauffman pointed to, "9/11 was seized to stake new ground in the same old, tired, culture wars" ("World Trauma Center" 648).

Comparable to the recruitment of young men to sacrifice themselves in the name of the jihad, Oscar Brick is taken to August Brill's fictitious reality and forced to execute a special assignment in Auster's novel.

Following DeLillo's path of dealing with the historic trauma of 9/11 by taking the story and the characters to the blank spaces in the past—back into the planes and the tower—, Auster "retrogression to the past" (Jiménez and Martín 154) is carried out by sending his soldier, Oscar Brick, to a fictitious national conflict that mirrors one of the most relevant moments of the U.S. history: the Civil War.

Auster's imaginary national conflict is caused by the Americans' disagreement with the results of the truly controversial 2000 Presidential elections, in which George W. Bush was, after various recounts and the rule of the Supreme Court, declared the legitimate winner. In Brill's creation—one of the many stories he imagines at night—, a few of the American states, following the example of New York, secede from the United States and conform the Independent States of America. Although recognized by most nations and the most important organizations—such as the EU or the UN—, the newly created nation is soon forced into a civil conflict in an attempt by Bush's government to piece the old American nation back together. This is the setting in which Oscar Brick finds himself, trying to come to terms with the clearly divided nation as well as with the assignment of killing the author of such reality.

Just as the terrorists flew the planes into the towers driven by the panic and desperation that the American culture's influence over their own caused in them, Brick is called to action by those living in the middle of the imaginary civil war in an attempt to destroy the person responsible for their suffering: their creator August Brill.

now that you've turned up, it's going to end soon. You're the guy who's going to make it happen.

(…)

But I didn't sign up. I didn't enlist.

Of course not. No one does. But that's the way it is. One minute you're living your life, and the next minute you're in the war. (Auster¸ *Man in the Dark* 9)

Emulating the sentiments provoked by 9/11—when in a matter of minutes America entered the longest war in their history, as Bush advised on September 22nd, 2001 not to expect just a single battle, but "a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen"—, Auster, through Brill's imagination, projects into his alternate world characters the same preoccupations as DeLillo does into his terrorist. Both Hammad and Brick find themselves in the middle of a conflict which will only end with their sacrifice: "I like to use the word *liberator*. Or *maker of the peace*. Whatever you want to call it, without you the war will never end" (9). In other words, it is only through the participation of civilians that the existing conflict will be terminated, just as the real War on Terror will end when Americans demand for it to end—or so DeLillo and Auster seem to be saying in their fiction.

The shaping of both Auster's Owen Brick and DeLillo's terrorist Hammad explore the notion of the disposability of the individual who is, first, stripped of any individual agency by making them participant of the higher purpose— "He was becoming one of them now (…) They were becoming total brothers" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 83)—to, then, be compelled to bring their lives and futures to an end in suicidal assignments which success could not be guaranteed:

Just for the sake of argument, imagine I shoot this man… this Brill. Then what happens? If he created your world, then the moment he's dead, you won't exist anymore.

He didn't invent this world. He only invented the war. And he invented you, Brick. Don't you understand that? This is your story, not ours. The old man invented you in order to kill him.

So now it's a suicide.

In a roundabout way, yes. (Auster, *Man in the Dark* 71)

Completing their mission means Brick and the other "soldiers" do not only cease to exist, but the reason behind the assignment loses its meaning as those who embody it lose their lives. The invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, just like all the previous operations in the area prior to the attacks of 9/11, were meant to help the strengthening of the national security—thus, guaranteeing the protection of Americans from the world's violence—as well as that of the invaded peoples. Yet, this was not the case for the nearly 570,000 people who perished in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan during the War on Terror—of which only close to 7,000 are reported to have been American soldiers. In this sense, just as Brick's mission to kill August to end the alternate reality's conflict ceases to exist with his death—which will happen whether he kills August or not as he will be killed if he refuses to fulfill his mission—, the reasoning behind the real U.S. interventions in the Middle East also loses its relevance when the violence and terror induced by the American army left behind such human cost as well as an even more politically and socially destabilized area.

Both *Falling Man* and *Man in the Dark* address through their realism the "blank spaces" in the official, dominant narrative of 9/11 and the War on Terror in their representation—and memorialization—of the events by directly challenging the veracity of said narrative and criticizing Americans' compliance with it. Through the construction of their realistic fictions, DeLillo and Auster search for the psychological, historical and personal meaning of 9/11 and the War on Terror beyond the one constructed by the U.S. authorities and media, while also returning the individual agency—that is, the individual's ability to decide, act and think on his/her-their own—to their characters, prompting readers to do the same in order to be able to look at 9/11 with a more objective lens.

However, there was another "blank space" that had remained in the dark in the early literary representation of 9/11—although DeLillo very briefly touches through the inclusion of Hammad in his narrative—: the perspective of the "Other." This missing viewpoint is finally included in the novels that will be analyzed in the following chapter, which add the missing piece to the puzzle of the full memorialization of 9/11 by providing the reader with the needed distance from the event, both physically, temporally and fictionally.

# 3. Danson and Ruff's Alternative Histories and the "Other."

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, brought about a sense of "national disorientation" (Nadel 142) which writers needed to tackle in order to get a more complex understanding of the attacks and its consequences. To do so, many literary authors—like DeLillo and Auster, as addressed in the previous chapter—chose to engage in this process of healing from the trauma of 9/11 by trying to find its "psychological, historical and personal meaning" (142) through the direct dialogue with the event. Others, however, attempted to reach said meaning in a different way: by "turning away from reality" (142).

The incommensurability of 9/11, along with the fear to misrepresent it, considerably conditioned the access to the attacks from a different perspective than the one offered by the American authorities and mass media. The official American narrative of 9/11—as a national tragedy which pictured the U.S. as the innocent victim and the terrorists as barbaric—arose from the domestic perspective, that is why scholars such as Nadel believe in the need to look at 9/11 with estrangement (129). In other words, a better understanding of the event could only be reached by distancing oneself from it.

Although there had been a public demand for authors to offer their views on the September attacks in the immediate aftermath, the general response had been that there were no words they could use to deal with a tragedy such as the attacks had been. The proximity—both temporal and spatial—to the event proved an obstacle for the perception and representation of the event. Thus, while the shock of watching the planes crash into the towers was still present in society and the images were still glued to the public's eyes, the first critical voices began to appeal for the alienation from the event, not in space or time, but through fiction.

Due to the possibilities that the alternative history novel offers, as well as its popularity among the public, it was seen as the preferable genre for the unimpeded and full engagement with 9/11. These texts provided the needed distance through the alteration of the event itself or its consequences while still leaving space for the discussion of some of the issues arisen by the terrorist attacks and the consequent War on Terror. It allowed authors to freely address some of the most

controversial aspects of 9/11's literary representation—especially when these literary pictures went against the official narrative—while bringing them closer to the ordinary public.

In a context in which the boundaries between reality and fiction are dissolved, alternative history stories, thus, can offer what other genres cannot, as the confrontation between the counterfactual—the alternative that is fictional—and the factual—which refers to the real—worlds is also lost. In this sense, David Danson and Matt Ruff's alternative history novels, discussed in this chapter, become the best examples of the merge of the real and the fictional in their treatment of 9/11 and the War on Terror, while also providing the needed distance by taking the narrative perspective out of the U.S.

David Danson's *Faultline 49* (2012) takes the 9/11 terrorists attacks out of the United States to its neighboring nation, Canada. The bombing of the WTC in Edmonton, Alberta—caused by a mentally ill man wanting to punish his ex-wife for leaving him—leaves hundreds of casualties and triggers a series of violent and diplomatic incidents in both Canada and the United States when the terrorist is identified as an American citizen. As a consequence, the U.S. government not only withdraws from the international investigation of the attack, but begins to obstruct the Canadian one by erasing evidence and conditioning the testimony of key witnesses. As tensions escalate and the U.S. interests in the region become at risk, the U.S. decides to intervene militarily to ensure the safety of its citizens and to protect their economy. The action, interspersed with various explanatory chapters—in which the narrator recounts the novel's historical events of 2001 and 2002—, takes the reader further in time, to a few years into the altered War on Terror with Canada, to follow journalist David Danson in his quest to find the head of the Canadian terrorists, Bruce Kalynchuk. The merging of narration and essay forms throughout the novel, along with the inclusion of multiple references to real documents and official statements from the period after 9/11, helps to defamiliarize the reader from what they knew about 9/11, the War on Terror and the invasion of Iraq—as what is extracted from the real world becomes part of the fiction's new world. This way, Danson deals with the problems of mass media's supposed objectivity and its dangers by contesting the "truths" about 9/11 and the War on Terror provided by the American government and spread by the national media.

Objectivity and truth are also the central themes in Matt Ruff's *The Mirage* (2012), a novel that depicts a fictional reality in which the world's superpower is the United Arab States (U.A.S.)—

a conglomerate of states in the Middle East with Iraq as the most prominent one—, while the U.S. is transformed into an underdeveloped region divided in various separate nations with the Christian States of America (C.S.A.) as the largest. Ruff's world acts as a direct reflection of reality in which Baghdad becomes the novel's New York City, while 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq turn into 11/9 and the invasion of America. The action is set nearly 10 years after a group of Christian fundamentalists destroyed the Tigris and Euphrates Towers in Baghdad's WTC, when Mustafa, Samir and Amal—Homeland Security agents—come across a mysterious plot, known as the "Mirage Legend," during the interrogation of a suspect of terrorism. The man, an American Christian, admits being looking for the "real" world, one in which the "other" America is the actual superpower and not Iraq. Ruff's novel merges counterfactualism and fantasy transforming America and Christianism into the "Other" to challenge readers' conception of both—especially during the post-9/11 tumultuous period—while exposing religious and political power as corrupting forces to be confronted.

## 3.1. Power Dynamics: The Search for Collective and Individual Identities.

Like DeLillo and Auster before them, Ruff and Danson perceive that "there in fact can be *no single* history or story or narrative of 9/11" as "alternatives exist everywhere" (Nadel 137). In this sense, the alternative history genre becomes the best literary form to introduce these multiple alternatives in the realm of fiction. In addition, its frequent association with the function of criticism—as counterfactuals are widely used both in literature and academic writing for the introduction of "possible solutions for societal problems" (Spedo 15) with the exposition of an altered and better world—made it the perfect means to continue with the critique on some of the most controversial views and messages from the period that authors like DeLillo and Auster had already expressed in previous literary works.

Yet, the most relevant aspect of Danson and Ruff's counterfactual stories is the possibility to provide the so needed distance from the September attacks scholars were demanding of authors writing about 9/11. This distance is, in this sense, achieved in their fictions through another important element of 9/11 literature: the recognition of the "Other."

In the matter of the literary representation of 9/11, admitting the existence of the "Other" and trying to bring their perspective into the period's discussion became as important as the event

itself. However, as most of the post-9/11 works focused on the domestic—as the stories were commonly set in the U.S.—the presence of the "Other" subject became problematic, with most authors choosing to include their perspective portraying the "Other" as terrorist. Although the presence of the terrorist within 9/11 fiction posed as a positive—and needed—innovation in most of the texts, it did not present the whole picture of the "Other" and new angles to approach the unknown subjects were demanded.

In her article on literary writing about 9/11, Morley points to the necessity of "a deterritorialized, multiculturalist approach" to "community, 'otherness,' liminality and the traumatized subject," especially as it would be the only means through which to contest 9/11 domestic conception as a "political manoeuvre" utilized to avoid having to deal with America's foreign policy (718). In other words, in order to offer the most complete picture of the "Other" subject, fictions needed to deterritorialize Americans, that is, to take the action out of the U.S by moving the characters'—and so the readers'—perspective to other territories and cultures.

Focusing on a fictionally powerful Middle East, Matt Ruff takes the action not only out of America, but directly at the center of the "otherness" perspective, but with a twist: nearly everything in *The Mirage* is conceived as a direct reflection of the reader's real world, even matters of power and religion. Just like the fictitious 11/9 mirrors the real 9/11, the dynamics of Christian-Islam relations are turned around, so Islam becomes the globally dominant faith and Christianism the opposing one. The new narrative presents Muslims as the most ardent defenders of modernity and Christian fundamentalists as God's servants in charge of destroying it so they can "get back there" (Ruff 64), to the world the reader is familiar with. In this context, Ruff converts American Christians into the "Other" subject in an attempt to bring a major understanding of the real Muslim "Other."

The configuration of the identity of the "Other" subject was one of the prime concerns of authorities and media in the aftermath of 9/11, as there was an urgent need to "put a face to the threat" so it would be identified in time in the event of new coming attacks (Upstone 35). This imagined identity was constructed—according to the West Orientalist attitude[5]—as the *Muslim*

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[5] Orientalism is the term used to describe the historical treatment of the Muslim subject as the "Other" as well as their identification with the Middle East—no matter their birthplace—, contributing to the stereotyping of Muslims as dangerous and threatening individuals. (Upstone 36). The term was firstly used by Edward Said in his work *Orientalism* (1978) as a "way of coming to terms with the Orient (…) based on the Orient's special place in European Western

"Other" (36). This way, the historical animosity between Christianism[6] and Islam, helped to nurture the new tensions between faiths the 9/11 attacks had awaken.

In his address to Congress on September 22, 2001, George W. Bush asked one of the key questions coming from the salient religious antagonism:

> Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber—a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. (Bush, "September 22")

Bush's inquiry is mirrored by Ruff's protagonist, Mustafa, during the interrogation of Dr. Costello, the man who reveals the existence of the Mirage Legend:

> You know, right after 11/9, all of Arabia asked itself Why? Why do they hate us? The rest of the country has tried to move on since then, but here in Baghdad, still living with the aftereffects of that day, we find it much harder to put the past behind us. We want to know: Why do you hate us, Dr. Costello? (Ruff 56)

The question "why do they hate us?" remains one of the most prominent in the attempt to comprehend violence against a given faith. Loathe against something or someone presumes the existence of an intense dislike of what said thing or person is or represents, but it may also bring along the impulse to carry out an aggression towards them. Thus, the sentiment of hate may directly

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experience" not only as the area geographically connected to the Old Continent, but also as "the place of Europe's greatest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1). This view of the Orient as the "Other" was later on introduced in the U.S. imaginary when the American nation began its economic and political expansion in the Middle East, this way adopting the consideration of the "Muslim Other" that Upstone mentioned in her work.

[6] Although "Christianity" is the term that refers to the monotheistic religion, "Christianism" is the term that has been adopted in recent history to refer not only to the doctrines of Christianity, but the increased politization of the faith in the pursuit of worldly power. Thus, for the purpose of this project, the term "Christianism" will be frequently used to refer to both the religion and its politization.

relate to violence, which seems to justify its use in the responses to both the real and the fictitious attacks. However, it also brings the attention to two directly related features of the historical Christian-Islam relations, especially in relation to radicalism within them: fear and revenge.

Sara Upstone calls the attention to how, even before 9/11 occurred, Americans already perceived Islam as the "unknown threat, the dangerous 'Other' in the midst of civilization" (37). This sentiment of fear came, thus, from the dangers Islam and its teachings entailed for their modern and advanced lifestyle. For most Americans, Muslims' more traditional and religious understanding of the world clashed directly with the modern technological world of most Christian countries and so, in this sense, both cultures constituted an obstacle for the growth and development of the other. The strictness of the Middle East theocracies and their wishes to expand their more traditional and orthodox views put in danger not only the liberties already present in Western societies, but their ongoing scientific and technological progresses. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the increase in the number of terrorist attacks on Western objectives—both within and out of the Middle East—, consequently, nourished the perception of the Muslim subject as "irrational, fanatical, and violent" (38).

In this sense, both Christianism and Islam were, thus, in the middle of a long-standing conflict, trying to gain as much ground as possible. The fear of one another, thus, comes from the threat the other posed to their expansion in the world's geopolitical board, as *The Mirage* very well portrays: "it's traditional for both sides in a church schism to claim they represent the true religion" (Ruff 305).

One of the ways in which Ruff portrays this conflict is, interestingly, in the racial relations within the fictitious America. Similarly to how the civil rights movement developed in the real America, Ruff's fictional one went through a moment of change in the 20th century as African Americans began to fight for their rights as citizens:

> For the first two thirds of the century, the CSA [Christian States of America] had practiced a form of racial apartheid—openly in the southern states, and more covertly in the north, where, according to the report, "white citizens wanted the benefits of racial preference without the culpability." (240)

Reflecting the "schism" between faiths happening in the real world, the space between "races"—one in which hate and fear coexist—remains, in the novel, a terrain where the battle for people's liberties is fought, with the "white" Americans imposing their rights over their fellow "black" Americans. As a solution, the government of the Christian States passes new legislation to put an end to the racial segregation of Americans, although the new law is nevertheless contested: "In the south, particularly, the Civil Rights Act was seen as a pretext for expanding federal power and curtailing 'states' rights'" (240). In the end, the matter is about who bears the power, and so, who is in charge of constructing the dominant narrative.

Moving forward to the novel's 2003, the Coalition's invasion of America takes apart the region's power dynamics with the intention of bringing democracy to the country—similarly to how the U.S.'s real goal was to eliminate the tyrannical Iraq regime. To do so, the leaders of the Coalition recruit Boulos al Darir, a member of Iraq's National Party of God, to "oversee the reconstruction of America during the crucial first year following the invasion" (241). In his attempt to guide the C.S.A. in the right direction, Al Darir elaborates a list of "decrees" that Americans need to abide to. The eight directives include the dismantling of the National Guard or Minutemen and the Christian Democrat Party—which leaves many Americans, most of them African-Americans, unemployed and angry—as well as more strict cultural measures like a ban on alcoholic beverages or pork products, which do nothing to alleviate the state of tension in the invaded America.

All these prohibitions seem to be coming from Al Darir's personal cultural perspective, especially when he offers Americans to smoke hashish as a substitute for alcohol which, although not allowed by their religion, many Arabs do to relax:

> He suggested that if Americans wanted to relax at the end of the day, they should try smoking hashish; the climate of the southern states in particular, Al Darir noted, ought to be excellent for the cultivation of cannabis (…) Morally, of course, the suggestion made no sense. The Quran condemns all intoxicants, not just alcohol. But a much bigger problem

was that it displayed, yet again, the administrator's complete ignorance of American racial sensitivities. (242)

The problem resides, not in the norm itself, but on Al Darir's—the administrator—complete disregard of the cultural landscape of the people he is trying to govern. The imposition of some of Islam's teachings, no matter how harmless it might be, directly attacks some of the Americans' more extended practices and underrates them, just like the novel's white Americans did back in the 20th century in their disrespect of African Americans.

Muslims' conception of Christian Americans as inferior is contained, indirectly, in the series of insensitive decrees, and directly through the statements found in some of the pamphlets—entitled *Thirteen Simple Rules for Dealing with Americans*—elaborated by members of the Coalition with information about the American nation for Muslim newcomers:

Rule #1 was DON'T EXPECT THANKS: "Americans are a proud people. Though their civilization is still in its infancy, they consider themselves equal, if not superior to, older and more established cultures. The fact that they had to be liberated by outsiders is a source of great shame to them, and while the vast majority are grateful for the gift of freedom, they are extremely reluctant to show it." (243)

This passage shows how the Arab authorities have taken the Christian fundamentalist message of hate—coming from the fundamentalist Christians' conception of their superiority which was being threatened by the Muslims' occupation of their rightful place in the world—and constructed an identity and a narrative that would justify their presence in the region. The paternalist attitude towards Americans shows not only the voluntary ignorance of the culture of the "Other," but also the infantilization of its members, spreading the belief that they need to be "civilized":

You may feel that Americans complain too much. Try to ignore this. Pointing out the many ways in which their lives have improved will only make them complain more. *Never* tell an American that they "ought to be thankful." In American culture this is considered a grave insult and may lead to violence. (243)

The pamphlet exposes the most problematic facet of both the promoted narrative by *The Mirage*'s Muslims and the one from the real American authorities and media: that the "Other" is a barbaric and uncivilized subject and it is their responsibility, as civilized people, to improve their way of life so it can be as "civilized" as ours. The issue, thus, is not so much the superpower's intervention in a developing nation, but how said intrusion mainly focuses on providing the necessary changes in their cultural and religious customs and beliefs instead of procuring them the freedoms they supposedly lack:

"Three million riyals, to figure out that people won't say thank you if you drive a tank into their yard. That's money well spent, don't you think?"

"It might have been," Mustafa said, "if anyone in the Coalition had paid attention." (244)

It is not, thus, a matter of how much money or means the government had spent in the war, but for what purposes and on what basis. This was also a preoccupation in the real U.S. as, a few years into the war on Iraq—when people had already begun to show disagreement with the government's actions there—, American media began to expose the estimated costs of the invasion which, by the early 2010s, was believed to have been of at least $2 trillion. The investment of such amount of capital, with many Americans suffering the consequences of a severe economic crisis, was conceived as unjustified, especially because the money could have been destined to cover the costs of education or Medicaid, or even to really help to improve the Iraqi's lives:

It sure is something, though, to think about the good that could have been done if we'd decided to use that cash for purposes other than to pound the stuffing out of a country that posed no actual threat to us and had no true intention of doing us harm. (Lazarus)

The disproportion between the expenditure on warfare and the resources destined to cover other most important costs—not only within the U.S., but also to aid the Iraqi people, who were losing their houses and loved ones—is also present in Danson's *Faultline 49* where the money spent to fight the Sprite (the Canadian fictional terrorist group from *Faultline 49*) exceeds by far the one spent to help ordinary Canadians:

America has spent huge sums of money to kill (with ease) comparatively innocuous individuals, but failed to generate much deterrent with regards to further insurgencies. This conflict's asymmetrical nature has placed U.S. forces in an especially precarious position. (Danson 97)

At this point in the novel, Danson—quoting Scott Taylor's work on the war against Iraq and its consequences (qtd. in Danson)—exposes the absurdity of utilizing a "three million USD" (98) missile to kill a group of "guerrilla" warriors armed with "an eight dollar magazine" fired from a "two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar AK" (97). The disproportional and unjustified expenditure on warfare during both the real and fictional Bush administrations—which only began to truly be addressed around the time both novels were published—responds to the American arms industry's profit motive and clashes with the supposedly humanitarian aim of the invasion, which is used as the argument to justify the intervention: "This is what they wanted all along. Corporate greed's greased the gears of war. We put a face on the threat, and they put a humanitarian face on the carnage" (9).

After 9/11, when the first plans for the invasion of Iraq began to reach the public, a few critical voices against Bush's policies expressed their opposition to the intervention by pointing to the falsified reasons the government was using to justify the intervention. It was a rather generalized belief that the American "Operation Iraqi Freedom" had nothing to do with the

liberation of the Iraqi people from the tyranny of the Hussein regime and the menace of Al Qaeda terrorism, but with serving the interests of the American oil companies in their attempt at "taking control of Iraq's oil" (Cord 249).

Disguised as a war against terrorism, the invasion of Iraq was, in truth, the means by which the oil industry and the U.S. government—especially considering the direct ties between George W. Bush and said industry—would fulfill the economic interests in the region as well as increasing their geopolitical control on the Middle East. Danson's alternative version of the War on Terror set in Canada also points to this view on the true reasons behind the conflict:

> Canada was the largest supplier of oil to the US (…) Without the Canadian connection, it would have to look to re-address its geo-political grip on the Middle East, which would require divided attention, even more pandering to conflicted, regional desires, and a more heavy-handed sorting of Iraqi affairs. (Danson 71)

Indeed, the historical trade and political relations with Canada in the real America, as well as the position the northern country occupied in the real world made it impossible for the United States to invade their neighbor and take control of its oil reserves—as in the novel's case—, thus prompting them towards an intervention in Iraq to gain control over its oil. Although the U.S. invasion of the Arab country had taken its first steps in the first month after Bush's inaugural—when U.S. forces attacked Iraqi radar sites to "enforce a 'no-fly zone'" in the area, covering it up as a "routine mission" (Miller Center)—the 9/11 terrorists attacks provided the perfect excuse to move forward with their plans of military intervention in the region.

The use of the "us vs. them" narrative to justify the U.S. military presence in Iraq proves, this way, misleading, an attempt to hide the government's real interests in gaining control of the territory. Thus, a conflict that was apparently triggered by the need to fight the fundamentalists' hate and the nation's fear of new terror attacks turned out to really had been caused by America's hunger for power.

Although the economic interests that America—especially the oil industry—had in the Middle East got the focus of attention of media and part of the public at the end of Bush's second

term, his administration continued to sell the idea that what they were doing in Iraq was mandatory if the U.S. wanted to avoid another 9/11 even with an impending economic crisis or the failure to locate any WMD (weapons of mass destruction) in Iraq. This is also present in the novel, as the U.S. government's rhetoric focuses on the Canadian issue to move Americans attention from domestic affairs, especially in relation to the U.S.' polemic 9/11 investigation: "The notion of participating in warfare as a means of avoiding domestic inconveniences has crossed my mind once or twice already today" (Danson 71).

David Danson's—the novel's journalist, not the author—sarcastic comment after an American soldier confesses to preferring a bullet to the head over having to go through a commute to work in Washington D.C. criticizes Bush's arrogant attitude for his prevailing obsession with Iraq while ignoring most of the nation's current domestic problems. It also exemplifies how the increasing presence of dissenting voices in American society helped writers in their efforts to challenge the—weakened but still dominant—narrative promoted by the U.S. authorities. In this sense, both Ruff and Danson's novels provide a critique on the Bush administration's greed for power through their own egotistical characters.

Just as the attacks on New York and Washington D.C. were used by the real Bush administration to justify an intervention in Iraq, *Faultline 49*' fictitious 9/11 utilizes the Canadian 9/11 and its consequences to invade and take control over the country's oil reserves.

> Before subduing a rogue Canadian state to initiate regime change, Bush first had to create one. Thus it was necessary to create an environment that would produce a reaction that could be conveyed to the American public as tyrannical. The threat of domestic violence was sufficient for police action and a small-scale intervention, but didn't warrant the full might of the war machine. (90)

Similarly to how the Bush administration adamantly promoted the belief that the Iraqi authorities—and especially Saddam Hussein—were in possession of weapons of mass destruction and were hiding it even to the U.N., *Faultline 49*'s United States' government tries to sell the idea that the Canadian president, Jean Chrétien, is secretly supporting the Sprites and other anti-

American organizations within Canada. The plan is finally discarded as the violent actions of various dissenting Canadians end up being enough to justify the U.S. to take more and more control over their neighbors.

The novel's Canadian-American[7] conflict begins in the days after 9/11—as the novel's David narrates to provide the reader with the needed information to engage with the story—, when the investigation marks American Harvey King as the prime suspect of bombing the WTCE (World Trade Center Edmonton). Bush, who had "recognized the act as an instance of international terrorism" and promised to "do everything in our power to cooperate with our closest friend" (45), decides to withdraw from the criminal investigation to initiate an independent American one. Whether it was King's supposed link to a Montana Congressman—which is addressed briefly in the novel without further explanation—or his American nationality, his participation in the September attack became more difficult to prove, as his computer's internet search records had apparently been erased and the alleged testimony of some nurses from a caring home confirmed he had been visiting his dying uncle when someone had reportedly stolen his van—which had been declared as the bomb's container. These exculpatory evidence were published in the *9/11 Report* elaborated by the American investigators, which declared that Harvey King had a "verifiable alibi" and that the "conclusions were inconsistent" (46). The fury of the Canadian authorities led the U.N. to invoke article 51 of the organization's charter to force the U.S. to hand King to the Canadian authorities, which they refused to do, "calling for the need of 'damning evidence', which American agencies ironically both destroyed and withheld" (47).

America's refusal to hand over King to the Canadian authorities back in 2001 resulted, as Danson explains, in a series of violent acts on both sides, including the bombing of a hydro-electric-power station in Quebec causing an electric shutdown that killed thousands of Canadians and Americans, who had frozen to death without electricity to heat their homes. The continuing increase

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[7] Danson makes frequent use of the term "American" to refer to the United States—as well as everything in relation to the country—and, by extension, it is also common to find his character allude to the conflict between the U.S. and Canada as the "Canadian-American war." Although the utilization of the term "American" to refer to the U.S. is seen as problematic—as it reduces a term related to a whole continent to refer to a single nation within it, thus, implying that the U.S. experience is also all of America's—, it is a well-extended practice among journalists, which may be the explanation to the extended use of the term in the novel.

in the hostilities pushed the U.S. to intervene and establish NORTHCOM[8], which expanded its influenced over the entire continent. This move was not well-received by Canadian authorities, who offer to promote a NORAD[9]-NORTHCOM coalition to maintain order and peace in Canada. However, the asymmetrical composition of the association—as the percentage of American forces outweighed by far the Canadian one—was perceived as another American step towards the total control over their neighbors.

The U.S. refusal to collaborate with the Canadian authorities becomes the first of many ways in which the American nation exercises its power over its neighbor in the novel, choosing to protect one of its citizens instead of helping Canada get justice for the 9/11 victims. The violent conflict that comes after just reinforces the view of *Faultline 49*'s America as another source of terrorism—understanding the concept of terrorism as "violence that is politically motivated" carried out through fear and "a demonstration of force" (Voronchenko et al. 342). This way, Danson calls the attention to the U.S. inadequate response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 by emphasizing how the nation's own violent actions had become as unjustified as the terrorists'.

Moreover, the sequence of events in *Faultline 49* and the U.S. response to each of them connects the country's quest for an expansion of its geopolitical power directly with the feeling of shattered innocence with the real 9/11 as it broke the illusion of America's sense of invincibility. While the "sense of privileged security evaporated" in the morning of September 11, 2001, the U.S. weakness was exposed and authorities believed something had to be done in order to go back to the past perception of exceptionality and invincibility (Nadel 129, 136).

One of the most prominent characteristics of the U.S. people is their shared sense of identity. Although a constant throughout the history of the country, the character of the American identity has been emphasized during moments of national crisis, when unifying responses were imperative. It happened after 9/11, when the day's narrative provided by media and authorities aimed at the nationalization of the tragedy to strengthen the sense of unity in the country's response to it. *Faultline 49*'s U.S. response to the fictitious 9/11 also stages this sense of national identity

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[8] U.S. Norther Command, a part of the U.S. army tasked with the military support of non-military authorities within the country as well as protecting the national territory created by George W. Bush in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.
[9] North American Aerospace Defense Command, a joint U.S.-Canada air force organization tasked with the detection and elimination of any aerial threat to North America.

after the Canadian authorities identify a U.S. citizen as their prime suspect of setting up the WTCE explosions. It is exemplified by the country's retreat from the international investigation, the initiation of a new independent one and the refusal to transfer King to the Canadian authorities so he could be subject to the due process of law—even to the point of killing him before he can even have the chance to publicly confess his crimes. In other words, it is the sense of shared national identity what prompts U.S. authorities to protect one of their citizens even when every piece of evidence points to his culpability. A U.S. terrorist attacking the neighboring nation—with whom the U.S. had a long history of good relations—is a black stain on the national narrative and may taint the country's international reputation.

In the end, what Danson is doing with his novel is what many others had criticized of the U.S. general attitude after 9/11: addressing the complete refusal to dedicate both time and space to discuss the American role and involvement in the international chessboard—and, by extension, on the circumstances leading to the 2001 terrorist attacks (Kauffman, "World Trauma Center" 647). In this sense, Danson provides a darker view of the self-conceived American exceptionalism "measuring the asymmetrical power of America to influence world events, to infiltrate, shape" (Gray 124) the geopolitical and cultural international landscape.

The quest for the acquisition of a larger influence on the international chessboard is also an aspect of post-9/11 American politics that Matt Ruff incorporates into his counterfactual novel, although moving to a different perspective or, more precisely, through the focus on other relevant figures in the War on Terror: Dick Cheney, Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden.

Leaving George W. Bush out of his alternative reality—he is only mentioned once and not even by name—, Ruff's *The Mirage* puts the focus on another relevant American figure of the War on Terror, the U.S. historical vice president who is converted into the director of the Christian Intelligence Agency (CIA) of America. Dick Cheney is one of the real American figures that are transported into the fictitious reality of *The Mirage*, but his portrayal as an extremely ambitious and aggressive man is only equaled by the two Arab characters that Ruff brings into the novel from the real world. Saddam Hussein is now a crime lord, depicted as a very powerful and wealthy man searching for the Mirage artifacts (objects that have been brough from the "other" reality of *The Mirage* to the new current one). Meanwhile, Senator Osama bin Laden enters the political arena while still holding his position as the head of Al Qaeda, though the organization is now a shadowy

intelligence agency fighting against Christian terrorism. All three characters portray the hunger for power that Danson's Bush displayed with his measures on the Canadian problem, mirroring this way the ambitions of their real counterparts.

In the alternative history genre, the inclusion of counterparts or characters that reflect another fiction's character or a figure from the real world is a matter of what is known as "transworld identity." The traditionally philosophical concept of the transworld identity refers to the fictional counterparts as an historical—or "Other"—individual who had been subtracted "as a result of some altered event" but that is "considered identical to the one in actual history" (Gallagher 11). This means that, even if the different influences and life experiences of a character in a counterfactual story result in them having a distinct personality, the fictional representation tends to reflect almost entirely the real figure—as having two same characters with two diverging destinies poses problematic (12). Essentially, altering the counterparts within a story that has already altered an historical event would eliminate one of the few ways in which the reader's familiarity is activated—which is necessary to maintain the whole counterfactual effect. Not only that but, the inclusion of counterparts in alternative histories is frequently associated with the genre's critical function, as a way to emphasize aspects of the historical reality that need change by providing a new and better version of the real world also through the counter-characters.

This way, while Danson chose to focus on George W. Bush to expose his disagreement with the president's policies in the Middle East—connecting those to his ambition to expand his geopolitical power over the region—, Ruff makes use of his characters' own greed to expose the same idea. In addition, whereas Danson's character was looking to expand his nation's international power, Ruff's are considerably more egocentric as their search for the Mirage Legend has only one goal: their personal acquisition of more power.

The fictional Saddam Hussein is the character that better displays this egotism in the novel. At one point during the Homeland Security investigation of the Mirage Legend, Mustafa ends up in Saddam's house trying to get more information about the origin of the mysterious artifacts. After the visit, the action moves to a secret room in the house where an American man is held captive by Saddam's men. The man—who is finally identified as the one who had made the wish to the jinn that gave way to the alternative reality—seems to know more about the novel's "Other" world and that is the reason why Saddam keeps him captive:

"Now I want to hear a story," Saddam continued. "It doesn't have to be perfect—I know you're not a professional—but it needs to be inspirational, something that acknowledges *my* manhood. No more of these ridiculous fantasies about military defeats, or spider-holes, or… guilty verdicts. I want a tale I can believe in. Are you ready to give me that?" (Ruff 227)

While the artifacts Saddam keeps in his "alternative reality room" already show what he seeks—having as much power as to govern over Iraq more than he already does—, the reliability of the stories told by a man who has lived the world he desires outweighs any physical object telling the same story, especially considering that objects can be manipulated but the man's memories are real. This passage perfectly portrays Saddam's craving for power as well as what might be behind it: the belief in the existence of a reality in which his social position is even greater that the one he enjoys in the novel's world.

Even though Saddam already enjoys his fair amount of influence in the country—as his criminal activities have led him to control the Baathists[10], among them many law enforcement workers and politicians—the specter of defeat continuously follows him, especially every time his enemies successfully bring him to justice. Moreover, even though he has yet to be sentenced for his crimes, some of the stories told by his prisoner show that he had, somehow in another timeline, already been defeated once. Like the real America's wish to bring back the sense of invincibility tainted by 9/11, Saddam wants to gain back the confidence in his power which had been shaken by the artifacts and the stories.

Just as the message of fear and revenge invaded the American discourse after 9/11, Saddam's actions seem to be guided by the fear of losing both the control he already possesses and the one he so badly desires, as well as the determination to avenge the wrongs his alternative self

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[10] In the novel, the Baathists are the members of the Baath Labor Union, an organization that represents construction, garbage collection, and river transport workers among others in Iraq and Syria. Saddam Hussein became the leader of the organization in 1979 after occupying the union's positions of secretary treasurer and vice president. This fact probably relates to the real U.S. connections between the mafia and the garbage industry, as yet another way in which Ruff shaped his U.A.S. as a direct reflection of the real United States.

had suffered—as conveyed by his words wishing both Bush father and son to be "frustrated. Eternally frustrated" (232).

The American equivalent to the avaricious Saddam is known as the Quail Hunter[11] in *The Mirage*, although his real name would be Dick Cheney. Bush's vice president is also one of the most powerful men of the fictitious America, leading the country's C.I.A. in a similarly tyrannical way to how Saddam does his criminal organization. Like Hussein, the Quail Hunter is also looking for the Mirage alternative reality, the one in which he is one of the most powerful men in the world, or so the artifacts show:

> I could tell he'd already made up his mind what the answers were. Of there really were two worlds, then the one where he was a heartbeat away from being the most powerful man on earth had to be the true one. And *this* world—the world where he was a glorified secret policeman in a dinky backwater country—this one had to be false. A cheat. A mirage. (315)

For Cheney, as for Saddam, the goal is to reach this "other" reality, the one in which their greed for power was fulfilled. The narrative told by the artifacts draws the idealized picture they had already constructed in their own minds, but within their reach. The key resides in the artifacts and the story they tell, which inflate their true value every time a new object appears. This way, just like the value of a counterfactual increases with the more grounded facts from the real world they include—as it facilitates the attempt to "render the familiar unfamiliar" for the reader (Funnell 143)—, the veracity of the Mirage Legend grows with each one of the objects discovered by the novel's characters.

One of the most significant aspects of the conviction of these men of the veracity behind the artifacts is that the story these tell is, in appearance, a fiction. Even if these objects picture the world the reader is familiar with—thus, real for them—, at this point in the novel, still at the beginning of the Mirage investigation, the reality painted by the artifacts remains a fantasy shaped

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[11] Although not mentioned in the story, the nickname probably refers to the quail hunting incident of February 2006, in which Dick Cheney shot Harry Whittington, a Texas attorney, on a ranch in Riviera, Texas, apparently by accident. The incident had been greatly controversial at the time, as some of the evidence and recreations contradicted the official statements given by Cheney and the administration.

by the wishes of a few desperate men. These fantasies, of course, act as foreshadowing to the story's end, when the new alternative world is exposed as the result of Saddam's American prisoner's wish to a jinn. It is nevertheless significant that these men's actions are based on what for them is a fiction, as it reflects the real American authorities' construction of a credible narrative to justify the many authoritarian measures—the invasion of Iraq as the most prominent, but also the passing of the PATRIOT Act or the creation of the Homeland Security Department—during the War on Terror. In fact, the Bush administration's insistence on Saddam's possession of WMD—that were, in the end, never found—is one of the most prominent features of the U.S. official narrative that exemplifies this.

Ruff's portrayal of Cheney also mirrors Hussein's in his aggressive behavior. In fact, in all his interventions within the narrative, he is pictured as a very violent man whose first reaction always involves the use of his gun:

> The joke is, if you've got an enemy you want to get rid of, you incite him out shooting and mistake him for whatever game you're after. The Quail Hunter had actually done that once. And he'd stepped over *a lot* of bodies, climbing the Company ladder. (Ruff 308)

The use of violence to achieve his goals directly points to Cheney's support to the military intervention in Iraq, which was, in fact, related to the oil industry's interests in the region. Violence, Ruff is saying, is the way through which corrupt men reach their goals, and so it should not be the way a democracy such as the U.S. achieved its own. The use of brute force reduces America's actions to the level of the terrorists', as their violent attacks were being responded with more—military—violence:

> "So here's a crazy thought," she said. "Is there any way we could pin a terrorism charge on Saddam? Get him and his family declared enemies of the state and ship them off to Chwaka Bay?"

"Believe mem it's been discussed," Mustafa said. "The problem is, Saddam is the wrong kind of terrorist." (99)

Mustafa's comment exposes what the author examines in the novel through the shaping of these characters, both powerful but dangerous men who use their influence to achieve their goals at whatever and whoever's expense, thus stating that one does not need to cause an explosion to become a terrorist. Indeed, the terror generated by the presence of Saddam's men in all levels of democracy or the cruel and brutal treatment of Cheney's C.I.A. workers reflects the fear that arose in American society after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and also provides a clear example of how frequently the use of brute force to instill a climate of fear becomes the means to expand a nation's or a man's power.

The arrogance exhibited by both Saddam Hussein and the Quail Hunter is also present in the novel's Osama bin Laden. Although he remains in the shadows for most of the story, his intentions regarding the Mirage Legend are finally unveiled to expose him as the novel's villain.

According to the "transworld identity" concept—which was previously explained—, a character within a counterfactual that has a counterpart in the real world is exactly the same individual as the one the reader is familiar with. This pictures the novel's Bin Laden "not a twin" but "the same man with a different history. Or the same history remembered differently" (357). This perspective suggests that *The Mirage*'s Senator bin Laden, a well-known politician and leader of an anti-terrorist force, is in truth the same man that ordered the attacks of September 11, 2001. And this proves to be true when it is discovered that he also did it in this new reality:

"The point I am getting at is this: A terrorist who attacks a Christian superpower in the name of Islam knows he is setting up his fellow Muslims for slaughter, because that is how superpowers react when they are struck. Which raises the question: If in one version of history, a man is willing to murder thousands of innocent Muslims by proxy, is it not plausible that in another version, he might be willing to commit the same sin more directly?"

(…)

"You think Osama bin Laden is responsible for the 11/9 attacks as well?"

"That is what I am suggesting." (357)

While Bin Laden is exposed as the man behind the mirroring 11/9 attacks as well as the original 9/11 ones—thus, yet another example of the use of violence as the means to reach an end—, the reason behind those attacks is not the avarice that defined Hussein and Cheney, but a more spiritual one which relates to another relevant part of *The Mirage*'s message: the religious perspective.

### 3.2. The Humanization of the Terrorist: Introducing the Perspective of the "Other."

*The Mirage* starts with a glimpse at the morning of 11/9 right before the attacks that will destroy the Tigris and Euphrates towers in Baghdad's WTC, to promptly move forward nine years in the future. The purpose is to introduce the novel's protagonists as much as to make a statement about some aspects that the text is going to be dealing with. The first chapter moves from one scene to another rapidly, to locate Mustafa, Samir and Amal physically and emotionally in relation to the day's events, but its Amal's mother who comes up first in the narrative. As Baghdad's mayor, Anmar al Maysani appears on Al Jazeera's morning show to discuss a few matters that are affecting the city with the *Baghdad Post* Christian publisher. The discussion, which has to do with the increasing murder rate in the city, very soon diverts to the matter of religion:

> Madam Mayor, there are many who believe that the increase in lawlessness we are seeing is an inevitable consequence of the secularization of society, and that what's needed is a new Awakening, a rejection of modernity and a return to traditional religious values. What do you say to this? (4)

The question arises from a growing understanding by some sectors of society that people's distancing from religious beliefs—breaking with some of Islam's traditions and being more open to circumstances that were considered sinful in the past—is provoking an increase in the rates of

criminal activities. Indeed, if "men were choosing to become gangsters" it would certainly mean that "they are *not* submitting to God" (5). Yet, the matter is not so much whether the individual is subjected to the mandates of God or if they abide by the nation's Law. One thing is, as Anmar responds, the growing "secularization" of their society, and quite another the "lawlessness" of a group of individuals (5). The stress, thus, should not be put on the binary opposition between religious devotion or society's modernization—and, in some way, between the East and the West—but on the faultlines "where identities are performed and contested" (Gray 65). This space between cultures was the origin of the main ideological contest of the War on Terror.

This ideological conflict—portrayed by the novel but also present in the historical reality—is, in this sense, what Michael Jacobson calls a "battle of ideas," in which the understanding of the radicalization process was key (12). In the fight against terror, recognizing the fundamentalism in the terrorists' views was only the first step in the conflict, which needed to be fought more on the ideological terrain than in the physical one. Thus, in order to succeed, the U.S. needed to construct a counternarrative to the one offered by the terrorists and, for that, they needed to also acknowledge the reasons behind the radicalization of the individuals (Leuprecht et al. 30).

The clash between religious traditions and the modernization of society has been used for the indoctrination of terrorists' long before the events of 9/11 took place. The terrorists' messages focus on the dangers of social advancements—most of which come from the influence of the Western societies—which threaten some of the most prominent traditions and teachings of their faiths. As modernization is felt like a threat to their culture and way of life, the use of violence against the source of that threat is justified.

This battle of ideas was the ideological basis of the real 9/11 terrorists' narrative—some even believe that it was precisely this message that the terrorists wanted to emphasize with the use of planes, one of the greatest Western technological advancements of the 20th century (Kauffman, "The Wake of Terror" 357)—and it is also here where Ruff puts his focus on in his novel. Not only does he hint at it at various points throughout the novel—as exemplified in the book's very first dialogue between Anmar and the journalist—but he also makes it Bin Laden's motivation:

"To what end, though?" Amal said. "Why would Osama bin Laden want to provoke a war between Arabia an America, or between Islam and Christendom? What would he be hoping to accomplish?"

"I think," said Mustafa, "that he wants to turn the clock back. Undo modernity and the Republic, and usher in a new Caliphate." (Ruff 358)

This way, the novel's Al Qaeda's ideological message is based on the threat that societies' secularization means for their traditions—among them religion and the worship of God—is also the main motivation behind 11/9 and every other terrorist attack linked to Christian fundamentalists, but ultimately plotted by Bin Laden and his Qaeda men. It becomes, thus, not a matter of religious fundamentalism as such, but of how the social identity of the Muslim—largely influenced by their religious beliefs—is at risk by the intrusion of modern conceptions—mostly associated with the Christian world—in the shape of the individual's identity.

This chapter began with Bush's address to Congress on September 22 and his statement on how the terrorists' motivations had been to strike at the center of their identity as Americans and citizens of the world: their freedoms. He had then asked, "why do they hate us?," and the question was mirrored by *The Mirage*'s Mustafa, not to support the narrative of the "Other" as a religious fundamentalist, but to emphasize how it is not only the American or Western identity that is at risk, but the identity of the Muslim "Other" as well. Ruff's altered history, thus, challenges the basic premises of the War on Terror narrative questioning who are the real terrorists and the real fundamentalists of the story, thus, constantly challenging the veracity or authenticity of the identities and stereotypes at play:

Our assumptions about the agencies and identities at work here are constantly dislocated, necessitating a continual process of reinterpretation, a process of questioning that, theoretically at least, is without end. (Gray 66)

Ruff plays with elements familiar to the reader also in terms of stereotyping or identification, by contesting readers beliefs and conceptions, most of which have been historically influenced by the authorities' narratives, like the Bush administration's official one on 9/11 and the War on Terror. Ruff's picture does not contradict the fact that the terrorists' intentions were, indeed, to harm the American—Western—identity, but addresses the long-ignored truth about how the identity of the Muslim "Other" might had been equally affected by the intrusion of the Western culture in theirs.

Ruff's picture of Islam as a community defined by its "devout—yet tolerant, modern, rational, and peaceful—religious practice" that might be "against Westernization, perhaps, but not against modernization" (Altheide 42–43), contests, this way, the tainted image promoted by American authorities and media in their conception of the Muslim "Other" identity. In addition, *The Mirage*'s critique on the traditional American view of Islam—mostly associated with the identity of the radical Muslim terrorist—brings to the focus of attention the often-ignored ideological fundamentalism of Bush's America.

Although the most prominent measures of the Bush administration were taken within the realm of foreign policy, there had been a series of major moves concerning domestic policy that can also be associated with the War on Terror and the ideological debate arisen by it. The passing of the PATRIOT Act in 2001 and the creation of the Homeland Security Department in 2002 were among the most controversial of the new regulations promoted by the administration, being largely considered in violation of some of the most fundamental civil rights protected by the Constitution. Openly criticized by many, these two policies were, nevertheless, just some of the oppressive political moves of the Bush administration.

On May 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to legalize homosexual marriage in the United States. Soon after that, Bush—who had previously expressed his disagreement with the legalization of same-sex marriage on various occasions—asked people to demand the banning of homosexual marriage in all states, even calling for a constitutional amendment. For him, those marital unions posed a "threat to the existing [heterosexual] marriage structure and to (American) society or (Western) civilization more broadly" (Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 262). Similarly to the conception—according to the historical picture of Islam that Western societies had also helped to construct over time—of the Muslim community as a very traditional and religious

group that rejected modernization in all its facets, the Bush administration offered a very traditionalist view of the American society that was also in close relation to the religious (Christian) conception of the world. In this sense, the War on Terror's message of fear was built upon an "outside threat"—coming from terrorist groups and the nations supporting them—but also upon an "internal threat"—coming from social policies such as the social and political movements supporting same-sex marriage—(264) to the most fundamental pillars of the American identity, strongly promoted by the Bush administration. Indeed, the terrorists were not the only threat to Americans traditional conception of life as those fighting for the rights of homosexual individuals—as well as those defending stem cell research activities, the right of women to decide whether to get an abortion, or the rights of immigrants looking for a better life in the U.S.—also endangered the Christian views on life that Bush and his government understood as traditionally American.

Along with the attempt to ban the legalization of homosexual marriage that some states were already in the process of authorizing, the U.S. government prompted all throughout Bush's presidency the implementation of a series of conservative policies—such as the ban on the abortion aid in 2001 and 2003 or the restriction in the federal funding of stem cell research in 2001 ending with its full in 2006. Many of these regulations reflect the conservative and religious vision of society that defined Bush and most of the members of his government. This traditionalist perspective echoes the fundamentalist ideas of the 9/11 terrorists and seems to be not so far away from Ruff's picture of the Christian terrorists or of Bin Laden in *The Mirage*.

In this sense, *The Mirage* deals more deeply with the similarities between the traditionalist views of both Christianism and Islam through the telling of the past of two of the novel's protagonists—Amal and Samir—which explicitly relates to some of the real American government's legislative moves mentioned above.

During her time at college, Amal had gone through what is known as "temporary marriage" within Islam, a marital union of limited duration with the purpose of permitting both individuals to fully experience life as a couple—mostly to be allowed by law and God to engage in a sexual relationship—before making the decision to convert it into a permanent marriage. As a consequence, she had gotten pregnant and was later forced to give birth by the baby's father so he could keep full custody of the child. Her story exemplifies how, while the nation's legislation

supports the man's control over the woman's decision on the possibility of abortion, it also stigmatizes those women forced to have their babies if they end up not married to the father's child. Consequently, Amal is forced to keep in secret the existence of her now grown-up son, as that information being public would be reason enough for her to lose her Homeland Security position or to affect her mother's political career. In fact, this is what Al Qaeda—unsuccessfully—uses to blackmail her into sabotaging the Homeland Security Mirage investigation.

Al Qaeda's methods of intimidation find their victim, however, in Samir, when Bin Laden's men obtain a series of incriminatory pictures reveling his homosexuality. Considered a crime as much as a sin, homosexuality in the Muslim world is believed to be a "crime against nature" (Ruff 158) and one of the worst sins against God a man can commit. Samir would be not only immediately expelled from Homeland Security but at risk of losing his family and his life. This is how he is forced to collaborate with Al Qaeda, becoming their mole within the Homeland Security during their investigation on the Mirage Legend and even accepting to detonate a bomb that would have killed him and his colleagues during their stay in America. Fortunately, the bomb does not explode, and they survive the following ambush to go back home for the final act of the novel, but his secret, as well as Amal's, is finally exposed to Mustafa:

"I think Samir is a homosexual."

(…)

"what troubles you about this, Mustafa? Are you worried he wants to do something improper with you?"

"What? No!... It's a sin, that's all."

Abu Mustafa shrugged. "Fornication with women is a sin too, last time I checked," he said. "But you didn't get such a look on your face when you though Samir was guilty of that." (350)

Here, Mustafa's father points to one of the most significant messages *The Mirage* offers: tolerance is key. It implies acceptance and respect of the other—and so of every part that conforms

the individual's identity—but also understanding of what makes the individual him/herself. This is how, according to Ruff, the "battle of ideas" arisen during the War on Terror can finally end, through a better and fuller approach and understanding of the "Other."

The portrayal of Mustafa as the novel's most tolerant character is not casual, as he is the only one who merges his religious values with the respect for the other—as exemplified by the acceptance of both his friend Samir and Amal's personal circumstances as well as by the few glimpses the reader has at his pre-Mirage relationship with the American who made the wish that prompted the jinn to create the new alternative reality.

This way, Matt Ruff's *The Mirage* alludes to the deletion of the "Great Men history"—frequently present in counterfactuals, used to "underscore the significance of the decisions of specific individuals who possess almost 'absolute domestic power'" (Kaye 44)—by refusing to give the jinn's power to redo reality to neither Hussein, Bin Laden, nor Cheney, but to the novel's three protagonists. This is what Kaye calls "the democratization of individual agency" (47) by which ordinary people take back the control of the narrative from the powerful individuals who had governed it before.

The elevation of the average individual's power is also portrayed in the described "humanization of the terrorist" (Wegner 88), firstly by offering a view of the Muslim "Other" that differs from the historically tainted conception of him, and secondly by presenting the "terrorists"—on one side and the other—as human beings in constant struggle to balance their identities with their ideals. This way, just as the ruptured "Great Men" history within counterfactuals moves the power from the dominant individuals to the ordinary people, the humanization of the terrorist Other breaks with the idealized perception of them as defined by their radical views, to portray them as average individuals with human feelings and desires.

Similarly, David Danson's *Faultline 49* also challenges the traditional "Great Men" history by giving his namesake journalist protagonist nearly full control of the narrative in the novel. Even with the multiple blank censored spaces (signaled by the phrase "embargoed report" at various points throughout the novel, interrupting the normal course of the story), Danson manages to present an alternative and significant vision on the Canadian-American conflict that stands out even after his detention leads to the publication of a censored version of his book.

The central role of journalism in *Faultline 49* echoes the essential one American mass media had in the promotion of the national narrative about 9/11 and the War on Terror. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that Danson presents a journalist as the story's narrator while offering a dissenting view of the real War on Terror through an alternative one, as it was in the hands of reporters and correspondents to tell the horrors of the war that authorities kept silencing back in America. This is portrayed by David's obsession with the figure of Bruce Kalynchuk, the alleged leader of the Canadian terrorist organization Sprites, who had been a proud American citizen until his son died in the novel's Gulf War.

Kalynchuk's son had been a soldier fighting in Iraq during the Gulf War when he was killed, apparently due to the explosion of a road-side mine. Kalynchuk, who had being given the Medal of Honor for his actions in Vietnam and was later assigned to a NORAD base in Canada, made use of his experience in the American army in his examination of the images of the vehicle his son had been in when he died. His conclusion was that the damage was not compatible with that of a mine or a grenade and so, whatever or whoever was truly responsible was being kept secret by the American authorities. His discovery sent him on a quest to unveil the truth behind his son's killing, but as "investigating Americans during wartime was career suicide" (Danson 171), Kalynchuk ended up losing his position within the army as well as his wife and remaining son. All the same, he did not stop his personal investigation while "collapsing into a five year bout of alcoholism, delusion, and self-abuse" (171).

David's picture of Kalynchuk, not as a cruel terrorist but as a damaged man suffering the consequences of a tragedy such as the loss of a son, helps to present a more humanized vision of the monster America is fighting, but also to show how frequently the American authorities use their power to hide those facts they do not want people to know. Adam Kalynchuk's death, in this sense, becomes the symbol for all those deaths that were covered by the American government during the invasion of Iraq—not only of American soldiers, but also Iraqi civilians.

After a "decade of fake news and real consequences" (1), *Faultline 49* takes the opportunity to expose the realities behind what was told and what was kept from the public about the events of the first decade of the 21$^{st}$ century by displaying the first person perspective of a war correspondent in the invaded Canada. Feeling like objective journalism is like a "sinking ship" (37), David decides to search for Kalynchuk in an attempt to show the absent voice of the "Other" in the conflict.

In the wake of 9/11, the American news media "chose not to present important contextual and background information" about Iraq or the Middle East as it "was not consistent with other news themes," especially in relation to the message of fear and unity authorities were promoting (Altheide 12). This is also the case in *Faultline 49*, as the anti-Canadian coverage by American media and the limitation of access to sites and persons of interest experienced by the Canadian one provide the needed protection to and promotion of the American official narrative of Canadian anti-Americanism.

The misrepresentation of the conflict in the media is summarized in the link between a photo and its headline from the November 7th, 2005, cover of a copy of the novel's *The Washington Post*:

The headline reads: "American Forces Avalanche through Sprite Stronghold." The photograph squeezed below substantiates the statement. On second review, the obvious disparity between the statement and the visual evidence appealed to hits me in the gut. In the photo smoke rises from a broken column of LAVIIIs outside of Canmore. Odd, given the Sprites have been primarily using stolen Leopard Tanks or avoiding armor altogether (…), whereas the official Canadian Forces tend to use LAVs to get around. (Danson 95)

The fact that the image offers a message—that it was Canadian troops that had been attacked either by the U.S. forces or by the Sprites—that clearly differs from the one offered by the headline is the perfect example of how someone's perception of the world and of history is constantly manipulated by mass media and other organisms that are at the service of those who are in control of the narrative. What Danson implies here is that an image—that is, visual narrative—can never in any way possess meaning, it "can only document, not interpret" (Nadel 131). It is up to the individual to provide a picture with significance and so in that process of providing it with meaning is where the possibilities of manipulation emerge. Media becomes, in this sense, the puppeteer who "has strings even if we don't see them" (Danson 9), altering the messages so they support the government's perspective.

The instrumentalization of media is also portrayed in the real censoring of images such as those of the 9/11 falling people—addressed in the previous section of this project and which was identified with the "loss of hope" message that contested the one of "resilience" from the authorities' official narrative—but also in the elevation of the members of the emergency services, pictured as heroes by all the American media. This last point is addressed by Ruff in his novel when Samir internally confesses to "had always been secretly grateful for" not being ordered to enter the towers on the morning of 11/9, but to also "secretly ashamed of" (Ruff 289) the relief he felt for that. Samir's confession along with his words about the truth behind some of the falling people—as he is certain that "some of them really had jumped" (289) trying to escape from the heat and the smoke generated by the planes' crashing—not only helps to portray the humanization of those men and women, but it condemns the instrumentalization of their final moments to serve the government's purposes.

Both Ruff and Danson call attention to how "thin the line between sensationalism and 'objective' reporting" (Kaplan 22) is, especially in a moment of chaos and confusion as the post-9/11 period was, when the need for a common unifying narrative was mandatory. Danson, however, goes beyond Ruff in his criticism by pointing to what true and ethical journalism really is when his character confesses that:

> This was not my war to fight but another war to document; that my objective is and has always been to collect facts, not medals; and that I have paid dearly for a proper account of what has truly transpired during Canada's final days. (Danson 11)

For the novel's David, journalism is about searching for facts—where the truth resides—to construct a narrative that is as close to reality as possible, not because of the praise he might get in the end, but because it is what his profession entails. Only through the collection of multiple facts will the picture offered be as complete as to facilitate its most objective interpretation. This way, Danson prompts readers to look for the truth behind the manipulated history and to not necessarily settle with what media or the authorities promote as true.

However, while the critique on the American media's lack of objectivity during the War on Terror is the main focus of Danson's *Faultline 49*, there is also a call for attention to the dangers the path towards the truth entails:

I have attempted to live up to an unattainable pedigree set by attached journalists for attached journalists, and succumbed to an extreme position within the discipline: participant. My current predicament is resultant, in other words, of becoming and active cast member on Kalynchuk's show. This means I've violated the essential divisions barring me from those I have attempted to research and threatened the objective followed by most attached journalists: to give the point of view of the appendage personality/group and contextualize a wider view, ultimately providing a stereoscopic account. (215)

During his days of cohabitation with Kalynchuk in his secret base of operations, David had unconsciously established an emotional and ideological connection with the Sprites' leader had influenced his picturing of the Canadian-American conflict as much as the American media's had. In other words, David warns about how easily "experience distorts perception" (Nadel 132) and so the objectivity of the image the individual is trying to construct is forever lost. With this, Danson tries to acknowledge the dangers of believing in the facts coming from the individual's personal experience as much as believing in the media and authorities' facts as absolute truths. The picture, he implies, becomes complete—and, thus, the most objective—when people document the entire collection of facts, from authorities and media as well as from theirs and others' experiences, to construct said picture.

This way, both *The Mirage* and *Faultline 49* attempt to present a wider picture of the period immediately after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 through the unveiling of the hidden truths behind the most prominent narratives: the American media and government, and the terrorists'. They explore the clash of cultures through the event's estrangement that many scholars had demanded of writers after 9/11. This distance—both in time by placing the action in the midst of their own War on Terror, and space by moving the point of view out of America—is successfully achieved by the use of the alternative history genre which provides the perfect space for authors to

freely develop their fictions while discussing and criticizing some of the most controversial themes of the period. Through the perspective of the "Other," both novels help to expose the ideological flaws of both the Western conception of the Muslim "Other" and of the West, both from the past and the present. These circumstances had historically tainted the relations between the Western and the Eastern worlds and had been the cause of the most violent responses on both sides. Ruff and Danson's novels go beyond literature as a tool for critique to present in their two protagonists—Mustafa and David—as the bridge between the two contesting cultures, exploring the themes of tolerance and ideological openness through the characters' actions and words, pointing to ways in which to finally put an end to this war on terror.

# 4. Conclusion.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, was defined as a pivotal moment in the history of the United States as the images of the aircrafts crashing into the New York WTC Twin Towers symbolized the entrance of the nation in the world's violent history (Cvek 19) and the end of its exceptional character. 9/11 was the first foreign attack of such magnitude on American soil since Pearl Harbor, and the first to happen in the midst of a period of domestic peace. The event was, then, defined as an "act of war" which consequently trigger what came to be known as the "War on Terror" by which the U.S. declared war to the terrorist and any nation that harbored them, as phrased in Bush's early speeches after the attacks. In order to move forward in his plans to fight terrorism in and out of the nation, the Bush administration needed the complete support of the American society which was finally achieved through the nationalization of 9/11. This led to the "instrumentalization of 9/11" (Cvek 185) through the creation of a shared official, national view of the attacks that would offer the needed support for the implementation of new policies both within the realms of the domestic and the foreign.

The construction of a nationally shared view of 9/11 shaped the event as a traumatic one that allowed the U.S. to, once again—through the war on terrorism—enter the world's history, but in its own terms (29). This recovery of the exceptionality—through the adoption of the international leadership in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq during the War on Terror—however, prevented the nation for completing a process of healing from the trauma the attacks—and the national pictured painted by the Bush administration and mass media—had provoked in the American society. Both life and the world had been reduced to the traumatic moment (185) which, consequently, affected the way the event was represented.

The dramatic and visually-stunning nature of the attacks made the event significantly difficult to portray in fields such as literature, effectively erasing the boundaries between reality and fiction and triggering a "crisis of representation" in all levels of society (Panzani 77). In addition, the development of the event's national narrative offered a challenge in the construction of a dissenting discourse. These limitations in the non-political construction of the event's image—especially if said image challenged the official one—resulted in more subjective and self-focused

narrations in the early post-9/11 literary works (Randall 2). These more personal works[12] dealt with the writers' own perceptions, feelings and experiences in the days and weeks after the attacks, becoming the first step in the recovery of the traumatic experience. However, the restrictions offered by the official narrative as well as the necessity to continue on with the trauma therapy, soon obliged authors to move forward in their representation and memorialization of 9/11.

Nadel identifies two ways in which this "trauma therapy" can be conducted in literature through the search for psychological, historical and personal meaning—which, in the context of the post-9/11 literature, was carried out through realism—, or by completely turning away from reality—fulfilled through the development of alternative history stories (142). This division forced writers to move beyond the subjective and the official perspective, to the unrepresentable blank spaces that these had been avoiding. This is, in fact what "trauma therapy" represents: "a means of recovering memories from the past in order to reconstruct the reality that has been banished by tragic events in individual lives" (Caporale Bizzini 40).

The recovery of the silenced memories of 9/11—initially conceived as unpatriotic and counterproductive by American authorities and media—is the central point of the four novels analyzed in the body of the present study, as examples of the two post-9/11 literature categories defined by Nadel. Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark* both move to the "black spaces of the unrepresentable" (Pöhlmann 54) in their attempt to bring back all the silenced aspects of the domestic perspective, while David Danson's *Faultline 49* and Matt Ruff's *The Mirage* turn away from the U.S. to present the frequently missing viewpoint of the "Other."

As the two representatives of the first category of more realistic fictions, DeLillo and Auster both attempt to defamiliarize the reader from his/her-their knowledge of 9/11 and the War on Terror, by approaching every aspect of the events that had not been covered—or that was even censored—by the media's sentimentalist portrayal of those (Panzani 87). This way, the image of the Falling Man—part of a series of photographs taken by Richard Drew of the men and women who jumped from the burning towers at the World Trade Center and that were generally censored by the American mass media—, the presence of the terrorists' perspective before and during the

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[12] For instance, DeLillo's aforementioned essay ("In the Ruins of the Future"), Martin Amis' *The Second Plane: September 11: 2001–2007* (2008), Ian McEwan's "Beyond Belief," and Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn's *102 Minutes: The Untold Story of the Fight to Survive Inside the Twin Tower* (2005)—examples found in Randall's work.

attacks took place, and addressing the futility of the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan—in which thousands of Americans and many more foreigners lost their lives—become central in DeLillo and Auster's representation of the events, clearly challenging the dominant narrative that had refused to give these people a voice. Both novels succeed in their purpose to regain a sense of family, life and normalcy in the wake of 9/11 and the War on Terror instead of continuing to support the paranoia and urgency promoted by the government and media's discourses.

Consequently, *Falling Man* and *Man in the Dark* return the individual agency that had been lost prior to 9/11—as represented by the figure of the corporate man in DeLillo's text, or the multiple censored pictures in both novels—to the ordinary individuals, depicting what Kaye defines as the "democratization of human agency" (45). Indeed, both novels portray the protagonists'—Keith Neudecker and August Brill—towards the recovery of their power as individuals both in relation to the memorialization of 9/11—represented through the confrontation with their own past traumatic memories—and through their own actions—a exemplified, for instance, in Keith's decision to become a professional poker player.

The symbolism of giving control back to the ordinary individuals is also central in the two alternative history novels analyzed as part of the second category defined by Nadel. *Faultline 49* and *The Mirage* portray even more directly the flow of power from the "Great Men" to the novel's protagonists as journalist David Danson fulfills his mission to find the terrorist Kalynchuk, and so to offer a more complete and objective picture of the Canadian-American conflict, and *The Mirage*'s Homeland Security agents succeed at finding the truth behind the Mirage Legend without letting any of the corrupted men in its search possess its power. The importance of how these two novels bring back their characters' individual agency resides in their form as well as in their publication dates—as both novels were published after the tenth year anniversary of the attacks, offering the temporal distance that most scholars saw as necessary for the complete understanding of the event.

The evolution of the Literature of Terror during Bush's presidency left a "blank space" still to be addressed: the figure of the "Other." The attacks of 9/11 tainted the U.S. multicultural society with an increase in racism against specific groups—Muslims and Jews mostly—and also obstructed any possibility of stablishing closer relations with the Middle East (Kauffman, "World Trauma Center" 647). These aspects had prevented American novelists from including the

perspective of the "Other" in their works, most of which were also located in the domestic setting. Then end of Bush's presidency and the beginning of the Obama era opened up the possibility of providing the missing perspective, effectively presenting the final piece to the puzzle that was 9/11's memorialization—and, consequently, provided the final step towards the recovery of its resulting trauma. However, the lingering proximity in time, space and memory of the attacks (Michael 73)—only ten years after the attack which made it still too recent—made the dealing with the perspective of the "Other" impossible to attain from within the country. As a result, both Danson and Ruff's novels take their stories out of the U.S., to the neighboring Canada and a fictitious United Arab States, fulfilling, this way, scholars' demand to deterritorialize 9/11. The utilization of the counterfactual or alternative history form provides the perfect conditions to develop two stories that talk about the U.S. failures regarding 9/11 and the War on Terror, identifying the wrongdoings and dangers of the West's historical Orientalism while opening up the door for a new and better political and religious dialogue between the two cultures (Upstone 43).

Further research on the variety of literary responses to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, can be conducted, especially as the temporal distance from the event can offer new perspectives to the study of the already important corpus of texts available as well as the new ones being published. A particularly interesting line of research would be on the use of counterfactual elements within the first post-9/11 texts as examples of counterfactual thought experiments—more widely studied by scholars from the field of psychology—in the context of the mourning process. Moreover, the close examination of the two counterfactual texts included within the present study and Philip Roth's alternative history novel *The Plot Against America* (2004) would add the missing Jewish perspective to the so-called "battle of ideas" mentioned by Leuprecht et al., which has already been addressed in this paper from the Christian and the Muslim perspectives.

The analysis of the four novels in the present study defends literature's role of social criticism by supporting the view of the novel as the counterforce that provides both writers and readers with a space in which to respond to the spectacle (Gleich 163), by directly engaging both in the process of memorialization and recovery of the 9/11 trauma. Readers are no longer spectators who passively consume pictures, but active participants of a critical analysis of their social and historical context, while writers continue their role as the social conscience that addresses the darker and more painful aspects of the public, political and historical landscape.

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