9/11 Gothic:
Trauma, Mourning, and Spectrality in Novels from Don DeLillo,
Jonathan Safran Foer, Lynne Sharon Schwartz, and Jess Walter

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to all the victims of the 9/11 attack and their survivors, and to all the innocent victims of war lost since in its name.
Conventions and Permissions

In all quotations of sources, I have maintained the original spelling, punctuation and typography of the editions of the works cited in the bibliography and footnotes. However, as the novels examined are all by Americans and set in New York City, and the press most interested in publication of the thesis is in the United States, I used American conventions for spelling, punctuation, placement, internal documentation, and the bibliography (from *The MLA Handbook*, 7th ed., 2009).

The parenthetical documentation employed for print sources will appear in order by author, date, and then page. If a digitized article is used is without pagination, then no page or paragraph number will follow the author and date in parenthesis. If a digitized book is used having only location markers that would change depending on the device’s selection of font type and size, then the word “eBook” will follow author and date in parenthesis, appearing in place of a page or chapter number.

All twenty-five images supplied are either samples from my fieldwork, used with permission from museums or institutions I visited, or marked as “fair use” by their makers.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all critical and other sources (literary and electronic) have been specifically and properly acknowledged, as and when they occur in the body of my text.

Signed: Danel Olson

Date: 8 December 2016
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Abstract

9/11 Gothic

Danel Olson

Al Qaeda killings, posttraumatic stress, and the Gothic together triangulate a sizable space in recent American fiction that is still largely uncharted by critics. This thesis maps that shared territory in four novels written between 2005 and 2007 by writers who were born in America, and whose protagonists are the survivors in New York City after the World Trade Center falls.

Published in the city of their tragedy and reviewed in its media, the novels surveyed here include Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007), Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Lynne Sharon Schwartz’s *The Writing on the Wall* (2005), and Jess Walter’s *The Zero* (2006). The thesis issues a challenge to the large number of negative and dismissive reviews of the novels under consideration, making a case that under different criteria, shaped by trauma theory and psychoanalysis, the novels succeed after all in making readers feel what it was to be alive in September 2001, enduring the posttraumatic stress for months and years later.

The thesis asserts that 9/11 fiction is too commonly presented in popular journals and scholarly studies as an undifferentiated mass. In the same critical piece a journalist or an academic may evaluate narratives in which unfold a terrorist's point of view, a surviving or a dying New York City victim's perspective, and an outsider's reaction set thousands of miles away from Ground Zero. What this thesis argues for is a separation in study of the fictive strands that meditate on the burning towers, treating the New York
City survivor story as a discrete body. Despite their being set in one of the most known cities of the Western world, and the terrorist attack that they depict being the most-watched catastrophe ever experienced in real-time before, these fictions have not yet been critically ordered. Charting the salient reappearing conflicts, unsettling descriptions, protagonist decay, and potent techniques for registering horror that resurface in this New York City 9/11 fiction, this thesis proposes and demonstrates how the peculiar and affecting Gothic tensions in the works can be further understood by trauma theory, a term coined by Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimied Experience* (1996: 72). Though the thesis concentrates on developments in trauma theory from the mid 1990s to 2015, it also addresses its theoretical antecedents: from the earliest voices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that linked mental illness to a trauma (Charcot, Janet, Breuer, Freud), to researchers from mid-twentieth century (Adler, Lindemann) who studied how catastrophe affects civilian minds not previously trained to either fight war or withstand cataclysm.

Always keeping at the fore the ancient Greek double-meaning of trauma as both unhealing “wound” and “defeat,” the thesis surveys tenets of the trauma theorists from the very first of those who studied the effects on civilian survivors of disaster (of what is still the largest nightclub fire in U.S. history, which replaced front page coverage of World War II for a few days: the Cocoanut Grove blaze in Boston, 1942) up to those theorists writing in 2015. The concepts evolving behind trauma theory, this thesis demonstrates, provide a useful mechanism to discuss the surprising yearnings hiding behind the appearance of doppelgängers, possession ghosts, terrorists as monsters, empty
coffins, and visitants that appear to feed on characters’ sorrow, guilt, and loneliness within the novels under discussion.

This thesis reappraises the dominant idea in trauma studies of the mid-1990s, namely that trauma victims often cannot fully remember and articulate their physical and psychic wounds. The argument here is that, true to the theories of the Caruthian school, the victims in these novels may not remember and express their trauma completely and in a linear fashion. However, the victims figured in these novels do relate the horrors of their memory to a degree by letting their narration erupt with the unexpectedly Gothic images, tropes, visions, language, and typical contradictions, aporias, lacunae, and paradoxes. The Gothic, one might say, becomes the language in which trauma speaks and articulates itself, albeit not always in the most cogent of signs. One might easily dismiss these fleeting Gothic presences that characters conjure in the fictions under consideration as anomalous apparitions signalling nothing. However, this thesis interrogates these ghostly traces of Gothicism to find what secrets they hold. Working from the insights of psychoanalysis and its post-Freudian re-inventers and challengers, it aims to puzzle out the dimensions of characters’ mourning in its “traumagothic” reading of the texts. Characters’ use of the Gothic becomes their way of remembering, a coded language to the curious.

This thesis holds that unexpressed grief and guilt are the large constant in this grouping of novels. Characters’ grief articulation and guilt release, or the desire for symbolic amnesia, take paths that the figures often were suspicious of before 9/11: a return to organized religion, a belief in spirits, a call for vengeance, psychotherapy, substance abuse, splitting with a partner, rampant sex with nearby strangers, torture of
suspects, and killing. All the earnest attempts through the above means by the characters to express grief, vent rage, and alleviate survivor guilt do so without noticeable success. True closure towards their trauma is largely a myth. No reliable evidence surfaces from the close reading of the texts that those affected by trauma ever fully recover. However, as this thesis demonstrates, other forms of recompense come from these searches for elusive peace and the nostalgic longing for the America that has been lost to them.
Introduction

0.1 The Unidentified Bones of the World Trade Center Towers

“You spend your whole life wondering if your life has meaning, and then it all comes down to one question: 'What should we do with your bones?''

--Zach Braff, Director/Co-writer, Wish I Was Here (2014)

In the early morning of 10 May 2014, New York City fire, police, and port authority vehicles carried from a Manhattan medical examiner’s office 7,930 pouches of human remains in American flag-draped transfer cases to their new vault beneath the just-unveiled 9/11 Museum at the former Ground Zero (Farrell 2014: 18). Out of the 2,753 people of 115 nations killed on 11 September 2001 at the World Trade Center towers (WTC hereafter), 1,115 victims or 41% were never identified, and the pouches held those bits of bone never matching the DNA from personal items the families of the dead could provide (Staff of The 9/11 Encyclopedia 2012; Dobnick 2014). Giving some sense of the gruesome WTC Plaza that day, only twelve bodies found at Ground Zero could be identified by sight alone (Olbermann 2003). To extract DNA from many of the nearly 20,000 other pieces of bodies found near the site, degraded by “fire, sunlight, bacteria and even the jet fuel that poured through the towers,” was too difficult a challenge, and the personal identity of these fragments remains a mystery (Dobnick
With the unknown dead situated beneath him in bedrock 70 feet down, President Obama would come the next day to dedicate this space as a “memorial for understanding” (The White House 2014). Despite that, on the morning of remains-transfer a day before, Rosemary Cain, who lost her fire-fighter son at WTC, cried, “Don’t put them in the basement. Give them respect so 3,000 souls can rest in peace” (Dobnick 2014). Another mourner who lost his firefighter son there, a 77-year-old retired deputy fire chief named Alexander Santora, stood on the ceremonial route on 10 May 2014 wearing his official uniform and a black gag over his mouth: “We had no say in what was going on here. You can’t tell me that tour guides aren’t going to be going inside that building and saying, ‘Behind that wall are the victims of 9/11.’ That’s a dog and pony show” (Farrell 2014: 18). Adding to the angst over what was “behind that wall” would be a private, black-tie champagne event for sixty fundraising guests (including former Mayor Bloomberg and Condé Nast officials) at the 9/11 Museum the night before its official opening to the public. Joe Kisonas, a retired Fire Department of New York marshal denied entry to the museum as staff were closing to tidy for the wealthy donors, left the museum feeling violated: “You don’t have cocktail parties at a cemetery” (Edgar Sandoval, Dan Friedman, Rich Schapiro 2014). The bones of the unknown thus present a quandary: they can neither be buried in a hero’s or heroine’s tomb, sprinkled over the waters, nor interred in a particular family’s vault as they are of no identified family. However, they cannot be abandoned, either. Undeclared remains such as these breed Gothic meditations. As I shall demonstrate, working from both the historical record above and the novels below, narratives of Gothic proportions always jut out from 9/11 representations, constituting the haunted grounds that this thesis will enter and explore.
First to call the smoldering six-story WTC site of wrecked concrete, steel, and flesh “Ground Zero” on the night of 9/11 were CBS News’ Jim Axelrod and NBC News’ Rehema Ellis (Yuan 2011). On the tenth anniversary of the attacks, the owner of destroyed WTC tower 1 and 2, Larry Silverstein, opined, “Ten years from today, I suspect very few people will remember it as Ground Zero” (Barrett 2011). From its first moments, then, this thesis negotiates the processes of memory and remembrance called into place by the attacks on the WTC. Possibly Silverstein’s speculation was a very American tendency at work, or that “the chief business of the American people is business” as President Calvin Coolidge famously said four years before the devastating collapse of US stock market prices in 1929 (Coolidge 1925). One reading of Silverstein’s remark is that Americans are, above all, interested in innovating, opening markets, and making money -- not in in mourning and enshrining tragedies. I doubted Silverstein’s surmise, though, when on field research in 2014 I visited the former site of Manhattan carnage and noticed several thousand attendees at the 9/11 Museum. An interview I conducted there with the Director of the 9/11 Museum (formerly affiliated for twenty-two years with the National Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., where the vow against genocide, “Never Forget,” is sacrosanct) seconded the doubt. When I shared Silverstein’s prediction with Director Greenwald, her surprised response was: “I hope they do remember!” (Greenwald 2014).1 At least so far, Silverstein’s prophecy that Americans will largely forget Ground Zero has not come true. This thesis investigates those fictional processes through which the act of remembering is realized.

1 My full interview with Alice M. Greenwald appears as the first text of this thesis’s Appendix.
Several realities emerge from the above-detailed procession of the remains and their interment within the bedrock vault: how precious these bits of unidentified human bone are to families who lack certainty, how contested it is who should possess them or decide where they will reside, and how assuredly their story of non-closure finds its way into print. Official city vehicles carried the inconsequential physical weight of the remains of these nameless dead with ease, but in attempting to shoulder their emotional weight, people are “overwhelmed,” a key concern in the contemporary study of trauma. All this affect, this problematic carrying of the dead, provides a metaphor for the problems encountered and charted in this thesis as a whole. That is, the dead are borne away early in each novel, but somehow the dead return, time and again, to the characters who remain alive. Resurrected are the desires, habits, and perspectives of deceased colleagues, friends, and lovers from the WTC towers. It is this process of the dead returning to the living, among others, that this thesis wishes to address. Why these mourning novels, terrorist tales, memorial narratives, fictions of twenty-first century tragedy and convulsion should reach for certain Gothic motifs and structures, in particular, is the central question at hand. One reason for this merging of post-9/11 trauma fiction and the established conventions of the Gothic could be that the Gothic serves to unsettle readers more than any other literary “complex,” as Anne Williams calls it (Williams 1995: 23, 175), dwelling on the horrific, the taboo and the repellent (terrorism’s bloody outcome and hoped-for widespread dread), and achieving a frisson that mimetic realism can barely ever render. Another reason for the combination is that the terrorism novel may become predictable and formulaic if it does not either adapt, merge with another sub-genre or mode, or mutate on its own.
The ways in which 9/11 survivors engage with the dead of New York City, as well as with their own raw and grisly memories of the towers burning and the bodies falling, are the stakes of emotion around which the following four novels pivot from their earliest pages: Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007), Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Lynne Sharon Schwartz’s *The Writing on the Wall* (2005), and Jess Walter’s *The Zero* (2006). I chose this set of texts out of the many I read for three factors beyond simply their uncommonly high level of literary expression and canny representational strategies for what theorists call “the unrepresentable”: first, they all demonstrate the problem of a vexing Gothic presence not easily explained; second, they are all written by people born, living, or working in New York City, and thus the texts display two levels of trauma -- that which is imagined in the narrative and that which is lived every morning by a writer facing the actual wreckage to his or her city and knowing the effects of evil will linger long after the hundreds of tons of debris disappear; third, these fictions all had to have the painful commonality of protagonists’ friends, lovers, or relatives lost in the explosion. Thus, I decided that each text ought to feature a protagonist with a friend or relative killed in the towers. These dead seem never to let the living go, and horrid memories of the brutal spectacle of the murders irrupt upon the consciousness of the living at any time. Here the conflicted survivors face the challenge of how to mourn, to manage guilt over not dying themselves, and to cope with fear and helplessness, knowing well that there is no longer a safe place that terrorists cannot reach. After much consideration, the definition of terrorism I chose to include in my

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2 In a 19 September 2016 book launch of *Here I Am* in Houston, Texas, that I attended, Jonathan Safran Foer remembered back to 9/11 and told me that the worst part of surviving 9/11 was dread and
conceptual framework is a wide one, coming from David Punter’s *Gothic Pathologies*: “terrorism is not merely a set of activities, reducible to bombings, kidnappings and extortions… It is that which exceeds or combats the existence of a normative space within which society lives, moves, and has its being… moving [people] into a world where order will disappear” (Punter 1998: 82, 100). This seems an apt definition borne out by the texts under consideration because, again and again, their characters will find that 9/11 “exceeds” their language, explodes what was once “normative space,” and sends them deep into an abyss of fear. These crises will be intense enough, I argue, to create reader-involvement and identification in readers for characters initially distant, unfathomable (in motive) and unforthcoming (of their pasts), like the protagonist lawyer Keith Neudecker in *Falling Man* (2007). Almost every protagonist figured in the novels under consideration evokes the question raised during a 9/11 panel on trauma at Harvard University led by Robert Jay Lifton, a psychiatrist who has studied the survivors of the Hiroshima blasts, the Holocaust, and crimes of the Vietnam War over a very long career: “‘How can I understand this vastly death-saturated event? And if I can’t understand it, I can’t understand or deal with the rest of my life’.…. The deeply traumatized person is caught between wishing to talk about nothing but his or her trauma and being unable to talk about it. Therefore, one can be completely stilled” (Lifton 2009). These novels let us into that “stilled” world of catastrophic victimhood, a domain that even the discourse and practice of psychotherapy may have difficulty entering. A large number of influential early critics, however, have derided 9/11 literature because its characters seem hopelessness. In as small a space as Manhattan, nothing was safe anymore: “If you took the subway, you could die, but if you walked to work, you would probably die, too.”
relentlessly solipsistic, turbid, and unable to heal, caught in a cycle of repeating actions and re-enactment that exasperate the interpreters. Theirs is a concern to which I shall return in a later section of this chapter.

0.2 Traumagothic: Gothic Presence in the Terrorist Novel

“The inhabitant of a crypt is always a living dead, a dead entity we are perfectly willing to keep alive, but as dead, one we are willing to keep as long as we keep it, within us, intact in any way save as living.”


“The Gothic keeps being invoked to help us face and not face 9/11.”


The Gothic has always had a tremendously uneasy relationship with the dead, sensing that they are not actually so very dead, just as Bluebeard’s final wife and her sister had decided in Perrault’s 1697 version of the tale that his beard was “not so very Blue” (Opie and Opie 1980: 133). Sudden loss, at least in the body of 9/11 fictions addressed here, wears a Gothic face, the precise contours of which I shall outline. No
matter that these unknown dead are encased 70 feet in the bedrock, people have seen the bones take flesh again. Figures in the novels become convinced that they have communed with them, and, as a result, their identities are thoroughly reconfigured. Very few current interpreters of fictions about 9/11 have considered the extent to which writers of this disaster continuously turn to Gothic imaginings to register what people saw or felt over the actual catastrophe itself. Even fewer critics have addressed the extent to which writers of 9/11 fiction rely on the components and themes of 250 years of Gothic works to make readers “feel more” as Jonathan Safran Foer wrote on the acknowledgements page about his novel on the Holocaust in the Ukraine, *Everything is Illuminated* (Foer 2002). As this thesis will argue, then, the literature of 9/11 reaches for and successfully uses Gothic conventions and motifs much more than is ever credited (such as associations, character types, overarching metaphors, enigmas, revelations, passions and dreads, violations and punishments). Perhaps fictional or non-journalistic renderings of communal traumas (national or international) ally themselves with the Gothic because this mode or complex possesses the lies that can tell certain emotional

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3 It would be hyperbole to say that every museum has bones hidden in its bedrock that visitors walk over (as with the 9/11 Museum), yet a recent illustrated study shows just what has been stashed from view -- because of its frail state, controversy, holy powers, or echoes of an unacceptable past. Molly Oldfield in *The Secret Museum* goes around the world to fifty specimen rooms behind closed museum doors (where usually “nobody ever goes in, nobody ever comes out”) and finds that “usually there is more hidden away than there is on display” (Oldfield 2013: 12). The 9/11 Museum may well have objects presented for view in the coming years that challenge or reinforce some of the conclusions in this thesis.

4 A few noteworthy articles, though as yet no book-length studies on the connection of the Gothic to 9/11 novels exist: Kuo John Sheng’s article, “9/11 as American Gothic: Terror and Historical Darkness in Patrick McGrath’s *Ghost Town*” (2007) and Jerrold E. Hogle’s “History, Trauma and the Gothic in Contemporary Western Fictions” (2014).
truths. Whatever the monster is in twenty-first century terrorism (the Al Qaeda-trained fighter, the Allied soldier gone mad, the torturer from the Coalition of the Willing, the ISIS zealots of religious and civil wars who brandish the decapitating blade, a launcher of invasions costly in blood and treasure, a politician for whom bodies are just statistics, a visitant in the shape of a blown-apart body, or a ghost voice that will not hush), the Gothic has seen them in some shape before, and can both summon and banish them again.

The portrayals of sudden ruin in the novels we witness here exploit all aspects that journalism and historical writing officially eschew: subjectivity, affect, passion, irrationality, and the supernatural. Each of these trauma novels has an identifiably Gothic foundation, and the work of this thesis is to investigate these various layers, showing the Gothic features, personality, and basis by pointing to at least four functional Gothic elements in each fiction. If these novels of terrorist tragedy do use motifs derived from the Gothic sphere, it may well attest to the fact that the Gothic is not always merely titillation of the darkest kind, nor always mindless horror shows or thoughtless diversions or circulating library hackwork no better than, as Coleridge unforgettably snubbed in Biographia Literaria, “gaming, swinging, or swaying on a chair or gate; spitting over a bridge; smoking; snuff-taking” (Coleridge 1817). More than a kind of literary frippery, then, the Gothic forms part of a vigorous study of time, place, injury, memory, the secret, the uncanny, and attempts at healing, indeed, all those concerns articulated in contemporary trauma theory of the last twenty years, a system of ideas that, along with Gothic studies and cultural criticism on terrorism, will draw into a three-part conversation with one another.
If, as Angela Carter postulated in 1974, “We live in Gothic times” (Carter 1987: 132), then the Gothic might lend itself now as the most useful and appropriate mode for representing the terror post-9/11. The conceptual framework or pre-existing ideas that this thesis extrapolates from are threefold: 1) Often the dead from disasters possess the living witnesses, largely in behavior, obsessions, and even new careers, and physical relocations (as discussed in the medical reports on victims from psychiatrists Lindemann and Adler after the Cocoanut Grove fire). Thus, I explore in these texts how characters are often losing their identity, often one of horror and Gothic writing’s chief fears and vehicles. I will show that this pathological process not only happens in real life but in the novels of 9/11 terror, too. 2) The line often vanishes altogether between victim and victimhood in the same individual after terrorism, and the idea of autoimmunity in the state moves us beyond stable, fixed notions of national victimhood (from Derrida’s philosophy on terror). Much mirroring exists between cultural / religious adversaries (as developed by Derrida, Žižek, David Punter, and others). 3) Dreams and visions and gaps in memory, along with radical uncertainty, reveal our fears, sadness, lies, longings, and testing of limits (as explained from Freud and his re-interpreters). Thus derives my sense that characters “phantomize” their trauma to utter it. Caruth’s so-called “inexpressible trauma” actually finds its voice all along in the novels through Gothic phenomena and transformation (when a trauma story is by turns a quasi-Gothic novel), with disguised beings, references to Gothic scenes unbearable and perverse, and to encrypted language demanding decoding. After the attack, the dead inhabit the living, and they speak. They are not supernatural wisps to be vented like smoke; rather, they are the very shades of terrorism’s lasting fires. And just as the novels of William Faulkner and Toni Morrison
held up dark mirrors to the metaphoric ghosts of miscegenation and the subjugation of African-Americans in *Light in August* (1932) and *Beloved* (1987) respectively, so the terrorism novel can presently hold that frightening mirror up to citizens who live in a transitional time when privacy and freedoms are curtailed in order to expand government power. It is the power of heightened surveillance that American presidents and intelligence agencies have averred and many have questioned, the enhanced watching that exists, officially, to observe and apprehend terrorists before the next debilitating attack.

This thesis identifies those places where the obsessions and concepts within trauma theory (and trauma novels) and Gothic studies (and Gothic novels) converge, recalling Jerrold E. Hogle’s insight that “Gothic fiction has always begun with trauma -- usually multiple kinds of trauma at the outset and in retrospect” (Hogle 2014: 72). The interpretation of a novel based on these linkages I have termed a traumagothic conception. What keeps a terrorist novel or a Gothic novel from becoming just another predictable product of the culture industry is their merging together, as these novels do, starting with Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007). We recall that when Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick published her dissertation on Gothic conventions in 1976 as *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1980), she noted, with an accuracy that can be quickly verified by our memories of the texts, that Gothic novels are conventional to an almost oppressive degree, slavishly following certain patterns of *mise-en-scène*, incident and discovery, conflict and complication, and endlessly recycling worn hero types and models of villainy. This claim of relentless formula-following holds especially true if, like Sedgwick, we limit its insights to eighteenth and very early nineteenth century Gothic fiction:
You know the important features … an oppressive ruin, a wild landscape, a Catholic or feudal society. You know about the trembling sensibility of the heroine and the impetuosity of her lover. You know about the tyrannical older man with the piercing glance who is going to imprison and try to rape or murder them. You know something about the novel’s form: it is likely to be discontinuous and convoluted, perhaps incorporating tales within tales, changes of narrators, and such framing devices as found manuscripts or interpolated histories…. Certain characteristic preoccupations will be aired. These include the priesthood and monastic institutions; sleep-like and deathlike states; subterranean spaces and live burial; doubles; the discovery of obscured family ties; affinities between narrative and pictorial art; possibilities of incest; unnatural echoes or silences, unintelligible writings, and the unspeakable; garrulous retainers; the poisonous effects of guilt and shame; nocturnal landscapes and dreams; apparitions from the past; Faust- and Wandering Jew-like figures; civil insurrections and fires; the charnel house and the madhouse. (Sedgwick 1980: 8-9)

With a slightly conspiratorial aside to the reader, established by the repetition of “you know … you know,” Sedgwick shakes her head at the wonder of it: that a sub-genre can thrive, yet simultaneously be so uncreative and formulaic. The questions become, then: How does the Gothic avoid benumbing readers with shop-worn conceits and characters now, and is the same instinct for holding to conventions (or an appetite for predictable destruction) held by trauma literature of the last twenty years? On first reflection, critics
might hold that the same could never be said of trauma literature. It is much more varied: setting differs constantly (near a Western country or an Eastern; on land or sea); tone and pace are not replicated; any social status and age group and gender may be focused upon (poor people or rich or middle class; young or old); the wrongdoer could be anyone (from an army to a corporation to one’s parent to oneself); and the trauma could be a blow from the outside or an unhealing wound that is self-administered. And yet Sedgwick’s simultaneous wariness, scorn, and wonder over the Gothic mode’s narrowness and predictability can come back to us with trauma novels, too. Despite some of the trauma novels’ coverage of an Al Qaeda attack less than twenty years old, the literature of trauma appears, at times, to be as overworked, predictable and formulaic as the Gothic itself.

Before addressing the conventions of the trauma novel, it is important to foreground the particular conceptualization of trauma that founds and underpins this thesis. Throughout the vast and diverse field of contemporary trauma studies, it is the work of Cathy Caruth that is most frequently cited, affirmed, expanded, deconstructed, denounced, or disputed. Trauma for Caruth, a concept probably most clearly stated in Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History and consistently adhered to throughout her later works, is “a wound inflicted upon the mind that breaks the victim’s experience of time, self, and the world and that causes great emotional anguish in the individual” (Caruth 1996: 3-4). With disruptions in temporality come breakage in memory, and lost memory affects individuals’ identities. This is much the same concept affirmed and applied in Caruth’s other works, including a psychoanalytical and history-themed issue of American Imago (1991), Trauma: Explorations in Memory (1995) and
However, as the novels analyzed in this thesis demonstrate, post-9/11 trauma narratives supplement Caruth’s definition of trauma with a new “experience of time,” adding a sense of “emotional anguish” and the presence of the dead to usher a change in identity in those who survive. In the seventeenth-century sense of the word, trauma is not a self-inflicted wound (OED) but a blow or injury from the outside. We will keep that outside sense in mind (as in the outside attack of Al Qaeda upon New York City), though we must also attend and analyze the self-inflicted wounds by these 9/11 novels’ characters (from substance abuse, to risky sexual behaviors, to suicide attempts). We must include another seldom mentioned shade of trauma’s meaning, that of “defeat” (OED).

In Caruth’s opening summary of trauma, distilled from the American Psychiatric Association’s diagnosis of thousands of patients suffering Posttraumatic Stress Disorder first indexed in their *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*⁵ (DSM-III) in 1980, appear terms that the Gothic itself uses as motifs: “The pathology consists [in its …] reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (Caruth 1995: 4-5). Besides obsession and possession, Caruth relates a number of other recurring symptoms of trauma,

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⁵ Note that whilst the 4th edition of the *DSM* (1994) will be in mind when we work with the next wave of trauma theorists who were influenced by it and cite it, we now have the 5th edition from 2013 with a much more expansive view of trauma (widening of the range of victims which exists) that informs this thesis. Much of the very latest trauma theory in print still has yet to reflect the latest *DSM-V* formulation of PTSD. Where there are vital differences in the American Psychiatric Association’s understanding of trauma between 1980 and 2013, they will be noted here.
including re-enactment, belatedness, guilt, disrupted memory, loss of identity, nostalgia, meditation on ruin, and increased arousal, not necessarily sexual, but what the DSM-IV-Text Revision diagnoses as “hyper vigilance, loss of temper, hyperactivity, exaggerated startle reflexes” (American Psychiatric Association 2000: 467-468). All of these forms of suffering and affliction appear in the trauma novels analyzed in this thesis, and in most other trauma works to which the argument, in passing, makes reference, including fiction and memoirs detailing schizophrenia, substance abuse, sexual molestation, extreme parental neglect, or human trafficking and smuggling (Olson 2008a). In trauma fiction, as in the Gothic, there remains a definite pattern of repeating motifs. But as I demonstrate elsewhere (Olson 2007, 2008b, 2009, 2011a, 2013b), the Gothic is one of the most impulsive and adaptive of sub-genres, able to split and reform the cells of texts in other categories, routinely combining with Westerns, quests and adventures, mysteries and detective stories, war accounts, shudder tales, romances, melodramas, science fiction dystopias, and even merging for moments with otherwise safely-banal contemporary realism. And the Gothic has no one predictable setting or abode: flourishing in tundra (30 Days of Night) or in the tropics (Wide Sargasso Sea), in crowded streets (Dracula) or barren wastes (Frankenstein; Cold Skin), and even into deepest outer space (Lifeforce), it seems to slouch, creep, fly or crawl to places it should not be, and therein lies the mode’s vitality: the possibility for unpredictability when so much else has been charted in the sub-genre it enters. And now in recent American fiction, as this thesis demonstrates, the

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6This delaying is a shattered, unhealing response to an unexpected or overwhelming violence that is not fully understood as it occurs, intruding later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, paralysis, shock, and other replaying actions based upon Freud’s idea of Nachtraglichkeit from his unfinished "A Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895).
Gothic creates an alluring synergy when it fuses with trauma narratives, especially 9/11 ones, expressing the ineffable, unfaceable, and uncapturable.

Caruth’s influential ideas have presented a number of intriguing challenges and tensions. Among the most articulate dissenters are Ruth Leys (Leys 2000: 17) with her questioning of the tyranny of using “Western-inspired notions of trauma and PTSD” for Caruth’s concepts; Dominick LaCapra (2001) with disagreement over what he sees as the essentialist and non-historical underpinnings to Caruth’s interpretations; Roger Luckhurst (2008) who wonders about how “unknown” the wound really is and whether Caruth solves the contradiction of how one can be affected by something but not know it; and Michelle Balaev (2012) who consistently contests the marginalization of nature and spatial particularity in Caruth’s formulations. Whilst this thesis does not propose a new model for the reading of literary trauma, it does engage with relevant theoretical debates within trauma studies, where relevant. Its primary contribution to the study of trauma lies in its account of a predominant fictional concern that remains, for the most part, overlooked by this body of theoretical works, namely, its numerous points of thematic and conceptual overlaps with Gothic studies, not least of all in those characters who are not only possessed by “image or event,” but also by a spirit of the dead.

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7 For more on the recent debates arising within contemporary trauma theory, see Michelle Balaev’s lucid yet not reductive, “Trends in Trauma Theory” (2012), Marinella Rodi-Risberg’s probing “The Nature of Trauma in American Novels (book review)” (2001), Susannah Radstone’s polemical “Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics” (2007), and Oxford University’s up to date and extensive, “Oxford Bibliographies” with the subject “Trauma Theory” (Susannah Radstone, Janet Walker, and Noah Shenker 2013). One of the longer treatments most interested in trauma theory’s handling of paradoxes and aporias, and how these are leading to dissenting schools is Roger Luckhurst’s thorough The Trauma Question (2008).
0.3 Criticism of 9/11 Fiction

“Today, again, the world narrative belongs to the terrorists.”

--Don DeLillo, “In the Ruins of the Future” (2001: 33)

Before discussing possession in Falling Man and in the 9/11 novels that came before it, it is appropriate to survey some recent critical responses to fictions written about the Al Qaeda attack. As the novels are recent and the critical reception relatively scant, this thesis will also make recourse to reviews in the popular press in order to assess cultural reactions. The overwhelming response to 9/11 fiction, especially in journalistic circles so far but also in more rigorous scholarly treatments, is that it has not delivered what it was to be alive in those times. The appraisals, again and again, are somewhat negative, even entirely dismissive. On the other hand, in many of the critical accounts, evaluators present few criteria as to how a “successful” 9/11 novel might read, perhaps because no model has yet had its qualities indexed, or its undeniable power largely agreed upon. Here, a number of pressing questions present themselves: is the novel supposed to capture what it was to walk through smoke and ash, and face the dread that more violence was to come? Does the ideal 9/11 novel analyze the destabilizing effects of terrorism on relationships (the arrival of “burning-skyline sex,” domestic abuse, an increase in separation and divorce)? If so, then the set of novels considered in this thesis would possess the basic operating obsessions and should be evaluated seriously, rather than be quickly disregarded, as they all too often have been.
Roland Merullo was the first American writer to allude to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, according to *Commentary* critic D. G. Meyers (2011). In a 2002 novel-as-memoir of growing up in the 1960s, *In Revere, in Those Days*, Merullo observes in passing that “people did not bomb airplanes in those days, or fly them into buildings” (Merullo 30). By the 10th anniversary of the plunge of planes into the WTC complex, the Pentagon, and an abandoned field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, media sources commenced to hunt, track, and tout the great 9/11 novel, or even a moderately impressive one. From around the world, critics appraised the body of 9/11 novels, finding 2006 and 2011 to be peak years of 9/11 novel production (Kohari 2011) and articulated, with depressing regularity, a range of negative assessments for a wide variety of reasons, not all of which seem to be warranted. Besides giving some historical record of the unease Americans in the press felt about the novels that contended with the monsters of terrorism, the initial reaction in the press is worth examining because it affects later scholarly research and public expectations alike.

Jimmy So, in *The Daily Beast*, for instance, judged that “even the best 9/11 novels only deal with 9/11 in oblique ways” (So 2013). D. G. Meyers seconded that and concluded that Claire Messud in *The Emperor’s Children* “is more interested in the drama of a romantic breakup, which she dramatizes very well, than in the trauma of 9/11” (Meyers 2011). More complaints from Meyers followed: Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* “is more absorbed with cricket than terrorism”; too much of Nicholas Rinaldi’s [*Between Two Rivers*] “is padding,” and, whilst there are “provocative connections between political terrorism and violent crime” in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*, the book shows an “implausible ending” (Meyers 2011). Despite the implausibility from the historical record
that she invites in, Meyers concludes the best novels about 9/11 actually took place before 9/11, namely, “Joseph Conrad’s Secret Agent and Philip Roth’s American Pastoral. The 9/11 books add little that cannot be learned, and more memorably, from them” (Meyers 2011).

On the other end of the spectrum, however, critics fault the novels under discussion not for their drama, but for their dullness. An editor for The New York Times Book Review determines that of the thirty 9/11 narratives his paper reviewed, none can “stack up to nonfiction," and “none has seized the public imagination.” There are “pretentious ones (Don DeLillo’s Falling Man) and sentimental ones (Jonathan Safran Foer’s Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close). But sorting through the pile of so-called 9/11 novels is a sad exercise, one that grows more pointless by the day” (Garner 2008).

He still awaits “the bracing, wide-screen, many-angled novel that will leave a larger, more definitive intellectual and moral footprint on the new age of terror” (Garner 2008). Besides desiring a novel to be more akin to a Christopher Nolan film (say, Inception) as Dwight Garner would appear to wish, many critics find that the novels lack a focusing drive. Others find the novels not only turgid but turbid, somehow paralyzed by the momentous need to memorialize, and in the process losing a narrative that compels readers. Yvonne Zipp “dutifully read [the novels] and wished they hadn’t felt so duty-bound to say Something Important. None of those novels had that tuning-fork moment that comes when reading something great. And none seemed to grab the public imagination” (Zipp 2011). Ruth Franklin in her ten-year review of 9/11 fiction in The New Republic blasts John Updike, noting the author “admitted that his research for the novel was superficial -- he even consulted a book called The Koran for Dummies”
Anis Shivani disagrees with Franklin, but only up to a point: “John Updike tried very, very hard, and we were grateful to him at the time, but now his earnestness on the topic wears ill. They were all just flailing and failing, and we were making excuses for them… 9/11 has become filler, agitprop candy, drama's rape, the magician's cap (and cape) we all put on when we don't know what to do. Its default mode run amok, secondary input masquerading as primary insight” (Franklin 2010). Thus the critical contention here is that famous authors felt obliged to write on the tragedy of 9/11, and readers felt obliged to buy the books out of a reverence for what headlines called “the Day that Changed the World,” but both parties were wearied by the ponderousness of the prose.

Arguing in the opposite direction, critics sensed that the fatal flaw in the 9/11 novels was that their authors could not make the losses distinct, so ended up pursuing the trivial. Laura Miller, in *Salon*, for instance, finds 9/11 simply to be “kryptonite to novelists”: “Charged with looking beneath, behind and around such images [of the WTC towers collapse], the novelist comes up against the question of what makes these particular violent deaths so very different from every other violent death. That isn’t easy to answer, and any answer you do come up with is likely to sound disrespectful, cynical, unfeeling and insufficiently solemn” (Miller 2011). Richard Gray complains that in this cataclysmic fiction, “all life here is personal: cataclysmic public events are measured purely and simply in terms of their impact on the emotional entanglements of their protagonists … [and this] reduces a turning point in national and international history to little more than a stage in a sentimental education” (Gray 2009: 135). In assent with this much, Michael Rothberg notes that in American 9/11 fiction, “epochal change remains
separated from individual lives” (Rothberg 2009: 1469). Again, more charges of unearned emotion are leveled at the authors of the novels to be analyzed in the thesis: “A novelist may decide to push onward anyway, whether into sentimentality (Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close) or smarmy self-aggrandizement (The Good Life), but in such cases, the results feel thin, vaguely false and meretricious” (Miller 2011). Art and culture critic Kevin Canfield in Salon concurs, and may issue the most blistering cry:

Forget the best Sept. 11 novel -- there are far more contenders for the most shameful and embarrassing…. There’s also been some embarrassingly bad prose -- lots of it by authors who should know better. For some writers, 9/11 offered an excuse to write about the anatomies of sexy Western temptresses or the siren song that is rock ‘n’ roll performed by men in spandex. For others, it was simply an obligatory and careless plot point tossed into the mix, a cynical narrative device meant to energize a flagging story line. (Canfield 2011)

The worst offenders, Canfield alleges, are also some of America’s better known: Andre Dubus III’s The Garden of Last Days, Tom Robbins’ gonzo Villa Incognito, and Jennifer Haigh’s and Nicholas Sparks’ terrorism-romances The Condition and Dear John. Citing multiple damning lines from each of the fictions, Canfield (echoing Meyers) laments that their endings were less a resolution than a concession: “I don’t know how to finish this novel, so I’ll add a dash of 9/11 and call it a day” (Canfield 2011). This claim of Canfield’s seems the least evidenced. In actuality, the endings for the narratives analyzed in this thesis tend to be of three kinds: the weary protagonist 1) has a vision, 2) leaves a marriage or a home having had big doses of “terror sex” beforehand, or 3) collapses,
crying out in his or her forlorn state. Nevertheless, continuing with the charges, Canfield levies most of the blame on the two literary lions of the group, finding myriad examples of how they lose their way. Both Dubus and Updike, it is said by Canfield, trip over giving too much luscious detail to the exotic dancers in their novels.

Although not literally stated as such by Canfield, the implication of his critique is that these fictions, considering that their remit was the impending death of civilians, fell unwisely into an unintentionally and erotically obsessive and comic sphere. *Terrorist*, for example, “spent a lot of time leering at ladies [at sexually oriented businesses].” Updike’s main character is named Ahmad. He’s a devout Muslim -- and a big-time breast man … taking note of ‘the tops of her breasts, exposed by a loose-necked springtime blouse.’ … [They] ‘bounce’ and wing’; they’re ‘white as soap’ or ‘dark as eggplants’; they’re ‘freckled’ and they ‘have crescents of shadow beneath their rounded weight’” (quoted in Canfield 2011). It is a point well taken that Updike (d. 2009) has been enthralled with women’s bodies ever since Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom commingled with part-time prostitute Ruth Leonard in *Rabbit, Run* (1960), and he may be in thrall to women’s bodies in this posthumous fiction. However, he was also reflecting the record of club forays by the so-called “Hamburg Cell” of terrorists who came to America, so he might be excused of this charge. Dubus, similarly, in *The Garden of Last Days* features an Al Qaeda operative named Bassam who holds up 160 one-hundred-dollar bills when he visits “the Puma Club for Men” (Dubus 2008: 16). Of course, odd connections are made in Bassam’s head, which Canfield objects to, including this deduction: “This dancing woman upon the stage wears nothing but the hat of cowboys… The singer David Lee Roth [front man of Van Halen], an American Jew, [who] wore a cowboy hat like this
This David Lee Roth, if there was time, Bassam would find him and kill him” (Dubus 2008: 90). On the one side, this is quixotic, bizarre, nearly too absurd; on the other, a number of sources report that, in order to blend in, but possibly for the less mission-related reasons of tasting and retasting the forbidden “evil place one last time” (Dubus 2008: 26), the terrorists of 9/11 did in fact visit sexually oriented businesses frequently (The 9/11 Commission Report). Thus it seems reasonable for a novelist to conjecture on what incongruously erotic thoughts the terrorists may have had at the clubs and how their experiences “in country” may have made them detest American culture all the more, its strange blend of attraction and repulsion, its almighty dollar and impossible fantasy, all the rusted tin beneath its promise of Las Vegas gold. Indeed, if foreign actors in American films have come under Al Qaeda targeting, as the FBI warned Russell Crowe as he was about to accept an Academy Award for Gladiator on 21 March 2001 (Staff writer of The Scotsman: 2005), then it may be no more patently absurd for a fictionalised David Lee Roth to be in the crosshairs, too. Though this thesis primarily exams the victim’s perspective, it is noteworthy that Hammad, the hijacker pilot of American Airlines flight 11 in Falling Man, also frequents “gentleman’s clubs.” An answer to Canfield is that both Updike’s novel and Dubus’s would be amiss if they did not feature this lurid, liberated, seemingly ironic activity of the fundamentalist terrorists’ American lives. Certainly the women who dance and strip at the parlor for Bassam in The Garden of Last Days, who in his misogyny he blights as “these dirty kufar who would laughingly pull him between their legs straight to the eternal fire” (Dubus 2008: 25), form a foil to the virgins that, he is told, will await Bassam and his fellow attackers. What reviewers may dismiss, then, as mere decadence in 9/11 fiction, mere titillation, may
actually be closer to the historical record of terrorists’ activities and quite necessary to dwell upon in order to begin to understand them.

In none of the ten-year retrospectives that surfaced in many journals around 2011 are any 9/11 fictions described as “superlative” or “destined to be read in the next fifty years.” None are given hoped-for Gothic adjectives either, such as “sublime,” grotesquely “abject,” or hauntingly “endarkened.” Yet, as we have seen, it seems the criteria used to rate them so far seem questionable: narrow, unusually subjective, unaware of how trauma manipulates a text, and unforgiving of the formal and thematic experimentation needed to register trauma. Shoring the bias against 9/11 novels is this last reason cited for the novels’ failures: time -- not enough of it to digest the events and make a masterwork from them. This argument is well summed up by literary editor Erica Wagner of The Times: “Ten years is not a long time from the standpoint of fiction…. If you look at Dickens's novels, for instance, they appear to be contemporary to his times. But often he was writing about his childhood -- that in itself is a distance of about 40 or so years" (quoted in Kohari 2011). Mohsin Hamid (author of The Reluctant Fundamentalist in 2007) seconds the view that a great terrorism novel’s redwood-paced growth is necessary: "Fiction is a long, rambling encounter with many things. Fiction re-complicates what politicians wish to oversimplify…. Events should have as many definitions as the number of people who experience them. Pearl Harbor was many other things also: it was a kiss, it was a swim in a lake, it was a fisherman wondering what the commotion was, it was a flock of birds taking flight" (quoted in Kohari 2011). This seems an ironic finding considering Hamid’s Camus-inspired The Reluctant Fundamentalist took only seven
years to write, and yet was Booker-Prize shortlisted and an international bestseller, a novel which *The Guardian* called “decade-defining” (Hamid 2011).

Still, the fallacy in the “mass-murder is still too close in time” argument (Kohari 2011) is that it ignores the presence of highly influential works that have appeared in the midst of the terrors they covered. Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Henri Barbusse’s anti-WWI novel *Le Feu* (*Under Fire*, 1916) and Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American* (1956) all critiqued the respective terrors contemporary to the hour of their publication. Announcing the death of the 9/11 novel, too, seems premature and unwise, but that is no less than Anis Shivani’s point. He delivers the eulogy:

> By now every variation of the 9/11 novel has been exploited…. The most exploited variation was this. Dysfunctional family, grieving over all sorts of superficial things, split up over non-issues, maybe with children and parents inhabiting opposite coasts. Somehow 9/11 brings them all together…. It is the event to end all interfamily disputes. The image of people falling off towers, flying to their death, somehow puts petty family grievances in their true perspective. A lot of novelists tried their hands at this genre, and no doubt will continue to do so until at least 2020. Or maybe until environmental collapse finally makes it into the novelist's imagination. (Shivani 2011)

It is true that dysfunctional families arise in all the novels surveyed in the thesis, and part of the investigation is to show the patterns of dysfunction. However, in none of the novels does “9/11 [bring] them all together.” Instead, 9/11 is a splintering force, causing wounds that people can barely understand or articulate as the memories of trauma intrude
without warning, and usually compelling characters to go inward to an unhealthy and isolating degree. Shivani’s analysis may too easily condemn the novels’ inner lives, plots and conflicts before making a sustained or authentic attempt to understand them.

It should be acknowledged that some noteworthy evaluators of fiction recently apologized for their minimizing of 9/11 novels, and we may sometime witness that change of judgment in relation to DeLillo’s novel and the others covered here. With disarming honesty, Ruth Franklin of *The New Republic* expressed regrets for her premature critical scorn in 2004, namely that “no important fiction dealing with that day had yet appeared” (Franklin 2011). As she later confessed in the same journal, “Every critic, I’d venture, has written something that he or she would like to take back... Blame it on the fever for documentation that arose in the wake of the attacks, perhaps” (Franklin 2011).

Surveying the majority of critical viewpoints above, we see trending several strains of complaint to these novels’ approach to catastrophe: the 9/11 novel has been too serious or too flippant, too sexual or too asexual, too earnest or too ironic, or too weak for the challenge of understanding and capturing even a part of what is called, in trauma theory, “the unrepresentable.” Considering the daunting task and the resulting damaging reviews over the last thirteen years, we may see Martin Amis’s comment, less than a year after the disaster, to be prescient:

> After a couple of hours at their desks, on September 12, 2001, all the writers on earth were reluctantly considering a change of occupation. I remember thinking that I was like Josephine, the opera-singing mouse in the Kafka story: “Sing? She can't even squeak.” A novel is politely known
as a work of the imagination; and the imagination, that day, was of course fully commandeered, and to no purpose. (Amis 2002)

The compulsion to write about the terrorism was irresistible for writers, Amis suggests, yet capturing the complexity of the story was too much of a challenge. Readers and initial reviewers were reluctant to accept it because the fiction could not create “the unrepresentable.” As Elizabeth Anker in *American Literary History* pronounces it, 9/11 is “a, if not *the*, paradigmatic postmodern event, given that it casts open the competing desires mobilized by the spectacle, lays bare the intimacy between art and terror, and reveals the violent underside of the postmodern sublime” (Anker 2011: 476). Still, the reaction is, as Director Alice Greenwald mentioned to me in interview, that very little

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8 There may be no tragedy in our lifetimes causing writers to so doubt their imaginative powers. At some point in their careers, many writers, if their memoirs speak true, face excruciating crises of confidence, but 9/11 was a communal, simultaneous, and sustained crisis of creation that seemed to lay waste their powers. What Amis admits as “a feeling of gangrenous futility” overtaking him about his own work or his “pitiable babble” also infected a number of major writers (Amis 2002): Jay McInerney reports “a period of intense self-examination and self-loathing after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center…. I worked as a volunteer for a couple of months, feeding the national guardsmen and the rescue workers near Ground Zero, listening to the rumours and the strange paranoid lore of the place” (McInerney 2005), whilst Norman Mailer told him “to wait ten years” (2005). Mailer’s advice would appear to fight his practice as he wrote the novels *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967) and *The Armies of the Night* (1968) with the Vietnam War in full fire. Following McInerney’s feeling, Ian McEwan claimed in an interview to have found it “wearisome to confront invented characters” post-9/11 (quoted in Mishra 2007). Last, America’s most prolific literary novelist Joyce Carol Oates, who wrote no novels about 9/11 (only a short story “The Mutants,” featuring a woman trapped in her Lower Manhattan apartment on the day of the crash), admitted the unsayable, “Words fail us” (Oates 2001): “This does seem to be about the right time for these novels to be coming out” (quoted in Wyatt 2005). Interestingly, Oates, perhaps America’s most influential living Gothic novelist (interview by Olson 2014: 103), admits that novels may not even be the medium of choice for this disaster: “But the greatest art form to deal with this might be film, because it can capture the hallucinatory nature of the long hours of that siege” (quoted in Wyatt 2005).
within this fiction leaves us awestruck or challenged, and the event was already witnessed
in real-time on screens by an estimated two billion people (Greenwald 2010: 118) which
limits the impressions these texts can make. Anker continues to make the case that 9/11
texts ruin themselves largely through their simplicity:

… [D]issatisfaction [reigns] over how [this] emergent genre has rendered
the trauma and other crises spawned by 9/11. Whether through their satire
of historical amnesia, implicit apologies for their self-sabotaging
protagonists, or reduction of 9/11’s representational stakes to the spectacle,
the question remains whether these narratives have imposed explanatory
prisms on 9/11 that facilely manage its complexity, despite their biting
sociopolitical diagnoses. (Anker 2011: 478)

If such consistently negative appraisals from the popular press on both sides of the
Atlantic are representative and critically-accurate, then either a) 9/11 fictions have
systematically failed in their powers to move and involve readers, to register terror, and
to present a time and its outer manifestations of characters’ anxieties, or b) reviewers’
evaluative schemes are limited, or c) a combination of defects in 9/11 fiction and its
criticism exists. As I will discuss in Chapter One, some of these popular assumptions and
value judgments work their way into more formal, academic literary discourse.
Chapter 1. Deserting the Dead, Possessed by the Dead: Don DeLillo’s 
Falling Man (2007)

1.1 Criticism Specific to Falling Man

“This was so vast and terrible that it was outside imagining even as it happened.… We could not catch up with it. But it was real, punishingly so, an expression of the physics of structural limits and a void in one's soul, and there was the huge antenna falling out of the sky, straight down, blunt end first, like an arrow moving backwards in time…. The event itself has no purchase on the mercies of analogy or simile.… Is it too soon?… Time is scarcer now…. We are all breathing the fumes of Manhattan, where traces of the dead are everywhere, in the soft breeze of the river, on rooftops and window, in our hair and on our clothes.”

--Don DeLillo, “In the Ruins of the Future” (2001: 39)

Falling Man is largely the story of Keith Neudecker, a middle-aged lawyer who escapes from the high reaches of the burning WTC north tower on 9/11, but not before helplessly trying to remove his best friend Rumsey from the office near his. Its three subplots, like the main plot, all revolve around memory. In the first, sympathetic Lianne, Neudecker’s wife, works to counsel those who are losing their memory (primarily early
Alzheimer’s disease sufferers). This job is understandably nearly unbearable for her because her father fatally shot himself in the head after a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s. Alongside the triggers of that traumatic memory comes another: Lianne keeps walking down streets where above her a heavily-harnessed performer named David Janiak\(^9\) re-enacts WTC jumper photos by hurling himself off Manhattan buildings.\(^{10}\) Though always appearing in the daylight, Janiak resembles to her now traumatised and Gothicised-imagination “a trump card in a tarot deck” with his “name in Gothic type, the figure twisting down in a stormy night sky” (DeLillo 2007: 221), a “falling angel” and a “beauty,” albeit “horrific” (DeLillo 2007: 22), which to Jerrold E. Hogle shows a trauma-born “displacement of [Janiack’s act] that is itself incomprehensible” (Hogle 2014: 80).

The second subplot has Lianne’s German father-in-law, suspected of former-Red Brigades guerilla actions, wondering if the current Mideast terror against New York City equates with German terror in the 1960s. And in the final subplot, Hammad, a terrorist on the plane that crashes into Neudecker’s building, keeps remembering his early unease and

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\(^9\) Sonia Baelo-Allué identifies a real individual claiming he inspired the character David Janiak for DeLillo with leaps that occurred two years before the novel’s publication, the “Brooklyn photographer Kerry Skarbakka, who staged a number of jumps from the roof of Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art on June 14, 2005” and exhibited his photos as *The Struggle to Right Oneself* (2007: 73). A key difference not acknowledged is that Skarbakka lived, and his moments in suspended peril did not take place in front of New Yorkers in the days following the attacks. Skarbakka’s photos are often instead over fairly short distances (e.g., a stairwell) and his face shows an almost comic expression of surprise, rather than fear of impact.

\(^{10}\) The leaps profoundly disturb most viewers in *Falling Man*, except for children beneath the jumper, who yell “Jump, Jump!”, and for the Mayor who dismisses him as “moronic.” However, Marie-Christine Leps incisively concludes that Janiak makes a “fictional stillness designed to give memory and provoke new modes of knowing … a different form of relation to the other, born of ethical responsibility rather than reason alone” (2010: 187).
disagreement about killing civilians with the true-believer ideologue who was his teacher in terror. Hammad is a barely disguised version of the leader of the so-called Hamburg cell, Mohamed Atta, who finally shows an “allegiance of the living to those who were dead and defeated” throughout Arab history (DeLillo 2007: 78). Jerrold E. Hogle perceptively calls Hammad the novel’s “Gothic primal destroyer,” committing the Gothic “primal crime” (Hogle 2014: 80).

As the narrative begins, two jets crash into the towers. Dust and ash cover all, bits of once-important paper float throughout Manhattan, and the odour of burnt flesh sickens. Neudecker, estranged from his wife for a year and a half, in automaton-like fashion plods to her apartment rather than his own on that killing day. Mysteriously, she later describes taking him to the hospital “step by step, like walking like a child” (DeLillo 2007: 9). The rest of the novel concentrates on their attempts to restore their marriage and improve his strained relationship with his ten-year-old son Justin. However, Neudecker’s visit and brief affair with a fellow survivor named Florence, his wife Lianne’s new way of seeing violence and peace after the terrorism, and Neudecker’s inability to confront, reveal, or

11 Born in Kafr el-Sheikh, Egypt (1 September 1968) and attending the same university at the same time as myself in the late 1980s (the American University in Cairo), the suicide-attack ringleader’s name is given elsewhere in the reviews and in the fiction cited as Mohamed Mohamed el-Amir Awad el-Sayed Atta, Awad Al Sayad, Muhammad al-Amir, Mohamed Elsayed, Muhammad Atta, Mohammad El Amir, and Mohammad Atta (Burke 2003; Corbin 2003; Yosri Fouda and Nick Fielding 2004; McDermott 2005; the staff of The 9/11 Commission Report 2004). For consistency and ease in this thesis, he will be identified as he is in the widely read The 9/11 Commission Report: Mohamed Atta.

12 Though it seems to be overstating it as the affair takes up few pages of the book and does not appear on each of the lovers’ minds all the time, Joseph Conte calls the “bond between survivors … the counter-narrative” (Conte 2011: 567) of the entire novel: through it, they meditate on their place in the catastrophe and in “the world narrative in which they are now engaged” (Conte 2011: 567). This raises the question of whether every novel of terrorism covered here has a counter-narrative inside it.
heal from what he has undergone damn all attempts at reconciliation. The secret agony stemming from his moments in the burning north tower reveals itself to no other characters, only to the reader at the book’s end. A growing incapacity to function at work, an inability to feel and to mourn, a detachment, and a dissociative fugue and identity crisis befall him as he wanders about like a drifter. At the novel’s finale, this once successful and motivated New York lawyer languishes in Las Vegas, relentlessly playing and losing at poker, the very game he used to look forward to each weekend with the only friend he was “intuitive” with, the dead office-mate Rumsey (DeLillo 2007: 121).

Moving away from the lashing, blustery short reviews of *Falling Man* that greeted its publication -- of which Anis Shivani’s seems the most dismissive -- we find that Andrew O’Hagan, a novelist himself, notes positively in *The Good of the Novel*, that DeLillo succeeds mostly “at male dissociation, especially the kind that can thrive in certain domestic environments, and he can be as forensic as Saul Bellow” (O’Hagan 2011: 36). O’Hagan concludes that the descriptions finally become “the best things in the book: they have the force of felt life” (O’Hagan 2011: 37). Curiously, when seasoned critics do find elements to praise in the novel, they are often keyed to what could be called the symptoms of the trauma novel, like the dissociative states just mentioned from which Neudecker will suffer. Kristiaan Versluys, one of the earliest to apply insights gleaned from trauma theory to this narrative, mentions DeLillo’s technique of having shattered sentences mimic the chaotic movements of a ravaged Manhattan as the book’s strength: “The very texture of the prose itself reflects the raggedness of experience, whilst the splintered composition of the novel is the most telling proof of the indelibility of trauma and its shattering impact” (Versluys 2009: 40). Drawing on Freud’s work on
melancholia, Versluys calls the book and its “anti-redemptive” ending “the most
devastatingly pessimistic novel among the 9/11 narratives” (Versluys 2009: 14). Beyond
its distinctive fatalism and dissociative states, though, this novel may distinguish itself in
its exploration of misaligned temporality. Certainly Linda S. Kauffman is aware of that
dimension as she probes Falling Man’s narrative structure and time, and is impressed at
its design: “Falling Man portrays the contradictions between present and past; life and
death; time and eternity. It records, moreover, the precise moment when these
contradictions collide with deadly impact” (Kauffman 2011: 368). Conte regards the
contradictions, as well, noting: “Temporally, the novel ends slightly before it begins, with
Keith fleeing the north tower, so that by violating in his fictional narrative the inexorable
forward thrust of events that comprise history, DeLillo can re-examine the motives of the
terrorists and the experience of the survivors… [The narrative of terrorism] can move in
only an inexorably linear fashion; totalising and enclosed, it can move only deathward”
(Conte 2011: 568). However, this reading seems forced and somewhat restrictive. Time
among the traumatized victims slides however it may -- to the past, to the present, and
back again. Versluys’ follow-up seems more convincing by dramatically illustrating how
this “reading experience [of Falling Man] itself mimics the violent lurching back and
forth between the (imperfectly engaged) present and the (vividly relived) past, which is
typical of traumatic memory” (Versluys 2009: 40).

Still, despite this linkage to one of North America’s towering and Nobel prize-
 winning novelists and its accurate display of the lurching testimony of witnesses
diagnosed by trauma theory, the fault-finding soon comes. O’Hagan, strongly
contradicting another appraisal he makes of the same book elsewhere, undercuts all when
he writes that DeLillo is unable “to conjure his usual exciting prose” (O’Hagan 2007: 37) and cannot make us imagine the horror any better than “the astonishing pictures on television” (O’Hagan 2007: 37). Not being able to compete with what everyone already saw on TV must cause a sense of severe defeat for people who make their living with silent words, as Amis predicted. In *The American Prospect*, Laura Frost echoes the flaw identified by O’Hagan, despairing over *Falling Man*’s “staged artfulness” and “compromised ambitions” (Frost 2007). *Falling Man* was faulted stylistically for its overuse of “monosyllabic speech,” “stilted diction” and lack of “wisdom”: its characters were a mere “amalgamation of strange habits” (Constant 2008). Reviewers at *The Garfield Review* simply found the characters “dull” (Staff of *The Garfield Review* 2011).

Perhaps Sonia Baelo-Allué accounts for the poor estimation of *Falling Man* most reasonably by noting that “Since DeLillo had previously written about global capitalism, terrorism, conspiracies, death and the media, some readers and critics expected him to write an epic, panoramic, political novel that would illuminate the cultural zeitgeist following 9/11. However, *Falling Man* deals with the domestic and intimate rather than the panoramic and public” (Baelo-Allué 2007: 64). Again, expectations thwarted or disappointed figure in Chris Cumming’s low ranking from *The Paris Review*. Cumming points out that politics in DeLillo’s “fictional treatments of terrorism and mass shootings” (Cumming 2013) are usually filtered through the killer’s consciousness [apparently referring to novels like DeLillo’s *The Names* (1982), *Mao II* (1991), *Underworld* (1997), and *Cosmopolis* (2003)]: “Throughout DeLillo’s work we encounter young men who plot violence to escape the plotlessness of their own lives. He has done more than any writer since Dostoevsky to explain them” (Cumming 2013), but in *Falling Man* we do not have
that to a great degree. The Al Qaeda terrorist Hammad’s account is at the very end, and we are not seeing the problem and the “solution” through his eyes as much as the disbelief and thwarted attempt to understand motivation through the eyes and minds of the survivors.

Thus, faulted expectations may occasion the first cause for reservation with critics. A short piece of non-fiction DeLillo wrote may have expanded the reservations. DeLillo’s affective and effective “Ruins from the Future,” a prophetic essay published by *Harper’s* just three months after 9/11, demonstrates a Whitmanesque tone, celebrating American diversity, energy, phoenix-like abilities despite loss, cataclysm, and war: the voice is a floating one, easing over the American landscape (especially in the first section) as the voice does in sections of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* or in “The Sleepers.” Whitman, the often-cited “Father of American poetry,” served as nurse throughout the war of greatest numbered dead in American history. Considered the greatest threat to the Republic in its first hundred years, the Civil War killed over 2% of the U.S. population at the time: 620,000 soldiers and 50,000 civilians (Faust 2008: xi, xii; McPherson 2002: 3, 177, n. 56). Accordingly, in DeLillo’s essay, there is a fear of what the attacks will do to the Republic, but also a modicum of hope, and a defense of the Western World and especially America: it is American “diversity,” “freedom, and “technology” that are most feared by the mullahs, his essay opines. As DeLillo sees it, the supernatural has been replaced by the technological, and that is an affront to the radical Jihadist: “The materials and methods we devise make it possible for us to claim our future. We don’t have to depend on God or the prophets or other astonishments. We are the astonishments” (DeLillo 2001: 37). In short, the technology, presumably offered by computers, the Web,
and mobile devices are a “threat,” as “less scientifically advanced cultures” would no longer “need to rely on a God in whose name they kill the innocent” (DeLillo 2001: 36-37). This essay may seem brash, defensive, and uncritically positive about America now, but considering how early it was written (not long after headlines in Frances’s newspaper Le Monde declared “Nous sommes tous Américains”), and before the post-9/11 wars against Afghanistan (beginning 7 October 2001) and Iraq (beginning 20 March 2003) commenced, it may well reflect the spirit of the times, and even the sensibility of the reviewers of his future novel. Thus this widely-read, praised, and cited essay of DeLillo’s promised one thing: an indictment of religious zealotry and the primitive, irrational, and broken barbarity of the “past-made-into-the-present” (often a key interest of the Gothic). It was such a cruel past “that humanity had to overcome to produce the Enlightenment,” DeLillo argues in the essay, and now it is the present outrages that must be defeated, those Taliban and Taliban-like cultures returning to “the old slow furies of cutthroat religion” and “Medieval experience” (DeLillo 2001: 37). An expectant reader for his coming fiction Falling Man may have assumed it to be a novel crying out against that falling back or regression into an older time and value system, but what Falling Man would offer was much different, almost a counter-narrative, and its key terrorist Hammad a much more sympathetic character than the essay’s position towards fundamentalist murderers would portend. If the novel fails on showing what it was to be alive then on 9/11, or gives too little for readers to care about the characters or their dilemmas, or has nothing in terms of style to distinguish it, then the critical panning is warranted. However, some appraisers may mistake unfulfilled expectations from DeLillo’s famed essay with presumed absences in the novel’s art, feeling, or depictions of an anxious age.
Alice M. Greenwald, the Founding Director of the 9/11 Museum (who has meditated on trauma before, as the Associate Director for Museum Programs for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), sees more potential than the earlier reviewers do for 9/11 novels, but less for DeLillo’s. Greenwald noted in interview that “fiction often provides a form of access to interior realities that are not as evident in more documentary forms of expression. This in turn provides a reader with a sense of personal investment in the narrative, creating a sense of immediacy and fostering an awareness of the familiar” (Olson interview 2014). Yet she thought “DeLillo’s [Falling Man] was compelling but also struggling itself to come to terms with the history and so not quite as powerful as some of his other works” (Olson interview 2014). Perhaps more clearly echoing Shivani’s claim that Falling Man is “pancaked [art], like the dust of the towers, unable to rise up and assert [its] concrete and steel narrative volume” (Shivani 2010) is James Wood, a Princeton University critic who has breached the academic / popular critical divide. Wood complains that the DeLillo narrative is “all limbs -- many articulations and joints, and artful map of connections, but finally no living, pulsing center” (Wood 2007: 50). As a counter-argument to Wood, we might argue that there is a detectable “pulse” in the novel but that it is a traumatized one, weak at times yet still beating.

Another figure who straddles the academic / popular literary-critical divide is Michiko Kakutani, senior fiction reviewer at The New York Times. For her part, she concedes that DeLillo’s novels, from Players and White Noise through Libra, Mao II and his massive, panoramic Underworld, “not only limned the surreal weirdness of the waning years of the twentieth century, but somehow also managed to anticipate the shock
and horror of 9/11 and its darkly unspooling aftermath” (Kakutani 2007). Yet her verdict on *Falling Man* falls like a death sentence: it is “spindly,” “small and unsatisfying and inadequate,” “a terrible disappointment” (Kakutani 2007). Its chief flaw is that “Mr. DeLillo makes no effort to situate these two very self-absorbed characters within a larger mosaic of what happened that September morning; they remain two not very compelling figures adrift in the anonymous sea of humanity.” Keith, the main character, is “a pathetic, adolescent-minded creature . . . [who] decided to spend his foreseeable future playing stupid card games in the Nevada desert” (Kakutani 2007). Most tellingly, she complains:

instead of capturing the impact of 9/11 on the country or New York or a spectrum of survivors or even a couple of interesting individuals, instead of illuminating the zeitgeist in which 9/11 occurred or the shell-shocked world it left in its wake, Mr. DeLillo leaves us with two paltry images: one of a performance artist re-enacting the fall of bodies from the burning World Trade Center, and one of a self-absorbed man, who came through the fire and ash of that day. (Kakutani 2007)

Though written by one of New York City’s best-known literary judges, this is a problematic appraisal of trauma’s effects in the novel. Besides the problem of omission – the blind spot in which she fails to reference the multiple traumas of Neudecker’s wife and his lover, which are draining in themselves -- Kakutani judges “paltry” the suffering of both the jumper Janiak and lawyer Neudecker. Yet we see in the novel that suffering has actually torn out their reason for living. None the less, in her impoverished view of *Falling Man* may rest on a word waiting to launch the book’s recovery, and that word above from Kakutani is “zeitgeist.”
1.2 Gothic Dimensions

“What is intolerable is that the Ghost erases the limit which exists between two states, neither alive nor dead; passing through, the dead man returns in the manner of the Repressed… The impossible is to die.”


An exploration of zeitgeist in the meaning of “spirit of the age,” the trend of associable ideas of a period, or the challenge presented in transcending them is of less interest here than its literal meaning. Zeitgeist in German means “time-ghost.” It is the notion of a time-ghost that signals a presence or being to take readers to the edge of Falling Man’s deepest abyss of trauma. There is a body (both in the sense of a corpse, and also an oeuvre of dark knowledge) from the trauma of murder that may not go away. It may not stay in its own time, but intrude upon ours. The next section charts Gothic appearance of traumatic wounds in this novel, including the Gothic’s emphasis on the grotesque and unwatchable (in this case, falling bodies and dead ones scattered on the avenues, and the breathing of dead flesh in the smoke for weeks after the attack). We will also explore the uncanny or Neudecker’s searching for images of himself in that most photographed and filmed day of disaster in world history, and the finding of no photographs of himself on the familiar streets. Second, we will diagnose his paranoid physical violence (with no acknowledged violence before the terrorism, Keith now hits
men for looking aslant at his lover and confesses wanting “to kill without penalty”
[DeLillo 2007: 214] whilst his wife grinds objects into the faces of women who play Mideast music). Moreover, we will examine death-play in sex (Keith commences sex with his wife after she strikes a position of a falling body first), and track disease (especially in the shape of the impossible sickness of nostalgia for what was before the destruction),\(^{13}\) and probe Keith Neudecker’s complete dissolution, his becoming something “other,” his possession by a disaster-ghost.

The Gothic impulse in this novel and other 9/11 texts erupts, I argue, like the fugue states, ontological uncertainty, nightmares, memory loss, self-destructive behavior, and identity changes erupt among the traumatized victims themselves. Such impulses repeat, re-enact, dissociate, disjoin, intrude, and contaminate. A means to decipher these 9/11 texts now, to see them as more than mere “death imprints” (Lifton 1980: 170) or chronicles of numbing or helplessness, is to understand and expand notions of the uncanny, and for that we turn to Freud’s concepts.

1.3 **Freud, the Uncanny, and Disaster Ghosts**

“The impression [the traumatized] give is of being pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some ‘daemonic’ power.”

--Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1919a)

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\(^{13}\) Lianne’s Basho-like sentence after the attack summarizes everyone’s nostalgia well: “Even in New York, I long for New York” (DeLillo 2007: 34).
Sentence for sentence, Freud is the thinker most mentioned by the seminal trauma theorists and interpreters from the 1990s forward in their discussions of PTSD and literature, including Michelle Balaev, Judith Butler, Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Ruth Leys, Robert Jay Lifton, Roger Luckhurst, and Anne Whitehead. Freud’s observations are extended, reacted against, and affirmed by these and other critics, and ought to be raised here. However, Freud did not treat through psychoanalysis the exact trauma wounds that we observe in *Falling Man*, nor the wounds from most of the novels that this thesis examines. Consequently, recourse will be made to the theories of Alexandra Adler, Erich Lindemann, Lifton again, and others. Populating the fictions of this thesis are characters who largely have no training to handle attack (unlike the World War I soldiers that would perplex Freud) and they have, except for one exception (Lynne Sharon Schwartz’s *The Writing on the Wall*, which I devote a chapter to), no added misery of sexual abuse (unlike Freud’s Der Wolfsmann\(^\text{14}\) who suffered debilitating depression much of his life, and could not have bowel movements without an enema). It

\(^\text{14}\) Sadly, in the case of the well-off Russian Wolfman, Sergei Konstantinovitch, supposedly sexually molested by his sister, therapy was once or twice a week for years starting in 1910 through 1914, and occasionally later as in 1919, and the estimated charge for treatment well over $250,000 in modern currency. Pankejeff recounts the invoice as the most painful part of his Freudian association. Freud insisted that his patient’s “seduction by his sister was certainly not a phantasy,” and Pankejeff maintained for decades that “This sister complex is really the thing that ruined my life” (quoted by Lukacher 1988: 136-137). However, Pankejeff laments in interview that “That scene in the dream where the windows open and … the wolves are sitting there, and his interpretation…. It’s terribly far-fetched…. The theory [was] that Freud had cured me 100 percent. However, it’s all false” (quoted by Luckacher 198: 136). Despite this discontent, Pankejeff would also be a client with Freud’s later disciples and continue in psychoanalysis for an astonishing sixty years. Pankejeff’s case raises a question about the limited worth of psychoanalysis and the inability of the patient to leave it, which will haunt the novels surveyed in this thesis.
should be said that Freud did not technically treat the mental afflictions from the mass
war trauma of his time: Luckhurst goes as far to say that Freud “wrote little on the war
[WWI] and treated no shell-shock cases himself” (2008: 56). Despite not
psychoanalyzing them, Freud did ponder the shattering, uncoded, unmediated dreams of
war neurotics carefully, as their suffering challenging his theory on dreaming from The
Interpretation of Dreams (1899), witnessed by comments in the second section of Beyond
the Pleasure Principle (1919a), which he began as he was finishing his short essay the
thesis has recourse to later, “The Uncanny” (1919b). A cornerstone of psychoanalysis
was that “Under the dominion of the pleasure principle, it is the function of dreams to
make reality of wish-fulfilment, albeit on a hallucinatory basis” (Freud 1919a: 226).
None of the dreams of the traumatized veterans, though, seem to be initially wish-
fulfilments because they are all of ghastly and unmediated suffering (the trenches, men
going “over the top,” and rat-chewed human bodies). In Unclaimed Experience, Cathy
Caruth presents the challenge to Freud’s understanding of the function of dreams in this
way:

15 Freud did, however, write with great sympathy about the veterans and attacked doctors’ cruel treatment
of them, as apparent from a 1920 memo. Asked to give expert opinion by the Austrian War Ministry after
WWI on treatment of the shell-shocked by army doctors, he wrote of the electro-therapy they were
administered: “The war that has recently ended produced and brought under observation an immense
number of these traumatic cases…. [Their] therapeutic procedure, however, bore a stigma from the very
first. It did not aim at the patient’s recovery, or not in the first instance; it aimed, above all, at restoring his
fitness for service…. The strength of current, as well as the severity of the rest of the treatment, were
increased to an unbearable point … in German hospitals there were deaths at that time during treatment and
suicides as a result of it…. I am in a position to bring forward conclusive evidence of the final break-down
of the electrical treatment of the war neuroses” (Freud 1920).
The returning traumatic dream perplexes Freud because it cannot be understood in terms of any wish or unconscious meaning, but is, purely and inexplicably, the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits. Unlike the symptoms of a normal neurosis, whose painful manifestations can be understood ultimately in terms of the attempted avoidance of unpleasurable conflict, the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way. In trauma, that is, the outside has gone inside without any mediation.

(Caruth 1996: 59)

To get out of the bind of why veterans dream their war experience without masquerade and masked symbols, Freud makes the case that trench-veterans and accident-victims are a special case of dreamers. Conceding “the haziness of these deliberations of ours, which we term metapsychological” and that “this conception of drives sounds strange” (1919a: 238), he supposes “these dreams seek to assert control over the stimuli retrospectively by generating fear -- the absence of which was the cause of the traumatic neurosis in the first place,” all of which is a function “more primal than the objective of gaining pleasure and avoiding unpleasure” (Freud 1919a: 226-227). Absence of fear signals unpreparedness, wild surprise, or “fright,” as Freud claims. This surprise allows Caruth to extend her argument in a fascinatingly Gothic way, one of highest uncertainty, of deepest ontological doubt, complete with the heavy italicization from out of a Poe tale:

It is not only the dream that surprises consciousness but, indeed, the very waking itself that constitutes the surprise: the fact not only of the dream
but of having passed beyond it. What is enigmatically suggested, that is, is that the trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in having survived, precisely, without knowing it. What one returns to in the flashback [or nightmare] is not the incomprehensibility of one’s near death, but the very incomprehensibility of one’s own survival. Repetition, in other words, is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt to claim one’s own survival. (Caruth 1996: 64)

We could further argue that not realizing that one is alive, as Caruth outlines, is a confusion and condition akin to a ghost not realizing that it is dead, and circling the abode it had whilst alive or re-enacting its last moments. A similar bewilderment befalls Falling Man’s protagonist Keith Neudecker, and may explain some of his numbed reactions to his post-9/11 life, which somehow never moves into the “post” stage. For Neudecker there is no exhilaration in surviving cataclysm because he still does not comprehend “passing through” the disaster.

In “The Uncanny,” Freud analyzes traumatised characters in quasi-Gothic tales of dread and strange resemblance including E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “The Sand-man” and Hauff’s “Story of the Severed Hand.” Applying Freud’s critical observations from those texts through the lens of Caruth’s concepts is decidedly helpful in understanding the uncanny behaviours of Falling Man’s characters. The most troubled one is Keith Neudecker (a gambling pun of a surname evoking a “New Decker,” suitable for a rambler looking for fresh cards and better luck) who “used to want more of the world than there was time and means to acquire. He didn’t want this anymore” (DeLillo 2007: 128).
Neudecker now listlessly watches gambling on TV or goes off to poker matches around the U.S.A., though apparently not making as much money as he did while working in the WTC tower. DeLillo himself points out in an interview the power of poker’s escape: “You have to give the game concentration, and for that reason, a game of poker helps you forget, for a couple of hours, all the problems you’ve got” (Amend and Diez 2008). Neudecker, however, cannot concentrate, yet cannot stop searching for a way to forget or be forgiven for his abandoning Rumsey at his hour of death. A once-prosperous lawyer for over ten years (at a firm where most employees have now been killed by the Al Qaeda attack), he currently has no interest in gaining a livelihood outside of gambling.

Neudecker no longer contacts friends, and he seems monosyllabic at best to his wife and ten-year-old son, Justin. Only in his brief sex affair does he give the sense of some energy and personality. At other times, he just seems in another state, nearly half dead, and it is more than his soulful, long-suffering wife can withstand near the book’s end: “Week after week … catching planes to go play cards. I mean aside from the absurdity, the total psychotic folly, isn’t there something very sad about this?… Like a séance in hell. Tick tock tick tock. What happens after months of this? Or years? Who do you become?” (DeLillo 2007: 216). Like the meaning of his first name, originally a Scottish surname indicating woods, wilderness, or one dwelling in the forest (Zaczek 2007), Keith is truly bewildered in appellation and action. If he does attend metaphorical séances throughout the book, as Lianne suggests, it has been a numbing form of communication: Keith “looked at her [Lianne] and nodded as if he agreed and then kept nodding, taking the gesture to another level, a kind of deep sleep, a narcolepsy, eyes open, mind shut down. There was one final thing, too self-evident to need saying. She wanted to be safe in the world and he did not”
(DeLillo 2007: 216). Exactly who is inside of him now, experiencing these somber misadventures of a nearly dead man, is what may keep much of the narrative drive going. On examination of textual evidence, the interpreter finds disquieting evidence that Keith is not anyone alive any more. The proof is faint at first, but grows: Keith is becoming his dead friend Rumsey.

The first unease that readers have towards Keith should come by page one. The south tower has just fallen, the north tower will implode any minute, and all around him are first responders and fellow businesspeople running, and yet the protagonist is walking away. Keith has no foot or leg injury, and only minor glass cuts to his arm and very superficial ones to his face. He is in no greater emotional shock than any of the people running by him. This first page marks the book as enigmatic and it will never lose this cipher-mark. Walking away is such an unexpected act that even the shrewdest critics see something that does not happen: they remember Keith runs. This is not a small point, and its oddness has yet to be fully realized. Sonia Baelo-Allué observes, “Time and space seem to have collapsed in the opening pages where we see how Keith, a lawyer who has worked in the north tower for a decade, has just escaped and is running through the smoke and debris” (Baelo-Allué 2012: 70). However, that is not the case: “Runners” and “Run,” are mentioned once, and “Running” is mentioned five times in these first seven pages, but for Neudecker there is only “walking” five times and “walked” twice. This mistaken but understandable perception that he runs when he only walks away from the swaying north tower is made by other critics, too.

Like a somewhat clichéd Twilight Zone scenario, Neudecker is in another dimension as all other life capable of movement almost flies by. The fact that Keith does
not quicken when he can raises a number of unsettling ideas, foremost being that he
doesn’t fully want to leave, that he is somehow fixed to the place of death, that he cannot
cross to the boundary to the escaping and alive, that he could be, as Helene Cixous writes
of the victims of the Uncanny, “dead while living … in a dubious state” (Cixous 1976:
545). When Keith does arrive to shelter, he goes not to his apartment, but to his estranged
wife Lianne’s home (they have been apart for a year-and-a-half). Something of the
uncanny greets her, she says to her Mother, when she opened the door and sees not Keith,
the man who fathered her son, but only the burnt traces of someone once alive. She says
to her mother, “It was not possible, up from the dead, there he was in the doorway. It’s so
lucky Justin was here with you. Because it would have been awful for him to see his
father like that. Like gray soot head to toe, I don’t know, like smoke, standing there, with
blood on his face and clothes” (DeLillo 2007: 8). She also says that her husband was no
longer really the same man, but something that seemed not older, as we would expect, but
younger, “I didn’t know what to do. I mean with the phones out. Finally we walked to the
hospital. Walked, step by step, like walking a child” (DeLillo 2007: 8-9). He is not her
husband; he is some other. This is one way to explain the cryptic lines that issue from the
mind of Neudecker: “Things inside were distant and still, where he was supposed to be”
(DeLillo 2007: 3). His thoughts turning ever more enigmatic, ontologically questioning,
and existence-doubting, Neudecker muses: “Maybe this is what things look like when
there is no one here to see them. He heard the sound of the second fall, or felt it in the
trembling air, the north tower coming down, a soft awe of voices in the distance. That
was him coming down, the north tower…. He tried to tell himself he was alive but the
idea was too obscure to take hold” (DeLillo 2007: 5). In many ways, he never leaves the
north tower and is unable to run away from the dead, and that is severely problematic for his marriage, the guidance of son, the holding down of his job, and the savoring of whatever life he does have left.

Ideas of the uncanny, unhomely, or “unheimlich, that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” as Freud understood it (Freud 1919b: 124), are those we can unreservedly apply to Neudecker and others in Falling Man. In an astute reading, Avril Horner characterizes the feeling of the uncanny as “the fear which derives from the helplessness experienced by one who continually finds himself confronting that from which he desires escape,” which goes a long way to describe Neudecker’s predicament (Horner 2009: 250). There are three common occurrences of the uncanny and they are part of the Gothic foundation in this novel: people can no longer orient themselves in Manhattan because the towering landmarks have vanished, people don’t recognize spouses or lovers or their ways of moving as they come home in dust, and their loved ones are eerily becoming someone else, someone no longer alive, yet not fully dead.

That grimness observed, something neglected about the uncanny albeit remembered by specialists on humor and the Gothic, such as Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, is that the uncanny first holds surprise that also has a farcical and ironic edge, something Freud calls “irresistibly comic,” as we see early in Falling Man. Later in this novel, the uncanny becomes unrelentingly dark. Every one of the 9/11 novels examined in this thesis contains at least one unexpectedly amusing or befuddling moment, one wintry smile, as the uncanny introduces itself. Certainly Freud’s personal accounts of experiencing the uncanny amuse. On wandering around lost one “hot summer afternoon
through the empty and to me unfamiliar streets of a small Italian town,” Freud keeps winding back and encountering the * putas* instead of the *piazza* and his lost *pensione*:

Strolling … I found myself in a district about whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Only heavily made-up women were to be seen at the windows in the little houses, and I hastily left the narrow street at the next turning. However, after wandering … I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence began to attract attention…. Once more I hurried away, only to return there again by a different route. I was now seized by a failing that I can only describe as uncanny. (Freud 1919b: 144)

He claims, at least, that they were not to whom he intended to go. Considering Freud’s equivalence set later between “little houses” and female genitalia in “The Uncanny,” and his frustrated search for his little Italian house, skepticism of whether he went to them by mistake is understandable.16 Coming back again and again to the streetwalkers, Freud suggests, was the equivalent of having “lost one’s way in the woods, perhaps after being overtaken by fog, and, despite all one’s efforts to find a marked or familiar path, one comes back again and again to the same spot, which one recognizes by a particular physical feature” (Freud 1919b: 144). True to this example, *Falling Man*’s bewildered

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16 Freud noticed that often for his neurotic patients, “…there is something uncanny about the female genitals. But what they find uncanny [‘unhomely’] is actually the entrance to man’s old ‘home,’ the place where everyone once lived. … ‘I know this place, I’ve been here before,’ this place can be interpreted as representing his mother’s genitals or her womb.” Dylan Trigg unpacks this repeated observation well, noting that “constant work modifying memory is required in order to fend off the unhomely shadow that lurks within the longing for home” (Trigg 2012: 46).
protagonist, whose first name etymology is “woods,” recalls to his wife a story of farce and bewilderment in the midst of disaster. A repairman’s service van pulls up to rescue Neudecker from the street of terrorist wreckage. The problem for the driver (who is either a plumber or an electrician) is that his radio has been stolen eight times, a ridiculously high number, and he cannot tell what has happened to New York City within the last two hours. This recalls one of the most satisfying commentaries and deconstructions of Freud’s “The Uncanny” from Helen Cixous’s “Fictions and Its Phantoms.” Cixous asks: “How many repetitions are necessary before distress turns into comedy?” (Cixous 1976: 540). In the case of Falling Man it is eight: one stolen radio is sad, two seems a cruelty, and eight gone is just carelessness: he is forever parking on the wrong streets of New York City. If repetition pivots calamity to comedy, then the sudden disappearance of a massive building turns a morning into a head-shaking mystery for the driver, and the dramatic irony mounts for readers. The repairman does not know what has happened on the morning of 9/11 in Manhattan, only that his two towering landmarks are hiding, seemingly moving, and he cannot orient himself. He cannot entertain that the unthinkable has happened, or that 110 stories have vanished:

… [H]e knew from the sirens that something was going on but he didn’t know what. At some point he had a clear view downtown but all he could see was one tower. He thought one tower was blocking his view of the

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17 In Cixous’s boundary-pushing analysis and characterization of “The Uncanny,” she defines it as “less a discourse than a strange theoretical novel [with] … something ‘savage,’ … a breath or a provocative air which at times catches the novelist himself off guard, overtaking him and restraining him. Freud and the object of his desire (i.e., the truth about the Unheimliche) are fired by reciprocal inspiration, … [and] the psychoanalyst [is] psychoanalyzed in the very study he is seeking to develop” (Cixous 1976: 540).
other tower, or the smoke was. He saw the smoke. He drove east a ways and looked again and there was only one tower. One tower made no sense. Then he turned uptown because that’s where he was going and finally he saw me and picked me up. By this time the second tower was gone.

(DeLillo 2007: 25)

On a crisp blue morning come sky-clouding explosions and the largest loss of life from any terrorist attack in history on American soil. Neudecker and the rest of the city look for some explanation, shelter, comfort, affirmation, or wisdom during these moments of sublime terror, but the service-driver only volunteers two sentences of dubious worth: “Eight radios in three years, he said. All stolen” (DeLillo 2007: 21). This homely, unfathomably trivial detail in view of the catastrophic loss garners snorts. Unexpectedly grim humor, absurdity and irony have a deep place in this process of defamiliarization, this process of “making strange,” but DeLillo has more complicated plans for the uncanny.

Much of the uncanny for Freud and for Otto Rank, whose study “Der Doppelgänger” Freud references, is in a mix of simultaneous recognition and non-recognition of ourselves. Rank and Freud mention seeing ourselves in mirrors yet not recognizing ourselves. Freud, in his final note to “The Uncanny,” leaves readers once again with what we could term the comic uncanny. He writes of a rude man stumbling from out the water closet and into Freud’s train carriage compartment, to whom the co-inventor of psychoanalysis sprung up to shove back out of door, before freezing himself and the intruder abruptly with a look:
The train lurched violently. The door of the adjacent toilet swung open and an elderly gentleman in a dressing gown and travelling cap entered my compartment. I assumed that on leaving the toilet … he had turned the wrong way and entered mine by mistake. I jumped to put him to right, but soon realized … the intruder was my own image, reflected in the mirror on the connecting door. (Freud 1919b: section III, note 1)

What *Falling Man* does is the reverse of this mirror story: Neudecker longs to see himself reflected and cannot see himself at all. On the day of the most still-photographed and motion-filmed terrorist attack in history, Neudecker cannot find himself in one image afterwards, though he was walking and not running from the falling buildings, and he pores over the news for one sign that he was there on the familiar streets, alive. As if brushstroked out of the crowd of 9/11 survivors, Neudecker feels the terror of being missing, or what David Punter in his definition of terror calls “being confronted with ‘absence’ … which threatens our illusions of a fullness of being” (Punter 2009: 244). By itself, this omission of Neudecker’s presence from any media-captures could be forgotten by readers, but DeLillo will leave us with a variety of even more uncanny realizations. Trauma comes for Neudecker not only from what is mysteriously missing in space, but from what is shifting in time. Indeed, this misaligned perception of time a victim suffers is important to a school of trauma theorists, as well, as it is consistently returned to in their conceptualizations, from Freud in “A Project for a Scientific Psychology,” to Caruth in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, to Lifton in *Death and Life*, and to Laub and Felman in their *Testimony*. As Aimee L. Pozorski cogently summarizes it: the aforementioned thinkers’ “idea of trauma comes more from a theory of time—a kind of
skewed temporality, … [a] repetition of the key aspects of the event … in search of that missed encounter with death” (Pozorksli 2011: 71). Horrors witnessed are not fully taken in at the moment of traumatic crisis, all the above theorists suggest, but return like an intruder at unwarranted hours: in its splintered and compulsive replay and physical repetitions, this process seems to express the death drive. More traumatic is how this fearful recognition / non-recognition of 9/11 terror and death produces angst in Neudecker. Angst, according to Dylan Trigg’s interpretation of Freud’s “The Uncanny,” is the central feeling created by the uncanny, and it is tied to time’s flow and a disruption of that temporal current: “Angst establishes a correspondence between a subject haunted by his or her self-discontinuity and a world that persists despite that discontinuity. As such, the tension between discontinuous and continuous modes of time is at the genesis for the experience of being haunted, … played out in both corporeal and material terms of Freud’s essay” (Trigg 2012: 319). To the most threatening depths, Neudecker descends; so far he falls that he “becomes co-owner of the other’s knowledge, emotions, and experience… [He may] identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other’s self for his own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged” (Freud 1919b: 141-142). Paradoxically, by walking away from the site of disaster, Neudecker has literally run out of time: from now on, he is in another time and place, more a comrade with the dead than the living.

A Gothic strangeness, compelling in its takeover of personality, begins in earnest. Caused in part through extreme identification, the living take the place of the dead, becoming a specter of the deceased. Readers witness a ghosting of the living man, a spectral rendering, a bizarre entwining of who Rumsey was and who Neudecker is. A
recount of basic details suggests that Neudecker is no longer in the world that we are in: he says he did not leave the north tower, that his wife at first seeing him post-attack is doubtstruck and thinks of him as dead (“It was not possible, up from the dead…” [DeLillo 2007: 8]), and that his son no longer speaks to him and vice versa. More than that, we might notice how little physical description of Neudecker’s face and body there is anywhere in this novel (fewer details than in any DeLillo novel or novella that comes to mind, save for The Body Artist), and how few highly visual passages there are of Rumsey. Either one of them can look like the other in the reader’s mind, and there is little to prevent them from merging in other ways, as well. One of the first signs of this merging is, fittingly enough, a rise in repetitive behaviors. For instance, Rumsey was a self-declared counter of anything and a compulsive-obsessive. This behaviour was uncongenially combined with an inability to stop fantasizing about women. As the novel progresses, though the protagonist never exhibited this behavior pre-9/11, Keith now seems to be counting more. More to the point, Rumsey had started an affair with a darker-skinned woman just before the disaster. Neudecker will start an affair with a darker-skinned woman just after 9/11. His friend Rumsey loved watching women take their clothes off almost more than anything else, and now Neudecker (for whom there is no evidence of an extra-marital lover before) visits his 9/11 paramour Florence Givens in her apartment, and growls, “Come out wearing something, so I can watch you take it off” (DeLillo 2007: 53). Rumsey had another delight: he confessed to loving when women would start wearing open-toed sandals in springtime. It apparently became a chief recreation for him, so much so that Neudecker would tease his tabulating friend, back in those days, before he himself became aroused by women’s feet. Neudecker mocked
Rumsey for the love of toes: “But what if the digits don’t always total ten? You’re riding the subway, … and you’re absently scanning the aisle, and you see a pair of sandals, and you count and count again, and there are nine digits, or eleven?” (DeLillo 2007: 123). But now, post-9/11, Keith who only pulled the legs of foot-fetishists before, cannot help pondering the divinely naked feet of his Florence Givens.

1.4 The Erotics of 9/11

“I don't know why, but I feel like going out and having sex with strangers.”

--9/11 Respondent, *Everything You Know About Sex Is Wrong* (Schwartz 2001)

“It’s strange, but it took away the fear I had.”

--Jane in “Remember Terror Sex?” (Kazdin 2002)

The Gothic has frequently obsessed over sexuality in a time of fear, showing mad desire and the often-lost battle with the internal censor since its first novel *The Castle of Otranto* showed the sexual designs of a father-in-law-to-be on his intended daughter-in-law after his son is mysteriously smashed to death on their wedding day. Later Gothic writers would focus on a demonic and violent sexuality: the attraction / repulsion of vampires, witches, and werewolves; the sinister secrets behind clerical rapes and murders in abbeys and monasteries and cathedrals; the aristocrat’s sadism over subjects; and the
coitus that would beget monsters. Novels of 9/11 plunge into sexual obsession, too, and we could ask if they are inspired by actions of the New York survivors. All four novels in this thesis feature “Armageddon sex,” and much of the 9/11 fiction read outside the thesis shows it as well. Trauma, as represented in the 9/11 novels, displays an illicitly sexualized dimension. Cole Kazdin in a feature at Salon coined a term for it in New York ten days after the disaster: “terror sex.” Kazdin wove her article around anecdotal reports of her New York friends experiencing a yearning to connect intimately with shaken strangers under the “Manhattan skyline, still burning.” Kazdin quoted a University of Washington professor of sociology, Pepper Schwartz, as saying, “You want some kind of homage to a life force. ‘I’m alive, I’m functioning, I’m real.’ There’s an euphoria, a triumph in sexuality that [sic] you can see why someone would want to do it as a very profound act” (Kelleher 2001). It was followed another ten days later by a Los Angeles Times article discussing the “most primal post-disaster reaction: Sex. The impulse to


19 Other 9/11 novels and novellas with “terror sex” include:
sleep with someone, even a stranger, comes from an instinctive place, and may have nothing to do with attraction” (Kelleher 2001). Indeed, the New York City love-shop Toys in Babeland “reported a 33 percent increase in sales that fall” (Baker 2011), and some New York hospitals “were reported to have seen a 20 percent increase in births nine months following 9/11” (Baker 2011), neither of which may necessarily involve sex with strangers.

The novels surveyed here commonly depict trysts at comfort stations for rescuers (including fire and police department forces) among near-strangers. Many accounts in New York magazines and newspapers reported them, as well, but some of the journals were renowned for exaggeration and sensationalism with an accompanying disregard for facts, studies, reputable sources, and statistics (The New York Post and The New York Daily News being chief examples of the yellow press). Thus there may have been much more terror sex unfolding among two or more people on the printed page than in real Manhattan. However, sources with more reliability than those of the popular press, polling from sociological and psychological methodology and published in the Archives of Sexual Behavior, suggest there was a terror sex phenomenon. One of that journal’s first post-9/11 studies was of 2,915 men who have sex with men (with twenty percent of the participants reporting sex with both men and women), trying to detect different patterns of sexual practice in the three months before and three months following 9/11. Men from all fifty states completed the survey, and exposure to the attacks varied: “11% lost a friend or relative; 5% witnessed the attacks in person [with eight of the respondents inside the WTC]; and nearly all saw the attacks on television within one hour of their occurrence” (Chiasson, Hirschfield, Humberstone, DiFillippi, Koblin, and Remien 2005:...
527). In brief, the social scientists found that a “significant proportion of men reported an
increase in UAI [unprotected anal intercourse] and an increase in the number of partners
following the attack” among study participants who were near the WTC collapse or
Pentagon attack than those who were not (Chiasson et al. 2005: 532). Their conclusion
sheds light on the erotics of trauma in 9/11 novels. As Chiasson and team understood it:

The powerful need to connect with another person experienced by many
after September 11 may have motivated some to seek comfort, security,
and affirmation of life through sex. The sense of fatalism prevalent after
the September 11 attacks, however, may have exacerbated reduced
concerns about high-risk sexual behavior, particularly within the context
of drug and alcohol use. (Chiason et al. 2005: 532)

Indeed, substance abuse, along with random sex, becomes a constant in 9/11 novels,
perhaps understandably for characters facing the continuing threat of additional air
attacks and bioterrorism-related anthrax mailings following the fall of the towers. In
Falling Man, reckless terror sex occurs. Neudecker, who has no history of sexual liaisons
before 9/11, suddenly has at least three physical intimacies with his fellow survivor
Florence Givens, and it seems a therapy for both, though also Gothically fraught with
memories of the burning towers, where they first met. In the other novels, the experience
of “end-of-the-world sex” is even more frequent but more menacing than in Falling Man
(as it is tied to rape, especially in Kalfus’s A Disorder Peculiar to the Country and
McInerney’s The Good Life). In Falling Man terror sex seems largely, but not exclusively,
an escape from a spouse who cannot understand the horrors (or for whom the spouse
cannot share the splintered memory of them) -- but no evidence stands that it arises out of
hope for a new and longer relationship borne out of the rubble with a fellow survivor. It
signals in *Falling Man* a hunger for risk, an attempt to have one’s consciousness fully
held by something sublime and to deliver forgetfulness of all the terror around them for a
few hours. Yet terror sex is not restricted only to outside lovers; it can occur occasionally
in these novels with one’s spouse. In *Falling Man*, on the first occasion post-9/11 when
Keith and wife Lianne make love, the event contains an unmistakable death-drive in its
eroticism. It is a silent and strange testimony, but it also suggests a weird third figure with
the lovers in the afterglow:

After the first time they made love he was in the bathroom, at first light,
and she got up to dress for her morning run but then pressed herself naked
to the full-length mirror, face turned, hands raised to roughly head level.
She pressed her body to the glass, eyes shut, and stayed for a long moment,
nearly collapsed against the cool surface, abandoning herself to it. Then
she put on her shorts and top and was lacing her shoes when he came out
of the bathroom, clean-shaven, and saw the marks of her face, hands,
breasts and thighs stamped on the mirror. (DeLillo 2007: 106)

Providing a screen that separates them from unbearable horror, their lovemaking is as
potent an affirmation of desire and life as can be made by two people who recently
assumed the other was dead in the exploded towers. Still, something of the taboo of the
dead is still raised here. Their Gothically-inflected sex seems at first to indicate, as Fred
Botting similarly notes in a discussion of Gothic film, that “horror cedes to romance, and
revulsion to attraction” (Botting 2008: 5). However, here we can also accept that the
“Gothic genre’s usual trajectory is reversed: a flight from figures of horror and revulsion
is turned into a romantic flight towards them, now figures of identification” (Botting 2008: 5). Why does Lianne make love to her husband and then take the position of a tower-jumper against the mirror, leaving a body-trace in the steam? Lovemaking may be often thought as a way of clouding terror, but Lianne presses against the fog and leaves the reminder of the falling man from the burning tower, a re-enactment as discussed in trauma theory. This act in steam reimposes the terror and the ominous ruin as witnessed in earlier Gothic fictions. Sex, here, does not obliterate fear and dread for long, as some may assume terror sex may do. The falling dead, unknown and unmourned, form mental-ghosts in the bedroom. For sixty pages before this, Lianne had watched again and again the “Falling Man” performance artist Janiak strike his dying leap-poses from edges of New York buildings in the days after 9/11, but she had never mimed him until now, after the sex. And her pose is uncannily like Janiak’s, with hands raised to head and body collapsing. Janiak and the deceased are the first thing on Lianne’s mind after intercourse, as demonstrated by her making their body-form on the mirror, instantly and wordlessly reminding Keith of them. This is the visible evidence that Lianne is identifying with them, posing as them, becoming them, inviting them deep inside. In the post 9/11 days, the living are honoring the dead even in after-moments of ecstasy. Though the dead (in particular, Keith’s colleague Rumsey) are initially left behind in the burning towers, they are not missing from the apartments of the living (even their burnt particles in the air waft inside to the rooms and are breathed): reminders of the murdered are so numerous that survivors are forced beyond memorialising into misery. Revealingly, in the next moment after sex, we see Neudecker going into a repetition cycle, staring long at her falling image in the fogged mirror, and then invoking the symptoms of trauma of his last moments with
Rumsey. His physical wound is outwardly healed but he cannot believe it so, as the wound to his mind remains an open one:

He sat alongside the table, left forearm placed along the near edge, hand dangling from the adjoining edge. He worked on the hand shapes, the bend of the wrist toward the floor, the bend of the wrist toward the ceiling. He used the uninvolved hand to apply pressure to the involved hand. The wrist was fine, the wrist was normal. He’d thrown away the splint and stopped using the ice. But he sat alongside the table, two or three times a day now, curling the left hand into a gentle fist… (DeLillo 2007: 107)

The trace of a WTC falling body on the mirror re-awakens Neudecker’s suffering, signified by his physiological reactivity. The body outline is a cue that, as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders recognizes in its discussion of PTSD, “symbolizes or resembles an aspect of the traumatic event” (APA DSM-V 2013: 468). He falls back into repetitive states, reenacting his old physical therapy for a hand already healed, a compulsion perhaps attributable to the intrusion of memories of using and injuring his hand in the north tower.

Neudecker leaves his friend behind in the tower with the defense that Rumsey is probably already dead, though he has no stethoscope or other device to check for a heartbeat, however weak. Jumpers must be flying by his window20 as he leaves the

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20 Horribly, Neudecker may have seen many more plummeting “white shirts” than he can recall. The New York Times notes “some researchers say more than 200 people most likely fell or jumped to their death. Others say the number is half that, or fewer” (Flynn and Dwyer 2004). USA Today estimates “that at least 200 people jumped to their deaths that morning, far more than can be seen in the photographs [and motion film] that morning. Nearly all were from the north tower, which was hit first and collapsed last. Fewer than
burning tower, but he does not see them as people, only as white shirts coming down “out of high smoke” and “falling again, down toward the river” (DeLillo 2007: 4). Internal defense mechanisms forbid the complete registering of the grotesque and completely unpredictable deaths of that morning, but much of the repressed memories will break into his consciousness by the novel’s last pages. By not taking Rumsey down the stairs with him, Neudecker violates a rule: never leave your partner, your “fellow soldier” behind in the slow-motion warfare that is the business world, whether he is dead, alive, or wavering in between. Neudecker makes his decision to abandon Rumsey, walking away from a WTC plaza presumably littered with human legs, arms, torsos, and heads, and now he must face the posttraumatic havoc that comes of it.

It is instructive to consider a contrasting case venerated at the 9/11 Museum with photographs and emotionally resonant artifacts on display. According to the Founding Director of the 9/11 Museum, moments after the south tower fell, Abe Zelmanowitz, a computer analyst on the 27th floor at Empire Blue Cross and Blue Shield in the north tower, would not heed the evacuation order and would not abandon his co-worker and long-time friend Ed Beyea, a wheelchair-bound quadriplegic. Captain Billy Burke of Fire a dozen were from the south tower. The jumping started shortly after the first jet hit at 8.46 a.m. People jumped continuously during the 102 minutes that the north tower stood.... For those who jumped, the fall lasted 10 seconds. They struck the ground at just less than 150 miles per hour – not fast enough to cause unconsciousness whilst falling, but fast enough to ensure instant death on impact. People jumped from all four sides of the north tower. They jumped alone, in pairs and in groups” (Cauchon and Moore 2002). Less reported is the belief that the north tower jumpers, like the ones Neudecker represses, saved many lives by their act. As USA Today reports, “Many south tower survivors say the sight of people jumping created an urgency that caused them to leave immediately and ignore announcements that it was safe to return to their desks. About 1,400 people evacuated the upper floors before the second jet hit” (Cauchon and Moore 2002).
Engine 21 (which itself is now parked inside the 9/11 Museum) encountered
Zelmanowitz on the stairs with Beyea, and Zelmanowitz still would not leave Beyea
behind. The Captain ordered all his men to head downstairs to safety below and he and
Zelmanowitz began to assist Beyea down the stairs. Phone contact with a close friend of
the Captain was made and, Burke was heard as saying, “This is my job…. This is who I
am.” Minutes later at 10.28 a.m. the north tower fell killing all three (Greenwald 123).
This presumably would have been a much-discussed true story in the newspapers during
Neudecker’s convalescence, and is an unspoken yet constant reminder to Neudecker that
he did not make the sacrifice that a man who loved his friend would.

1.5 The Viral Transmission of Trauma

Many trauma theorists speak of the virus-like transmission character of traumas
(Butler 2004; Caruth 1995, 1996; Leys 2000, 2009), as when sons or daughters of
genocide-survivors exhibit some of the same angst, fear, dread and depression as their
parents, though their parents chose not to share the details of their years in concentration
camps or interrogation / torture centers with their children. Affirming this pattern to a
degree, Lianne demonstrates some of the uncharacteristic violence shown by her husband
who is driven to Gothic excess. No evidence exists to suggest she would smash objects
into women’s faces before 9/11, but her violent ways start mirroring her husband’s after
this unnatural disaster. Nevertheless, the contagion of violence is less pronounced in this
novel than the Gothic power of possession of the dead over the narrator. Even Neudecker
recognizes something peculiar in the trend of possession: “The persistence of the man’s
[Rumsey’s] needs had a kind of crippled appeal. It opened Keith to dimmer things, at odder angles, to something crouched and uncorrectable in people but also capable of stirring a warm feeling in him, a rare tinge of affinity” (DeLillo 2007: 122). This affinity goes too far, though, when Neudecker identifies with the dead, as is felt in one the most soulful moments of the novel when Keith returns to Ground Zero days after the attack. He hangs on the hurricane fencing wrapped around the disaster site for a period, and gazes at the “skeletal remnant of the tower where he’d worked for ten years”: “The dead were everywhere, in the rubble, on rooftops nearby, in the breezes that carried from the river. They were settled in ash and drizzled on windows all along the streets, in his hair and on his clothes” (DeLillo 2007: 25). It is indisputable that the dead are everywhere as DeLillo says, but most crucially they are also breathed, in minute amounts, directly into Keith’s lungs.21 He has mixed his essence with theirs, and a curious switch in perspective happens when Keith goes to his own apartment on the next page: “He stood and looked and felt something so lonely he could touch it with his hand…. Maybe he was thinking of the man who used to live here” (DeLillo 2007: 27). It seems the view has changed: mentally he is outside, closer to the ruins, magically looking at the man in his apartment who once was him, and yet he is also physically inside the apartment.

The uncanny stresses repeated encounters with a thing, and in this novel that repeated encounter is with falling white things -- again and again Neudecker finds

21 It should be noted that out of the dust breathed by these characters in lower Manhattan, a very small amount of it contained human remains. One of the most detailed studies of dust of the WTC concludes from its samples that only 1.4% of the dust produced from the towers’ fall was human, and 45.1% was fiber glass and rock wool (Schuppli 2012: 132).
falling white paper, or sheets stuck to windows, as in his apartment, and the vision of a white shirt falling and floating over Manhattan from the morning of 9/11 replays in his mind each time he sights white paper. They are the same figure that each of these novels will see and turn away from, and later repress, then have re-emerge: the falling bodies of 9/11, the ones seen but shut away, and the overwhelmingly gruesome aspect that this trauma must include, the bodies meeting with the ground, a vision unconsummated in the survivors’ minds. This is the grief that cannot be expressed, the wound that will not heal, the view that was too violent to take in and too shattering to remember, but like these white sheets descending and sticking to surfaces, the bodies of the dead exist no matter how diligently witnesses may look away. The clinging paper represents an inevitable return of the corpses to the minds of the sufferers. As Freud reflects, “The frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns. This species of the frightening would then constitute the uncanny … something that should have remained hidden has come into the open” (Freud 1919b: 147). The twisted and burned bodies from that morning come back into Neudecker’s consciousness with each nearly weightless, singed scrap of twenty-five-pound cotton bond floating by or stuck in the gutter.

Neudecker’s symptom presentation -- heightened reactions, flashbacks, dissociation, and identity change (seeming to metamorphasize into a living-dead man) -- suggest the PTSD syndromes from the DSM-V. In much of the recent research of trauma theory from Caruth, Felman, Laub, and Lifton, it is often pointed out that the arrival of PTSD as a category in the DSM-III (1980) was in large part a result of research on afflicted Vietnam War soldiers, and activism by health professionals, peace groups, and veterans themselves. The attempt by these four groups was to help the psychic wounds
from war gain legitimacy and, it was hoped, much more and sounder psycho-medical help (Caruth 1996; Leys 2000; Luckhurst 2008). However, a number of sources outside the arena of trauma theory point out that the effort to recognize PTSD has much deeper roots, particularly in the first studies of acute grief as a “remarkably uniform” syndrome (Kastenbaum 2008: 354). The first such study was by neurologist Alexandra Adler (born in Austria in 1900, the daughter of Alfred Adler, Freud’s psychoanalysis colleague and the founder of Individual Psychology). Psychiatrist Eric Lindemann (born in Germany in 1901) led the second study. Before World War II broke out, both Adler and Lindemann settled in America, and with the War’s advent, both ended up interviewing and studying survivors of what is yet the largest nightclub fire in world history, and still the third deadliest building fire in American history, following the WTC with 2,666 deaths and Chicago’s Iroquois Theater in 1903 with 602 deaths (NFPA 2016). In 1942 the Cocoanut Grove nightclub blaze in Boston would kill 492 people, and leave traumatized survivors re-enacting, and at other times repressing, memories of “being choked and trampled upon” (Adler 1943: 1099). It was these two landmark hospital studies that paved the way for more reports of how trauma affects survivors, enabling George Engel’s ground-breaking medical model of grief in 1961 which asked if grief was a disease (Kastenbaum 2003). Engel would argue that one could have a disease (like grief) and still not require medicine: to claim the opposite would only follow a social, not a medical, definition of disease.

In listening to patients from the fire and encountering them later, Adler repeatedly detected “anxiety neurosis” (Adler 1943: 1100). Adler noted in the Journal of the American Medical Association that they “complained mainly of fears and anxiety which
Image 1: The Cocoanut Grove nightclub, Boston, MA, 28 November 1942.

Image 2: Street outside the Cocoanut Grove nightclub where rescuers moved the injured and dying on the night of 28 November 1942. It remains the most lethal nightclub fire in world history.

Source (two images): The Boston Public Library
Images 3-5: Pioneering treatment in burn therapy at Massachusetts General Hospital would be followed by Adler’s and Lindemann’s psychiatric studies of the survivors. Source (three images): MA General Hospital
they were unable to control and which prevented them from readjusting to normal activities.” Their prognoses were not good, as “two thirds had hardly improved when re-examined after nine months” (Adler 1943: 1100-1101). In a psychiatric journal a year later, Lindemann would draw an even more startling pattern, sketching a portrait of possession that is eminently like Keith Neudecker’s symptoms, especially in what Lindemann termed the “sixth characteristic”:

These five points: 1) somatic distress, 2) preoccupation with the image of the deceased, 3) guilt, 4) hostile reactions, and 5) loss of patterns of conduct, seem to be pathognomonic of grief. There may be added a sixth characteristic, shown by patients who border on pathological reactions, which is not so conspicuous as the others but nevertheless often striking enough to color the whole picture. This is the appearance of traits of the deceased in the behavior of the bereaved, … especially symptoms shown during the last illness, or behavior which may have been shown at the time of the tragedy. A bereaved person is observed or finds himself walking in the manner of his deceased father. He looks in the mirror and believes that his face appears just like that of the deceased. He may show a change of interests in the direction of the former activities of the deceased and may start enterprises entirely different from his former pursuits. A wife who lost her husband, an insurance agent, found herself writing to many insurance companies offering her services with somewhat exaggerated schemes. It seemed a regular observation in these patients that the painful preoccupation with the image of the deceased described above
was transformed into preoccupation with symptoms or personality traits of
the lost person. (Lindemann 1944: 189-190)

It is hard to see which portions of this distressing diagnosis of morbid grief and over-
identification with the deceased that Neudecker does not have. For the survivors to go
from meditating on the loved lost one to transforming into that lost one, or at least taking
up his or her interests and believing they appear just like the deceased (even if of another
gender), is an extreme bond of, in Gothic terms, the living becoming a ghost of the dead.

Neudecker’s spectral condition provides a traumagothic model to compare to the other
novels in this thesis, though his possession by the dead, starting subtly at first, may well
grow to be the most extreme of any of the novels herein.

A question arises as to whether these ghostly possessions or pathological
identifications are still happening after recent disasters, and if their depiction in fiction
resembles that in life. Exploring another cataclysm, British journalist Richard Lloyd
Parry has had a large number of encounters in the wake of the Japanese tsunami in 2011,
when 20,000 people died at a stroke (Kastenbaum 2011: 338), of which he has written of
at length (Parry 2014). Through these accounts, we begin to see that what happens to
Neudecker in Falling Man happens elsewhere in contemporary “real” trauma. Parry
describes his research in a bereft Japanese inland town named Kurihara, where the local
chief Zen priest noted that the survivors “didn’t cry. There was no emotion at all. The
loss was so profound and death had come so suddenly.... They couldn’t understand what
they should do, or sometimes even where they were…. I couldn’t really talk to them, to
be honest” (Parry 2009). Though the number of lives lost on 9/11 was just over a tenth as
many as those lost in the Japanese tsunami, the Al Qaeda strike was also swift and left
survivors speechless with the many bodies of friends and loved ones never recovered, the living often not knowing how to mourn such a catastrophic loss (Kastenbaum 2011: 338).

Like the tsunami in Japan, the day in September in New York was “Impossible … insupportable, soul-crushing, unfathomable…. Television images failed to encompass” it (Parry 2014). What the Zen priest and residents started noticing in Kurihara was a rise in the number of family members not acting themselves, as in Falling Man. People began seeing “sightings of ghostly strangers, friends and neighbors, and killed loved ones. They reported hauntings at home, at work, in offices … and on the beaches in the ruined towns” (Parry 2014). A case in point was a local builder Parry calls Takeshi Ono.

Continually revisiting the shore where multitudes were swept away, he later exhibited behaviors of some of these dead that he claimed were within him. Ono’s family took him to the local Zen priest Kaneda to have the invading-dead possessing him exorcised. Many other examples of disaster ghost possession follow in this memory from Kaneda, twenty-five over the summer for the Zen priest, leaving him “overwhelmed…. [I] found myself listening to the voices of the dead” wherever he would go (Parry 2014). As with the thousands of mental health workers sent to New York to help after 9/11, often the burden of hearing and empathizing was too great to bear, and “the therapists developed reactions that were characteristic of trauma,” including exaggerated startle reflex, avoidance, flashbacks, fear of attack or collapse, feelings of failure at their job and helplessness” (Seeley 110-111). Despite the rash of disaster ghosts and supernatural possession in Japan, Parry insists on a resolute rationality in the Japanese character which typically might reduce credulity or over-receptiveness to the paranormal, and be at odds with fanciful sightings and symptoms of occupation in the living by the dead. When “opinion polls put up the question, ‘How religious are you?’”, the Japanese rank among the most
ungodly people in the world” (Parry 2014). This rationality, despite the intrusion of the uncanny, recalls Neudecker, who pays no heed even once in the novel to gods or devils, angels or demons, and spirits or ghosts, yet seems inhabited by his dead friend.

1.6 Conclusion

“In our postmodern era of terrorism, it is significant that postmodern literature has become possessed by a Gothic imagination”

--Maria Beville, Gothic-Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity (2009)

“Let the dead bury the living.”

--Friedrich Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations (1876)

One of the least examined Gothic elements in 9/11 novels is how the living are possessed by the dead. Moreover, walking in the manner of the deceased, cultivating new interests “in the direction of the former activities of the deceased,” believing one’s face to resemble the dead individual, and channelling the “personality traits of the lost one,” into oneself are not the stuff of fiction alone, but pathognomonic among survivors of sudden disaster in psychiatric and medical journals (Lindemann 1944: 189-190). However,
though distinct characteristics of PTSD in life and in fiction are outlined in the key post-1990s texts on trauma, possession by a dead friend is not one of them.22

Out of all the protagonists encountered in the novels discussed in this thesis (except perhaps for *The Zero*'s police officer, Brian Remy, who shoots himself in the head at novel’s beginning yet goes on to work for another 325 pages), Neudecker does the least grief-work and may be the most shattered trauma-sufferer. He barely talks with his wife of his panicked moments in the north tower, never attends a 9/11 memorial, and never joins a therapy-group of survivors to share his memories with people who could understand. He never seeks professional psychological help, never conducts a ritual of any kind in the name of those that he lost, never tries to help the many children of the dead, and never has an imaginary dialogue with his lost friend. Ominously, Keith Neudecker never cries, either. This victim may have had some temporary relief and control by suppressing grief, but this grief resisted or ignored ends by dissolving him, corroding all connections with family and friends and even his lover, until he floats away to the hazy, smoke-filled gambling dens around the U.S.A. His mishandling of trauma is a pattern to revisit as this thesis probes the traumas and responses from the remaining

three fictions. There is little indication from Neudecker on how or when he has dealt with bereavement before -- no mention of his parents or siblings dying sometime before 9/11, or any other lovers or friends who died before planes “were coming out of that ice blue sky” (DeLillo 2007: 134), so the reader has no sense of his former capacities to heal. This makes Keith Neudecker a cipher, certainly. Yet the chorus of critics affirming that he is “not very compelling” (Kakutani 2007) may have misjudged him. Holocaust Research Centre director Robert Eaglestone finds *Falling Man* fails along with other 9/11 novels because they continually "fetishize a lack of communication and understanding of events and contexts, … show[ing] an inability to address the terror that is their proclaimed subject, and indeed perform their own failure and collapse of voice" (Eaglestone 2007: 22). Yet, Neudecker, a ghost-man in Gothic isolation who reveals to what extent being possessed by the dead is incompatible with living, is a patient as tortured, fascinating and instructive as Freud’s Rat Man or Wolf Man. Though dismissed by scholars for showing a “lack of communication” between spouses and even between fellow survivors – when so much agony, fear, grief, and rage yearns to be expressed, *Falling Man* is yet a terror-entity unto itself. More to the point, Keith Neudecker is not *one* being, as critics have heretofore assumed, but weirdly *two*: he is “*double* in himself

[emphasis added], coming and going, [in his] walks across the park and back, [in his] deep shared self, down through the smoke…” (DeLillo 2007: 157).
Chapter 2. Searching for the Dead, Disinterring the Dead: Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005)

2.1 Criticism Specific to *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

Though separated by three decades of age, the psyches of nine-year-old protagonist Oskar Schell of Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and thirty-nine-year-old WTC lawyer Keith Neudecker from DeLillo’s *Falling Man* operate in similarly dismal Gothic mazes of injury, re-enactment, dissociation, guilt, fear, self-contempt, and self-harm. In short, they both identify with the dead, enter a quest, experience rage that turns into either imagined or real violence, experience encounters with the uncanny, and pull away from the family that loves them and that could, conceivably, help them start living in the present instead of struggling in the past. The one difference is that in Foer’s novel a second individual, the boy’s grandfather, will eventually reveal the truth of what happened in his war-related trauma afflicting the Schell family decades before the 9/11 traumata commenced. But like *Falling Man*, burdens unbearable and traumas long untreated are the distinctive features of what, to date, is the bestselling of the American 9/11 novels surveyed here. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* made the *New York Times* Bestseller List both on its release in 2005 (appearing as number fifteen in April 2005) and again in the year of its film release for two weeks in February 2012 ("Combined Print & E-Book Fiction"). The first 9/11 novel to be made into a film, it featured celebrity actors (Tom Hanks and Sandra Bullock) who brought large audiences to theaters.
The youngest of the writers considered here, Foer was twenty-eight at book release and a Princeton protégé of America’s veteran Gothicist Joyce Carol Oates. He debuted his fiction and found an agent through a contest at Zoetrope magazine, a creation of director / writer Francis Ford Coppola whose Gothic mind also directed Dementia 13, Bram Stoker’s Dracula, and Twixt. Foer’s creative writing thesis would become his first novel, Everything is Illuminated, which contended with the trauma of Nazi extermination. That a considerable portion of the reading and viewing public in America was engaged with both media forms of Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close at first suggests mainstream tendencies in its character, thought, dialogue, and conflict that may be less visible in the other novels addressed in this thesis.

Despite its popularity with readers, reviewers habitually articulate five recurring complaints about the novel, the first being that it tends towards incoherence: “the novel as a whole feels simultaneously contrived and improvisatory, schematic and haphazard” (Kakutani 2005). Second, critics penalize the work for its narrator seeming too intelligent for a nine-year-old. Oskar, “the book’s precocious, insufferable Montessori casualty of a narrator” (Beck 2005: 92), is “invested by Foer with little other than an intense desire for our attention” (Munson 2005: 80). Walter Kirn echoes the impatience, claiming that this motormouth drives Foer's story. He's a cross between J. D. Salinger's precocious, morbid, psychiatry-proof child philosophers and all those daunting city kids from children's books whose restless high spirits and social confidence get them into funny predicaments while their preoccupied but loving parents conduct their mysterious offstage grown-up business -- business that they'll come home from just in time to save
their offspring from real trouble. Which is pretty much how things go in Foer’s novel. (Kirn 2005)

But the fiction actually shows no adults saving Oskar. He will have to save himself, and perhaps them, too. Munson, for his part, rejects the book’s supposed sentimentality at first, but then reveals what may underlie much negative commentary: the fact that Oskar, a high-operating child who none the less may have Asperger’s Syndrome, puts unusual demands on readers. As Munson reasons, “All this is Foer’s way of showing us, or belaboring us with, Oskar’s great pain, fear, and susceptibility. The trouble is that, despite the long stretches of time a reader spends listening to Oskar’s hyperactive narration, his habitual and unstoppable overstatement prevents one from ever coming to know the inner character of his pain and fear and susceptibility” (Munson 2005: 83). Fellow 9/11 novelist John Updike concurs, prescribing that “a little more silence, a few fewer messages, [and] less graphic apparatus might let Foer’s excellent empathy, imagination, and good will resonate all the louder” among this “family consist[ing] of a dog called Buckminster, an unusually permissive and remote working mother, [and] a loving grandmother who lives across the street and talks to him through a baby monitor” (Updike 2005). That describes the family to a degree, except that, to clarify the record, his Buckminster Fuller is actually a cat. The cat is one of Oskar’s few friends, and a preternaturally patient one at that, who allows this budding scientist to execute gravity experiments on him, mostly by being dropped out of window to test his righting reflex to make himself into a parachute, recalling Oskar’s understandable obsession with the bodies falling out of the WTC and what could have saved them. Beck takes his agitation one step further, wishing the narrator ill: “Had we a real Oskar, we’d shut him up, Kaspar
Hauser-style, in some damp and cobwebbed oubliette -- that is, if we couldn’t just send him the way of Little Nell” (Beck 2005: 93). The fourth tendency is to judge the book as being overly obsessed with American rather than world’s suffering: “But not only is Oskar’s vision disturbingly regressive, the use of the first-person-plural pronoun in the final sentence of the book limits even these powers of textuality to the restoration of safety only for those who can be counted as victims of the World Trade Center Collapse” (Greenwald Smith 2011: 157-158). Mitigating Rachel Greenwald Smith’s concern for narrowness, the portrayal of the Allied firebombing of Dresden and American atomic bombing of Hiroshima in this novel both well support Caruth’s claim that “history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (Caruth 1996: 8).

I suggest that the foregoing faults and limitations cited regarding *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* are largely attributable to interpreters being attentive to one-third of the conversation. There are actually three narrators in this novel: Oskar’s consciousness fills eight chapters, but his grandmother’s mind directs four chapters, and his grandfather’s thoughts rule the other four. Without initial reviewers and later scholars detecting weaknesses in the grandparents’ half of the book, as well, they have not given sufficient reason to condemn the whole. The book opens to greater wonder, surprise, and traumatic commentary when we comprehend Oskar’s thoughts, actions, and words as being in strange concert with those of his grandfather and grandmother, as his grandfather exhibits many of the compulsive, artistic, and endearing habits of Oskar himself. Indeed, this novel’s commercial success makes a bold exception to Elizabeth S. Anker’s observation (which could none the less be applied to *Falling Man* and *The Zero*) that
“Almost unanimously rendering 9/11 as a crucible in middle-aged masculinity, [9/11] narratives” indict “American self-reference,” and “American ineptitude, or the disavowed truth of late imperial impotence and failure… foreboding the waning of American fiscal, military, and geopolitical dominance” (Anker 2011: 464). In this case, however, the middle-aged Thomas Jr. is the missing presence altogether in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, as he dies at the novel’s genesis before narrating a word.

The last common critical reservation is the narrative’s post-postmodern inventiveness. Here, the presumed fault is that the novel’s many photographs and typographical experiments are “by turns precious and poignant” (Frost 2008): that “Plenty of typographical gimmickry” becomes “heartbreaking folly, a staggering failure of imagination, punning on the title of Foer’s first novel, apparently” (Beck 2005: 93, 94). Robert J. Hughes evaluated the ending as superficial and tasteless: it is "fairly offensive to see a novelist co-opt such an indelible image of desperation and death for such a trite purpose" (Hughes 2005). However, these experiments can also successfully mediate between the literary and photographic worlds in a way that few 9/11 novels have yet achieved, registering greater affect. For example, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close meditates upon and shows a visual record of destruction and demise, with many scattered photographs, especially of objects connected with the sky and with falling, including birds in flight, upper windows and fire escapes, trestles from bridges, the Empire State Building, the twin blue beams eerily emitting from what American graphic novelist Art Spiegelman imagined as “the Shadow of No Towers,” and a controversial Associated Press photograph of falling man from the WTC (but this time falling in reverse, as rearranged by the narrator Oskar in his hidden Book of Stuff That Happened to Me). As
Foer emphasizes, "To speak about what happened on September 11 requires a visual language" ("Interview with Hudson" 2005). If trauma is unwritable, this novel goes beyond merely pointing that out: it offers visual representations, including photography, to overcome the limits of language. John Updike was one of the very few to consider the power of the novel's flipbook: it is "one of the most curious happy endings ever contrived, and unexpectedly moving" (Updike 2005). The images project the boy’s remaining fears and his attempt to remediate the past, all while he blames himself for his father’s death, manifesting that by covered his body in thirty-eight self-administered blows. His speech detaches himself from his mother and makes her weep, as when in a wounding passage near the novel’s midpoint, he remembers his scream at her:

   I said something I wasn’t planning on saying, and didn’t even want to say. As it came out of my mouth, I was ashamed that it was mixed with any of Dad’s cells that I might have inhaled when we went to visit Ground Zero. “If I could have chosen I would have chosen you [to die]!” (Foer 2005b: 171)

Outbursts like this one, accompanied by the self-bruising, victimhood at the hands of bullies, and an inability to make friends will tempt the boy’s therapist to have him hospitalized, away from both the mother and paternal grandmother who seem the most devoted figures in his life. It is an offer wisely rejected by the mother, because rather than medicating him into obedience she senses the worth of a risk, allowing Oskar to make some progress with an unknown stranger who reflects the idea of trauma as both the return of the repressed and the revisiting of unfinished business. The stranger is his grandfather, the so-called new secret “tenant” across the way.
2.2 Establishing Gothic Tendencies inside the Quest

“It took me a week to finish the first sentence…. My mind wanted to wander, to invent, to use what I had seen as a canvas, rather than the paints. But, I wondered, is the Holocaust exactly that which cannot be imagined? What are one's responsibilities to ‘the truth’ of a story, and what is ‘the truth’? Can historical accuracy be replaced with imaginative accuracy? The eye with the mind's eye?”


*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* has none of the major Gothic paraphernalia that Anne Williams scrutinized in her influential *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, a critical study that helped show that Gothicism is more poetic than novelistic, that the Gothic and Romantic form one tradition, and that there are two congruent directions in the mode, Male and Female. Namely, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* has no "fatal women, haunted castles, bleeding corpses, and mysterious warnings" (Williams 1995: 4). None the less, that does not exclude this novel from the discourse on Gothic belongings. Buried in the novel are empty coffins, midnight disinterment, reburials, subtle hauntings, and re-enactment for months (via a treasure hunt by a boy who remembers those searches his now deceased father set him on before). And this novel has more stuff of Gothic dream and darkness as summoned by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1980: 8-9), to wit: "an oppressive ruin" (which I identify as the fallen, smoldering WTC towers 1 and 2); "sleeplike and deathlike states" (which the young Oskar and his Grandfather wander around in,
as well as the grandmother to a degree); "live burial" (these worries Oskar has -- he insists, for instance, that his mother save up for a “sarcophagus” to house his mortal remains); "doubles" (suggested by all those named "Black" that Oskar tracks and talks to); "the poisonous effects of guilt and shame" (Oskar’s body is covered in welts self-administered: "I would have given myself the biggest bruise of my life..."); "nocturnal landscapes" (Oskar and others dig up a grave under the cover of darkness); "apparitions from the past" (the grandfather, presumed lost or dead, comes back from oblivion; moreover, a mentor of the grandfather once sent off to a Westerbrook concentration camp materializes decades later thumbing through books in NYC though it is nearly impossible that he could have survived that death camp and that he should be alive so long); and "Faust-like and Wandering Jew-like figures" (Oskar's sojourning grandfather is an exemplar of unexpiated guilt -- he has run a continent away from his pregnant wife and only come back when their child, grown to middle-age, is dead). Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close has what all the 9/11 novels of victimhood investigated here have: a focus on the body of those trapped by the burning towers, not a normal body but a Gothic one. Steven Bruhm’s meditation on Romantic fiction’s "gratuitous spectacle of the pained body” (Bruhm 1994: 146) from two centuries before 9/11 is apt:

The Gothic "in its fascination with pain and physical limitation, registers a crisis of sensibility that both engages and distances. . . . [P]ain in Romantic fiction is that apocalyptic moment of revelation and understanding when one moves from naiveté into knowledge. Like Frankenstein’s monster and Maturin's Immalee, . . . the self in Romantic fiction seems to know itself only through acquaintance with physical agony. (Bruhm 1994: 26, 46, 147)

For the son, his sensory take of body-destruction is primarily visual: how do these people
about to die look in free-fall, how do they look on the ground, and which one of them -- when he enlarges the photographs to the point of utter pixilation -- is his father? The photographs are inconclusive, and this reinforces the vexing and haunting ambiguity over the identities of the dead suggested in this thesis’s introduction, as well as in Bruhm’s thesis of attraction and repulsion. What is more, the pictures engender a ghostliness of their own. As Fitzpatrick intuits, people “in these photographs [of the falling] are thus doubly condemned: first to the actual deaths to which these photographs are preludes; second to ‘live’ for eternity in the photographic emulsion” (Fitzpatrick 2007: 90). Interestingly, Avery F. Gordon extends this idea helpfully into the realm of hauntology when she finds that, “The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible ... makes itself known or apparent to us.... [But] the way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening” (Gordon 1997: 8). Thus the spirit draws us “affectively, sometimes against our will” into a past reality that becomes transformed by new knowledge (Gordon 1997: 8). Finally, this pictorial connection to ghosts, so inherent in the 9/11 novels and one which makes Oskar scrutinize the frozen frames of the WTC jumpers for weeks, also uncannily and poetically develops in a film that first released in the United States in September 2001, The Devil’s Backbone. Guillermo del Toro’s poem begins the film with a reflection on the ghostly nature of photographs,

What is a ghost?
A tragedy doomed to repeat itself time and time again?

An instant of pain, perhaps.

Something dead which still seems to be alive.

An emotion suspended in time.

Like a blurred photograph ...

(quoted in Olson 2007: vii)

The question arcs over this whole novel, too: where is the blurred photograph that holds Thomas Schell Jr. in mid-air?

When Jacques Derrida writes of terroristic “pervertability” of the media through photos of terroristic carnage, and the repetition of the tragedy *ad infinitum*, he anticipates Oskar’s somber findings as the boy scours the internet for images typically censored in mainstream print, but which he hopes will give him certainty about his father. Derrida calls coming across such images “the ineradicable root of terror and thus of a terrorism that announces itself even before organizing itself into terrorism. Implacably. Endlessly…. [Here] is traumatism with no possible work of mourning” (Derrida 2003: eBook). Certainly when Oskar performs his Google searches in unsafe mode, he finds all kinds of odd matter that he cannot process at the time, and which will return unbidden later: “a shark attacking a girl, someone walking on a tightrope between the Twin Towers, that actress getting a blowjob [sic] from her normal boyfriend” (Foer 2005b: 42). But one image is paramount in its terror, seen early and recast throughout the novel: “a soldier getting his head cut off in Iraq” (Foer 2005b: 42). Even at the novel’s end, the image of decapitation rolls back to him when he applies the possibility to himself. On his mission to the graveyard with his grandfather to finish a ritual for his father, Oskar stands through
the sunroof of the limousine snapping pictures of the stars. It is then he realizes the
danger: the driver yells at him every time they go under a bridge or into a tunnel: “Get
back into the car so [you won’t] be decapitated!” (Foer 2005b: 317). Through his Google
searching sans parental control, Oskar knows all about decapitated heads -- “but really,
really wish I didn’t” (Foer 2005b: 317). Oskar applies the image to himself, and tries to
replace with any other thought he can: “In my brain, I made ‘shoe’ and ‘inertia’ and
‘invincible’” (Foer 2005b: 317). However, the images of radical Jihadist beheadings of
Westerners and Western-led foreign soldiers are not so easily sublimated: they will never
leave his head. No matter what “blocking words” he throws at this headless Allied ghost-
soldier, the image will continue to complicate Oskar’s mourning. As David Carr
convincingly argues, such still pictures and videos online “deliver in miniature the same
message as the towers falling… Everything has changed, no one is safe and the United
States is impotent against true believers” (Carr 2014). Carr reasons persuasively that a
video beheading from Al Qaeda or ISIS provides a “triple death”: murder, defilement,
and an electronic pike to put the head upon -- YouTube. What must shock Oskar is the
full sense of justice from the Other: that the victim deserves such an obscene killing; that
the executioner is only, in Fehti Benslama’s memorably dark phrase, “the instrument of
God’s jouissance,” and the one who makes day into endless night (Benslama 2014: 19).

When terrorists murder Oskar’s father Thomas Schell Jr. on the morning of
September 11, his only-child loses not only his paternal guide, and the nurturing one who
would tuck him in each night, but also the one guide who launched intellectual
adventures. The “suspended” emotion he thus feels for hundreds of pages would seem to
be abandonment. Before the Al Qaeda attack, both father and son had an ongoing habit of
scanning *The New York Times* for errors and, every Sunday, launching a “Reconnaissance Expedition.” One ambitious mission from his father asked Oskar to retrieve an object from every decade of the twentieth century all in one day, and the son successfully did: he handed his dad a rock. Neither of Oskar’s two anti-social “friends,” Toothpaste and The Minch, seems to spend much time with him, outside of the three visiting a drugstore slyly to peak at pornography, and neither enjoys the intellectual pursuits that delight Oskar. Thus, as with Keith Neudecker’s loss of Rumsey, the loss of Thomas Schell Jr. ushers in a depression as it also signals a vanishing of one’s dearest friend.

Neither a body nor body-part is ever retrieved of Thomas Schell Jr. after his visit for jewelry-business to the WTC, and an empty coffin is buried for him, a service straining with emptiness attended by Oskar’s mother and paternal grandmother, a woman with whom Oskar’s bond seems second only to his deceased father, yet a woman who is never given a name.24 Everyone else has a name, including the doorman, the chauffeur, the cab driver, and almost everyone else Oskar stumbles into on his nearly year-long quest across 24 As central a figure as the grandmother in this novel is yet never named, perhaps to make her more easily fulfill the role of Anna, her dead sister. With a name not unlike Poe’s Annabel Lee, this sister suffers the same fate as Poe’s maiden, and shares three other resemblances. She and her lover are young (“I was a child and she was a child”), the love is intense and leads to a pregnancy on the first lovemaking (“we loved with a love that was more than love -- / I and my Annabel Lee --”), she buys Thomas Sr. a typewriter to write her notes only when they are both in the room (“And this maiden she loved with no other thought / Than to love and be loved by me.”), and she is killed by the rain of fire from the night sky out of the planes of the RAF and USAF (“the wind came out of the cloud by night, / … killing my Annabel Lee.” Thus this his unnamed woman assumes not only a reflection of Anna (as when she poses for Oskar Sr.’s sculptures only to find he has carved her dead sister), but actually stand-in status for Anna -- she has married her sister’s Intended and, breaking their agreement, has a child by him, forcing him to relive the trauma of begetting a child who could be killed by the night sky again, and prompting his escape from New York City to the city of his first trauma, Dresden.
Manhattan to find the mysterious owner of a lock of which his father had hidden a key. This is a novel of hurtful words and painful silences against loved ones, of hiding one’s sorrow, and burying one’s guilt, but what spans nearly the whole of the book is the conducting of a search. Oskar’s mother searches for someone who can make her laugh and forget, the grandmother searches for peace and her husband (and thus memories of her sister, as her husband loved first her sister), and her husband searches for forgiveness and forgetfulness. Lastly, Oskar searches for an impossible reunion with his father. Tellingly, Derrida makes the point in *The Specters of Marx* that mourning cannot commence without a body being visible, and here now mourning is thwarted by the absence of Oskar’s father’s corpse: “Nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one *has* to know who is buried where -- and it is necessary … that, in what remains of him, he remain there” (Derrida 1994: 9). Now through the uncertainty over missing bodies the Gothic finds its aperture into terrorism fiction. With trademark ambiguity and despair, it is the Gothic that moves in 9/11 fiction’s suddenly emptied, blown-asunder buildings and which fills the maws of graves otherwise holding only bodiless coffins. The Gothic takes possession of all the blood-stained stairs leading to open air after the commercial planes strike. This darkest mode appropriates as clues to an awful mystery all the torn sheets of writing blowing down Manhattan streets amid the unidentifiable scraps of burned skin and scalp left by the people who wrote them.

If “full” or “proper” mourning is blocked or repressed by an absent body, then, a Gothic search arises. By extending his dead father’s usual “Reconnaissance Expeditions” from when he was still alive, Oskar seeks the owner of a key his father owned, tucked in a vase the son fortuitously tipped in a closet over a year after his father’s death. Oskar
probably hopes the person or persons named as only “Black” could tell Oskar what was on his father’s mind on his last morning or give Oskar some missing essence of his father. All are on a quest, and all are doomed to find something darker than they thought they would.

A folly beyond hope may be Oskar’s odyssey, as even he admits there are “472 people named Black in New York… I calculated that if I went to two every Saturday, which seemed possible, plus holidays, minus Hamlet rehearsals and other stuff, like mineral and coin conventions, it would take me about three years to go through all of them” (Foer 2005b: 51). The mission, however quixotic, invests a purpose to his trauma. Bryan Reuther has noted how “surviving an event that places the individual’s life or physical integrity in jeopardy propels individuals to realize the finitude of their own existence. When this occurs, an individual’s orientation to the world changes, and previous ways of structuring the world no longer work” (Reuther 2012: 275). This insight elucidates this novel well, in the sense that with extreme distress, in this particular case, comes the need for a reorienting journey: to find what was lost, or process the meaning (literally, the lock and the owner) that the key holds. To accomplish this is in a sense to become his father, to go about his father’s duties, allowing Oskar to take back the spirit of his father into this world for a time. The suggestion, then, is that this is a subtle ghost story -- not only from a coming reference to Hamlet and the role that Oskar will play in that drama, but from the thoroughly off-script lines and actions that Oskar will give to the dead. Paradoxically, as with Neudecker, after Oskar loses his best friend / father, he only regains his will to live by becoming the dead.
2.3 The Shakespearean Gothic Connection

“Isn’t it so weird how the number of dead people is increasing even though the earth stays the same size, so that one day there isn’t going to be room to bury anyone anymore?... There are more people alive now than have died in all of human history. In other words, if everyone wanted to play Hamlet at once, they couldn’t, because there aren’t enough skulls!”

--Oskar on the ride to his father’s burial service in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (2005: 3)

“What about digging up Dad’s empty coffin?”

--Oskar upon meeting his paternal grandfather in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (2005: 259)

That the reference above to Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Oskar’s father, and whoever’s bones are disturbed making room for the newly dead (whether the tossed skull of a Yorick -- who Oskar will play -- or a prior decedent in a New York City cemetery) appear at the novel’s beginning and its end suggest the primary importance of all three to the narrator. Some of the most trenchant recent work of understanding Shakespeare gothically appears in Shakespearean Gothic (2009) and even more percipiently in Gothic Shakespeares (2008), where ghosts and their messages may ambiguously be either “of truth” or may be of “devilish purpose” (Hogle 2008: 207). Illuminating how “the Gothic

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can help us retroactively define some of Shakespeare’s own dramatic and symbolic choices” (Hogle 2008: 201), the approaches in both studies cast light on *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, as well. With a few references to *Hamlet*, Foer raises a multitude of Gothic associations and questions: how will Oskar avenge his father’s death? Were his father’s final dying thoughts of Oskar? Who is the man so soon courting Oskar’s widowed mother? Where is the spirit of Oskar’s father now? How will Oskar overcome his fears and find meaning without his Father? Who or what spoke to his brain to cause him to disinter his father? And what does Oskar go to find, and what will he leave there? These are not rhetorical questions, but the ones that Oskar carries through the uncanny topography of Manhattan’s streets and parks.

Freighted with perhaps too many dimensions (like the play *Hamlet* itself, infamous for being multiple-faceted and painfully delayed in its revenge), Oskar’s trauma is a multiple complex of guilt, hiding, shame, searching, fear, and paralysis. To be bereft means to sustain a loss that no one can replace, and this seems certainly Oskar’s condition as he is nearly friendless now, save for his odd trinity of pen pals – Jane Goodall, Ringo Starr, and Stephen Hawking. One of Oskar’s first mailed letters and one of his last go to the celebrated Cambridge astrophysicist. No longer having a father as a mentor, Oskar asks in his first letter if he can be Hawking’s scientific protégé, and in his fifth: “What if I never stop inventing?” (Foer 2005b: 305). It seems that creating clever machines -- often ones that defy gravity -- is Oskar’s dominant mental process and joy. If he ceased inventing, he would seem to stop existing, but then he might be reunited with his father, as well. Curiously, out of his hundreds of inventions planned, Oskar dreams of no machine that could determine how exactly his father died and where exactly
his remains went, the very concerns that plague him for hundreds of pages. Perhaps, and in this Oskar follows his Cambridge mentor’s understanding, no machine Oskar imagines can overcome a rule of quantum physics. Hawking asserts, in his *The Grand Design*, that “Quantum physics tells us that no matter how thorough our observation of the present, the (unobserved) past, like the future, is indefinite and exists only as a spectrum of possibilities” (Hawking and Mlodinow 2010: 82). But perhaps, as Hawking argues further, “the fact that the past takes no definite form means that observations you make on a system in the present affect its past” (Hawking and Mlodinow 2010: 82). Never able to decide on one version of how his father makes his final “movement from point A to point B,” as Hawking might put it, from life near the top of the WTC to death in its plaza, Oskar entertains all the possible scenarios at once of his father in the burning tower, and this changes how Oskar appreciates his father. Moreover, the quest Oskar makes now -- the search for who owns the lock, the investigation into what his father’s relation was to the owner (helpful, giving, faithful, kind) -- may tell something of Thomas Jr.’s end. If Oskar discovers now on his sojourn Thomas Jr.’s helpfulness and sacrifice of time for others at one stage in his life (with this key from his closet vase) then it raises the strong possibility that his father may also have helped people escape down floors the day planes crashed into the WTC, or perhaps comforted them by touch or word in their last breaths. His father, a steady partner in all of Oskar’s adventures and Manhattan discoveries, was emotionally everything to him, and may have been everything to strangers in their final moments, too. He becomes through this imagining of his last moments, I suggest, a more giving man than Oskar had ever supposed.
The sought spirit of Oskar’s father, however, is not represented by a ghost like King Hamlet, who has voice and movement and some command over the living, but instead suggested by the skull without agency of the figure who Prince Hamlet in the graveyard scene supposes may be a politician, courtier, or lawyer, but turns out to be Yorick, moldering in the grave for twenty-three years. Yorick is obviously suggestive of Thomas Schell Jr. by being dead, but Yorick also evokes the father by representing his entertaining ways, his tricky questions and his ability to make the son “crack up” (Foer 2005b: 1). These are like the acts of the court jester who once put child Hamlet on his back, just as the Schell family remembers Thomas Jr. hefting and playing with Oskar. The skull may also be a memento mori to Oskar, intimating that he has not as much time as he thought he had. Last, as we shall see, the skull in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is used as a weapon by the defenseless and bullied, namely Oskar, in the middle of the school play. Oskar has no way to avenge his father as all the man’s direct murderers were incinerated in the crash into the WTC, and terror mastermind Osama bin Laden at the time was still plotting from an ocean and a cave away. There is no ghost in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* of the traditional kind that can be sighted, felt, or heard, giving instruction to a “sensitive,” warning to the unwary, or confession to the hoped-for avenger. However, Oskar, despite his atheism, does give some mild indication of supernatural thoughts coming from outside sources. The boy can summon the courage a skull gives to destroy -- at least in his mind -- all his tormentors, starting with Oskar’s Enemy No. 1, a nerd-harasser named Jimmy Snyder. Oskar is asked to play Yorick in an elementary school *Hamlet*, “actually an abbreviated modern version, because the real *Hamlet* is too long and confusing, and most of the kids in my class have ADD” (Foer
Nemesis-bully Jimmy gets the prized Prince Hamlet role. This marks an unexpected reinvention of the revenge story, a way of aligning Oskar ever closer to the dead and to his father, all at a perilous time when Oskar, who meditates long on the “To be or not to be” speech “which I know about from the Collected Shakespeare set Grandma bought me,” is considering suicide himself (Foer 2005b: 142). Oskar confesses his depression, “my boots were too heavy.... What exactly made it worth it? What’s so horrible about being dead forever, and not feeling anything, and not even dreaming? What’s so great about feeling and dreaming?” (Foer 2005b: 142, 145). Eschewing the corpse role initially, he promises to play his tambourine as accompaniment to the school play instead. When the teacher Mrs. Rigley insists there will be “no orchestra,” she flatters him and finagles his support, vowing: “It’ll be terrific. You’ll wear all black, and the makeup crew will paint your hands and neck black, [with] … some sort of papier-mâché skull for you to wear over your head. It’ll really give the illusion that you don’t have a body.” The teacher adds one more promise that seems an outright lie: “If anything, I’m afraid you’ll steal the show” (Foer 2005b: 142). We know from Shakespeare’s play that Hamlet is unable to act. In the school production, removing Oskar from those roles that allow the possibility of action breeds the above bullied impotence and Gothic despair in him. There is a compulsion in him to move somehow through the play, but he has no script, no object of revenge, no Laertes, no obvious anger-target. However, when the school production aligns with Oskar’s fantasy-designs, impotence gives way to dreaming. The costume-department plays into Oskar’s own plans for a prototype of an invisibility
suit that could keep people safe, so eventually he accedes: “I was [now] excited to be Yorick” (2005: 142).

What Gothically and bloodily captivates in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close is how Oskar becomes the dead in order to attack all the wrongs or brutality he sees living in his world. This sabotages the play of course, but also lets Oskar construct his own vigilante tale, one where humor meets horror, and one that reddens the grave of this school stage. With the impossibility of playing the part of Hamlet in the production -- despite the overwhelming intertextual presence of the play in his life -- comes this substitute desire to become the dead. Ultimately to act dead is, for the son, to become the father for a time, to conjure the lost Thomas Schell Jr. Thus, rather than only attempting restoration of his father’s damaged legacy as Hamlet does for his murdered father through “performance of dramatic roles” (Townshend 2008: 61), Oskar’s ad-libbed and subversive dialogue as a skull identifies with his father’s dead state. At the same time,

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Much of the novel is an inventive, sometimes exhausting display of 9/11 posttraumatic stress and obsession, shown by Oskar driven to insomnia by imagining inventions that could save people from the disaster next time:

All I wanted was to fall asleep that night, but all I could do was invent.

What about frozen planes, which could be safe from heat-seeking missiles?

What about subway turnstiles that were also radiation detectors?

What about incredibly long ambulances that connected every building to a hospital? What about parachutes in fanny packs?

What about guns with sensors in the handles that could detect if you were angry, and if you were, they wouldn’t fire, even if you were a police officer?

What about Kevlar overalls?

What about skyscrapers made with moving parts, so they could rearrange themselves when they had to, and even open holes in their middles for planes to fly through?

What about… What about… What about… (Foer 2005b: 258-259)
Oskar’s dead-one wreaks vengeance on all those who would terrify through threats or actual violence, such as the grand tormentor of the weak, Jimmy Snyder. But more than that, we see an anger erupt not only against the living who terrify others, but against all those alive, a kind of contempt and Gothic rage against the breathing for no longer being part of their world:

Jimmy [as Prince Hamlet] put his hand under my face. “This is where his lips were that I used to kiss a lot. Where are your jokes now, your games, your songs?” Maybe it was because of everything that had happened in those twelve weeks. Or maybe it was because I felt so close and alone that night. I just couldn’t be dead any longer.

ME. Alas, poor Hamlet [I take JIMMY SNYDER’s face into my hand]; I knew him, Horatio.

JIMMY SNYDER. But Yorick… you’re only… a skull.

ME. So what? I don’t care. Screw you.

JIMMY SNYDER. [whispers] This is not in the play. [He looks for help from MRS. RIGLEY, who is in the front row, flipping through the script. She draws circles in the air with her right hand, which is the universal sign for “improvise.”]

ME. I knew him, Horatio; a jerk of infinite stupidity, a most excellent masturbator in the second-floor boys’ bathroom -- I have proof. Also, he’s dyslexic.

JIMMY SNYDER. [Can’t think of anything to say]

ME. Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs?
JIMMY SNYDER. What are you talking about?

ME. [ Raises hand to scoreboard and swearing in the only way his mother allows] Succotash my cocker spaniel, you fudging crevasse-hole dipshiitake!

JIMMY SNYDER. Huh?

ME. You are guilty of having abused those less strong than you: of making the lives of nerds like me and Toothpaste and The Minch almost impossible, of imitating mental retards, of prank-calling people who get almost no phone calls anyway, of terrorizing domesticated animals and old people -- who, by the way, are smarter and more knowledgeable than you -- of making fun of me just because I have a pussy [Oskar’s cat]…

JIMMY SNYDER. I never prank-called any retards.

(Foer 2005b: 145-146)

Jimmy’s amusing inability to remember the lines -- comparable to Hamlet’s amnesia -- makes him produce a counter-script. This is dialogue truer to his experience, and which subverts the canonical text. For Oskar’s part, the combining of death remembrance and unmasking, along with “intolerable wrong,” “thirst for revenge,” and blood spilled “on hateful objects,” as Coleridge conjured in “The Pains of Sleep” (1803: line 24), imbues the novel with Gothic bloodlust and madness. With this violent release comes a pairing with Falling Man, in the most explosive scene we will see of Oskar, where his mind, like that of another character from Hamlet, becomes “marvelously distempered”: 
ME. “On behalf of the dead…” I pull the skull off my head… I smash it against JIMMY SNYDER’s head, and I smash it again. He falls to the ground, because he is unconscious, and ... I smash his head again with all my force and blood starts to come out of his nose and ears…. I want him to bleed, because he deserves it. And nothing else makes any sense. DAD doesn’t make sense. MOM doesn’t make sense. THE AUDIENCE doesn’t make sense…. The only thing that makes any sense right then is my smashing JIMMY SNYDER’s face.... There is blood everywhere, covering everything. I keep smashing the skull against his skull, which is also RON’s skull (for letting MOM get on with life) and MOM’s skull (for getting on with life) and DAD’S skull (for dying) and GRANDMA’s skull (for embarrassing me so much) and DR. FEIN’s skull (for asking if any good could come out of DAD’s death) and the skulls of everyone else I know. (Foer 2005b: 146)

Beyond reinventing a role for Yorick’s bones, Oskar shows how violence against oneself and others is a predominant act among the traumatized, as the DSM-5 reports, and so readers should not be shocked, despite Oskar’s sensitivity throughout much of the novel and his angel-like preference for always wearing white. The triggering cue for the assault could be anything. The DSM-5 reports that for the posttraumatic afflicted, the cue could be “high winds, tall buildings, a person who resembles the perpetrator, anything symbolic of the attack” (American Psychiatric Association 2013). Functioning for over a year with enormously high levels of stress hormones, Oskar detonates, and perhaps the cue was the bully saying and doing acts connected with Oskar’s father, appropriating Thomas Jr.’s
role and leaving the son violated. What is less understood are Oskar’s self-administered bruises, which is not seen in the other 9/11 novels. Psychologist Jo Hemmings argues that self-harming is seated actually in a lack of inner self-esteem. Oskar knows himself to be a misfit, and if the bruises give pain, perhaps “the pain and pleasure access are quite close. Self-harming is quite similar to the high a drug will give you. It gives you pleasure while you're doing it. Again the self-harming leaves scars but at the time you're doing that self-harming the intensity of the pain is pleasurable and it is very hard for people to understand who have never considered doing something like that” (Hemmings 2013).

Beyond releasing pressure through self-bruising and tearing apart scripts, Oskar finds some solace in reversing natural laws throughout the novel via developing Dr. Seuss-like inventions. One invention makes a 9/11 jumper harmlessly bounce back to his or her office and not fall onto the WTC plaza, as seen in the book’s final images to us, or the “flipbook” as John Updike calls it. Oskar becomes thus a tambourine-playing Orpheus of a boy obsessed with bringing back the dead and meeting his father. Hilary Mantel’s understanding can reveal something of Oskar’s mourning drive:

When we talk about ghosts, we are speaking in layers of metaphor. We are not usually speaking about wispy bodies in rotting shrouds, but about family secrets, buried impulses, unsolved mysteries, anything that lingers and clings. We are speaking of the sense of loss that sometimes overtakes us, a nostalgia for something that we can't name. We want to undo death; we love the idea of the soul, but we are incurably addicted to the body, and we want the dead back. (Mantel 2005: 4-5)
Oskar despairs of the search for what is lost initially, but by meeting others who are wounded by divorce (Mrs. Abby Black), loneliness (her ex-husband, William Black), the death of a lover and the horrors of bombing (neighbor A.R. Black, Oskar’s grandmother, and his newly found Grandfather), he is spurred on, inquisitive of their trauma, entangled by their suffering and unhealed wounds. As Reuther notes, after a traumatic episode, “Individuals may question their self-concept and render themselves with a foreshortened sense of the future as well as a plethora of other psychosocial issues… [yet] experience a renewed sense of purpose” (Reuther 2012: 275). Thomas Jr. turns out to be the subtlest of ghosts in the cache of novels this thesis considers. He (through dying) invisibly brings both his son and his father physically closer. Oskar starts taking on the roles of the father in the family, and the grandfather begins accepting Oskar as a kind of son by skipped generation. The wisdom of the book is the realization of a communal trauma, and attempt to help heal the others, as when Oskar repeatedly listens to and hugs other sufferers.

2.4 Behind Every Trauma Stands Another

A favored or repeated metaphor for the traumatized brain like Oskar’s in much 1990s theory is the poem of the Crusader Tancred and his paradoxically twice-killed lover, one authored by Torquato Tasso in his epic Jerusalem Liberated and ruminated upon by Freud. Freud would deem the account exceptional in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, as possibly the “most moving poetic picture of a fate”:

Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he
makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders’ army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (Freud 1919: 24)

As Caruth interprets it, “The actions of Tancred [are] … the way that the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will…. [R]epetition [is] at the heart of catastrophe -- the experience that Freud will call “traumatic neurosis’” (Caruth 1996: 24). The seemingly impossible second death that the killing lover delivers (who is also a trauma victim from it) is worth contemplating in relation with Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close. An aspect that trauma scholars have not much inspected is that the second killing occurs in a “strange magic forest” that even seasoned crusaders who have travelled over Europe and Asia Minor fear. Tancred is not in a place that others can typically access when this second murder occurs, just as figures in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close are consistently operating -- during their frequent periods of traumatic dissociation -- in a place not in the present but a strange forest of the past. Certainly a portion of Oskar’s trauma is repeated again and again. Part of his unhealed wound is that his father left five messages at the home, and Oskar was too fearful to pick up the phone on the last call: one assumes he did not know how to talk to a man about to die, and slid into denial, burying the message machine in the closet. He recites his father’s messages throughout the novel down to the seconds between his father’s pauses, has reinterpreted it into Morse code, and even fashioned a bracelet out of the messages for his mother. Consistently in the
readings of Bessel van der Kolk in the 1990s (which influenced Caruth) to his memoir / trauma meditation in 2014 (*The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*), it would appear that the central problem of the trauma victim is the unexpected, unwanted return to the scene of the trauma and all this repetition, leading to a steady cancelling of the future for the victim.

Caruth via van der Kolk hints at the Gothic-possession dimension when she addresses how

Freud wonders at the peculiar and sometimes uncanny way in which catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves for those who have passed through them. In some cases, Freud points out, these repetitions are particularly striking because they seem not to be initiated by the individual’s own acts but rather appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control. (Caruth 1996: 1)

Indeed, in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, this construct is borne out as the paternal grandfather comes back to New York City only because of a replay of an earlier trauma, the death of his child (the first time the child was embryonic; the second time the child is middle aged). However, one of the most emphatically argued claims of 1990s trauma theory is that the victim cannot remember much of the experience due to its “overflooding” nature; here, in particular, is where some of our novels under study issue the most stringent challenge.
2.5 Memory Debates

“The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness.”

--Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery (1997)

"It is hard to forget repulsive things."

--Mark Twain, The Innocents Abroad (1869)

We can assuredly agree with Rachel Greenwald Smith that “representing 9/11 as narrative content is …a highly problematic endeavour” (Greenwald Smith 2011: 164). As developed in chapter one, Butler, Herman, Caruth, Felman, Greenberg, Leys, Radstone, van der Kolk et al. contend that some violence is so obscene, towering, or injurious to one’s integrity, self-concept, and worldview that its victims do not comprehend the import of what happens at the time or even later. Memory reduces to dysfunction because the degree of “violence has not yet been fully known” (Caruth 1999: 6), and the experiencer may entirely forget the event. Dissociation (from “the thousand-yard stare” to nightmares to night terrors to flashbacks), shame and destruction of self-image (Wirth 2005: 38), and ruptures to human relationships frequently follow. As Uytterschout and Versluys attest, the survivors may “externalise their emotions into physical or bodily symptoms,” yet there is not conscious “access to the memories of the incidents that formed the basis of their condition” (Uytterschout and Versluys 2008: 218). Kacandes argues there is no hope for the victim ever recovering his or her pre-traumatic identity
(Kacandes 2003: 179–180). What Pierre Janet termed in 1925 (of World War I soldiers in his work Psychological Healing: A Historical and Clinical Study) “le souvenir traumatique” is the result -- a self-imposed amnesia. As Uytterschout and Versluys describe it, “The solution to overcome this dissociation consists of guiding the trauma victim from his disjointed traumatic memory to a coherent narrative memory. In other words, traumatized people have to learn to express themselves and try to fit their experiences into a larger, coherent whole” (Uytterschout and Versluys 2008: 218).

This model from the 1990s’ first wave of trauma theorists is still widely accepted and vociferously defended. Prominently in 2000, Ruth Leys devoted her final chapter in Trauma: A Genealogy to describe Cathy Caruth’s ideas, as much as she gave to Freud’s concepts on trauma. The healing possibilities within Caruth’s popular theory are well summarized by Joshua Pederson, “[I]maginative literature -- or figural, rather than literal language -- can ‘speak’ trauma when normal, discursive language cannot, and fiction helps give a voice to traumatized individuals and populations” (Pederson 2014: 334). Contemporary critical studies of trauma typically make reference to Caruth’s concepts, while as recently as 2011 in London, Cambridge University’s CRASSH (Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities) sponsored a colloquium on her work and its application to literature.

Indeed, Uytterschout and Versluys cite many of this 1990s model of trauma theory in a 2008 interpretation of who is melancholy (namely Oskar) in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close and who is mourning (namely Thomas Sr.). They note the obvious sign of being overwhelmed by trauma -- that Oskar’s grandfather develops aphasia or the loss of speech after the firebombing of Dresden, and never regains his speech in the novel.
They argue that “in a very literal sense, Thomas Schell Sr. is unable to share his traumatic experiences … and precludes every attempt at coming to terms with that past, … encompass[ing] the victim’s urge to hide, to live bodily in the present but to remain psychically in the past and constantly relive the events that torment him” (Uytterschout and Versluys 2008: 222). While I accept that Thomas Sr. is in a constant state of re-enactment (from watching his suffering as he approaches doors and buildings that he senses could blow off or fall at any time), the claim that he is unable to share the trauma should be reconsidered, just as Caruth’s once nearly unquestioned theory should be open to critique.

While Uytterschout and Versluys and other critics consistently apply a Caruthian model to the traumas of Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, dissident opinions exist from psychology, and they should be considered. Trauma theory, as we shall see, is not monolithic. Although Caruth’s model fits and explains Falling Man more than competently, the difference with Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close is that the narrator Oskar and his Grandfather and Grandmother have keen memories of the traumas they experienced and can express them -- although in writing not in speech. The grandfather is an exemplar of this as he has not been able to speak since the firebombing of Dresden in waves from 13 -15 February 1945 by the RAF (with over 750 Lancaster bombers) and

the United States Air Force. However, he has written over two suitcases overstuffed with letters to his son -- which will be stuffed into Thomas Jr.'s coffin -- giving reasons for the desertion of his wife and details of the tightly target-marked firebombing of Dresden. Through the lens of the novel we see the cruelty of the attack, leaving civilians nowhere to run, so pointlessly vicious and sweeping it would even be denounced by Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The American and British efforts to put the art-city Dresden to ruin, the so-called Florence of the Elbe, was an attack so dreadful that we are still trying to measure it seventy years later. The photographs of the Dresden carnage are still labeled as too objectionable for viewing, and this could lead the way to meditations on the actual images of the WTC jumpers about to perish in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, much criticized for their publication in newspapers from the day after, which all the novels in this thesis muse upon.

27 Even an actual British bomber-crew member Miles Tripp was, in trauma theory language, “overwhelmed” from his sky view: “The streets of the city were a fantastic latticework of fire. It was as though one was looking down at the fiery outlines of a crossword puzzle. Blazing streets stretched from east to west, from north to south, in a gigantic saturation of flame. I was completely awed by the spectacle” (Taylor 2005: 322).

28 From Dresden resident Margret Freyer, witness to the carnage that night: “From some of the debris poked arms, heads, legs, and shattered skulls. The static water-tanks were filled up to the top with dead human beings, with large pieces of masonry lying on top of that again. Most people looked as if they had been inflated, with large yellow and brown stains on their bodies” (Taylor 2005: 339).

29 Winston Churchill in a “Memo to Chiefs of Staff, 28th March 1945”: “It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of bombing of German cities simply for the sake of increasing the terror, though under other pretexts, should be reviewed. Otherwise we shall come into control of an utterly ruined land. The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing” (Taylor 2005: 430).
My stance is that for some of the 9/11 terrorist novels (or parts of those novels), we should activate the Caruthian concepts for the way they dredge the submerged traumata, but for other texts we should be aware of their this particular trauma theory’s limits. For instance, in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* we could argue that the Caruthian model helps understand a character’s aphasia (like the Grandfather’s) or some lacunae in the narrative, places where the victim leaves out something elemental that must be sleuthed. But rather than exclusively meditate on what is missing in a text and what those missing parts may mean, it is also beneficial to scrutinize what is said in the novel by the sufferers of trauma. It may be too reductive to imply or declare that trauma cannot be fully expressed, when a wealth of survivors’ accounts of the Holocaust already exists, denoting horrors with explicit detail (witnessed vivisection, starvation, shooting of children, mass hangings). Spanning four decades, a sampler of Holocaust-oriented non-fiction and autobiographical fiction startles us in what it is able to express, from Tadeusz Borowski’s harrowing *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman* (1959), to Simon Wiesenthal’s *The Sunflower* (1969), Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (1972), and Primo Levi’s *The Drowned and The Saved* (1987). These form a quartet of voices of the traumatized, that none the less unflinchingly tell of the abyss, all remembered by the victims themselves instead of imagined by non-participant novelists. All of these memories strongly reinforce Richard McNally’s important and well-supported challenge of van der Kolk and Caruth’s paradigm, especially from his *Remembering Trauma* (2003) and *What is Mental Illness?* (2011).

Harvard experimental psychopathologist McNally finds a wealth of errors, supported by over twelve other studies, to show that van der Kolk’s “theory is plagued by
conceptual and empirical problems” and supporting that critique with reference to no fewer than a dozen other clinical studies (McNally 2003: 179). The neuroscience research and empirical studies that McNally cites do not support the idea of “traumatic amnesia.” Moreover, he wisely points out that “one cannot conclude that a person who does not think about something for a long period of time -- who has ‘forgotten’ it, in everyday parlance -- is suffering from amnesia. Amnesia is an inability to recall information that has been encoded. We cannot assume that people have been unable to recall their abuse during the years when they did not think about it” (McNally 2003: 184). His opponents on trauma face their greatest challenge over representing the “unexpressible.” As McNally points out, though, “Contrary to van der Kolk’s theory, trauma does not block the formation of narrative memory. That memory for trauma can be expressed as physiologic reactivity to traumatic reminders does not preclude its being expressed in narrative as well” (McNally 2003: 183). Frequently, “[P]eople who have experienced harrowingly close brushes with death (such as falling off a mountain) often report extreme dissociative alterations of consciousness (time slowing down, everything seeming unreal), yet they remain fully capable of providing detailed accounts of their experiences” (McNally 2003: 182). Joshua Pederson sums up McNally’s findings well by concluding that, “After reading McNally, one recognizes that Caruth’s theory of trauma is damaged by the material he gathers, as significant strains of contemporary psychological research suggest that trauma victims can both remember and describe their traumatic past in detail” (Pederson 2014: 338).

As literary evidence for McNally’s view, I would like to raise and address ten places where the Grandfather can indeed recall his traumatic suffering at will on the night
that his pregnant beloved is murdered by the Allied planes overhead (as noted in a letter to his son on 11 March 1978). Registered in greatest detail, it increases our understanding for his need to run away from his new baby in New York City, as he didn’t want to bring life into the world a second time after losing the first baby along with the mother Anna during the firebombing of Dresden. These vivid memories of his also suggest weakness in the trauma theory that overstresses or oversimplifies how memory works for the traumatized. Key is to quote the Grandfather at length to suggest how seemingly in control, detached, unflinching and specific he is, without breakdown or interruption. On the same night his lover tells him: “Don’t be a child… I’m pregnant… Please be overjoyed [sic]” (Foer 2005b: 210), incendiary bombs fall over Dresden. Thomas Sr. “kissed her, I kissed her stomach, that was the last time I ever saw her. At 9:30 that night, the air-raid sirens sounded, everyone went to the shelters.” Then, through the night over one hundred Allied planes fly over:

We ran out of the shelter, which was flooded with yellow-gray smoke, we didn’t recognize anything... A horse on fire galloped past, there were burning vehicles and carts with burning refugees, people were screaming... I told my parents I had to go find Anna…. I grabbed the doorknob and it took the skin off my hand, I saw the muscles of my palm, red and pulsing, why did I [then] grab it with my other hand?... My father shouted at me, it was the first time he had ever shouted at me … he struck me across the face, it was the first time he had ever struck me, that was the last time I saw my parents....

On my way to Anna’s house, the second raid began…. I walked over
children, everyone was losing everyone, … I saw a woman whose blond [sic] hair and green dress were on fire, running with a silent baby in her arms, I saw humans melted into thick pools of liquid, three or four feet deep in places, I saw bodies crackling like embers, and … the bombs kept falling, purple, orange and white…. I heard the roar of that baby’s silence. I passed the zoo, the cages had been ripped open … One of the keepers was calling out for help, he was a strong man, his eyes had been burnt closed, he grabbed my arm and asked me if I knew how to fire a gun: “You’ve got to find the carnivores…. Shoot everything.”

(Foer 2005b: 209-214)

Thus Thomas Sr. will kill a bear cub climbing atop its dead mother, a camel (though it takes twelve bullets), a rhinoceros, a giraffe, a zebra, sea lions, and an ape (in whose simian “eyes I was sure I saw some form of understanding, but I didn’t see forgiveness” [203]). It is hard to imagine where Thomas Sr. has left out any of the horrors from his sensory-loaded memory of Allied attack here, as his five-page account, of which the above is a small portion, is shattering. Notably, the grandfather’s index of horrors is not partial, missing, fragmented, or unrecoverable. It has simply not been asked for by anyone. In fact, one discovers the same bitter sharpness to anguished memory elsewhere via Lawrence L. Langer’s extensive interviews from Holocaust Testimonies (the 1991 National Book Critics Circle Award winner) with survivors detailing Axis horrors. There, survivors of the Shoah offer amply detailed memories of atrocities they suffered and witnessed in the concentration camps and in Nazi slave-worker factories.
2.6 Conclusion

Oscillating between the Caruthian model (of the mind overwhelmed and retaining little or no conscious recall of the event, and being prey to intrusions of instants or scenes of violence) and the McNallian theory of complete or overmuch traumatic detail that can be summoned, this field of 9/11 novels supports two different, even oppositional readings of trauma. Keith Neudecker had only partial memory of the WTC fall and death of his office mate in *Falling Man*, Oskar and Thomas Sr. seem to recall past events (especially explosions and bombings) at will, and the next novel *The Writing on the Wall* features overwhelming shocks and sexual abuses buried decades ago that are exceptionally difficult to disinter, except in the face of a new disaster that weakens the crypt of memory where lay past traumata. The erupting theoretical differences between the two major trauma schools will advance an argument regarding the place of the Gothic in trauma that I will elaborate in the next chapter.
Chapter 3. Avenging the Dead, Resurrecting the Dead: Lynne Sharon Schwartz’s *The Writing on the Wall* (2005)

3.1 Criticism Specific to *The Writing on the Wall*

Covered far less in media than *Falling Man* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, yet more consistently lauded than either, Brooklyn-born Lynne Sharon Schwartz’s *The Writing on the Wall* (2005) garnered praise by book reviewers, novelists, and literary critics for its affecting meditations on how past losses direct characters facing a new trauma of disaster. *The New York Times* sounded perhaps the most negative notes of any media surveyed on the novel, though. The pattern of *The New York Times*’ complaint undoubtedly is familiar now: the tragedy of 9/11 seems beyond words for this novel. The reviewer Cowles notes that after the protagonist Renata’s “past marked by incest, a stolen child, a possible suicide or two and, centrally, the death of her twin sister at 16,” the 9/11 passages seem “strangely remote” (Cowles 2005). However, *The New York Times* does concede that Schwartz’s novel reveals how a latter trauma can at least reveal more of an earlier cataclysm: “the novel's most provocative aspect is its questioning of the ways public tragedy can inform and amplify private grief” (Cowles 2005).

The *9/11 Encyclopedia*, on the other hand, gives Schwartz’s novel inordinate praise, ranking it as one of the three “best literary fiction” works to come out of America in the year of its release (Leonard 2005: 60). They observe a rich psychological portrait “superior to the 9/11 fictions of both Ian McEwan and Jonathan Safran Foer” in its protagonist. Renata is traumatized by the WTC fall, yet willing to handle domestic
disasters at the same time: “a crazy mother, an importunate lover, a teenage mute, a dead twin, and the child she thinks she lost on a merry-go-round” (Leonard 2005: 60).

Countering the 9/11 Encyclopedia’s praise of style and content, however, Andi Diehn finds weakness in the novel’s arrangement of the events, noting that the “plot seems to slide into a too-convenient pattern: Schwartz takes advantage of the aftereffect of a national tragedy and brings together people who would otherwise have remained ignorant of each other’s proximity” (Diehn 2005). To Diehn, these collisions with others’ traumas indicate a fascination with alternate histories, twins, and doppelgängers. Schwartz’s characters -- a teenage girl on the 9/11 streets resembling the niece the protagonist lost, an aunt who disappeared twenty years ago, and her husband long suspected of pederasty and now dying in a Houston hospital -- all convincingly “tug [the protagonist] toward both an act of selfishness and one of self-destruction” (Diehn 2005). Renata’s facing of the suspect uncle leads us to the matrix of trauma, memory, terrorism and Gothic in which dread grows most fiercely in the novel. David Cockley approaches a much-meditated-upon aspect of trauma studies freshly when he notes how “Renata cannot change her own history of the facts of the past,” but that she can change what parts of them she emphasizes, and this might make her a different person, either perhaps less of a wrongdoer or less of a victim (Cockley 2009: 18). Struck by the process of the traumatized victim gaining perspective on disaster, using private languages, and sometimes moving out of a “delusionary state,” Bimbisar Irom stresses how Schwartz employs characters to use other characters as empty slates to “reclaim [their] lost family” (Irom 2012: 539, 535). The keenest of the novel’s observations, he finds, pertain to the “quest for domestic fulfillment” and outsiders’ pressure to “relinquish [traumatic]
memory” (Irom 2012: 533), two yearnings expressed through the all the novels I survey. At Harper’s, John Leonard acknowledges the tendency I have addressed earlier -- critics’ unjustified marginalization and neglect of 9/11 novels, which always leaves the novelists’ insights on trauma unprobed and untested. His notable idea is that New York critics who were in Gotham on 9/11 tend to “project our own uneasiness, hysteria, or relief on the writer: he or she hasn't described the way we feel, or has softened and sanitized it up.... Thus Jonathan Safran Foer gets kicked about like an Aztec skull” (Leonard 2005: 85). Schwartz’s truth-seeking through the rubble, Leonard contends, should be favourably compared to how trauma reveals itself in the essays of Joan Didion and novels of Norman Mailer (Leonard 2005: 85-86).

One of the untraced yet most striking patterns throughout the body of 9/11 novels delineated here is how a new trauma develops the obscurest aspects, unacceptable thoughts, emotional tangles and repressions from a previous trauma, for a reawakening of suppressed terrors. Caruth demonstrated this tendency, as explored in my second chapter, with the example of Freud’s discussion of Tancred’s accidental double-slaking of his lover. Indeed, Gothic writers frequently fashion a skeleton key to their own works of Gothic terrorism when they conclude, as Patrick McGrath has done, that “one trauma always hides another, and can therefore function to uncover it” (McGrath 2016: “Afterword”). Of all the novels surveyed in this thesis, The Writing on the Wall (2005) most potently portrays the dangerous but necessary resumoning of sunken memory and unprocessed horrors and unmemorialized losses that a new trauma entails. In exploring this, and in structuring her protagonist’s path through a labyrinth of Gothic obsessions, Schwartz is framing the 9/11 terrorism / trauma text as a Gothic one. In what follows, I
seek to illuminate the Gothic tensions prevalent in *The Writing on the Wall*, revealing the extent to which they can be decrypted through a range of trauma theories. In turn, these trauma frameworks help us to understand characters’ mournful, furtive, self-destructive, and quizzical behaviors and expressions.

After categorizing these texts as a strain of the Gothic, the more consuming question that remains is what does the Gothic presence allow these books to achieve? How does the Gothic function in this trauma text, and what functions does it undertake that could not conceivably be fulfilled by another literary genre, mode, or impulse? I propose that the Gothic mode forms a ghostly trace or ghostly template, even if both reviewers and scholars often deem the texts surveyed here as realist novels. Post-9/11 fictions, I argue, make frequent recourse to a 250-year-old “carnivalesque mode,” thus serving as a “discursive site” for “representations of the fragmented subject,” as Robert Miles claims of the Gothic (Miles 1993: 28). It is a locus for excess, vanishing, ruin, death, and even the supernatural return for a dead twin, which we see represented in *The Writing on the Wall*. Coursing through their pages, the Gothic mode (fashioning secrets, dissembling, and family ruptures through taboo) permits these texts to encrypt at the same time as they decrypt, offering a vision and vocabulary for the return of the lost, dead, and the presumed-dead. The Gothic functions in Schwartz’s novel, in particular, to give its personages the fantasy that they will see their dead or their lost ones again, or the sense that their identical twin is indeed *at home* or actually inside of them. Beyond giving hope of the supernatural return of those from another realm, the Gothic strain in *The Writing on the Wall* suggests a revenge fantasy for the finding, control over, and destruction of those who have done one wrong long ago in the past. The Gothic presence
thus satisfies a Poesque need for retribution in some of these characters, namely the protagonist. At times, the Gothic works as a self-imposed punishment for their love-crimes, as they perceive them; at other times, it is sentencing without jury for others’ neglectful behaviors.

_The Writing on the Wall_ begins with a lost chance at love, and will continue to structure itself with points of lost opportunities and unheralded moments of final goodbye, often producing grave survivor-guilt for its cast. On the dawn of 9/11 and before the cataclysm, social-worker lover Jack is in a hurry to get to work. Declining to make love to his girlfriend (the protagonist Renata) despite the overture, this could easily have been the last chance for him to ever touch her. For her turn, thirty-four-year-old Renata joins the morning Gotham crowds trudging to their employment. She works at the New York Public Library, and within that place, a center for languishing languages. One of her tasks is to attempt to explain in English those foreign-language concepts for which there is no one-word equivalent. With admirable brevity, Schwartz makes us cognizant of the limits of language, and focuses readers’ minds on those acts and emotions that are seemingly unrepresentable by words, a constant and contested interest of trauma theorists such as Caruth, Felman, Laub, van der Kolk, and Lifton. Traversing Brooklyn Bridge, one of the most celebrated bridges in American poetry, inspiring verse from Walt Whitman to Hart Crane, she is a close witness to a vision more apocalyptic than either poet would dream. The first hijacked jet slams into the WTC north tower, and she watches as the second strikes deeply into the south tower, too. Then what had been a languorous longing for sex in her moments before turns to disbelief at mass murder. The language of the sublime and the spectacular summarily ensues: “Adrift in her erotic fantasies, she didn’t see it happen,
although she’s seen it so many times since that it feels like she saw it. People around her screamed, so she looked where they were looking, at a huge marigold bursting open in the sky, across the river, flinging petals into the blue” (Schwartz 2005: 45). This first direct vision of terror amidst the screams (unmediated yet by the TV broadcasts of the attack that will intrude relentlessly upon the rest of the novel) is directly marked in the text as “nothing comprehensible.” It must be filled instead with metaphors for Renata to express it, curiously mixed with attraction, eroticism, bursting, and release. The violent and horrible are made beautiful, to a degree, with the blooming marigold reference. Unexpected gorgeousness is, as in the groves of orange and lemon before the Alps in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, “sleeping in the lap of horror” (Radcliffe 2008: 55). This “wondrous horror,” as Renata describes it later (Schwartz 2005: 229), brings to mind the Gothic’s intensely “pleasing terror,” as Samuel Johnson called it in *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (1759). A heightened awareness of the simultaneous pulsions of sex and death, a Gothic staple from *The Castle of Otranto* onwards, comes at the same fateful skyfall for Renata, along with a transformed vision of her world. Renata, whose Latin name literally means “Rebirth,” will start seeing the world freshly now. She begins digging up the past she has buried, and what she has not disinterred will claw itself out on its own through mere chance and coincidence. The fall of these buildings is a structural echo of the collapse of the walls restraining her -- her guilt, her recklessness with her three-year-old niece, her own repressed memories of her sister’s loathsome seduction -- and it figuratively scorches then consumes her. Such memories are those of the disappearance and death of her twin sister, Claudia (by either accident or foul play); the discovery that her uncle was molesting her sister (making Claudia pregnant); and
losing Claudia’s daughter Gianna ten years after she lost Claudia. The planes cut into the
WTC towers, and with their resulting grotesqueries, anguish drills into the vault housing
Renata’s repressed memories, threatening to take her on to her twin sister’s own
deathward drive.

The explosions themselves are an intriguing example of the process of the Gothic
in general wherein, as Vijay Mishra observed, “the sublime threatens our very capacities
of cognitive judgment” (Mishra 1994: 16): Witnesses describe what they see, but cannot
understand it or explain why it has happened. Extending the Gothic framework higher,
though, are the coming strange impulses and fateful meetings and identifications and
misidentifications, unions and reunions, as the order in the narrative moves towards what
Mishra has called the Gothic mode’s “extravagant, colorful, complicated plot[ting]”
(Mishra 1994: 27).

Despite the panic-driven impulse to “walk as fast as she can” homeward to
Brooklyn on the morning of the terror, Renata pauses as the flames and poisonous smoke
climb higher, a gesture that recalls Keith Neudecker’s refusal to run in Falling Man as the
human stampede rushes past him. However, she is not stunned into paralysis. Rather, her
stopping is to recover something long lost, though the object found would seem to
readers a substitute and not the lost thing itself. Her pause in the midst of the largest
attack on American soil confirms Derrida’s observation in “Autoimmunity...” about
9/11, namely, that on that day we would all “deny the irresistible foreboding that the
worst has not taken place, not yet” (Derrida 2003: note 10, 189):

An impulse she would never fathom, to riffle through the papers gathered
at the edge of a grilled sewer lid coated with ash. Among the paper, as if
she’d been hunting for it, she found the twenty-dollar bill.... She had the absurd notion that it might be the same twenty dollars that went missing when she was eleven years old, causing the estrangement from her now-dead twin sister and lasting grief. Changing the course of her life.

(Schwartz 2005: 47)

What is striking, here, is how the tower attack and this reaching for twenty dollars will explode the lies and silence which Renata has kept for eighteen years. Peculiar things happen during catastrophe, but this one concerning cash is not motivated by greed; instead, it is highly steeped in Gothic reference, revealing, as it does, ghostly traces of traumata to be decoded later.

3.2 Gothic Scripts

“Cinema is the art of ghosts. And I believe that the cinema, when it’s not boring, is the art of allowing ghosts to come back.”


Before discussing the text’s correspondences with the tradition of Gothic romance, and how these correspondences change our perception of the disaster, it is useful to look at other creators who have fused one genre or sub-genre with the Gothic (as we examine the fusion of terrorism tale and the Gothic impulse), and how they describe and facilitate this act of genre-merging. Accepting Linda K. Kauffman’s belief that “since cinema and psychoanalysis were born, like conjoined twins, near the end of
the nineteenth century, cinema provides a useful lens for examining the workings of [traumatic] memory, displacement, condensation, and melodrama,” I assert that we may include Guillermo del Toro as one of the foremost Gothic-oriented moviemakers in our time. (For her part, Kauffman mentions Hitchcock, Marguerite Duras, Sarah Kofman, Maya Deren, and Tracey Moffatt as key Gothic filmmakers [Kauffman 2009: 650]). Del Toro shows a similar Gothic modality at work in many of his films, blossoming perhaps most darkly in the 2015 film of roofless mansions and incestuous, murderous twins, *Crimson Peak*, where “love makes monsters of us all.”

The day before 9/11, a war film 30 showed in North America that was also a Gothic romance and ghost story (of a dead boy and old doctor), to wit, *The Devil’s Backbone*. Its director Guillermo del Toro admits to me that he now recalls nothing of the Toronto Film Festival where it premiered because the Manhattan blasts of the next day obliterated memory. The film soon engendered discourse in media related to traumas in its depiction of innocent deaths from an orphanage explosion; the forming of a proto-fascist (in the character of Jacinto); summary executions of Republican soldiers and

30 To add to the correspondence and secret language between disaster and cinema, Claire Kahane wisely considers how 9/11 is understood and contextualized through earlier films in “Uncanny Sights”: “Even as this historical event unfolded, it was quickly recognised, placed in a familiar category, and given a local habitation and name: ‘it’s just like a movie,’ the newscasters blurted out, a remark echoed repeatedly that morning. . . . Thus the actual reality before our eyes was almost immediately transformed into and by the virtual reality of Hollywood and made familiar, déjà vu. In this assimilation, as we turned to the movies to orient us to the real disaster, the historical was confused with the fictional, and the event of 9/11 itself -- familiar and unfamiliar, real and unreal -- took on an uncanny ambiguity. . . . Our response to 9/11 made disturbingly clear how much our perceptual experience as well as our psychic life is filtered and managed through films we have seen, even experienced as films we have seen” (Kahane 2003: 107).
International Brigade volunteers; and the covered-up murder of a boy long before. Because of concerns about the depiction of deaths of civilians (especially children) in the month of its release, the distribution company scaled back the release to only an art-house premiere of twelve screens in America during that September. What is especially interesting and applicable to The Writing on the Wall, a text which also deals with sudden death and the disappearance of children, is del Toro’s appraisal that even in our terrorism-ravaged time, “the elements of a Gothic Romance have not changed that much”:

Generally, most of the action is linked to a place, to a building. In the case of The Devil’s Backbone, it’s clearly the orphanage that lies in the middle of nowhere. Within this building there is always a dark secret that is buried in the past and that affects the lives of the people living in it. It is mostly shrouded in silence. In the case of The Devil’s Backbone it is both the murder of this child and the existence of a stash of gold hidden within the orphanage. . . . There is always a link to a treasure in a Gothic Romance, it is either gold, or a family treasure, fortune, inheritance. Finally, the element that is very important is the Romance, the passion, and absolutely carnal desires and the sexuality that brews and broods. . . . The arrival of another element in the Gothic Romance -- in the center of all this darkness, all this plotting, secret hideaways, secret passages, cellars -- . . . stands a pure heroine or hero. In The Castle of Otranto it is a pure boy and girl who are in love, and in The Devil’s Backbone it is the arrival of Carlos the orphan, who brings a new set of
eyes which explores the secret, and through the purity of his heart, unravels the mystery. . . . The Gothic Romance, and the predecessor the horror tale of [Eighteenth century] Germany, always required this virginal presence, or an innocent pair of eyes. And in that I think you have a third evolution, which is the modern horror tale, and that innocence is abandoned slowly. But to make the Gothic romance, you have to have those almost fairy tale elements here and there. (del Toro 2013: The Devil’s Backbone Voiceover, minutes 5.13-7.06)

If we follow del Toro’s helpful description and taxonomy, we recognize that from early to late, The Writing on the Wall is a terrorism novel with startling plot similarities to all of the qualities of the most traditional Gothic romances that the Director describes. However, the absence of a much-earlier trauma also sets these two Gothic works apart, and partially explains how the young hero of the film avoids the paralysis detectable in the older heroine of the novel.

In both the book and film, an adult pushes someone much younger against a pillar: the victim stumbles, falls into water, and drowns with a massive head injury. The recovery of the victim’s corpse is a fraught process. The dead one then returns to the living at night.31 In the war film’s case, ghost boy / manslaughter victim Santi (an abbreviation for the decapitated Santiago, the patron saint of Spain, and suggestive of Spain itself facing its extinction in the Civil War) communicates with the hero / new orphan who takes his bed and desk place. Santi communicates his wish to the fearfully

31 Derrida simultaneously shares etymology and tracks ghosts in one sentence: “You know, ghosts don’t just appear, they come back. In French, they are the ‘ones who returned’ [or les revenants from ‘revenir’]” (Derrida 1983: Ghost Dance).
intrigued Carlos, but not his murderous backstory -- only the words: “Bring [my killer] Jacinto to me.” Carlos for a very long time has no idea why; nor could he know that little Santi looks the same as he did when he died, as there are no photographs of him about. Like many visitants in Gothic stories, Santi wants to express his nearly unutterable story to an empathetic or sensitive listener and to hold his murderer in a death embrace. As it transpires, Santi will kill Jacinto and express his story through the help of the living orphans. Though he explodes the Santa Lucia Orphanage, the former orphan Jacinto will never achieve his base wish -- to steal the orphanage’s gold reserved for the Republican war effort. The gold bars only weigh him down and he drowns in a cellar pool, still a “prince without a kingdom.” Though explosions also thunder over Renata’s head, and though a thousand tons of gold and silver sit not far away (beneath the WTC plaza in a vault of the Bank of Nova Scotia), it is the splitting of her psychic vault that is of primary interest. The buried storehouse of traumatic memory and secrets fractures for Renata. Her subterranean life-story frees itself after the shattering of the WTC above, and the Gothic mode, as in del Toro’s film, becomes its interpreter.

Just as Carlos in *The Devil’s Backbone* becomes what Geoffrey Hartman terms an “intellectual witness” (Hartman 1998: 37) to another’s trauma (the murder of Santi), so too, then, other 9/11 survivors would become the witnesses to Renata’s multiple traumas. Their hearing of her shocks will move unprocessed “traumatic events” in others into what Caruth calls “narrative memory” (Caruth 1995: 153). As Richard Gray observes, with an attuned and therapeutic audience, one’s narrative memory can be “verbalized and communicated but also ... assimilated; the dispersed, and in most cases repressed, pieces of the event can be disinterred and delivered into some kind of sequence ... with the text
[becoming] both symptom and diagnosis” (Gray 2008: 130). Finally, the victim can, as Judith Herman perceives it, “see more than a few fragments of the picture at one time, ... retain all the pieces and ... fit them together” in a full account (Herman 1992: 2). Just such a process helps Renata move beyond blaming the victim for the violence.

Mediating the gap between cinematic example and literature, we observe a similar pattern of seeking punishment from The Devil’s Backbone to The Writing on the Wall. To begin the Gothic Romance parallel in The Writing on the Wall, we keep in mind Derrida’s observation that “modern technology of images like cinematography, instead of diminishing the realm of ghosts (as does any scientific or technical thought [leave] behind the age of ghosts as part of the feudal age with its somewhat primitive technology as a certain perinatal age), [actually] enhances the power of ghosts and their ability to haunt us” (Derrida 1983: Ghost Dance). One could buttress Derrida’s insight with the fact that electric illumination replacing candles and gaslight did not, despite Edmund Wilson’s famed prediction in “A Treatise on Tales of Horror” in 1944, kill the ghost story, and neither has any other technology so far. As Derrida intuits, such inventions -- particularly when they inexplicably fail -- only give ghosts one more surface to play upon, as suggested in the cinema of fright with every inexplicable light flicker and eventual stormy blackout. Though they stood as gleaming towers of post-modern 1970s design and not ancient castles, the WTC towers still may have, in the midst of their rubble, a Gothic surface to build upon possessing taboo secrets and spectral presence.

I posit that the texts previously discussed in this thesis hover between two different theoretical possibilities about trauma: that overwhelming situations cannot be adequately inscribed, remembered, and expressed, on the one hand, and the conviction
that their terror is expressible, on the other. This place of indecision between two perspectives on trauma, in fact, is useful for showing how the Gothic functions in relation to trauma, and where the Gothic resides, as the text of *The Writing on the Wall* oscillates between these two poles. Where repressed memory will not provide details, and when a victim cannot articulate them and never expand and reconfigure the disabling flashes of violent disruption into a full account, Gothic elements emerge to ghost the margins of characters’ smokey recollections. Ruined towers, the diminished skyline, ash-filled streets, and the silhouettes of body parts thrown upon the avenues act to fill the “empty coffins” of fictional trauma narratives. But beyond a Gothic *mise-en-scène*, protagonists and antagonists themselves employ metaphors of the Gothic, consciously or not, because they supply a template that intimates the horrors of the individual trauma. Very soon into

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This ambivalence evokes Renata’s own movement between the extremes of loving her dead sister and resenting her. The melancholia she suffers (and self-blame, denigration, and self-punishment) also evokes much of Freud’s thinking on melancholia, and its vast difference from mourning. For advancing my own idea on her possession ghost, I trace Freud’s intriguing exposition of the loss of the beloved becoming part of the ego, and in a sense possessing one, directing action: “There is no difficulty in reconstructing this process. An object-choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then, owing to a real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the object-relationship was shattered. The result was not the normal one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different, for whose coming-about various conditions seem to be necessary. The object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance and was brought to an end. But the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object” (Freud 1917: “Mourning and Melancholia” 3-4). Lukacher’s pithy sharpening of the above describes Renata’s psychic plight precisely and partially explains why she bonds to no one after Claudia: “The patient’s feeling of guilt at the death of the loved one, as the result perhaps of a deep-seated satisfaction or relief at the other’s death, creates an impasse that blocks the normal process of mourning as introjection” (Lukacher 1988: 89).
this novel, we already have a skeleton of a Gothic story in its tropes. A plethora of Gothic identifications rises: doubling, unexplained disappearance, splintering of identities, grotesque violence, furtive incestuous sex, predatory males who stalk women half their age and hide their crimes well, doppelgängers, the sublime, abysses of madness, disrupted time, the uncanny, compulsions to repeat actions, hungers for revenge, paranoia, xenophobia, muteness, paralysis, and “mutilation beyond recognition” (Kauffman 2009: 649, 653, 654, 656). A sense of disintegration weighs over all, and what is worse, a lack of commemoration for what vanished. For the days to come, there is only DeLillo’s forecast: terrorism’s menace to kill hope for generations and make “ruins of the future” (DeLillo 2002). When trauma does “speak” here, it articulates in the language of the Gothic.

Gothic dread in The Writing on the Wall escalates by concentrating on the perils of vulnerable heroines first. Renata’s twin Claudia seems always unprotected. Like the Gothic heroines stretching back to The Castle of Otranto, and continuing through The Monk, The Mysteries of Udolpho, The Italian, Dracula, and beyond, we perceive in Claudia a young woman who is “at the mercy of ... a wicked older man.... She is a potential victim of his desire” (Horner 2009: 180). Her uncle Peter seduces Claudia (the novel keeps a black veil over the details of the whole violation), but he is mentally so benighted that sometimes he confuses one twin for the other, starting shameful romantic play before he discovers the misidentification and retreats from predation. When Peter assumes that it is Claudia’s whose back he erotically rubs whilst in the garage, when it is actually Renata’s bending over to tend her bicycle, he ushers a budding shame and confusion in Renata. She feels instantly a partial victim: through the mistaken identity,
Renata feels a fraction of soul-sickness and self-disgust that Claudia must face daily, and in a sense Renata becomes Claudia for a moment, long before she houses Claudia’s ghost and longings in her own body. Shy at the time and caught in a liminal state between girlhood and womanhood, Renata will not fully understand or confess what was happening at this moment of intolerable intrusion until years later, when 9/11 will refocus her mind on imagining this early sexual trauma of her sister. For her part, Claudia’s silence to Renata (and others) about the extent of Peter’s attraction and possible molestation may not be mere passivity. It could be Claudia’s sharing of the desire her father has to protect his younger brother / the twins’ uncle. Gianna, the child of Peter and Claudia’s taboo sexual intercourse, is born when her mother is only seventeen-years-old, and promptly given to another family without a chance for Claudia’s input or a chance for her to mourn the relinquishing of her own blood. Ten days following the birth, Claudia suffers a head injury in the early hours of the morning from falling against a pillar, and drowns in the Hudson River not far from the family home. The police never conclusively solve the case, and ambiguity reigns over all unto the novel’s final pages. The remaining family will have to watch on shore later as Claudia’s bloated body, looking like some rotted and unspeakable human / animal hybrid, is dredged from the river.

Ruled accidental by the authorities, the death of Claudia causes implosion in the family. Renata’s father turns to alcoholism, drives into a tree, and dies -- again it is unclear if it is intended or not, but enough doubt remains for his daughter to consider it suicide. The molester, Uncle Peter, goes missing, and his wife disappears soon thereafter. Renata’s mother Grace, giving quixotic answers to unasked questions and making Renata
feel uninterrupted survivor-guilt, finds herself institutionalized and a victim to electroshock therapy. Grace’s worldview changes to that of a defeated, traumatized victim marooned by her nostalgia: “There’s nothing for me out there. Nothing. You can’t make things the way they were before. Don’t bother trying” (Schwartz 2005: 251). Renata’s guilt alloys with some real wrongdoing, however, or at least strong negligence. While Peter and Claudia’s child of incest is given up for adoption initially, Gianna eventually returns to Renata’s family, and Renata at eighteen-years-old assumes mothering duties for the niece. On one otherwise cheerful outing to Central Park, with weather much like the crystalline skies that open this novel on 9/11, the niece vanishes. Renata leaves her spinning on the horse carousel, goes away for two minutes to fetch ice cream, and the child is gone, forever to haunt the protagonist and to make the grandmother repeatedly, almost ritualistically whisper: “Where is she now? . . . Where is she?” (Schwartz 2005: 119). Ironically, when on the streets of blown-apart Manhattan years later, Renata finds a dumbstruck teenager whom she thinks resembles Gianna, and later insists she is Gianna, despite the inestimable odds. Renata takes her to the distraught grandmother and senses her quest has finally come to a good end. Grace, in the only moment of lucidity in the entire book and speaking as one traumatized woman to another, levels with her daughter: “Listen Renata, you need to get this child to a doctor.... She can’t keep hiding out with you. . . . And listen, don’t bring me any more children. I can’t take it” (Schwartz 2005: 251). A rare and wintry smile comes to Renata, and she quips: “You’re seeing things so rationally, all of a sudden. Did they change your medication or what?” (Schwartz 2005: 251). Perhaps this remark hints that Renata realizes that the “miraculous rescue” of Gianna is false, yet she has nothing with which to replace this fantasy of
restoration, so she lets her dream abide.

### 3.3 A Clamor of Ghosts

What is the ghost, after all, that it should frighten us so, but our own face? When we observe it we become like Narcissus.... [W]e need ghost stories because we, in fact, are the ghosts

--Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* 1981: 272-273

As mentioned in chapter one, and recorded in the psychiatric reports of Adler and Lindemann following the Cocoanut Grove nightclub fire in 1941, revenants of trauma victims sometimes “creep” into survivors. Indeed, the ghosts in 9/11 fictions internalize so successfully into the living that we often do not recognize them except through a trauma disorder manifesting in a protagonist’s perceptions, words, and actions, mimicking those traits of the deceased. Bringing in an identical twin to the trauma equation, as *The Writing on the Wall* does, introduces more variables that we will explore later. The Gothic concentrates on the presence of ghosts as a sign of something that is unsettled and unsaid. Schwartz’s fiction, like the other novels presented here, communicates the unfinished business left by terrorism, mass murder and thousands of missing bodies. Something terrible happened in the past that haunts characters and which seeks some form of resolution. Being a severe trauma, though, it is still happening. The violation so overwhelming is not over; yet characters feel they must bear witness to it and mourn it even they cannot articulate it. They cannot capture its immensity and sublime sorrow; still they heroically try, and through such a mere, imperfect medium as words.
The mimicking of the lost one, as observable in *Falling Man*, begins extremely early in *The Writing on the Wall*. It is unclear whether Renata knows that and will not admit it, or whether she does not know the correspondence at all. As Irom succinctly diagnoses it, “The 9/11 attacks set in motion a series of events through which Renata tries to compensate for the past by finding substitutes for her lost family” (Irom 2012: 60). I would go further and suggest she *herself* becomes the substitute for dead family, especially her dead sister (whether killed by Claudia’s own suicidal impulses or by Peter arranging a meeting by the river, dashing her against the pier, and impassively watching her fall under the waves). Within months of her sister’s unsolved death, Renata withdraws from college, and in a move of identification with her sister, moves to New York City, for “that was where Claudia used to sneak off, to escape [to]” (Schwartz 2005: 123). This is a detail that we do not learn until at almost the halfway point of the book. Like all of the 9/11 novels analyzed here, this split-time narrative format allows characters’ memory to discharge at readers like shards from an explosion, fragments and splinters that are not all gathered orderly, or in a typically linear fashion but that explode in a circular blast, glimpsed at but not fully realized. What is more, this fractured narrative allows us to understand how the ghost is operating, and what characters in the novel become witnesses for the traumatized to confess to (like the social worker / first long-term boyfriend Jack), slowly pulling out some of the darker truths. Ghastly and gruesome details are exposed, reaffirming that in the Gothic, “deception, conjecture and mystery that surrounds the dead must, in the course of the narrative, eventually be submitted to the rigours of empirical proof, even if this amounts to the rendering of death and the dead, decaying body as a horrid spectacle” (Townshend 2008: 74). We will need
to see how “each of Renata’s corpses had ... a distinct way of being dead” (Schwartz 2005: 122).

At this point, a concept of Derrida’s dilates the portals towards the haunted world of this novel, and we see clearly, as Virginia Woolf once wrote in discussion of Walpole and others, “the ghosts within us” (Woolf 1945: 51). In Ghost Dance, we remember that “To be haunted by a ghost is to remember something you’ve never lived through. For memory is the past that has never taken the form of the present” (Derrida 1983). Caruth describes that same paradox through trauma theory, by defining a flashback as a “history that literally has no place, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood” (Caruth 1995: 153). Therefore, a catastrophe like 9/11 has an impossible “history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence” (Caruth 1995: 153).

Likewise, time-boundaries between discrete events vanish in The Writing of the Wall. In one paragraph, the WTC trauma forces together the disparate past into one agony. Renata flashes back to her sister leaving the house on the fateful night of her death, believing that she should have followed her; she has a similar strobe-like memory of the police delivering the news of Claudia’s death days later; and then Renata casts ten years forward placing her sister’s daughter Gianna on a carousel in Central Park before someone abducts the little girl. The young Renata who was witness to both vanishings is not the protagonist that we have in the story now, older, with different reactions to pain, with nuanced understandings of love and sacrifice and longing and desire for forgetting, though she remains just as psychically blocked as when she lost Gianna. In one other critical respect, the Renata providing this story is different. She is haunted not only from
the outside. Like other living victims of 9/11, in particular, DeLillo’s Keith Neudecker, there is someone else inside of her. Though others will peer at her and swear they had “seen a ghost,” she protests halfheartedly “I’m not a ghost. I’m Renata” (Schwartz 2005: 197).

We recall how Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham developed their theory on the arrival of ghosts through a rereading of Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia*, an endeavor which Derrida discusses at considerable length in a forward to their *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word* (1976). In that volume and in other media (from strikingly unconventional films of interview and action like *Ghost Dance* in 1983 that explored living traces of the dead, to volumes investigating the vulnerability a friend’s death opens in us like *Memoires: for Paul de Man* in 1986, to anthologies of essays on a number of dead colleagues like *The Work of Mourning* in 2001), Derrida keeps revisiting ideas of the presence and the absence of the dead. As the years go by, Derrida’s philosophical remembrances of his dead friends grow more affecting. The cry of the heart in them and the utter loneliness from missing these intellectual friends can often be summed in the idea of missed chances, i.e., How would these fellow thinkers be challenging me, changing me, and completing me if they were still alive now? This longing for what we are missing pairs well with what one widowed survivor of 9/11 Abigail Carter says, exactly fifteen years later on 11 September 2016, of her husband forever lost in the burning towers: “I think the hardest thing is just not knowing what you’re missing. And at the same time, knowing how much you’re missing” (Laura King 2016). Beyond exploring the impossible query of what we are missing, Derrida also keeps revisiting ideas of introjection / idealization versus incorporation / interiorization in these
meditations. In Freud’s idea of “normal” mourning, Derrida contends, “one internalizes the dead. One takes the dead into oneself and assimilates them. This internalization is an idealization. It accepts the dead. Whereas in mourning which doesn’t develop naturally, . . . there is no true internalization. . . . That is to say, the dead are taken into us but don’t become part of us. They just occupy a particular place in our bodies” (Derrida 1983: Ghost Dance). Later, with a careful skepticism, Derrida notes both types of mourning have flaws: the mourning that supposedly introjects (that assimilates; the one where we even imitate the dead for a time, as he admits he did with some of his friends) and the melancholia that incorporates. Both rather narcissistically “betray the [deceased] other’s otherness” (Derrida 1989: 95). As he raises the aporias, lists the incompatibilities, and explores the contradictions of mourning and melancholia in the aforementioned works, he ends arguing compellingly in Memoires: for Paul de Man that “impossible mourning” would be preferable. Such a mourning is the kind where the loss can never be comprehended or “closed” as it would be in introjection, and yet it is ethically preferable to incorporation as well, since it leaves “the other his alterity, . . . [and] refuses or is incapable of taking the other within oneself” (Derrida 1989: 95). Impossible mourning, his theory goes, would be precipitated by “a movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us” (Derrida 1989: 35). A “kind” renunciation of the dead becomes the necessary betrayal: it would, paradoxically, signal the greatest respect for the dead.

For years, Renata and her parents’ melancholia for the dead Claudia (and their grief for the missing / possibly dead Gianna later) seem to follow the “tomb-creating” incorporation which does not signal respect, which does not ethically acknowledge
Claudia’s “infinite remove” (Derrida 1989: 6). They take the dead females “inside them” and do not let them be spoken of on “the outside.” But it may be that after 9/11 -- which is the great tribulator for characters, the great vault-breaker of once securely-sealed past traumas -- that Renata’s incorporation of the dead fails, and she starts to move to this impossible mourning. What makes her incorporation “successfully” fail and move her to a more ethical relationship towards the dead is, ironically, her “tender rejection” of the dead, as Derrida would put it. The rejection comes in the form of breaking a vow once given to her twin: ending the silence over Claudia’s incest and her murder at the hands of a family member, and dissolving the incorporation of her sister by finally divulging all to her boyfriend Jack, confessing and releasing all this decades after the Gothic events transpired. It is a fraught and torturous process, summoning self-hatred and ghosts, but it ensures the twins will no longer be one.

As evidence that Claudia was not properly mourned at her death, but simply “taken inside” the survivors, we could remember that there was no mention of commemoration for her, no rites, and not even a basic funeral. Instead we see what the family calls a “something” recovered, which receives neither ritual nor recognition, nor any full investigation of “its” death. With Gothic ominousness, Renata detects a noticeable wince as her parents look at her when police hook and pull her twin’s swollen body -- just ten days after delivering her baby -- out from the river mud and muck. The human looks inhuman and sinister here, and family cannot say to each other that this is their daughter or sister. There is retrieval, but there is not an accompanying ceremony and celebration of what she gave her family and others in her short lifespan. They are authentically overcome by her death and cannot stop thinking of it; yet they cannot ask
too much about it because to enquire means they have to ask more questions of who the father of the baby is, and their suspicion must be for the worst as they never saw Claudia with a boy -- only her perversely attentive uncle. The incest-shame surfaces when, even dredged from the waters, the twin’s cadaver betrays a monstrous, obscene and impossible fertility: “Claudia’s stomach was puffed up, as it had been when she was pregnant” (Schwartz 2005: 100). The parents cannot admit much to others of the loss of their daughter, which must only add to their unbearable suffering and keep the grief constant, because this taboo strikes them dumb.

Three moments arise in *The Writing on the Wall* revealing how Renata’s grief for his sister is changing. The three moments each give a deeper clue about her twin’s suffering, and each is occasioned by a 9/11 discovery. The first flashback to Claudia’s movement from missing person to recovered body comes immediately after Renata spies signs plastered everywhere after 9/11 showing faces of those yet missing from the WTC. Significantly, Claudia sees an image and caption of a lost young woman -- “Stefania Pignarelli, worked on 87th floor of south tower, wearing striped miniskirt and black top, mole on right cheek, yin-yang tattoo on lower back....” (Schwartz 2005: 94) -- and the sign ushers reflection on her own loss. The “writing on the wall” here is allusive,\(^3^3\) but it

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\(^3^3\) The eponymous “writing on the wall” may suggest a mighty power’s vulnerability, or even stand for the decline of the American Empire or the end of President Bush’s reign, as could be obviously inferred by the use of the phrase from the Book of Daniel, in which Nebuchadnezzar’s son and enslaver of the Jews, King Belshazzar, has the end of his reign announced in the midst of feasting through a disembodied hand writing on a palace wall, “Mene Mene, Tekel, Parsin” [Translation: God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians] (Seow 2003: 75).
is literal for Renata: a search for what she still loves and what she has no more. Renata muses on “Signs, what a good idea. It never occurred to her to put up signs for her missing. Claudia: age sixteen, 5’7’, slim, long black ponytail held in a wide chrome barrette, dark eyes, olive complexion, wearing jeans and Nike sneakers, striped tank top” (Schwartz 2005: 94). Looking at this mirror-like sign of a lost young woman, Renata sees herself, and sees her dead sister as herself. It makes her recall when the Hudson River-dredgers “dragged in something big and dark and caked with mud, hauled it onto the boat and headed to shore. . . . A terrible smell drifted to shore; soon they could see Claudia’s face, green and bloated, her hair tangled with mud and reeds, her clothes shredded, her leg bent back at a crazy angle” (Schwartz 2005: 100). Now, after 9/11, Renata remembers that moment as if “it was like seeing herself, the way she might look, dead” (Schwartz 2005: 100). A ghostly possession follows.  

Claudia becomes the shade that lives in Renata, as well as a ghostly burden of guilt, failure, and separation. Indeed, such traumas and their neurosis-fueling power

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34 Commemorating searches for the missing exactly one year after 9/11, Lamentation: 9/11 is a coffee-table sized book of photographs of the actual signs that appeared on streets at such “Missing Walls” with the disappeared often smiling, often on vacation and hugging their families. With text by E. L. Doctorow and a foreword by past Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan, the book remembers the chaotic and surreal days afterward with David Finn’s large pictures snapped at “those places where outpourings of grief -- and shattered shreds of hope -- blanketed walls, sidewalks, trees” (New York: Ruder Finn Press, 2002).

35 As developed convincingly in Gothic Shakespeares, the works of Richard Wilson (especially his “Monstrous to Our Human Reason: The Empty Grave of The Winter’s Tale”), and Shakespearan Gothic, the Gothic mode gets its repeated notion of the rising of ghosts from incomplete memorialization through Shakespeare’s plays, and mourning (through proper burial and / or continuous recollection of the dead) becomes “the fundamental obligation in Gothic writing” (Townshend 2008: 75).
became an interest of Abraham and Torok, so much so that their English translator and
foreword-writer Nicholas T. Rand describes their meditations in perfectly Gothic terms:
psychic obstacles “include the phantom, an undisclosed family secret handed down to an
unwitting descendant; the illness of mourning, which the authors define as bereavement
complicated by an untoward sexual outburst in the mourner at the time of loss;
incorporation, or the secret and vital embrace of an alien identity; and the secret, or crypt,
which ‘entombs’ an unspeakable but consummated desire” (Rand 1994: 16). Rand’s
recourse to Gothic vocabulary and tropes to explain trauma matches Renata’s metaphors
of anger, miscommunication, and disease as well, a pattern observable in all the fictions
that this thesis addresses.

Into this vacuum of mourning, as if to occupy the space where ritual and
commemoration often exists elsewhere, ghosts stealthily move, a characteristic dread that
locates the novel firmly within the Gothic tradition. Claudia is dead but not gone, not
contained. Encrypted onto or entombed inside her sister, in times of disaster, Claudia
returns in force, for “a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back”
(Derrida 1993: 123). Just as werewolves may “wear their fur on the inside” according to
Stephen King, so some ghosts dispense with winding sheets, instead becoming the
visitants within us: “They can haunt our body and ventriloquise our speech. So the ghost
is enclosed in a crypt, which is our body. We become a sort of graveyard for ghosts... The
other’s unconscious speaks in our place ... plays tricks on us. It can be terrifying. That’s
when things start to happen” (Derrida 1983: Ghost Dance). The ghost Claudia
“ventriloquises” Renata’s speech, and adds her own rashness, contempt, disdain, and
wounded distrust. Indeed, “things start to happen” when Renata becomes Claudia in her
behaviors, in both her sexual abandon to many men and in her search for her sister’s
daughter. Renata, who had shown no interest in promiscuity and saving lost girls before
her sister’s death, becomes obsessed with both of these drives: she brings home male
patrons twice her age for indiscriminate sex and simultaneously scans the lonely streets
for waifs who need rescue. This is not merely an identification with the dead, but a
traumagothic reaction, as we previously explored with survivors of the Cocoanut Grove
nightclub fire where the living hosted the dead inside them. After that fire, the living soon
dressed like the deceased, and began reflecting their tastes, personality, motivations, and
even careers. We remember this syndrome in fictional terms, as well, when Neudecker
“becomes” his dead best friend Rumsey, pursuing the identical women to those of his
friend’s tastes, pursuing the same fetishes with them and leaving his job to play poker,
these three forming the games that Rumsey most loved. We observe, again, how young
Oskar “becomes” his father when he objects to what he perceives are the new suitor
Ron’s intentions on his mother. Similarly, addicted to death yet unable to mourn Claudia
openly, Renata is Claudia enfleshed. Significantly -- as one disaster often makes room for
another -- she can confess this conduct to no one in the novel until after 9/11. The
information of her new mores comes only from a third-person limited omniscient
narrator: “She started letting [bar patrons] come to her apartment after work. In this way
she learned all about sex, and sometimes the sensation of Peter running his finger down
her spine in the garage came to mind.... She slept with them to keep her body quiet. It
was loud, her body; it set up a clamor only she could hear” (Schwartz 2005: 124). Read
the first time without the benefit of combining Gothic and Trauma theories, Renata’s later
alarmingly frank language perplexes: “Don’t leave me alone with the words I dredged up.
Drown them out... Fuck me like you fucked her. Ram me into oblivion!” (Schwartz 2005: 228). Such outbursts could evoke a nymphomaniacal nun from a Ken Russell film of phallic-frenzy, or the fully possessed Regan McNeil with a crucifix in one lewd hand beckoning to the priests inside her bedroom from William Friedkin’s *The Exorcist*. But a key difference is the tight joining of sex to death. If we sense that a substitution has been made, and remember that the only reference to dredging earlier in this novel is that of victim-recovery, we could easily replace her cry “Don’t leave me alone with the words I dredged up” with “Don’t leave me alone with *that body* you dredged up.” The sexual phantom that screams inside Renata seems a cipher for unrepresentable fears and the horrid until we accept that could also be the response of her dead-yet-active sibling.

A fictional case that illuminates Schwartz’s ghost brightly is Sarah Water’s *The Little Stranger*, where spooks, ghouls, goblins, and poltergeists are names necessary for representing a much greater dread inside crumbling Hundreds Hall in rural Warwickshire, perhaps an ineffable, unnamable one. On the one hand, the Gothic gives trauma a voice, it inscribes trauma but it also points to that which exceeds a Gothic register. Both operate at the same time through the Gothic: this modality of anxiety allows some inscription and recording, but also lets that which must always slip away, exceed, and go unmemorialized to have a place (things that characters cannot or will not admit, but which we determine despite their reluctance to share them). The Gothic inscribes at the same moment it encrypts, puts the truth into another code, and also tucks it into a crypt. Time stays and defeats old orders and a cast of characters in Gothic and trauma novels -- and for the Ayreses from *The Little Stranger*, the time is fixed at twenty minutes to nine. But the Gothic mode itself is unfixed and shuttling, flitting, peeking through the keyholes,
recording, signaling its dark knowledge all the time. Between tightly held secrets and brazen confession from traumatic times, there the Gothic exists. Its ghosts are representatives for what we cannot talk about or show without destroying ourselves or bonds with others. Like the boy analyzed by Abraham and Torok, who carried his older dead sister “alive” within him by stealing garments she would have needed if she had still been growing, Renata carries her sister within her, who was, after all, the first person Claudia shared her guilty, fateful news with: “I’m pregnant” (Schwartz 2005: 58). Renata is not fully authorized to decode the encryption yet, and the ghost grants no passkey. The loss of her twin keeps Renata lost and engaged in “cryptophoria” (Abraham and Torok 1972: 131), having become, as Timothy Murray gracefully posits, “a carrier of melancholic phobia” in which “a phantasmic world sustains a separate and occult life” (Murray 1993: 89).

Carrying a sexually hyperactive phantom in her body, Renata propositions men of all kinds. Renata will not admit this, but the third-person narrator, perhaps a bit intrusively, confesses it: She “wanted to think as little as possible.... When the men were inside her she was stopped up, less liable to spill out, leaving a crumpled skin. The man inside her was like a cork holding her together. She did it because Claudia had done it, to keep something of Claudia close by” (Schwartz 2005: 125). A dybbuk resides, clings to and sickens her body and her longings. Renata is, in effect, reborn as her twin sister. The horrors of lost identity, amidst all the other suffering post-9/11, ensue. No more potentially debilitating or “comprehensive haunting,” to use a phrase of Geoffrey Hartman, could be imagined than to house the ghost inside oneself of another (Hartman 1981: xviii), but that is what happens now.
3.4 Twins

So far we have explored five ways in which the Gothic expresses traumatic truth in this novel: ghostliness; corporeality (the shuddering horrors of exposing the human as a rotting animal in the Hudson River or food for rats on the WTC plaza); versions of the sublime (with language of the towers’ fall); the uncanny; and mourning. But more remain, in particular, aspects of the uncanny (doubles, toys that tell allegories, and coded messages). Resisting the supposed power of twins to communicate their pain telepathically is the sexual trauma experienced by Claudia. With such identical twins there are boundaries called into question and demarcations blurred: where does the dead Claudia end and the marginally living Renata begin? One of the most prominent messages never told by the deceased sister is that her uncle made her pregnant. When as a sixteen-year-old, Renata asks who the father of her sister’s baby is, she hears only from Claudia about being attacked. Claudia says she was raped, “...well, sort of -- and spun out a story about going in to the city with two girlfriends a couple of months ago. They met some guys in a bar, ended up in a dorm room, drank too much.... She didn’t want it to happen but it happened anyway” (Schwartz 2005: 59).

In twins of myth (Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Hercules and Iphicles, Apollo and Artemes, Castor and Pollux, Freyer and Freyja), tragedy often befalls the one who is a shadow self, the one who is a force of wildness opposed to any civilizing influence, and to some degree Claudia may be that. If twins have suggested duality since antiquity, as Freud suggests, then we could find resemblance here, as Claudia is the twin
who cannot be controlled: “She had always been the restless and impetuous one” (Schwartz 2005: 13). However, we could not say so reductively that one twin absolutely embodies light and the other darkness, one good and the other evil, one resistant to disorder and the other opening the barriers to chaos. There is something more here: Schwartz’s twins are both victims, though not entirely passive ones, and Claudia’s victimhood simply comes earlier than Renata’s. Thus to some degree the pattern with myth is broken and the narrative is in a closer dialogic relationship with twin behaviors and abilities in Gothic literature, especially Claudia and Renata’s telepathy. In the twins of Gothic novels and stories, there exists a bond more intense than in non-twin siblings: there are far better ways of communicating than by words and greater defenses to shield their past from intruding outsiders. Examples could include Sophia Lee’s narrating twin daughters of Mary, Queen of Scots in The Recess (1783–85), William Child Green’s Alphonsine and Victoria in The Algerines, or, The Twins of Naples (1832), Poe’s Madeleine and Roderick36 in “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), Daphne du Maurier’s unnamed psychic twins of ”Don't Look Now,” Anne Rice’s redhead twins Maheret and Mekare in The Queen of the Damned (1988), Diane Setterfield’s Adeline and Emmeline Angelfield in The Thirteenth Tale (2006), or David Mitchell’s immortal Jonah and Norah Grayer in Slade House (2015). Yet with all the powers they may have, trauma is still the destroyer of their bonds. Following Hartman’s delineated pattern of

36 Bizarrely, despite the fact that “Roderick Usher had been one of my boon companions in boyhood,” the narrator does not realize that Roderick has a twin until the twenty-third paragraph and by that time she (Madeleine) is dead, or so she appears to be: “A striking similitude between the brother and sister now first arrested my attention; and Usher, divining, perhaps, my thoughts, murmured out some few words from which I learned that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them” (Poe 1839: 399).
trauma theory, Claudia cannot express her violation or give “testimony” to an “intellectual witness” through any twin-telepathy, nor can she through other means, including a darkly improvised Play Therapy.

3.4.1 The Twins’ Toys and Gothicized Play Therapy

“Surely there must be a possibility of observing in children at first hand and in all the freshness of life the sexual impulses and wishes which we dig out so laboriously in adults from among their own debris.”

--Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy" (1909: 6)

The first documented analysis of play and games to help express a patient’s fear dates to Freud’s case of Little Hans (1909), who would grow up to be the successful Viennese opera composer and conductor Herbert Graff (Wakefield 2007). Largely through letters sent by Han’s father (but also by rare visits), Freud examined the boy’s play wishes for undercurrents of anxiety. Any creative substitutions the child would make Freud would mine with care: “[I] know that the game which Hans intended to play with the loaded carts must have stood in the relation of a symbolic substitute to some other wish as to which he had so far uttered no word. But, if it did not seem too daring, this wish might already, even at this stage, be constructed” (Freud 1909: 47-48). Charles E. Schaefer holds that throughout Freud’s works, he considered play to serve three functions: “Promotion of freer self-expression (especially of those instincts considered
taboo), wish fulfillment, and mastery of traumatic events” (Schaefer 2011: 4). Controlling the situation of the drawing or the toy, a child abreacts, bringing “repressed memories to consciousness and reliv[ing] them while appropriately releasing affect” (Schaefer 2011: 4-5). Through repeated play again and again, dangerously “negative emotions are brought out and released slowly as a child gradually assimilates the experience,” a process that Freud’s daughter Anna would bring larger attention to in her work with children (Schaefer 2011: 4-5).

Likewise thus far, key characters in the 9/11 novels have tended to invest themselves, often unknowingly, in games, play, or drama: in Falling Man, Keith Neudecker retrieved memories and a “presence” of his card playing best friend by leaving his job to play poker full time; in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, Oskar Schell expressed his loss and his rage through acting as the skull in Hamlet. In The Writing on the Wall, Claudia invests what cannot be expressed -- what the days of incest were like, when they begin, what her pedophile uncle would say to her in the “wooing” -- in play. Close textual analysis reveals how Claudia is articulating terror, its psychological impact and its tie to trauma theory, by encoding her play farm with her rape. As there is no professional therapist the girls see who can meditate on the revealing patterns of psychic violence and physical violation from the shadow story of the girls and their play-farm, we become a therapist by default.

We know as very young children Renata and Claudia receive a colorful hand-made toy farm with little wooden people one Christmas from Peter, their faraway uncle in Montana, who will not substantially enter their lives until a few years later. The children decide to name the homesteaders Farmer Blue, Mrs. Blue, and their children Sky
Blue, Powder Blue, and Pastel Blue. There is also one more little man: they make him deaf and mute and call him “Hired Hand,” as someone must tend their horses. A guilty pleasure, a “lulling routine,” they keep playing with the toy farm in secret for years, well into junior high. Much of Renata’s memories of the farm could seem a desire to return to childhood, except for one incident whose significance needs tilling. At age eleven, Claudia’s engagement towards the entrancing “little house on the prairie” abruptly and darkly changes:

Claudia had been pressing for something truly terrible to happen. She lusted for mayhem. She wanted strangers to ride in from the plains and steal the horses or kidnap the children. She got the notion that Hired Hand, who had served the family faithfully and mutely from time immemorial, was actually an ex-convict who was planning to destroy the farm and run away with the savings Mrs. Blue kept in a cookie jar. (Schwartz 2005: 12-13)

This is seemingly a shadow story connected to the secret abuse (never exactly shown) at the hands of her uncle -- one who is traumatized himself after his parents die in a hotel fire, and who is in constant need for his brother (the girls’ father) to fund him. Encoding the farm in shocking ways, Claudia’s sudden script-changing from idyllic pastoral to In Cold Bold merges farm play with her own nightmare and survivor fantasy / revenge saga, for “maybe Farmer Blue would catch and kill him in revenge” (Schwartz 2005: 13), a murder-dream that ironically Renata will nearly act out near novel’s end. The “savings Mrs. Blue kept in a cookie jar” are possible substitutions for Grace’s own imperiled children, Renata and Claudia, which the Hired Hand wants to steal. What rises in the
farm play is an expression of the unutterable. The Gothic keeps chipping at the cheerful bright-blue paint of these farm characters to reveal their ugly underside. Hauntingly timed, her soured play dates to the same moments of the predation on her body, since Renata discovers much later that her sister and uncle started the incest while she was in junior high school. None the less, Renata is not a therapist and cannot then interpret the destructive impulses in the play as a message of inner turmoil, shame, and death wish. Unknowing of it all, Renata only gives up her attachment to her farm after Claudia tosses Farmer Blue over her shoulder and he lands in a patch behind the house.

   Renata: “But the farm is ruined... Why did you want to kill them all? What’s the matter?”

   Claudia: “They’ve gone on long enough.” (Schwartz 2005: 15)

This memory of the stoic, laconic execution of her toy-farm family comes back years later at 9/11, finally reacting darkly with the memory of Uncle Peter’s licentious stroke of Renata’s back in the old garage, mistaking her for the twin he molested. The difference between Claudia’s tossing Farmer Blue into a garden versus months and months of supervised therapeutic play by a psychiatric professional following sexual predation is immense. For professionals treating children who have suffered sexual abuse and who afflict other children (often younger and even more defenseless) the point is for them to “act out in dramatic play [only] . . . their traumas” (Moffatt 2013). For instance, through Tinker Toys one therapist of thirty-years’ experience treated a little boy named Mateo who had been sexually abused by his male babysitter. The therapist witnessed how with “His eyes wide and his face full of rage, [Mateo] took a Tinker Toy, an apparent phallic symbol, and repeatedly jammed it into the doll’s mouth. ‘He doesn’t want it in his
mouth,’ Mateo said into the air, ‘but he’s going to get it in there anyway!’” (Moffatt 2013). When the boy forced the Tinker Toy into the small therapy-doll’s mouth, he was abreacting safely in a therapist’s office. At unsafe moments, he was also reenacting sexual abuse “when he fondled children on his school bus, and his masturbation was also a form of abreaction” (Moffatt 2013). When the same therapist arranged ten months of play therapy for another child, the boy abreacted towards a perpetrator by “burying a little toy man in play dough” instantly. As sessions went by, he more confidently uncovered the dough, telling the therapist that, “OK, I can handle him,” and working through, the therapist suggests, “his abduction and abuse” (Moffatt 2013). A vital distinction from The Writing on the Wall is that this counseled child still holds the man in the dough and shows that he is watchful and in control, not loosening the threat, but monitoring it. Claudia’s action is the opposite. By throwing all the farm family into the garden, she shows that she relinquishes control, that both victims and perpetrators are still “out there,” tossed far but not far enough, hardly buried at all and sure to surface again at unpredictable times.

Upon confessing to Renata her pregnancy six years later, Claudia, without the aid of the farm as a shadow story, laconically declares: “it happened anyway.” She reaches for what Renata calls “Plain English” to explain her trauma and its aftereffects: it is what they also both term the language their parents can understand (opposed to their rapid-fire, vowel-sliced and syllable-sacrificed “Twin Language,” a special argot developed since their earliest lisps and warblings, forbidden by their spooked parents, and only spoken in secret to “conspiratorial glee”). But our protagonist again understands none of it. Claudia to her closest friend and sibling can only plead: “Why don’t you believe me? Because I
didn’t come home bleeding with my clothes ripped off? It’s not always like that” (Schwartz 2005: 59). “Plain English,” unfortunately, will not permit the asking of more questions that Renata needs to answer in order to settle her doubts. Normative language, like a dark screen hanging between them, cannot transfer the overwhelming details of the incest trauma, but their “Twin Language” can express something -- that Claudia has been lying for years. Claudia has nullified the long explanation in normative language with two words of code that translate to “Not true.” Thus the reader is left in a mixed state: we sense some man has made her pregnant who is still a hidden threat, an unknown identity. On the other side, we are left feeling Claudia is not utterly helpless because she has not left us with a lie: she has only made an omission. She is not powerless, and this leads to more conjecture about her death. A murder or an accident could underscore her haplessness or passivity, but a suicide could suggest she made the fateful decision herself. Only one witness saw the death and his testimony is unreliable, but following this textual analysis, there seems more evidence to believe she had the strength to take her own life.

3.5 Gothic Contamination, Art, and Lovers Meeting

“The lessons in death that the Gothic extracts from Shakespeare's play are two-fold. First, death, however resistant, must be drawn into an intimate and enduring relation with truth. That is, the situations that led up to any particular death -- its origins and its causes -- as well as the physical embodiment of that death -- in the
form of a corpse, or, more frequently in Gothic, a mere skeletal remainder -- must be disclosed in their full immediacy.”

--Dale Townshend, “Gothic and the Ghost of Hamlet” (2008: 73)

Borne fully by Schwartz’s narrative, the lessons above maintain that before mourning can be achieved, there must be full discovering of the cadaver in all its shuddering horror and also a clear reporting of the stages leading to death. Seeing body parts strewn about Manhattan streets raises what has been repressed in Renata: the very detailed memory of her sister’s body rising from the river. We have reviewed the first memory, but the second and third memories of body-retrieval have different details. It is as if the whole memory can never be testified to at one time, but its parts seep out over many moments. The family “stood on the banks of the river and watched Claudia being dredged up, her face pale green like some kind of sea monster, her leg twisted and her body puffy -- from languishing underwater, from childbirth. . . . Did Renata imagine it, or did her parents really wince when they looked at her face [Renata’s face], the image of Claudia’s before it underwent its sea change?” (Schwartz 2005: 120-121). Here exists a dreadful ambiguity: the parents look at Claudia’s face but at the same time they somehow see Renata’s face. Simultaneously they see a face in blooming adolescent life and a bruised face of decomposition, sexual victimhood, and fearful isolation. Kristeva’s formulation on abjection is especially useful for a reading of Renata’s own confrontation with the abject:

The corpse (or cadaver: cadere, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one
who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance…. [R]efuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit -- cadere, cadaver. (Kristeva 1982: 3)

Seeing her twin dragged lifeless out of a river is a barely disguised version of seeing how Renata would appear as a cadaver. Claudia is a kind of corpse-doppelgänger at its most gruesome for Renata. As Freud has it, observing a dead body is the fundamental uncanny experience.

Before her meditations on the dark gifting from the river of her sister’s body, and all the physical and psychical taboo and contamination that entails, Renata muses on another defilement. This contemplation brings her to a significant painting and to her mate, and seems a thinly guised version of an actual legal battle in 1999 between the Brooklyn Museum and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.37 In the novel, Renata attends a New York City art exhibition called “Sensation” under threat of fund-cutting by the Mayor. The painting there causing a furor with City Hall is of an African Madonna with “dollops of elephant dung plastered here and there” (Schwartz 2005: 87). Whilst looking at the painting, Renata meets her significant other, Jack.

37 Giuliani’s perceived authoritarian stands would beget comparisons to “a little Mussolini” from Jess Walter in interview, whose novel we will probe later, The Zero.
In real life, Mayor Giuliani viewed this same painting only in a Christie’s auction catalog, but from that insisted it was sacrilegious, calling it “disgusting”: "The idea of having so-called works of art in which people are throwing elephant dung at a picture of the Virgin Mary is sick” (Abrams 2005: 195). He vowed that a museum receiving city funds could not show it, threatening to cut the $7 million municipal support headed to the Brooklyn Museum and force its eviction. The Brooklyn Museum Director Arnold L. Lehman challenged the Mayor’s office with a 1st amendment free-speech trial in federal court, and “The Holy Virgin Mary” would remain on view during the entire trial, which the complainant eventually won (Abrams 2005). For his part, artist Christopher Ofili noted that the painting registered his understandable confusion as former Roman Catholic alter boy that a virgin could give birth (Vogel 1999; BBC Staff 1999): “I really think it’s a very beautiful painting to look at, full of contradiction which is perhaps why it’s been misunderstood” (Christie’s Exhibition Catalog 2015). Its seller, Christie’s auction house, argued that “Applying elephant dung directly to the canvas was, for him, a way in which to bring the environment directly into his painting... Dung is a symbol of growth and motherhood. In this way, Ofili’s Madonna is at once of heaven and earth. Gilded with sparkling beads, it becomes a metaphor for transformation: the humble material elevated in the same way the Virgin becomes sacred with the birth of her son” (Christie’s Sale 10381). Its previous seller, South African professional gambler David Walsh, admitted that "Chris Ofili's wondrous painting was a bit of controversy at the Brooklyn Museum. I just don't see the controversy in it. You have a few cut-out portraits of vulvas and some elephant shit, but these are profoundly integrated into what is an incredibly aesthetically pleasing, beautiful painting" (Christie’s 2015 Special Features: the Man from Mona). What connects deeply between Ofili’s art and 9/11-themed novels and photography is
the inability of some viewers to stand gazing at the body and what it produces -- or what can be done to it. Indeed, despite its selling for £2,882,500 in 2015 at Christie’s, the painting still gathers complaints of its odor, even from otherwise sympathetic museums. Just as American politicians (especially the late Republican Senator Jesse Helms) assaulted American-artist Andre Serrano’s alarmingly beautiful photographs of blood, semen, milk, urine, and pus in the late 1980s and early 1990s, starting with his painting “Piss Christ,” and threatened to cut off funding to the National Endowment for the Arts for underwriting him, so too, politicians would attack 9/11 sculpture, photographs and paintings that showed too much of the body, in particular bodies coming into contact with the ground, or photographs that showed a disturbing contradiction or a lack of mourning. Pictured below are several paintings, sculptures, and photographs alluded to in this thesis’s four surveyed novels. These artworks produced uncommon fury and condemnation among observers.

From photographer Thomas Hoepker on 9/11 came a composition of a group of people in a Brooklyn park, talking in the sun and looking at each other instead of the WTC towers as the flames climbed higher, causing outrage among viewers for its detachment and a condemnation as “shocking” photography by New York Times reporter and regular columnist Frank Rich. Eclipsing the blast against Hoepker’s photography, the Associated Press would receive more criticism from readers and fellow media outlets for Richard Drew’s photograph of the jumper than any other photograph in recent memory, as noted by Drew himself.

It features prominently in The Writing on the Wall. Source: Christie’s
Erick Fischel’s “Tumbling Woman,” modeled on images of the 9/11 jumpers that DeLillo described in *Falling Man*, displayed in Rockefeller Center’s lower concourse. A barrage of critics attacked it, as the Associated Press noted, as a mere “naked woman with her arms and legs flailing above her head, as if in a backward somersault” (Staff for Associated Press 2002). Abruptly covered in a cloth and surrounded by a wall of curtains, a Rockefeller Center spokesperson apologized for art: “The sculpture was not meant to hurt anybody. It was a sincere expression of deepest sympathy for the vulnerability of the human condition” (John Gregory Brown). Last, Todd Maisel who described the fires at the WTC as “like Hell coming towards you,” photographed a blown-off hand on a street (“The Hand, 9/11”) for *The New York Daily News*, and more critics rebuked the newspaper the next day (*Behind the Lens* 2008).

Ofili’s painting would be assaulted by eggs, ink, and white paint in Brooklyn, while Staten Island-artist Scott LoBaido would hurl horse manure at the Brooklyn Museum walls (Dubin 1998; Plate 2006). The painting represented an invasion of something foul, unutterable, base, and contaminating to some viewers. Yet it is at this same moment that Renata looks on Ofili’s “The Madonna” with wonder that Jack walks into her life, a man she will have the longest relationship with in her life, sleeping with him for eight months and telling him in stages about the traumata of her past. The narrator notes with a mixture of mockery and admiration that Jack would “step right into it” while looking at the Madonna and at Renata, “even though he didn’t know the early chapters. That took nerve. And he was patient. He could wait for the story. He would wait a long time” (Schwartz 2005: 6).

Image 8: Richard Drew’s “Falling Man.” All four principal novels of the thesis reference this image, and it forms the title of DeLillo’s novel.

Source: Associated Press

Image 10: Todd Maisel’s “The Hand, 9/11.” Jumpers’ skyfall and contact with the WTC plaza, along with the survivors’ discovery of others’ blown-apart body parts (especially hands, feet, and scalps), darken the four texts of this thesis. Source: The New York Daily News
A parallel exists between the painting’s threat of excrement, religious defilement, and invasion by the Other -- and the threat to her borders that Jack represents. Their coequal timing suggests such an uncanny relationship. As Kristeva asserts,

In the first place, filth is not a quality in itself, but it applies only to what relates to a boundary and, more particularly, represents the object jettisoned out of that boundary, its other side, a margin... The mistake is to treat bodily margins in isolation from all other the danger of filth represents for the subject the risk to which the very symbolic order is permanently exposed, ... the frailty of the symbolic order itself. A threat issued from the prohibitions that found the inner and outer borders in which and through which the speaking subject is constituted. (Kristeva 1982: 6-7)

So, too, through a painting accused of violation, intrusion, and filth, Renata is moved and impelled to absorb what she has before rejected, a man who will stay will cross a boundary into her most personal space, and become a presence that seeks out her secrets, those hidden dirty facts which make her feel debased, sub-human, isolated in grief, forever unlovable, and unacceptable to the living world: “the shit ... [that] life withstands,” in the words of Kristeva.

It is Jack’s questions and observations that help precipitate each of Renata’s searches into memory, too. He shares 9/11’s sublimity when he notes, “You can’t grasp it [all the wreckage] from what they show [on TV]. It’s huge. Thousands of tons of steel tied up in huge knots. Crushed cars and fire engines all over the place” (Schwartz 2005: 88). Then he shares its gruesome violations and contamination: “And the smell. It’s all
still burning. It’ll burn for months... Shoes strewn all over. That was the worst, the shoes.... No bodies. Parts. I saw a foot...”38 She has had concern that this one man who mourns with dedication and passion, and who works with a social-worker’s instincts and curiosity about human motivation, will tease out her past. Before a reader assumes so, she already knows Jack is more committed and a better listener than any of her previous one-night-stands. For our investigation on trauma, as well, Jack’s live-witness reporting differs from the standard media reporting of 9/11 where, as critiqued by Žižek in Welcome to the Desert of the Real,

the same 'derealization' of the horror went on after the WTC collapse: while the number of victims -- 3,000 -- is repeated all the time, it is surprising how little of the actual carnage we see -- no dismembered bodies, no blood, no desperate faces of dying people ... in clear contrast to reporting on Third World catastrophes, where the whole point is to produce a scoop of some gruesome detail: Somalis dying of hunger, raped Bosnian women, men with their throat cut. (Žižek 2013a: 15)

Žižek elaborates that Western media posits that the most viewable grotesque and

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38 Jack illustrates what Derrida saw as missing from 9/11 reportage. Derrida, who arrived in Manhattan two weeks after the attack and stayed for a month more, critiques news agencies for repetitively playing the crash but not showing the human devastation on the ground. But where Jack has an intuition, Derrida has a concept: “We thus deny the irresistible foreboding that the worst has not taken place, not yet. Thus to the [limited yet recycling] visual archive there have recently been added the recordings made by an amateur radio operator in San Francisco of all the messages exchanged by police and firemen during the collapse of the Twin Towers. The only testimonies that escape archivization are those of the victims, not of the dead or of the cadavers (there were so few) but of the missing. By definition, the missing resist the work of mourning, like the future, just like the most recalcitrant of ghosts. The missing of the archive, the ghost, the phantom -- that’s the future --” (Derrida 2003a: note 9).
suffering must occur “over there” rather than “over here” in the West. He builds the case that Western citizens live in some "numbness," an "immersion in our everyday ideological universe," existence in a continual, "hypnotic consumerist state" (Žižek 2013a: 10). In short, Western ideology through layers of deception attempts to blunt or even lock out “the Real in its extreme violence” (Žižek 2013a: 5). Technically his thesis could be challenged as there were very few remains -- except for parts of twelve bodies that could be identified on the WTC plaza -- that were recognizably human in the debris out of the 3,000 dead. As I have argued in the Introduction, the combination of jet fuel, extreme heat and flame and explosive shock wave quickly turned innocent lives into ash. In short, except for a few cases, and perhaps some of the two hundred jumpers, there was very little for a camera to show as a cadaver; Žižek’s argument about Western media resisting showing our own cadavers seems initially questionable. However, the few photos of torn-apart bodies that were shown on the first and second days were so heavily censured, that his contention of a double standard towards showing the exploded Westerners seems valid.

### 3.6 On the Terrors of the Future

An inner debate soon consumes Renata, raising the question of whether she will be reborn as her name suggests, or stay born only to William Blake’s “endless night.” As evidence of this internal discussion, she wonders: “If she cedes herself to the future and gives up clinging to the past, would it be a betrayal? What about her dead father and sister, the lost Gianna, her anger, her remorse?” (Schwartz 2005: 294). While not living
in one of the fantastically described “melodramatic dungeons” described by Ann
Radcliffe, Renata does inhabit an abode decorated with newspaper cutouts of murders by
malice aforethought and manslaughter by neglect, and she sleeps under clippings on the
wall of child abductions and unexplained disappearances. Her one steady boyfriend Jack
is so mortified by these gloomy rooms of cold-cases that he has trouble concentrating on
sex at her apartment, and typically makes a case to wander over to his place to make love.
A parallel exists between her psychic struggle within her dismal apartment and Derrida’s
reflections both on the terrors of the future (the sense the terror act is actually unfinished),
as well as on the missing ghostly elements of her “archive,” for no matter how she
searches for completion, she fails. The news clippings of lives transformed by other
people for the worse that she hoards on her walls helps explain Renata’s fear of long-term
involvement, or how since all the years since her sister’s unsolved death, she has never
considering starting a life with one partner, never wanted anyone to move in with her,
and never considering having children. It would at first seem counter-intuitive, then, to
insist that what Renata dreads most now is not the horrid past but the awful and unknown
future. However, it is difficult to mourn or build memorials or return to normalcy when
the greatest evils (e.g., biological threats including anthrax poisonings, chemical bombs,
and dirty nuclear weapons) still seem immanent. After an act of major terrorism (and
repeated television coverage of it), the trepidation over plots still secret generates a chain
reaction of more fear and greater terror in the public -- and increases the chance of state
attacks and even war. In short, as Derrida astutely summarizes: “Traumatism is produced
by the future, by the to come, by the threat of the worst to come, rather than by an
aggression that is ‘over and done with’” (Derrida 2003: eBook). Rather like the case of
Oskar’s grandfather who ran from his American family back to Germany, Renata may wish to hold back from loving and staying with others now because the trauma of past losses make the prospect of future losses impossible to withstand. Yet, equal amounts of loneliness and bravery in her seem to overcome such dread, and she does not abandon her lover, Jack.

Only after the violence of 9/11 does she admit to anyone (in this case, Jack)\(^3\) that she had a twin who met a violent end, and that she has never stopped feeling pain over Claudia’s incest and murder, and that she is in ceaseless bereavement for her (of the Derridean kind). This confession could be seen as the betrayal of secret information that has held them together beyond death itself, but it also ethically functions as the announcement that Claudia is the “other,” not just the incorporated twin. Renata’s expression of grief is a constant pining (for her sister’s living, non-ghostly company), a regret (that she cannot talk with her sister about their lives and discoveries now), and a pain (like Derrida’s for Paul de Man, that they can no longer be with each other and thus transform each other). And now, by facing her own mortality in such an honest, graphic way after the fall of the towers, Renata becomes even more like Claudia was: utterly susceptible, endangered, and frightened. The novel becomes a study in how seeing effects from one disaster (along with a fateful visit to a museum’s exhibit on tombs and killers) disinter memories long suppressed, just at the same moment crews are digging out human remains from the WTC disaster site. The terrorist attack comes as Renata’s attempted incorporation or internal entombment of Claudia within herself is failing: the

\[^3\]It is to Jack (and to no other person outside her family) that she utters the four words made more haunting by what they leave out: “There was a baby.”
“psychic mummification” unravels. Renata can still long for her sister yet see her as separate -- a ghost elsewhere. Whatever its defects this “living” grieving may be, it is still, as Derrida would have it, a “gesture of faithful friendship, its immeasurable grief, but also its life: the sublimity of a mourning without sublimation and without the obsessive triumph of which Freud speaks” (Derrida 1989: 39). Indeed, there grows a sense in the novel that such "an aborted interiorisation is at the same time a respect for the other as other” (Derrida 1989: 35). Confessing the traumatic past to Jack untwines the twins.

Declaring it removes the shroud over the Gothic mysteries of victimhood, and starts to dissolve the incorporation of Claudia within Renata, fostering a Derridean ethical / impossible mourning to take effect. Renata and Claudia are no longer the closed human unit that developed and then spoke their own argot which could hold sensitive facts away from their parents and others for years. And they are no longer the twins that literally spoke as one, like the slaughtered Grady girls from Stanley Kubrick’s film *The Shining*.40

3.7 Doppelgängers and Perpetrators

One of the most pondered-over Gothic tendencies within 9/11 and its aftermath is

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40 Curiously, the penchant of the young twins Louise and Lisa Burns to speak new thoughts in harmony (along with their resemblance to two strange, dark twins in a Diane Arbus photograph) convinced Stanley Kubrick to chose them for this iconic haunted hotel film, according to the twins themselves and the casting director / acting coach Leon Vitali. As Lisa Burns put it: it was “funny weird, funny peculiar” for Kubrick as “he might not have met many people that talked at the same time.” Louise Burns added that what is weirdness to the rest of the world is normality to twins: “We hadn’t noticed it was anything special because we spent so much of our lives” doing it (McAvoy in Olson 2015: 405).
how New Yorkers suddenly saw their city as familiar, estranging, vulnerable, and forbidding all at the same time. Renata frequently experiences the uncanny, shuddering at a corpse (her sister’s) who is like a double in death. But following 9/11 she has more frequent uncanny encounters, seeing her missing niece, who was thought to be dead. Intriguingly, even the third-person limited omniscient narrator slips three times into calling this stranger from the streets “Gianna,” who the reader might reasonably instead assume from her description is a Jodi Foster-looking young prostitute out of *Taxi Driver* (1976).

The uncanny first emerges in the novel after an unexpected cell call from her long-lost sister-in-law, Cindy, ex-wife of the pedophile Peter. Unable to find her new boyfriend in the days after 9-11, Cindy reconnects with Renata, and they agree to meet at New York’s St. Vincent’s Hospital to search for the missing man. It is still September 2001, and even before going into the hospital, the matrix of ambiguous loss and chance encounters starts expanding. Facing a “Missing Wall” where survivors place images of their vanished beloved, Renata sees at the periphery a little stranger scanning faces of the missing:

She wears small, thin gold hoops in her ears, the kind Renata got for Gianna when she was seven... The olive skin, the earrings, the lithe body and that elegant Botticelli profile are so eerily familiar that Renata shudders, the way they say you shudder when someone walks over your grave, still empty.... There’s something else odd. She doesn’t carry any purse or backpack, nothing at all. She must be homeless, a street kid, yes, with that look of no place to go, all the time in the world to do nothing.
When their paths cross, her glance falls on Renata and becomes a bland stare. She looks like she’s about to speak but she doesn’t. Renata acknowledges her with the tiny nod she’s given the others at the wall, the sign of communal sorrow. When the girl reaches the end of the row of photos she starts drifting back in the other direction. As she does so, Renata feels she’s watching her through the wavy glass of Jack’s window; the molecules that make up the girl shiver and reassemble, again and again, so that she never quite keeps her firm shape. She’s about the age Gianna would be now, and come to think of it -- but truly, the thought has been there from the first instant -- it’s uncanny how much she resembles Claudia at that age (and me, too, Renata thinks). (Schwartz 2005: 148-149).

This use of the Gothic Uncanny moments before the meeting with Cindy, ex-wife of the pederast-uncle, is extraordinary and heightened to an unbearable degree for the protagonist. Within this passage we see recognition clash with doubt over the waif’s identity, leading to seemingly absurd conclusions: that Gianna has not died, that disaster has somehow flushed her from bondage (from abduction? from prostitution?), and that she walks towards her aunt now. It is magical thinking, all at a wholly understandable instant when 1,157 other families were still hoping their missing loved ones would knock on the door, as happens in DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (and happens in dark fiction elsewhere occasionally, perhaps most famously in W. W. Jacobs’ 1902 story, “The Monkey’s Paw”). Somehow survivors still in shock find their way home from makeshift triage centers or hospitals after the most unprecedented crisis in New York history. On 12 September 2001,
researchers at Berkeley developed a website that allowed people (or hospital administrators overseeing them) to post that they were alive. By the last days of September 2001, when at least 1,157 individuals did not include a report or confirmation they were alive, “many [surviving] families began to lose hope” and concluded their significant others, relatives, friends, or fellow employees had perished. Some of the most devastating search boards are still available to view.\(^{41}\) That said, many families were split in their rulings of disappearance equaling death:

Therapists encountered tensions between couples and among siblings in cases where family members disagreed whether their relatives were lost.

Some family members ‘were incredibly hopeful beyond all logic,’ while others wanted to start notifying friends and arranging memorial services...

Some held funeral services where they buried empty coffins; others buried coffins holding the possessions of the deceased, including photographs,

\(^{41}\) A heartbreaking reality about such life-report boards is that some people in their hurry read the instructions wrongly and reported names that were actually dead as those who were alive, causing yet more ambiguity and trauma, making ghosts of the living and vice versa. Many life-report boards were taken down as a result. Their names and old URLs, however, still appear at the Library of Congress. One entry speaks for many of the desperate urgency of the disaster and the sense of community formed between the strangers of New York City. From Rina Rabinowitz on Friday, September 14, 2001: “I am looking for anyone that [has] heard from or seen Denise L. Benedetto. She is my one and only sister. Mother of 2 daughters and a devoted Catholic. She was last seen on the 78th floor in Building 2. She works for AON corp. Any, I mean any, information is a help. I was on the phone with her when the first plane hit. I heard the crash and the screams. I know that I am scarred for life, but I still need to know any whereabouts of my big sister.... I heard that she was on the elevator w/ a lot of people and a man saw her and left down the stairway. Please, please help me! We all need each others’ help right now. I’ll help you and you help me” (Library of Congress 2001).
musical instruments, and bowling balls. (Seeley 2008: 76-77; Boss 2004: 551-552).

Likewise, Oskar in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* observes an empty casket stand for his father and suffers the psychological distress of an obscene ritual he finds empty as well. As a result he is not able to begin a grief process “that encourage[s] psychological resolution” (Seeley 2008: 75; Boss 2004: 553). Instead, he physically attacks himself and repeatedly distances himself from his mother.

Out of the thousands declared missing, only eighteen people surface as alive following 9/11, all discovered within two days of the catastrophe (Langeweische 2002). However, Schwartz’s fiction does posit miraculous thinking. Near novel’s end, Renata clips a newspaper article about a mother in La Paz, Bolivia. Ms. Ortega assumed that Al Qaeda had killed her four undocumented immigrant children working near or inside the WTC, because no word had come from them. Finally, the Bolivian Embassy ruled their missing cases as deaths, and she was invited to a memorial ceremony in New York City a month and a half later. Touching down to New York City, she discovered that all her children were actually alive. In the novel, one clearly traumatized son explained his cryptic decision not to contact his distraught mother: “I didn’t want to do anything. I didn’t want to speak with anybody. I was left with nothing” (Schwartz 2005: 283). In Renata’s mind the miraculous can happen, and thus we track the uncanny. Cindy, after all these years, looks unlike herself but still sounds exactly like Cindy from decades ago; a boy in St. Vincent’s who has no apparent physical problem makes Renata’s “heart flip” when she discovers his leg is a prosthetic, “a blue and white sock, which lies absolutely smooth on the plastic leg. The sock almost undoes her. She quickly turns away.” Cindy’s
boyfriend appears in the hospital, but so swathed in bandages his girlfriend can only
mutter disbelief that it is he: “Hal? Baby?” Further, Renata looks out a hospital window
and cannot believe that “there’s empty space where the towers should be.... It resembles a
scene from a movie about interplanetary travel, ... yellow machines move slowly, like
enormous, menacing bugs ... where they mine for bodies.” Then she finds from Cindy
that her niece was sold to people initially -- “Renata can’t speak. She will have to let it all
spool out, then sort it through later” (Schwartz 2005: 155). Last, Cindy admits that her
husband was in fact the father and was with Claudia the night she drowned.

Upon delivering missing pieces of Renata’s past, Cindy speaks in the language of
psychotherapy: “Confront what you [now] know. It’s no good living in denial” (Schwartz
2005: 160). This advice leads her to travel to Houston to face the perpetrator on his
deathbed. Before leaving New York for the first time since 9/11, she finds the strange
waif girl floating about in a couple of other places in the city in the days following,
disappearing, then reappearing: “With the world turned surreal, notions of the
supernatural were tempting, notions of transformation. Had the girl metamorphosed into
a tree, perhaps? A parking meter?” (Schwartz 2005: 172). When Renata asks the
mysterious girl if she needs help, the lost child says nothing but only nods. It is no
surprise that readers would think her not real -- possibly an apparition, more likely a
traumatic hallucination -- and odder still, this character has no “money, no bag, no shoes,
no bra” (Schwartz 2005: 163). Later, however, other characters will see her too and
suggest that she has a verifiable, physical presence. Less a ghost than a cipher, she
silently eats, brushes teeth, buys makeup, reads romances, and watches Nickelodeon. In a
sudden move that surprises the reader, Renata invites the girl to stay at her apartment, and
the girl accepts -- without a word, but again a nod and a mouthed “thank you.” Renata then tells the girl to make herself at home, take her apartment keys (which she has not even given before to her boyfriend of eight months, Jack), and promise to still be there when Renata returns after a trip away to Houston for a few days. This creates a useful tension between reader and protagonist, as well as a dramatic irony, because while the waif is perhaps not a convincing Gianna-doppelgänger for the reader, the strange girl is such a one for Renata and for even the unknown narrator, who three times embeds the identity of the missing Gianna into this living lost girl. Discovering the stray girl is weirdly synchronous with Cindy’s confession that her ex-husband Peter sold drugs and possibly children. The more Renata interrogates her fellow female sufferer Cindy, the more wrongdoing she suspects of the Gothic villain Peter, not only of impregnating her sister and pushing her off a rotting pier to her death, but of actually taking his own daughter little Gianna off the carousel years ago for criminal ends. At this juncture, Renata without much proof becomes convinced that Peter may be involved in “kiddy porn,” too. Perhaps deeper suspicions also engulf Renata now because the world seems more inherently predatory in the wake of the towers’ fall. I would extend Deborah Willis’s convincing analysis that argues

> When trauma is caused by human agents (rapists, for example, or war criminals), it can do more lasting damage than trauma caused by accident or natural disaster. One's assumptions about human relationships, one's basic trust in others, may be profoundly tested or undermined by such experiences, making it difficult to reconnect to the human community, to form new attachments or sustain old ones, to reach out to or feel empathy
for others. (Willis 2002: 27)

One’s trust in others is obviously damaged after a major terror attack (though, to be sure, one can also be surprised by the valor and sacrifice of those who rushed to save the trapped of the towers). The addition I make to Willis’s conception is that terrorism could cause an inventory of past intense suffering, and a re-evaluation of its cause: barely-understood trauma from years before could be seen then as less by accident and more by malicious design. One burden of trauma is the testing of our previous interpretations, an assault on our history and our relationships with others and the “truth.” All along, Renata’s interpretation of how and why her twin died could have been a myth, perhaps a self-protective one.

3.8 Pursuing Revenge

The influence of Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies on Gothic novels is well defined in recent criticism, with Douglass Thomson constructively adding that “the most Gothic version of revenge in Gothic Literature is the idea that it can be a guiding force in the revenance of the dead” (Thomson N.d.: 23). I would like to adjust that idea to note that the sighting of a doppelgänger can be tied, or even become a “guiding force,” to a woman exacting vengeance on an older male figure. Gothically-driven vengeance by women against men -- a tossing off the “gentle garb of a female,” as Mary Ann Radcliffe would capture it in The Female Advocate (1799) -- arises in many places. As Hoeveler has it, “The gothic feminist heroine ... co-opts the father, she survives and creates a ... world in which men exist as chastened versions of themselves" (Hoeveler 1998: 101-102).
This “urge for vengeance,” as Snodgrass sums it, “is often the outgrowth of misogyny, repression, threats, and violence against women.... [It is] the wreaking of havoc against oppressors, torturers, and rapists provid[ing] the satisfying comeuppance in such vengeance lore” (Snodgrass 2004: 291). As Tóth describes it, revenge gives the chance and the change to “step out of the role of the objectified, victimised woman” (Tóth 2010: 30). While all of the beliefs are accurate, none of this yet fully registers the impotence behind The Writing on the Wall’s gestures of vengeance.

Suturing the Gothic uncanny with the unfinished mourning, unresolved questions and unreleased rage, Schwartz has Renata take a killing-journey to Houston. She finds the hospital where her sister’s violator sleeps, emaciated, hanging on to life from the ravages of lymphomic cancer, and she struggles to overcome the sympathy for the dying that washes over her. Readers may well sense he resembles in condition too closely Cindy’s new lover, seen just days before, bandaged in a New York’s St. Vincent Hospital, to fully ignite Renata’s hate and revulsion into violence. During her dilemma over murdering him, the uncanny rises again along with a succession of grotesquely Gothic images: “Peter’s hair, once so black, was a steely gray, matted from sleep, his face a sickly ivory, the skin blotched with grayish spots. The stubble on his chin was white. His lips, greenish gray.... [H]ands the color and texture of used waxed paper” (Schwartz 2005: 196). She can barely recognize this yellow-toothed specter as Peter. So slight he is that the bed appears concave, as if the maw of a grave is widening beneath him. Adding to the uncanny, her reflection from his pupils shows her as an avenger in pause, deliberating on her kill: Peter’s eyes “opened straight onto her, and the look in them, gathering terror, was worth years of grief. The same look as in her father’s eyes when
they dragged the river. In her own [eyes, too], in the mirror, when she entered their [her and Claudia’s] bedroom and knew she would sleep there alone from then on” (Schwartz 2005: 197). Throughout this novel, she insists that “I am not a ghost”; she vows that she is “not destroyed, like a twin star slipped out of orbit. [Claudia] is lost but I will not be destroyed.” But Peter’s surprised, deathbed eyes (with apparently no guile) indicate that she is a punishing spirit. Indeed, the narrator claims of the pederast: “He’d seen a ghost” (Schwartz 2005: 197). One of the most unexpected and disturbing acts in the book then occurs. A unusual deal is proposed, namely, that she will leave the room without killing him if he fully and truthfully confesses what happened the night of her sister’s death. He says he will, but only if she kills him, as well, for “You’ll be righteous. You always liked being righteous” (Schwartz 2005: 201). He continues his odd plea, as we sense the real motive is that he would rather die than spend one more minute with this woman: “You hate me. So do it. Now. Hold your hand over my mouth... You won’t get caught. They expect it any minute. Pull out the tubes. Do something. You know you want to. You’ll be satisfied and I’ll be done with everything” (Schwartz 2005: 201). Finally, he confesses: he went to the river to meet Claudia, she demanded her baby back, he refused, and she ran off onto a rotting jetty and fell in. After scanning the river for her for a time, he assumed she was simply hiding and not drowned, as the water was rather shallow and she was in the mood to punish him. Then he sidled off home. Not all of this account seems particularly believable; moreover, there are no other living witnesses and no possible corroboration. But his story stays consistent under Renata’s rapid questioning, so she takes what admission she hears and leaves. In a motion reflected by women in some very recent and similar Gothic accounts (cf. Olson 2011: “In Praise of She Wolves...”), she
chooses not to suffocate him, perversely I would argue, because he wishes to die. Killing would make her resemble him more than she could withstand. In a line that stays faithful to this novel’s constant ambiguity, she vows, “I’ll think it over. Maybe I’ll come back and do it tomorrow” (Schwartz 2005: 201). Reinforcing a crueler fate upon him in the style of one of the most famed Gothic revenge accounts, Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado,” his life will be an extended death while held in a hospital of no visitors save for her. Unlike the vengeance-fantasies that sustained victims through their suffering hours in many Gothic accounts, though, Renata’s “revenge didn’t feel sweet. If felt like more to add to the past” (Schwartz 2005: 201).

Recalling how the Gothic situates itself in the space between representation and non-representation of trauma (and oscillates between them), Renata’s compromised revenge is one where she neither smothers the dying man, as was her earlier fantasy, nor offers forgiveness and a promise of no harm. She moves towards one pole and then reverses course to the other. Hers is an in-between state, pledging she “may” come back tomorrow to be his angel of death. This power play reflects trauma theorist Judith Herman’s observation that "The revenge fantasy is often a mirror image of the traumatic memory, in which the roles of perpetrator and victim are reversed" (Herman 1997: 189). Renata may long have nursed this fantasy of torturing Peter, but exercising it is a failure. Everything in her dream of vengeance has hinged on violence achieving something meaningful or revealing important secrets. But such fantasies, just as George Orwell discovered upon visiting a concentration camp where the former inmates took control, frequently reveal “there is no such thing as [true] revenge. Revenge is an act which you want to commit when you are powerless and because you are powerless: as soon as the
sense of impotence is removed, the desire evaporates also” (Orwell 1945: 5). Monsters no longer seem the same monsters as time goes by or when we have leverage over them: “indeed, once under lock and key, they almost cease to be monsters” (Orwell 1945: 5). Derrida exposes the fallacy of revenge against those declared as monsters further: “Monsters cannot be announced. One cannot say: 'Here are our monsters,' without immediately turning the monsters into pets” (Derrida 1989: 80). I perceive the last victim of the monster is the monster itself -- once we begin early acts of domesticating it with a name and a history.

The observation of the “merely pathetic and disgusting” actions of “impossible revenge” follows observations in trauma theory elsewhere on other concentration camp inmates upon liberation. The prominent Romanian trauma theorist and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub describes a young woman whom he knew and whose “relatives had been put into a boarded-up wooden shack that was set afire” (Laub 1995: 64). Following Allied liberation, the woman took part in partisan hunts of local collaborators. Giving free hand to avenge herself against a seventeen-year-old Axis soldier, she “bandaged the German’s wounds and turned him over to the POW group instead” (Laub 1995: 64-65). When asked why, she said, “How could I kill him -- he looked into my face and I looked into his” (Laub 1995: 65). Similarly, with Renata’s face just inches from Peter’s, smelling his breath of “rot,” she could pounce on the nurse’s buzzer-cord before he could call the staff for rescue. She does initially feel that “predator’s thrill, a flutter behind her ribs, a low whir in her head” that called out to murder (Schwartz 2005: 196). The possessing spirit inside Renata could try to re-enact a trauma scene, this time with her as the victimizer, but it is all too obviously false (for Renata and her possession ghost, Claudia).
Renata looks into the dissipated face of Uncle Peter and recognizes her own gaze of terror and her father’s. It is the recognition that saves Peter from asphyxiation, and perhaps saves her from future trauma visited upon those who kill the helpless. She does not deny him his life, but she denies him forgiveness when he asks for it, which seems an honest and authentic act on her part. (Neither will she give Peter reconciliation or amnesty.) We could offer Derrida’s insight as her defense as “by its own internal logic, genuine forgiving must involve the impossible: that is, the forgiving of an ‘unforgivable’ transgression” (Derrida 2001: 32). In this way forgiveness links with trauma. Both suggest the pain is not ever over, and that there is a “permanent rupture, or a wound that refuses to heal” (Reynolds 2004).

After this encounter in Houston (especially in her greater trust of Jack and her release of the waif to her proper parents upon return to New York City), it strongly appears that this confrontation sets free some trapped and paralyzing conflicts and emotions in Renata. She neither exhibits as much self-hatred, self-blame, and excessive holding on to the past, nor the multi-directed anger and distrust at those people in her life who had no part in her sister’s death or niece’s long ago disappearance. It is illuminating that the only dream Renata has in the novel follows the Houston hospital encounter. It comes after she and Jack have just made love, despite the fact that he admitted returning to his old lover (just once) on some kind of sexual “healing mission” during her absence. I would argue the dream is restorative for her. It looks at but reconfigures her past, brings back objects of the dead, just in the way that Freud found that “Dreaming is another kind of remembering” (Freud 1899: 302). The dreaming here could represent a mode of honest or conditional mourning, free from the cant and political posturing she detects in official
memorials involving President George W. Bush on television. She dreams of being part of a great crowd on a lawn with Ferris wheels, parachutes, and carousels. A slender large, dark rectangle made of mist materializes: couples race towards it, and both they and the tower gently ascend into invisible heights, leaving witnesses with a “wondrous horror.” Her night dream may seem a wish-fulfillment (as if the jumpers that held hands as they threw themselves out of the tower on 9/11 were reunited and now ascend), a phantasy, a record of her unconscious’s masqueraded statements (the carousel suggesting the one from which an unknown person or persons snatched Gianna), and a reordering of history (the tower suggesting both WTC towers’ disappearance). As Lacan would say of the importance of Freud’s work, so too in Renata’s dream, “the real supports the phantasy, the phantasy protects the real” (Lacan 1981: 41). But there is also something beyond reciprocity in the dream: a kind of ceremony in her “dream work” where she attempts to say goodbye to the dead of her far past and recent past. Here in dream, she is not alone in her suffering or grief anymore (a crowd “waited” with her, “witnessed,” “grasped” what happened). What is striking is that after her encounter with the perpetrator and this communal dream, her earliest action on returning to New York City is to search for and reunite the parents with the stray girl in her apartment. Before going to Houston, she had no interest in contacting New York City Child Welfare Services to find whose child this is. The child functioned largely for Renata as a living image of what was inside her, as an avatar for both her sister and her niece. But now Renata moves to respecting the girl’s independent personhood and humanity. The girl exists as more than an uncanny substitution for what is lost.
3.9 Conclusion

When Renata cries to her lover Jack, “Don’t leave me alone with the words I dredged up,” we could reasonably make a substitution as “Don’t leave me alone with the body you dredged up,” because it is the traumatized body that haunts here. Jack signals risk to her, and to her mournful incorporation of Claudia, more than anyone else in the novel. For Jack “was curious; some time soon he’d be asking about her past, her family. She’d have to be evasive, and everything would turn sour. Sometimes there is comfort to be found in lies. She would keep silent as long as she could, to make this feeling last” (Schwartz 2005: 53). None the less, Renata is brave enough to break the vault of incorporation within her through a Derridean “tender rejection of the dead,” remembering and confessing the secrets and loss of her sister and niece in full detail, letting her memory express through words what has been heretofore unrepresentable. Just as courageously, she recognizes what Torok terms the “hallucinatory wish-fulfillment” in herself as a phantasy, after she returns the waif she found on the post-9/11 streets to the rightful parents, rather than keeping her in her home as a replacement and a receptacle for the missing Gianna who disappeared ten years before 9/11. She thus understands and empathizes with the anxious horror that the missing girl’s adoptive-parents are feeling, valuing that sympathy over her own narcissistic desire for a substitute. Renata -- the twin who avoided involvement so long (“Ever since she’d lost Claudia, she hadn’t wanted to be close to anyone else”) -- is now aware that she is part of a community hurled together by two planes destroying twin buildings on a sunny Tuesday in September.

The trauma is of course not magically “over,” and indeed what Derrida calls full
and “true forgiveness”\textsuperscript{42} is not obtained. Still, there are conditional advances. While Renata was too naïve, obtuse, or denial-prone as a teenager to help her sister, she now has the confidence and knowledge to at least interrogate the male figure who cursed her family’s life, even if she cannot yet share that conversation with the other male in her new life, Jack. Her guilty uncle may not give answers that are satisfactory or provable, but he at least responds. From such responses her perceptions of herself change somewhat. She begins to recognize the limits of her young self, and of her ability to solve all of the family’s problems or recognize every sign of abuse. As the novel heads to its end and a dream vision, Renata no longer seems so strangled by guilt, passivity, and negligence. She begins to forgive herself even if there is no way she can (or should) grant Peter “true forgiveness.”

Certainly the two most successful individuals to deal with traumata in the novels we survey will be Oskar and to a lesser degree, Renata. Their commonality is that though they are self-serving for a time, they finally accept a greater community of fellow sufferers into their lives and take a more objective view of their trauma. That objective view is a catalyst for compassion: Oskar finally cries, admits the secrets that destroyed him with guilt and caused him to bruise himself nightly, hugs and enfolds his mother, and allows her to love a man again whom, significantly, she met in a trauma-support group. He is a man “who makes [her] laugh again.” All of this change and empathy only come about after a quest taken with others who have likewise lost much. It appears here that for Oskar, he must empathize with another’s trauma before he can start to positively manage

\textsuperscript{42}Derrida explores the paradoxes of conditional and unconditional forgiveness further (alluding to crimes from Japan, South Africa, France, and beyond) in remarkable essays within \textit{On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness} (Paris: Éditions Galilée 1997; London: Routledge, 2001)
his own life and enframe or limit the devouring powers of his own trauma. One can see a
similar development in the case of Renata. Both protagonists appear to follow the
sociologist Kai Erikson’s claim on devastated groups that

[T]rauma can create community. In some ways that is a very odd thing to
claim. To describe people as traumatized is to say that they have
withdrawn into a kind of protective envelope, a place of mute, aching
loneliness, in which the traumatic experience is treated like a solitary
burden that needs to be expunged by acts of denial and resistance. What
could be less “social” than that? But traumatic conditions are like no other
troubles to which flesh is heir. They move to the centre of one’s own
being and, in doing so, give [a band of] victims the feeling that they have
been set apart and made special. (Erikson 1995: 187)

Thus, following Erikson’s observations to a degree, once Renata becomes enmeshed in
the trauma of the whole of Gotham itself on 9/11, she can face more clearly and start to
remember her own earlier private family trauma. Not remaining silenced, Renata takes
actions to still seem alive in the dead man’s zone of trauma, including her face to face
meeting with Peter as he lies dying. Meanwhile, she is moving out of her private morass
to actually helping others. The people in her apartment building need help on 9/11 and in
the days after, and so she shares with people she barely acknowledged or spoke to before
such useful things as towels, aspirin, milk, bread, Valium, and Bourbon. She finds herself
taking care of an infant named Julio because his mother died in a WTC tower.
Neighbors who had seldom knocked on each other’s door before now beg to help her: a
woman brings Renata an outgrown stroller and a used bassinet; a gentleman with a
resonant tenor offers to coo to the baby to help it sleep when it cries. In the days following disaster, a secret nature blooms and Renata observes she cannot “go down the street without stopping every half block to talk” (Schwartz 2005: 92).

Along with all the horrors, there is doubtless a candle in the darkness after 9/11. Renata discovers “these are her neighbors, and though she’s usually reserved, just a nod and a smile [before], she’s as transformed as all the rest, ... and the hot-dog man is giving away pretzels out of gratitude [of being alive]. Renata takes one to share with [baby] Julio ... [whom] everyone fusses over, ... and he gives his brightest smiles as people murmur their sympathy for his loss” (Schwartz 2005: 92). One can search but cannot find in our lifetimes a moment in Manhattan’s history when people cared more for each other and less for themselves. And this moment enters Renata’s being, permeating her. As she strolls the motherless baby, she seems to realize the utter fragility of everyone -- and how they are suffering an unending trauma and facing mourning just as or more disabling than her own. Perhaps, as Roger Luckhurst argues, such a community may be a temporary “transcendence from torturous times” (Luckhurst, “Torturous Times” 2010: 18). For a time, at least, Renata is not wholly alienated from others, not giving sex away to anyone only for forgetfulness, not wanting to die the suicide of a melancholic, not merely existing in a quietly larval form of death, but alive in the united states of grief.
Chapter 4. Interrogating the Dead, Becoming the Dead: Jess Walter’s *The Zero* (2006)

4.1 Criticism Specific to *The Zero*

In March of 2001, the Washington-state novelist Jess Walter became a memoir-ghostwriter for the New York City Police Commissioner Bernard B. Kerik. Five months later, Walter walked through the WTC rubble and smoke rising above bodies still trapped under gigantic beams. He spent months thereafter near “the Hole,” recording his employer’s remarks and reactions to the disaster, an official he scornfully fictionalizes as the “Capo di Capi” in his novel, *The Zero* (2006). Walter’s police boss would later serve a prison sentence of over three years for multiple lying and corruption convictions, an experience that Kerik characterized Gothically as “dying with your eyes open” (Kerik 2015). Walter’s intense involvement with the police department at the highest levels and his presence at the smoldering fifty-foot crater that absorbed buildings half a mile high help explain the unusually deep detail he summons in his novel. Adding even more insight, Walter attended and recorded briefings of city commissioners held by Mayor Rudy Giuliani in the days following the destruction. This access may explain the generally appreciative reviews that the novel received for its detailed, original vision of the competition, corruption, and confusion within New York City bureaucracy. That realism duly noted, Walter still manages a recasting of 9/11 through a monstrous dream filter, one where the word “normal” becomes “familiar and strange, like a repressed memory” (Walter 2006: 7).
Like his fiction from the year before (*Citizen Vince*, which won the Edgar Allan Poe Award for best novel), *The Zero* received high praise, except for some notable exceptions useful for investigation. One reservation among early reactions for the novel, which Walter himself characterized as “life becoming a thriller plot,” came from *The Washington Post* which none the less gave a lucid description of the plot: “During bouts of mysterious memory loss, [police officer] Remy has been enlisted by a secret organization involved in tracking down a woman named March Selios, who worked in one of the towers but may have survived. What ensues is a cross-country hunt for clues and Remy's growing suspicion that he is committing unspeakable acts during his blackouts” (McNally 2006). Early on, then, reviewers focused on the conspiracy-theoretical aspects of Walter’s fiction: i.e., someone impossibly survives the attack while the rest of her office perishes, surviving perhaps by being tipped off by someone close to the Al Qaeda plotters. McNally does praise Walter’s depiction of the U.S. government’s political cant within “our often surreal post-9/11 world, where exploitation of the tragedy has become commonplace” (McNally 2006). Such tracking of exploitation we traced earlier in reactions and concepts from philosophers of culture and language including Žižek, Derrida, Judith Butler and others. However, in Walter’s over-concentration on revealing layers of exploitation, he under-develops the characters, McNally argues, and weak reader-involvement with the novel’s figures is the result. As McNally puts it with detectable frustration: “Like a character out of a Kafka novel, Remy isn't sure what the purpose of his pursuit is, and yet he pursues.... Walter tries to sustain the credibility of Remy's frequent memory loss for 300 pages.... Why is Remy remembering certain things but not others? Why does he remember ‘not remembering’?” (McNally 2006). Testing
McNally’s claim, I find that Remy loses consciousness thirty times in the narrative. McNally posts reasonable queries, but trauma theory is replete with cases of severe blows and mental intrusions, amnesia and the resulting lacunae in the text. This disorder of Remy’s memory is the telltale traumatic symptom, or as Caruth would describe it, the classic “forgetting before remembering” (Caruth 1996). The questions from McNally are still provocative ones, though, to address later, for example: “What is Remy's role in this secret organization; why does he continue doing what he's doing?” (McNally 2006).

For her part, Janet Maslin of The New York Times highlights more faults than high achievements in the novel, suggesting that Walter exhausts his plot devices and risks exhausting readers, as well. Noting that what Walter experienced firsthand among the actual city “bosses” of New York “is clearly echoed in [the novel’s] bleak, unflinching humor,” she notes that, even so, “the gaps in Remy’s memory are dramatically potent until The Zero overuses them. The mounting notion that Remy is complicit in some kind of skullduggery, and that his memory lapses have a sinister component, is suspenseful until it has to be explained” (Maslin 2006). Both McNally and Maslin find it increasingly “hard to care for a narrator who is unsure of his own motives and whose goals remain murky even to himself” (McNally 2006). However, one could more forcefully argue the opposite: that the novel explains little, but that its overarching ambiguities reflect the ambiguities of 9/11 itself and emotionally enrich the entire narrative. Indeed, the thorn in the heart of all 9/11 literature is an unsolved mystery, asking in particular, where are the bodies from the towers? Moreover, not finding the WTC dead that Walter so earnestly searches for helps “the Hole” become the unofficial and authentic memorial to “the unknown civilian” in an age of sudden cataclysmic terrorism.
Surprisingly, one of the most conservative newspapers in America was lavish in its praise of the novel, and among the first to be attentive to its dark humor and potent critiques of New York City organization and institutions, as well as American military and political reactions to the attack. Kyle Smith in The Wall Street Journal declared that “The Zero could end up as the Catch 22 of 9/11.... [Remy’s] exhausted confusion ... distills what many Americans have felt for the past five years.... He is among the first to diagram the tragedy-into-kitsch machine" (Smith 2006). Such effusive admiration echoes Deirdre Donahue of USA Today, who finds in the narrative “a dark allegory about the attack, the aftermath, and what has happened to America as seen through the prism of one man's nightmarish journey” (Donahue 2006). So too did staff at international newspapers, including Toronto’s The Globe and Mail, give highest approval, judging the novel “a chronicle of the United States' disintegrating post-9/11 polity ... [and] one of the funniest -- and darkest -- satires I've read in a quite a while” (Staff 2006). Concurring, Jeremy Leipert of the Calgary Herald interpreted The Zero as exposing how "we allowed ourselves to be anaesthetized ... [towards an] irrational reaction to events that will define our generation" (Leipert 2006). Porochista Khakpour, a 9/11 novelist herself who wrote Sons and Other Flammable Objects in 2007, ranked The Zero as “one of the top ten international novels written of the attack” for The Guardian, which earlier chose not to review The Zero at its original release (Khakpour 2014). She also shared this “top ten” honor with New Yorker Ken Kalfus’s novel A Disorder Peculiar to the Country, which we will address later in the chapter.
4.2 Autoimmunity

In her characterization of early media reviews other than the ones raised above, the 9/11 scholar Kristine A. Miller stresses the terrorism-texts’ allegorical readings:

“Although no sustained scholarship on The Zero has yet been published, reviewers have focused on how the troubled, inarticulate Remy symbolically represents America’s post-9/11 trauma” (Miller 2014: 30). Though Walter’s protagonist Remy may indeed represent a nation (and a world) wounded, lost, confused and growing blindly cruel, he is also markedly different in that he is an insider, a first responder to the tragedy. Though the world watched on live television in shock, few people actually went into the north tower after the attack on a rescue mission, as Officer Remy did, and so few have the

43 Fifteen years later, the continued relevance of 9/11 phantasms appeared for record-audiences to watch live during U.S. Republican Primaries from 2015 - 2016. One candidate, Donald J. Trump, recalled seeing “thousands and thousands” of Muslims on rooftops in New Jersey celebrating, dancing, chanting, and singing on the day the WTC fell, and another, Ben Carson, soon said he saw the same (Benen 2015). When interviewers pressed both candidates the following week, both held to their stories, which would prove to be either hallucinations or false memories. Carson would finally recant his version of events, but Trump never wavered from what he imagined he saw: "It did happen. I saw it. It was on television. I saw it. There were people that were cheering on the other side of New Jersey where you have large Arab populations. They were cheering as the World Trade Center came down. I know it might be not politically correct for you to talk about it, but there were people cheering as that building came down" (Kiely 2015). Trump lays the blame for why no corroboration emerges and why there is a continued lack of evidence on a coordinated media attempt to discredit him. Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop ended the discussion by complaining, “Trump has memory issues” (Karpan 2015). As yet to be investigated by trauma scholars is the effect of TV-viewing of a trauma on policy makers at the highest American level, and what their imaginary sightings inspire them to do, as revealed by their later letters, diaries, interviews, and conferences. To date, New Jersey police, governor, and community leaders still deny these “catastrophe parties” ever happened, and no witnesses to the Muslim celebrations of death have surfaced.
amplified traumata that he has, namely, injury to body and his very identity, which we need to unravel. No one ever sees film footage from inside the WTC during the attack, as Derrida astutely adds in a long interview with Giovanna Borradori, and the living witnesses sometimes cannot articulate it. Perhaps resembling the more penetrating trauma scholarship itself from the mid 1990s on, these early and briefest newspaper reviewers detect what is “unpossessable” in the words of Kristiaan Versluys: “It is a limit event [trauma of global proportions] that shatters the symbolic resources of the culture and defeats the normal processes of meaning making” (Versluys 2009: 1). Additionally, though all of the protagonists surveyed in this thesis may inflict physical or emotional harm on themselves to some degree, Remy’s suicide attempt on the first page is the most obvious and determined attempt at self-annihilation in any of the fictions investigated here. This text may be the best candidate from our 9/11 collated fictions for interpretation through Derrida’s extremely original post-9/11 autoimmunity concept developed in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (2003). Both people and superpowers, Derrida contends, can act like a body’s overactive immunity system attacking its own healthy tissues, a distinguishing feature of incompletely-understood diseases like “diabetes (type 1), idiopathic arthritis, glomerulonephritis, Graves’ disease, Guillain-Barré syndrome, ... multiple sclerosis, primary biliary cirrhosis, psoriasis, [and] rheumatoid arthritis” (National Institutes of Health 2016). Derrida’s argument will look backward from the terrorism of 2001 to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 for historical support. To give some sense of history, I quote him at length:

> Immigrated, trained, prepared for their act in the United States by the United States, these [9/11] hijackers incorporate, so to speak, two suicides
in one: their own (and one will remain forever defenseless in the face of a suicidal, autoimmunitary aggression -- and that is what terrorizes most) but also the suicide of those who welcomed, armed, and trained them. For let us not forget that the United States had in effect paved the way for and consolidated the forces of the “adversary” by training people like “bin Laden,” who would here be the most striking example, and by first of all creating the politico-military circumstances that would favor their emergence and their shifts in allegiance (for example, the alliance with Saudi Arabia and other Arab Muslim countries in its war against the Soviet Union or Russia in Afghanistan -- though one could endlessly multiply examples of these suicidal paradoxes). (Derrida 2003)44

Derrida’s impressive analogy of a self-induced disease illuminates many corridors of The

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44 It is paramount for this analysis of anti-terrorism to have a definition of terrorism to work from or to deconstruct, and the CIA itself offers a definition of terrorism remarkably close to Derrida’s (drawing from Title 22 of the US Code, Section 2656f(d)). Terrorism is “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents. The term ‘international terrorism’ means terrorism involving the territory or the citizens of more than one country. The term ‘terrorist group’ means any group that practices, or has significant subgroups that practice, international terrorism” (CIA staff 2016) However, the CIA -- despite widespread media coverage to the contrary and admissions by Al Qaeda officials themselves -- continues to deny involvement with bin Laden during the Russian invasion of Afghanistan: “Numerous comments in the media recently have reiterated a widely circulated but incorrect notion that the CIA once had a relationship with Usama Bin Laden [sic]. For the record, you should know that the CIA never employed, paid, or maintained any relationship whatsoever with Bin Laden” (CIA staff 2016). Moreover, ominously replaying the righteous language of the Mayor in The Zero, former CIA director Leon Panetta vowed on the day of Bin Laden’s death, “A war will be won. God bless the United States of America” (Panetta 2011).
Zero, which after all begins with a self-induced gunshot wound. We may in fact see a tripartite model of terror at work within The Zero, one that that stands in contrast with all the other works of this thesis: namely, that terror and trauma do not wholly come from outside. For this novel, the terror comes from 1) a belief in conspiracy theories that help lead to a suicide attempt by the protagonist 2) the traumatic sufferings of the torturer looking back upon his torturing and 3) accessories and affiliates of Al Qaeda that either the U.S. federal government initially trained and funded (in the case of the WTC destruction) or Walter’s “New York City Office of Recovery and Liberty” (ORL henceforth). The ORL bribes young Arab Muslim men to become informants. These informants, acting much as they do in John Updike’s 9/11 novel Terrorist released in the same year as The Zero, become ultimately disaffected agents because of all the U.S.-sanctioned abuse they witness in their positions. Thus in Remy we have a city law officer who, somewhat magically, gets promoted to the rank of anti-terror agent and informant-procurer; grand interrogator; torturer of suspects through beating, suffocation, and not mere waterboarding but drowning in the ocean; and then arresting officer at gatherings of Al Qaeda terror cells in their (mock) preparation for suicide bombing. However, in the desire to protect the Homeland, the pre-emptive actions of Remy lead to the active radicalization of actual operatives -- a suicide bombing at a New York train station ensues after the wrongful arrest of those who were actually informers. The killing of Remy’s lover by an Al Qaeda operative occurs, all done by a man who was for a while a U.S. government agent, code-named Jaguar. This is a version of the fatally ironic, futile, and damning history that Derrida gives of the U.S.’s Middle East policies through his
notion of autoimmunity, but exemplified in fiction, rather than purely the “blowbacks”45 of contemporary U.S. history that Derrida analyzes.

Indeed, of all of the traumagothic novels herein, *The Zero*, like the digit zero itself that the engineer / terrorist Jaguar meditates upon, is the most radically uncertain. It is difficult to tell what in the narrative is fever dream, hallucination, hospital drug-induced vision, trauma shock, or “real.” Is the hero on a special and secret anti-terrorist mission from The Boss, apparently the Mayor of New York City Rudy Giuliani, or is he severely injured early on by entrance into the WTC and his memory traumatized, unquietly dreaming this entire narrative in a hospital bed? Becky Ohlsen perceptively asks the purpose and effect of its many unfinished chapters and deliberate narrative evasions. I assume that evasiveness includes how the novel jump cuts from flashes of torture, to a painful talk with an ex-wife, to a son delivering a eulogy to the father (Remy) standing alive before him, to clandestine envelope deliveries, to the collection of tons of “sensitive” paper from the WTC plaza and surrounds (which includes a federal building that housed CIA offices), and then upon the bed where he makes love to a sister of his number-one

45 First mentioned in a CIA document from 1954 in connection to fears regarding the American supported coup of the freely elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran, “Blowback” is a “metaphor for the unintended consequences of the U.S. government’s international activities that have been kept secret from the American people” (Staff of *The Nation* 2001). Days after 9/11, a former CIA consultant during the 1960s - 1970s named Chalmers Johnson would add this helpful analysis: “Terrorism by definition strikes at the innocent in order to draw attention to the sins of the invulnerable. The United States deploys such overwhelming military force globally that for its militarized opponents only an ‘asymmetric strategy,’ in the jargon of the Pentagon, has any chance of success. When it does succeed, as it did spectacularly on September 11, it renders our massive military machine worthless: The terrorists offer it no targets” (Johnson 2001). The futile response of the U.S. military machine as described to actual sources of terror in response to the “asymmetric strategies” of terrorism, sadly reflect the damage of the anti-terror units in *The Zero*. They have no success and only breed more discontent among the underprivileged and alienated.
suspect. As Ohlsen notes: The “flashes are usually accompanied by significant quantities of whiskey, which, along with his brooding silence, his inferred toughness and other people's failure to take his questions seriously, helps Remy skate along with his memory loss undetected. The structure of the novel calls to mind works like *Memento* or *Fight Club*, in which the disjointed plot must be pieced together based on mostly faulty evidence” (Ohlsen 2006). I would add to her apt film comparisons of disjointed structure and permanent doubt over protagonist actions (which may be all a dream) such films as *Life of Pi* (Dir. Ang Lee, 2012) *American Psycho* (Dir. Mary Harron, 2000), *Shutter Island* (Dir. Martin Scorsese, 2010), *Mulholland Drive* (Dir. David Lynch, 2001), *Jacob’s Ladder* (Dir. Adrian Lyne, 1990), and *Pan’s Labyrinth* (Dir. Guillermo del Toro, 2006).

For Remy, these abrupt transitions without closure that Ohlsen references are a way of avoiding too long a gaze at the monster in the mirror, a shrinking away from unpleasant truths, or how the characters and the country embark on an erring, retaliatory, and warring path that will lead to more trauma and what philosopher Jürgen Habermas calls an “unmasterable past” (Habermas 2003). With, at best, “faulty evidence,” we begin now to extend Ohlsen’s analysis. From answering how much of what Remy remembers truly happened to him, so many other questions emerge: why does he take part in torture and corruptions? And what are the lengths Remy (and others) go, as Derrida wonders of others in his dialogue with Borradori, in order to “attenuate or neutralize the effect of the traumatism (to deny, repress, or forget it, to get over 9/11)” (Derrida 2003: eBook).

Both newspaper reviews and scholarly journal articles reasonably suggest that *The Zero* is a satire intended to mock and critique reactions to 9/11 and to criticize Americans
for attacking non-involved countries and stigmatizing Arabs at home. What is problematic, though, is how all of these critics take at face value Remy’s entire musings about a federal and state government-funded organization in New York City that is pitting informants to kill each other. If this were so, the Mayor of Gotham would also be guilty of presiding over a scheme to funnel more money to city government, all for an organization that supposedly tracks, disrupts, and kills terrorists (and purportedly is in a jurisdiction-war with the FBI and CIA). Book reviewers do not dismiss this as a paranoid dream-phantasy of the injured Remy, yet I would argue it is. The hunt and capture of faux-terrorists constantly borders absurdity. So many false leads mount that that one secret-agent partner with Remy, Agent Markham of the ORL, finally cries over yet another ruined mission: “Oh, for Christ’s sake... We’ve got informers on the informers!” (Walter 2006: 293). In reviews so far, there is a less than questioning stance towards Remy’s “secret missions,” and a somewhat naïve acceptance of his spying as an actual happening outside his imagination. From this lack of skepticism towards the protagonist come some very free interpretations.

First, to suppose that the New York Mayor’s office would hire Remy (formerly a mid-level liaison between the city attorney’s office and police department) to be an undercover operative against hidden radical Muslims on terror destinies is extremely

46 The novel is undeniably a critique of mindless war. The first target or war-buffoon may be Steve, the man who marries Remy’s ex-wife. Opening up a can of beer at a “wake” for Remy, Steve declares, “Personally? I don’t see that it matters who we bomb, long as we do it while we still got the upper hand. Line ’em up. Clean house. But I don’t need to tell you that, right?... We should have had the stealth bombers in the air before the smoke cleared” (Walter 2006: 26). The protagonist, who comes to his own “wake” organized by his “grieving” son, and searches for bodies in the ruin, can only counter such warlike assurance and swagger with the fact that the smoke has not yet cleared from the WTC.
unlikely. To begin, we notice Remy has no training in eavesdropping or computer
decryption, he has no skills with Middle Eastern languages, nor in interrogation. Last, he
has serious vision problems, having just gone blind in one eye and suffering macular
degeneration and vitreous detachment in the other. None of his skills, training, or
education would qualify him for the job, and his potential to be a liability to secrecy --
routinely endangering the lives of others through his unintentional negligence, naïveté,
and forgetfulness -- is ominously high. That said, New York City does have an anti-
terrorist operation, one that even works outside the city, hosting field offices in Europe
and the Middle East. The New York City Police department radically changed after 9/11
and massive funding was shifted to it, so in that aspect the novel is not sheer fantasy. As
Brad Reagan describes the New York City organization in the year of this novel’s release,
“At 51,000 strong, the NYPD employs more than 1.5 times as many people as the FBI,
and its anti-terrorism initiative is a synchronized effort between the department's
Intelligence Division and the Counter Terrorism Bureau” (Reagan 2006). The ultra-secret
force that seems to employ Remy does bear some resemblance to “the Hercules teams
[within the Intelligence Division], which are composed of specialist cops rotated in from
throughout the force. The effort even stretches far from New York, with nine liaisons
assigned to such overseas hot spots as Tel Aviv, Israel; Amman, Jordan; and London”
(Reagan 2006). Knowing more about the NYPD’s huge and assertive ATI (Anti-
Terrorism Initiative) through working with Kerik gives Walter an admirable sense for the
realities of tracking terrorism, but the plot mainspring of fierce rivalry between the
NYPD counter-terrorism bureau and the FBI and CIA seems to show more his powers of
fiction and invention than reality. Sub-departments such as the NYPD / FBI Joint
Terrorist Task Force join together, instead of operating as separate and competing entities (Reagan 2006). My argument, then, is that it makes less sense to hold a literal reading of the novel’s action of organizational rivalries. Such an undiscriminating acceptance of the story would mean that the Mayor hires a hopelessly traumatized man, Brian Remy, in the hopes of making money and gaining more power. Yet Remy makes for an agent-candidate who seems to have no memory of previous conversations with the Mayor, who mostly asks “What?” and “Who?”, who seems silent much of the rest of the time, and who has (as Remy readily admits) shot himself in the head a week before with the wound still visible. An individual like Remy would be an extreme risk in an undercover operation that demands subtlety; quickness of mind; keen memory for faces, names, speech, locales; and a strong idea for what his next move in the operation is. Remy is a suffering trauma victim, and possesses none of these necessary abilities above. This

47 The novel imagines that the New York City Mayor engineers a scheme to extract federal funds through exaggerated reports of post-9/11 Al Qaeda plots in his city. In reality, Mayor Rudy Giuliani, just three months after 9/11, did actually speculate in “terror futures.” In December 2001, he wrote to the New York City Conflicts of Interest Board asking permission to begin forming an international consulting firm with three members of his outgoing administration (Solomon and Mosk 2007). This firm would specialize in protection from terrorism for governments that could pay the fees. However, some of his clients included states whose own government officials also sponsored or shielded Al Qaeda operatives. In 2007, just one year into his bid for the U.S. presidency, Giuliani would have to step down (at least temporarily) as head of the terror-security company he started, Giuliani Partners. Raising suspicions, his company “had secured a contract with Qatar to provide security assessments for that country’s lucrative oil infrastructure” (Jacoby 2007). However, “factions within the [existing] Qatari government” that Giuliani Partners worked with had previously “tipped off” Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in 1996 to leave the country before FBI agents were to arrive and apprehend him there (Jacoby 2007). Mr. Mohammed would go on to become “the principal architect of the 9/11 attacks,” according to the 9/11 Commission Report. Walter’s fictional conspiracy theories in The Zero take on a patina of truth with Giuliani’s career post-9/11.
officer cannot articulate what he saw at the day of destruction, but he can show us the
effect of his PTSD. Through the ruins of his dreams and the threatening figures of his
paranoia we see the effects of trauma, though not what the actual traumata were.

Beyond the inability to express the trauma, the second obsession in *The Zero*
broods on the missing: both missing people and missing documents (paper records from
the WTC that flew away or incinerated in the blast; paper suggesting terrorist
involvements and connections; and paper trails of criminality from the Mayor’s office,
along with other New York law enforcement officials). An endless search for human
remains ensues, and as in real life, only the tiniest fragments surface, leaving well over
1,000 bodies still unidentified and untraceable. Readers may wonder at the amount of
attention and scrutiny that this novel gives to mere paper, yet these inscribed, half burned
pieces of paper awaiting decoding are a metaphor for the retrieved portions of 9/11
cadavers. Just as Derrida argued that titles in the archive cataloguing system represent
knowledge but are not the whole works, so too these burned names and body pieces
represent personal identities but are not the whole identities. At once complete and
incomplete, this search for detail or a authoritative archive of the names of the 9/11
victims is an even more intense agony and malady than is presented in Derrida’s original
eyssay (later turned into a book), “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression.” In “Archive
Fever,” we remember, the malady for completion consumes: “It is to burn with a passion.
It is never to rest, interminably from searching for the archive right where it slips away”
(Derrida 1995: 57). Further, Derrida detects “an incessant tension here between the
archive and archaeology,” bringing to mind Freud’s interest in the excavation of
antiquities and his sustained analogy of unearthing physical artifacts in the earth to the
raising of buried wounds, drives, and longings sedimented in the psyche. Likewise, it has been a search “one goddamned bucket at a time” (Walter 2006: 17) for human remains in The Zero, as Remy calls it. Gathering all the pieces and interpreting them correctly could establish identity; close missing persons’ reports; clear ambiguity; start the mourning, rituals, ceremonies for families, friends, and coworkers of the deceased; and provide an object for the otherwise empty coffins. But the human remains, like the sheets of paper that fall on 9/11, are mostly burned and incomplete. No one decodes the paper contents, and no one clears the ambiguous status of the disappeared people. Bringing up the pieces will affect the body-retrievers’ minds profoundly, but not bringing up enough bodies will affect them more. And yet in this novel the key therapist Dr. Rieux will not energetically excavate minds through psychotherapy, but instead prescribe medication. Though termed a therapist, he acts more like a psychiatrist with more recourse to pharmaceuticals than “talking cures.”

From the eighteenth century onwards, the Gothic has been the literature of absent things -- missing papers (of lineage, deed, ownership, and court) and absent people (heirs and lovers, fathers and criminals). The Zero sutures itself to this tradition by conducting searches for missing people (the woman March who may have been tipped off by a terrorist friend to exit the north tower minutes before the crash, and the thousands who were pulverized before any warning could come) and missing papers (the documents flying out of the WTC that the New York City Mayor oddly claims are central to retrieving for reviving the US economy, and also a secret harvest of documents related to a terror conspiracy). However, what unites The Zero even more intimately with the Gothic impulse is that these missing things are still full of agency. The sense in the text is
that the dead are weirdly and quietly operative agents who possess the living, shame them, burden and break them, but sometimes liberate them, too. The living through their words and deeds, again and again, desire forgiveness from the ghosts of the dead for still living while so many others were vaporized on 9/11. To underscore that, each of these surveyed novels mentions that every breath of the New York City survivors robs something from the dead -- the very essence or dust of the dead. A survivor guilt settles over all the narratives as unavoidably as the WTC explosions’ gray ash cakes the living who flee from the burning and falling towers.

If Derrida’s notion of autoimmunity may be seen as deconstructing the proclaimed division by the U.S. of Al Qaeda terrorism and the American War on Terrorism, then Walter’s The Zero decenters or readjusts who the ghost is. The one who threatens, warns, disrupts is not always another, a stranger, a visitant from the land of the dead, or the Other, but at times the one the reader often initially most identifies with, the protagonist himself. The traditional concept of a ghost, then, is taken apart, rebuilt and left with parts missing in the process: the ghost’s mission, motivation, and mourning-relationship is incomplete, unreadable, and contradictory. Indeed, in seeing the protagonist try to kill himself in the first pages to “save himself” and then not being able to die, we see something of Derrida’s proposal executed: “As we know, an autoimmunitary process is that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion, ‘itself’ works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself against its ‘own’ immunity” (Derrida 2003). Later, through a series of slips, gaffes, mistimings, and misspoken words -- these “accidents” that never were accidental -- we could argue that Remy strips his “spook” status, a kind of suicide of his undercover-agent identity, and another autoimmunity
attack is underway within him.

Looking back to our chapter three, if the film *The Devil’s Backbone* informed *The Writing on the Wall* (with its doppelgängers, orphanage, missing gold, and lost parents) then *The Shining* just as surely illuminates *The Zero*. Like that film’s autoimmunity victim Jack Torrance, Remy too has nightmares, memory lapses, sudden violence he cannot explain, a sense of possessions, reincarnations, lapses back into alcoholism, meetings with spirits no one else sees, and walks down halls with someone’s blood on his shoes. The most interesting filmic nod is Remy’s time at “The Ghost Bar,” and how he himself parodies the ghost barman played with diabolical restraint in Kubrick’s *The Shining* by Joe Turkel. Two days after 9/11, Remy discovers a storefront not far away with broken windows and dusty tables but intact bottles of “decent gin.” It will be this abandoned bar he slinks into for much of the novel and wherein he encounters strange characters that will corrupt him later. When thinking himself alone in the bar, Remy looks for a clean glass, gazes upward and sees “a slender man in a dark suit [who] was standing in the doorway, holding a briefcase. He was younger than Remy, but about the same height, with a short, military haircut. But his exact age was hard to determine because he had the youngest face Remy had ever seen on an adult, as if a ten-year-old’s head had been grafted onto the body of an adult lawyer” (Walter 2006: 21). Agents such as the unknown man in the doorway combine the dark smoothness and efficiency of a John Le Carré (see particularly his novel of extraordinary rendition, *A Most Wanted Man* from 2008, based on the real-life tortures of the innocent Turkish-born Murat Kurnaz at American detention camps in Kandahar and Guantanamo Bay) with the surrealism of a William Burroughs (particularly *Naked Lunch*, 1959) and the alarm of a Stephen King.
(especially in his 9/11 ghost novella from 2003, *The Things They Left Behind*). Strange heads from then on will become the weird and dreamlike constant in *The Zero*, from Remy’s landlady’s chatting head which was “just a fraction off-center, giving her the look of a ... foosball goalie” to a decapitated head encountered during Remy’s sifting duty at the landfill “under all this fuggin’ steel on top and shit on the bottom” (Walter 2006: 6, 45). After such horrors comes a greater terror, a haunting in Remy of the kind that Derrida discusses no less than ten times in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*: that 9/11 bears on the “body the terrible sign of what might or perhaps will take place, which will be *worse than anything that has ever taken place*” (Derrida 2003: eBook). Trauma ruins all illusions of safety, and television (which most of the characters in *The Zero* frequently watch and discuss) enlarges the fear, reinforcing trauma’s power of repetition. Avery F. Gordon enlarges this portentous Derridean sense when she writes that trauma always “binds you to what cannot be forgotten or forgiven ... [and] binds you to the repression of it. This repetition of and libidinal investment in the repression binds the future -- what comes next -- to the trauma, which is what never ends, what cannot end. In this sense, trauma is a deeply regressive and repressive state” (Gordon 2011: eBook). We might be reminded, as well, of Punter’s apt “ricochet” delineation and the impact of endless replay on the television news of vengeful terrorism: granted, “the numbers of deaths in the Twin Towers ... do not stack up statistically against ... the deaths of one million Filipinos in the US / Philippine War of 1900. But this, of course, is not the end, or perhaps even the beginning, of the truth: because terrorism depends on the effects of ricochet” (Punter 2008: 212). Thus theorists establish well how the portents and omens of terrorism work, and my intention is to analyze, across the many disappearances of the living and the
returns of the dead, how this novel binds us to what cannot be forgiven or forgotten --
torture, concealments, omissions, and the inability to tell if we are alive among the living,
or if we are dead among the other phantoms. Remy, I would argue, is chiefly interesting
in his professional contradictions and personal revolution. He converts into the villain of
his own “heroic story.” He also changes into the injured victim of 9/11 he sought to
rescue, and thus transforms into the ghost of the tale he long searches for.

4.3 Ghosts in the Gaps

It is defensible to see Remy’s Kafkaesque confusion, doubt over whether he exists,
and his vast conspiracy-suspicions as a symptom of his trauma, or of that paranoid
thinking that understandably comes from an unprecedented attack which no one could
understand at the time and few could process later. In his mental disarray of losing
forever his friends and colleagues who died in rescue attempts at the WTC, Remy is like
the real-life Marcy Borders, who escaped the 81st floor of the WTC on the day of attack.
Photographed on the street leading away from the WTC in an image that became
indelible of the tragedy, she would die of cancer in 2015, in part from exposure to the
toxins in the air that day. The image of her evokes at first glance the dead from a museum
-- perhaps an Egyptian mummy initially, and then a Pompeian victim later, stopped in
mid-stride by Vesuvius’s hot ash and smoke. At second view, she may even appear as a
jaundiced ghoul, but then she seems all too human as we gaze upon the broken and child-
like face seeking explanation, comfort, and refuge. From 9/11 forward, Borders would
suffer severe mental disruption, and until Borders’ death at 42 years of age, she still
“feared for her life, that a missile might hit her. She began to drink, sometimes to the point of blacking out” (Lowe 2015: 59). When Borders would go to a parade with her daughter, she would run for cover upon hearing a plane overhead; when she saw a stranger on a roof, she thought it was Osama bin Laden in sniper-mode, with his always-ready AK-47, narrowing again upon her, not content until he killed her.

Image 11: Marcy Borders (“The Dust Lady”) escaping the WTC on 9/11. Similarly, in the thesis’s four texts, survivors appear as ghosts or uncanny creatures of the dust as they emerge from the Towers.

Courtesy: The New York Times
As her *New York Times* obituary concludes, when her photo as The Dust Lady appeared in Arabic newspapers, the “fame increased her paranoia. She believed Osama bin Laden was not done. He would not stop with the WTC; he would pursue her” (Bromwichaug 2015). True to her terror, what awaited her was Derrida’s “unpresentable future” (Derrida 2003: eBook). What shadowed The Dust Lady is what shadows Brian Remy: fear, confusion, eroding identity, paranoia, and unspeakable delusions. I contend it is that dread combined with survivor guilt and repression (along with those things that cannot successfully be repressed) that bedevil him and that helped kill Marcy Borders. It is not only the sleep of reason that produces monsters in 9/11 novels, but the strange risings of the unrepresentable, difficult for the afflicted fully to express yet impossible for them to fully repress, either. Just as it is in psychoanalysis that what remains outside the ego is of most revealing import -- all those details that cannot not be recalled or which stubbornly refuse to discard their masquerade -- so too it follows in *The Zero* that all the vanished memories and forbidden ideas provide the source of Remy’s tension and pain, and leave their vestigial traces on his conversation, obsessions, and acts. These “compromise formations,” as Freud called them, could include Remy’s constant shifting references to “gaps,” “dust,” “ghosts,” and “the missing.” But what blame, aggression, sorrow, guilt, and longings for suicide brood beneath the textual shell to these references are never pierced by his analyst, Dr. Rieux. The analytic sessions will not effect a cure, nor even seem to begin to do so, because Remy’s closed-off moments and struggles are never acknowledged: “‘Gaps,’ says Dr. Rieux [to Remy], ‘what gaps?’... [and] he reached for the prescription sheet” (Walter 2006: 196). The ever-increasing medication prescriptions and steady ignoring of his visions only fuel Remy’s fear that everyone -- from Osama bin
Laden to Dr. Rieux -- is trying to hurt him.

To varying degrees, all these novels struggle with survivor guilt -- the awful and unanswerable question of why the protagonist has lived and all these other innocent people beside him or her perished. Shame, blame, or guilt converts to taking the nature and identity of the dead, as we have seen in the fiction of previous chapters and in the case reports of psychologists investigating trauma detailed from the Cocoanut Grove nightclub fire in Boston, wherein survivors became living ghosts by taking on the personalities, dress, hobbies, and even careers of the deceased. Ghosts, as Derrida forcefully argues, always bear “the right of manifestation of a certain truth” (Derrida 1995: 49), and this truth in The Zero is as dark as a Gothic crime, a scandal put away. Not only do these ghosts imply that they have not been fully mourned, but they suggest that an end to mourning is itself a myth, or that emotional closure over the mass murder of loved ones will always be fraudulent. Moreover, the possession ghosts, which include Remy now, seem again and again to mouth one truth: a desire for vengeance against the attackers. The fact that the 9/11 hijackers are dead poses an acute problem. Who does a surviving terrorist-victim properly retaliate against if the attackers died themselves along with the innocents? This is a conflict implied but never adequately solved in any of the investigated novels. None of the survivors say they gain anything from America attacking an Iraq that had no part in the WTC’s fall. This futility points to perhaps the most threatening truth, profoundly articulated by Derrida, that the United States routinely executes state terrorism and its declaration of a “War on Terrorism” as a de facto autoimmunitary war on itself by itself. The “lost characters” in 9/11 fiction, as Chloé Tazartez forcefully argues in “Terrorist or Victim?”, begin in readers a “questioning of
the usual conceptions” of obsession and violence, and the quickly reversing, never settling nature of victimhood. Enlarging this thesis, these novels show us clearly how the victims of terror may be doubly or triply victimized, the second time by their own government and a third time by themselves. In such a process, victims become victimizers. Derrida’s formulation on victimhood is worth adding to because The Zero seems in conversation with it. Derrida’s meditation during a New York interview just “steps away from the ruins,” as he puts it, removes the boundary between “victim” and “terrorist.” The principal feature of language about terrorism appears to be its reversibility, its lack of fixedness. Derrida potently questions the easy assumptions: “If one is not to trust blindly in the prevailing language, which remains most often subservient to the rhetoric of the media and to the banter of the political powers, we must be very careful using the term ‘terrorism’ and especially ‘international terrorism.’ In the first place, what is terror? What distinguishes it?” (Derrida 2003: eBook). Complicating our response to 9/11, without taking away from our sense of its bottomless tragedy, Derrida alleges that it becomes hard to differentiate between a “terror that is organized, provoked, and instrumentalized,” like Al Qaeda's 9/11 attacks, and a U.S. Department of Defense retaliatory killing. This claim gains credence when we consider that both Al Qaeda attacks and American armed responses are designed with the goal of changing another’s policy or removing its presence in a region. Indeed, when the United States dropped bombs and fired drones against sovereign states near the time President Obama would win the Nobel Peace Prize, some U.S. allies still declared the killing as part of a Just War. Yet such attacks kill foreign civilians frequently, as reported on the front pages of newspapers around the world. Approval from sites of international diplomacy for the American strikes could make little difference to remaining survivors who lost homes and
their families. They are the constant victims of “collateral damage” whose faces or names may not be widely known and whose continuing trauma has not stopped drone attacks as of this writing. This disturbing similarity of terrorist violence and American military actions is what Remy tries to reconcile himself to, thinking aloud: “Maybe this is what it feels like to be a soldier. That you just move forward because if you stop to think about the context, what it all means, you’ll just go crazy” (Walter 2006: 167).

Remy’s meditation captures the FBI, CIA, and ORL characters’ mentality to continue with a mission no matter how strategically misguided, morally debased, possibly prosecutable, or ultimately suicidal.

The confusion, ethical fog, and survivor guilt, along with the corrosive shame and sense of injustice within what I term “avenger guilt,” darkly blooms in Remy, and murder is the result. Cynthia Weber’s largest “post-9/11 question” is useful now: “The foundational question of U.S.-ness [after the WTC fall] is what does it mean to be a moral America(n)?” (Weber 2). Weber and other public intellectuals (Georgiana Banita, Noam Chomsky, Žižek, Baudrillard, Versluys, Gray, Butler, Punter, and Derrida) dwell on the crimes of the U.S. visited upon many innocent people in Afghanistan and

48 Based at City University London since 2010, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism estimates that since 2002, USAF drone strikes have killed between 91 - 181 civilians in Yemen. Since 2004, similar strikes have felled 424 – 966 non-combatants in Pakistan, and between 3 - 10 civilians have died from them in Somalia since 2007. Between 2015 and 11 September 2016, approximately 75 - 130 non-enemies have perished by U.S. drones in Afghanistan. Twenty-one of the dead were children (“Get the Data: Drone Wars” 2016). The estimates are pooled from these and other sources: The Independent, the Financial Times, the Daily Telegraph, the Sunday Times, Le Monde, Mediapart, The Guardian, and The Observer.
Iraq, and ask how much longer Americans can still hold the mantle of "innocent victimhood" post-9/11. More importantly, they ask if there is any sympathy for all the new and often blameless victims of the War on Terror beyond America’s shores. They are interested in why “patriotic euphoria” (Banita 20102: 3) occurs rather than a greater, empathetic “consciousness or recognition” (Banita 2012: 5) growing for the millions of sufferers and displaced persons. Why have Americans failed to resist entering and refueling a cycle of violence? These complicated ethical questions apply to Remy, and the unsatisfactory answer from him is often silence, accompanied by his traumatic “amnesia.” As Banita understands it, Remy’s “dreamy condition, which prohibits emotional connections with others because he cannot remember them from one moment to the next, dramatize[s] a more generalized post-9/11 amnesia and disaffection, ... [Americans] nursing their grief in solitude” (Banita 2012: 6). This unrelieved “grief in solitude,” opposed to the communal anguish that comes at the end of The Writing on the Wall and leads New Yorkers to help each other in their days and weeks of need, may help to explain Remy’s detachment from others. Asked to spy upon, torture, and kill those who seem at first to be Al Qaeda suspects -- but later are revealed as informants for American bureaucracies -- Remy cannot leave his own labyrinth of solitude to help or defend them.

Despite the many competing motives and multiple parties behind The Zero’s state terrorism, its hydra-headed appearance of threat can also express itself in one character. Remy clearly evokes the state’s behavior in its violent action and forgetfulness, or what novelist and war critic Gore Vidal termed in a documentary film, “the United States of Amnesia” (Vidal 2003). Disconcertedly like U.S. defense and intelligence agencies the
book raises, Remy’s bloody crimes and killing of civilians are 1) barely recognized by himself 2) excused and rationalized and then 3) unremembered later by the others who torture. Indeed the whole of the novel represents a surface where people easily slide from one identity to another: from terror suspect to terror victim and back again. What makes this a perfect environment for such identity slippage are the constant gaps in the narrative. In “Digital Fatigue,” Garrett Stewart rightfully observes that “the real problem” of depicting the War on Terror is “that it’s too shapeless for plot” (Stewart 2009: 45). But we can add to that diagnosis that these shapeless ambiguities grow into sublimity, into a matrix of gaps and lacunae where tortures occur, “black ops” fester, extraordinary rendition spreads49 to secret U.S. detention sites abroad, and extralegal “limbolands” burgeon. In such places, neither declared charges, nor habeas corpus, nor scheduled trials exist, effectively skirting public attention and due process. Tending to shapelessness, indeterminate in its scene and chapter endings, opaque in its speech, and unstable in its characters -- one moment characters are “real” and the next phantomised or gone for good -- The Zero is a kind of fictive uranium. For instance, Remy is a victim of the 9/11 tragedy, rushing into the north tower and experiencing the inexpressible. But neither Remy nor anyone else in the novel is able to explain or depict what happens to him after the lost fifteen minutes in the north tower, or for the remaining twelve hours of his day. Readers are left to only guess where he next goes, what he does, and what he sees.

49 When CIA agents speak of the American-directed abduction and transfer of terrorism suspects abroad to select detention and interrogation facilities, they are often direct and bluntly practical. The country that American operatives send a person-of-interest to often suggests his or her fate. According to CIA operative Robert Baer: "If you want a serious interrogation, you send a prisoner to Jordan. If you want them to be tortured, you send them to Syria. If you want someone to disappear -- never to see them again ----- you send them to Egypt" (ACLU 2016).
Identification with victimhood demands a story and not just a missing slot on a time log. All we are told from his policing partner, though, with only six percent of the novel remaining, is that “I thought for sure we’d lost you, until I saw you that night.” Remy searched his memory, but there was nothing” (Walter 2006: 283). This lost day is an extreme gap, which along with the constant jump cuts of action in the novel separates *The Zero* from all the other fictions surveyed here. Remy ponders for hundreds of pages, “... [Wasn’t] I just here? Didn’t I just hear this conversation? Were the gaps moving ... backward now?” (Walter 2006: 27). As vocalized by Remy’s cruise-car partner Paul Guterak, our doubts on Remy’s location and activities become overwhelming, and never receive answer: “How come you never talk about it? Every other cop I know talks about it, even if they weren’t there. But you... you never talk about it” (Walter 2006: 283). Remy’s constant line of “I don’t really remember” is not a straightforward one, though. He in fact does remember what seems like “billions of papers” falling from the towers, and he recalls hearing loud splats that he cannot identify. From the perspectives of all the earlier 9/11 novels, those splats would seem to be the sound of jumpers in fatal contact with the concrete plaza alongside Remy.

Visions, sometimes noted by *The Zero*’s characters as “hallucinations” and at other times “fever dreams,” often arise following gaps in the narrative, like the one that follows the fall of the jumpers, and they have their own mysteries to be interpreted. Frequently recurring in the novel, the word “gaps” grows in power and Kafkaesque enigma in *The Zero*, but no one in the novel provides resolution for what happens during them. The novel’s sole therapist, rather than beginning a course of a psychotherapy for Remy, only looks on in an utterly uninvolved and disbelieving way and reaches for yet another
prescription sheet for his client.

What should interest us even more is that Remy’s psychiatrist labels the key informant Jaguar a “hallucination,” that same informant who becomes a train-station suicide bomber at novel’s end, who kills Remy’s substitute-lover April Selios (or possibly kills her in the hallucination). On the one hand, this is suggestive of the trouble readers have had understanding fictional terrorists from as early on as the bomber of the Greenwich Observatory, Adolf Verloc, in Conrad’s The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale (1907). As Punter concludes from his meditation on The Secret Agent and other terrorism texts: “In encountering the terrorist, we are taken to the limit of understanding, to the end of inscription: nothing but death is written on this body, and death is not interpretable, it is the liminal case which simultaneously forbids all thought of the threshold” (Punter 2008: 202). Moreover, the problem of understanding and interpreting Jaguar is not merely that he suggests death, or that he is a changeable, oscillating figure (from U.S. agent to U.S. attacker), but that he too much resembles those that hunt him. He fulfills Punter’s insight that Terror is reflection: “mirroring in its purest form” (Punter 2008: 203). Moreover, Jaguar’s later suicide bombing (mirroring the folly of retribution by U.S. agencies in The Zero) signals the moment when, in this incisive definition of terrorism, “all thought appears to have failed and only ‘direct action’ … appears to suffice” (Punter 2008: 203). Remy eventually becomes a twin to the one who had been his polar opposite, making it impossible, in a Derridean sense, to tell who is a terrorist and who an innocent victim. Jaguar (in a supposed terror ring, wholly manufactured by the ORL in order to exaggerate New York’s continued Code Orange attack-risk and funnel more federal funds their way) is a victim, too, as we recall that he lost an apparently innocent relative
in the Iraq War. A mirroring relationship soon establishes between ORL investigator and
his terrorist-quarry in the book, between Remy’s Dr. Jekyll and Jaguar’s Mr. Hyde. Chloé
Tazartez apprehends the mirroring well: “They are alone, they act against their
convictions, they do not exist for most people and they do not succeed in expressing what
they want to communicate. They doubt a lot about what is their part in society and seem
often desperate, .... unable to catch the world, to represent it and understand it which
forces them into paralysis” (Tazartez 2011). If Jaguar is a hallucination-invention of
Remy himself, as Tazartez maintains, and a dream within the larger dream that this novel
seems to be, then Jaguar is also invested with all the darkness that Remy cannot vocalize,
but which he has some inkling that he himself possesses. Thus Remy is not only
possessed by the dead, but ethically paralyzed during the “gaps” by the living.

If we study the gaps through the lens of psychoanalysis, we may be reminded of
Nicolas Abraham’s influential essay, “Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's
Metapsychology.” One of Abraham’s compelling ideas is that “what haunts are not the
dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others ... the burial of an unspeakable
fact within the loved one” (Abraham 1987: 287-288). Let us apply this idea to Remy’s
romantic involvements and fantasies. Beautiful, charismatic March Selios -- suspected
conspirator and eventually-cleared victim in The Zero -- has a face that Remy long
lingers over. She possesses a “buried fact” for much of the narrative, namely whether she
worked with an Al Qaeda terrorist known only as “Bishir Madain” or not. A close
reading indicates that Remy goes about his detective work in the most roundabout way.
He is keenly interested in her sexual life and asks her associates, neighbors, and parents
about her sexual liaisons under the moral shield of investigation. Technically, the
discovery of her sexual partners may either link her closer or much farther away from what the other investigators in The Zero first announce a terroristic “inside job” on 9/11 that she was part of. But the frequency and variations in her love acts may have little bearing on the investigation. Yet Remy is deeply interested in her sexual world anyway. April Selios (March’s younger sister) becomes, in his mind, an acceptable version for a woman he longs for, the suspect who holds the secret that would close his investigation or potentially open more perplexities on the terrorism.

From the first pages, Remy lives three roles: the amnesiac, the suicide, and the lover. He wants to discover where he is going the whole time, who he is actually working for, and ultimately what March’s involvement in 9/11 is. A compulsion to end his constant confusion through self-destruction also betrays him. His attempted suicide will not be one of total dismemberment through explosion in some uncanny identification with many of the 9/11 murdered whose remains he searches for, at “The Hole” by day and in dreams at night. But it is at least an attempted partial disintegration. He aims a pistol at his head and fires. Psychoanalytic theorizations of the Gothic commonly probe such violent tropes. Ideas taken from Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle imply that trauma victims rehearse death (through nightmare, flashbacks to pain, and abuse of substances) as a way to, as Roger Luckhurst elegantly sums it, “master and contain painful psychic disturbances by returning to a beatific state without stimulus -- death. Life, in essence, [reveals itself as only] a lengthy diversion between states of deathly quiescence” (Luckhurst 2016: 526). In The Zero, the longing for “deathly quiescence” counterbalances with the impulse to answer mystery (from the content of the gaps, to the reasons for the attack, the extent of March Selios’s involvement in terror, and the basis of
Remy’s attraction to her). The novel may begin with Remy’s closed eyes and the seeking of death from the barrel of a gun, yet it ends with the protagonist shutting his eyes and seeking love, specifically the hand of March’s sister.

Besides a complicated intersection of drives in Remy, there are opposing identities in him. He could seem largely a victim of terrorism, yet by other criteria he may appear mostly as an agent of institutionalized state terror. As Walter Benjamin memorably put it (himself purportedly a victim of state terror by one theory)\(^5\): “In times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in a situation where he has to play detective” (Benjamin 2006: 40). As such detectives, we see, on the one side, that Remy loses comrades in the WTC and suffers grave trauma from his entry into the burning towers. On the other side, his acts as terrorist-hunter include spying, informant-cultivation, arresting, fraud, cover-up, interrogating, torturing, and sometimes killing people who are only suspects. The Janus-faced nature of Remy causes a problem in both reader identification and understanding. Perhaps Walter even downplays this character’s complexity in his own critique of the novel, suggested by a *Playboy* interview where Walter remembers that “There was a real conflation of hero and victim in the wake of 9/11, in our perverse desire to create a triumphant myth out of pure tragedy... [Remy] is a helpless man of the very best intentions” (Walter 2006: *Playboy*). A fuller interpretation

\(^5\) Both Edward Rothstein in *The New York Times* and Stuart Jeffries in *The Guardian* from July 2001 give Stephen Schwartz’s theory from “The Mysterious Death of Walter Benjamin” serious consideration. The belief is that Benjamin, who had just completed a devastating critique of Marxism (*Theses on the Philosophy of History*), was killed by agents of Stalin in Portbou, Spain, in 1940, contrary to the long-held idea he was victim of a self-administered morphine overdose. Schwartz further argues that Benjamin’s being on a Stalinist “kill list” would finally explain why his “suicide note” appears in a language that Benjamin typically did not write in (French).
of Remy is that he is “hero and victim,” but also a villain. Following D. H. Lawrence’s famous injunction to trust the tale and not the teller, we heed the fresh blood observable again and again staining Remy’s shoes. It is not blood of his veins. The memory gaps that he reports increase in number as he intensifies the interrogations of suspects. Though we do not see the full interrogations, the confirmed presence of Remy there may assist accounting for the blood -- if he is the torturer beating someone, an accomplice to a beating, or else a witness far too jaded to bring an end to the bludgeoning, or at least to report it. This uneasiness over what our protagonist's nature is has the promise -- perhaps more than any of the books surveyed here -- to hold readers accountable over what they may be uneasily quiet about. American and Allied readers may ask if they are accomplices to state terrorism themselves through their tax dollars, voting records, and lack of protest over torture, extra-judicial detention, and institutionalized murder. After violations of terror-suspects’ rights inside America, extraordinary rendition of American-sought suspects to allies with questionable human rights records (including Poland, Pakistan, and Romania), and the violent excesses from invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, readers may find no easy answer about clear victimhood or culpability. Into this ambiguity, Walter inserts himself: “It’s satire about us, about the collective post-traumatic stress that we’ve suffered and the way we’ve retreated into a cocoon lined with real-estate listings and 401K updates while truly frightening measures are undertaken on our behalf” (Walter 2006: *Playboy*). The cocoon is a revealing metaphor to use for Remy as the ORL protects him and entombs others (in particular, those ghost detainees who are officially not logged when taken into holding facilities, tortured, and never seen alive again). The cocoon is what the rest of America retreats to after the first-strike bombings
done in its name and under the rationale of a Just War: the pre-emptive strike seen as a necessary protection of the Homeland from perceived enemies at home or abroad. If art should make readers question the use and abuse of power, then terror is the agent that makes room for the questions. Foucault has a productive insight that applies well to the novel: “By the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, ... a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself...” (Foucault 1965: 288). Terrorism is the madness that disrupts this text more than anything else, even more than the supposed hallucinations. The uncomfortable “question without answer” possibly becomes, in this case, what political and military interventions were perpetrated elsewhere for decades against the Islamic Other prompting terrorism and blowback now, and what will be disproportionate destruction and killing meted out by America and allies to retaliate for it?

What Derrida raises in this regard is of great bearing in this novel: who gets to decide what violence is warranted and what is senseless, which violence has widely approved status, which power better “legalize[s] it on the world stage” (Derrida 2003: eBook)? In a possible reference to Walter Benjamin’s *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Derrida reflects: “Benjamin speaks of how the state tends to appropriate for itself, and precisely through threat, a monopoly on violence....” (Derrida 2003: eBook). The greatest questioner of the state monopoly on approved killing and upheaval in this novel’s key debates is the Muslim Other, the informant. When amnesiacal Remy asks Jaguar if “you work for us?”, the informant’s reply is “Us? I’m sorry, but your idea of us tends to be a little bit fluid, my friend. Either you’re with us or... what? You switch sides indiscriminately, ... arm your enemies and wonder why you get shot with your own guns”
The mocking reference to President Bush's State of the Union vow that “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” is a clear one (Bush 2001). But besides functioning to reveal Remy’s memory dysfunction and mental sluggishness once more, this conversation concentrates the conundrum perfectly: Jaguar is thought to be an enemy to America, but then why does the U.S. constantly supply and employ him? Interestingly, Derrida’s autoimmunity concept applied to the acts of the state here supplies a beginning answer. We remember that political autoimmunity is that disease wherein all the strength of the state attacks itself (its healthy “tissues”) through agents of terror that it secretly hires (or that its allies hire, as with the case of educated, yet disaffected young men turned fundamentalist terrorists from Egypt and Saudi Arabia). The U.S., thus, either pays, offers refuge to, or long tolerates those who will try to explode its political, military, and economic systems and hegemony. With a black humor that masks the gravity of their conversation, Jaguar ponders who are the innocent people any more. What lies beneath that question is more vexing one -- who decides who the innocent people are?

Remy squeezed his good eye shut. “Are you…” He couldn’t find the words. “… trying to hurt people?”

“Which people?”

“Innocent people,” Remy gritted.


Significantly, Remy can never give answer to these questions of guilt and of identity. Their exchange also shows what might at first seem an extended objection over a minor
point: Jaguar bristles at being overcoded with several secret double-agent names. However, his complaint here is also directed against the power of the state agencies to erase his actual first and last name (which they do know but refuse to use) and recharacterize him at will with whatever name of an Islamic Other fits their ideology at the moment. These names function very economically as aggressive wit, in the way Freud illustrates in his *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. For example, the first name “Jaguar” immediately evokes animalistic force, furtiveness, cunning and resourcefulness, and the second signifies emotionlessness: “Ice-Man.” Both names concisely disclose much of his American handlers’ prejudices to their Muslim contacts.

Chloé Tazartez adds to the conception of Jaguar as the Other: “He does not eat, work or sleep. He appears only in scenes where he is alone with Remy and is talking to him about broad matters as American society, trauma or violence. He is mainly built by the discourse of other characters (especially Remy’s) which present him as the official creator of the terrorist cell” (Tazartez 2011: 6). Despite the reduction of Jaguar to someone no one listens to, he still begins to successfully disassemble the construct of “terrorist” whilst on the phone. There are no absolute ways to tell state terror from non-state terror, Jaguar convincingly reasons. He does not argue this through appeals to Islamic religious beliefs, but through logic. Remy and Jaguar, then, are each carrying in them the Other: “They are [both] alone, they act against their convictions, they do not exist for most people and they ... are trapped in collective images which do not correspond to them” (Tazartez 2011: 6). If the doubting Jaguar is the hidden side of

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51 I have explored this mechanism of humiliation-via-renaming before, through Freud’s *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, on the enemies of the protagonist in Lawrence Durrell’s five novels of WWII Nazi-occupation trauma, *The Avignon Quintet* (Olson 1993: 93, 97, 99).
desperate Remy, and the evidence Tazartez offers suggests he is, then Remy supports even more fully Derrida’s contention of the autoimmunity process within not only states, but also individual beings. The enemy cannot be escaped because, as Derrida claims, the Other is also “in oneself.”

If we begin to question the invisible borders said to separate a non-state movement’s violence from state terror, then we will remove its exclusiveness and discrete identity. Boundaries are as much about identity as they are about exclusion, as Derrida explored in pre-9/11 works. Raising and examining at length relevant FBI and CIA definitions of terrorism post 9/11, along with U.S. federal laws on this terrorism, Derrida concludes that the U.S. government agencies reason terrorism to be violence for “a political end (to influence or change the politics of a country by terrorizing its civilian population) ... [which does] not therefore exclude ‘state terrorism’” (Derrida 2003: eBook). Thus U.S. law-making and law-enforcing bodies, driven by “a political end” themselves, would not be able to find exculpatory language or evidence (from the charges of “Western Terrorism”) for their own attacks by official military and black ops on foreign populations. And Jaguar could be seen as the most wronged, for, as Derrida intuits, “Every terrorist in the world claims to be responding in self-defense to a prior terrorism on the part of the state, one that simply went by other names and covered itself with all sorts of more or less credible justifications" (Derrida 2003: eBook). Jaguar leaves the debate by blowing himself up at a New York City railway terminal, but it is Remy who keeps falling into ethical and logical traps that -- along with his compromised memory -- he has no escape from. These aporias and gaps do not give Remy enough pause, though, and do not stop him from committing more violence. However, the ethical
exercise may make the reader question his or her own culpability in encouraging or at least tolerating state terror, and to erode our unquestioning belief in simplistic, reductive categories of us / them, with us / against us, innocent / guilty, and victim / terrorist.

4.4 A Time to Torture

“We’d sweep up every fighting age male on the streets and get them locked up -- taxi cab drivers, welders, bakers, and if we couldn’t find their parents, we’d take the children of suspected terrorists [male and female, some sixteen years of age].... We we’re trying to get them to talk ... that’s all.”


Despite his traumatized confusion and dissociative fog, Remy inexplicably operates as an *inquisitor extraodinaire*. This would seem a potential weakness in the narrative, for victims would plausibly be less afraid of a torturer who seems disjointed temporally, physically, and logically. One way around the contradiction is that Remy’s cohorts always praise his intelligence-gathering in earshot of the detained, perhaps causing *greater* distress and apprehension in the detainees as the seemingly benighted Remy approaches them. Words become reality, and even Remy's most muddled and circuitous questioning takes on the shades of the most diabolic game. After U.S. officials grow bored and then dissatisfied with the terror-data retrieved from their usual methods of
information-extraction -- merely tying suspects’ hands behind backs and hanging them from bars before dousing their scars with sea water -- they ask for Remy’s superior techniques. Remy then plays a cruelly effective confidence game on one suspect. Smuggling a tortured detainee named Assan out of the empty hold of a ship and into international waters bound for Miami and freedom, Remy gains trust and extracts possibly vital intelligence from him during the passage that the others never came near to obtaining. But afterwards, the getaway boat turns around, and the suspect finds himself not rescued or released, but simply returned to the empty hold of the waiting ship of ceaseless tortures. Not insignificantly, the name “Remy” derives from the Latin “Remigius,” meaning “oarsman,” and indeed Remy does take people onto the water, making sea-crossings towards a dark destiny, onto a further shore, or into deeper ambiguities -- first saving then dooming them. His ferries them as an oblivious Charon. As Remy’s partner Markham remarks as the dispirited detainee slumps back into the hold of the torture ship after what seemed an escape: “So Assan was holding out on us. I was dubious, but damn if that didn’t go just like you said it would” (Walter 2006: 140). Once more, though, Remy will have no memory of practicing any masterfully duplicitous interrogation strategy, seemingly dumbfounded as agents pull Assan back into the hold and to an unknown fate. Later in the novel and back in New York City, we may infer that Markham attempts to validate the idea that it does not really matter which Arab is apprehended in New York (including Assan) and will die in torture, in a U.S. federally-controlled ship or anywhere else, whether unknowing of terrorist cells or complicit in them, because no one keeps any record of the arrest and the government has endless attorneys to stymy any search for information by relatives. We can judge by Markham’s
behavior and comments that what matters to him is solely supporting the American power structures, and continuing the federal revenue stream to the New York City anti-terror organization. All this promises well-paid employment for the rest of his life, as major U.S. government officials in the novel announce there can be no end to the War on Terror. But Remy’s and Jaguar’s behaviors and words illustrate another process: the possibility of being a victim and a terrorist at the same time, depending on who talks about them.

Followed not only in the media, but also represented in poetry and fiction, in TV and film, as well as in the "ethical" turn in trauma studies in the mid-2000s were U.S. Presidential, Justice Department, and Congressional approvals and defenses of torture methods during almost all of the Bush Administration (especially from 2001 - 2008). The event that seared the practice of U.S.-administered torture into American and world consciousness was the leaking of photos of violations of suspects held at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison (in Arabic, "the place of the raven" or alternately, "the father of the raven"). Photos of what investigating American General Taguba called “every kind of obscenity” appeared committed by American soldiers (largely military police) and government agencies (mostly CIA) abusing detainees, many of whom had not yet been charged yet with a crime but were caught in random sweeps and held until processing could begin. The embrace of “enhanced interrogation” by the Bush Administration would be shunned and officially end under President Obama, but some organizations suggest institutionalized-torture continued until 2011 or three years into Pres. Obama’s first term (sources including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, The Atlantic, and Reuters). Torture’s resurfacing as an acceptable method for information procurement
during the 2015 - 2016 Republican primaries may mark the immanent return of this repressed tool in intelligence and military circles. Indeed in one of the earliest 2015 primary debates, Republican candidates competed for who would be most willing to defend the violence practice, with Donald Trump portentously vowing: "I would bring back waterboarding ... and more!"

How to assess torture and formulate a theory on its practice in *The Zero*, however, becomes more complex when Remy and his team apparently obtain a believable confession of a terror plan against North America or Europe, and the naming of a wider net of conspirators, all of which is life-saving information. Readers may move from being passive spectators of the state’s manipulation, humiliation, and violent interrogation to complicit spectators or even, vicariously, the torturer himself, if the violence appears to achieve “results.” Later, when we find the torture was largely useless, our emotional trek seems well defined by Roger Luckhurst’s tracing of torture in contemporary film and television: “Dramatic scenarios seem sometimes to justify torture, but just as often suggest a rueful critique of the idiocy of thinking violence could provide any form or resolution” (Luckhurst 2010: 16). The continued and knowing use of torture when faulty intelligence and confessions of guilt come from it (that cannot even be admissible in a U.S. court if taken under duress) seems a paradox. A re-examination of the novel shows the use of torture stems largely from xenophobia, a desire for revenge, frustration and feelings of impotence, and a failure of imagination to extract information by any other means.

Torture, of course, rises in Gothic fiction from its genesis novel *Castle of Otranto* forward (including *The Monk, The Italian, and Melmoth the Wanderer*). The torture
specifically used in 9/11 novels shares an element with Gothic fiction in the desire to cause fear in the victims and dread for others in the victims’ circle, gain utter control over someone, attempt revenge, extract some confession, and to satisfy the torturer’s sexual gratification and sadism. In these terrorism novels, though, U.S. and Allied torture attempts to penetrate the network of Jihadist cells, which by their design typically occlude discovery by each member knowing little to nothing of most of the other members. Hence the torture in the 9/11 novels, unless a suspected terrorist lieutenant is caught with high-level data, often goes on for days with no hope of helpful intelligence to harvest. Among books surveyed in this thesis, we do not enter the consciousness of a tortured, so-called radical Muslim terrorist. We only enter the point of view from those who torture him. And through ghostly contacts after the killing of a detainee, much more of the affect and trauma releases from the perpetrator.

The torturing seems to continue Derrida’s argument about the disabling autoimmunitary outbreaks in a state. We could argue, for instance, that every act of torture in the novels helps to defeat the state, no matter if any useful information comes from the organized cruelties of The Zero, which include strappado-hanging, smashing, freezing of naked suspects, and the splashing of sea water into their cut faces. Beyond the horrors done to the helpless victims and their communities, threats of “Homeland terror” in the U.S. increase as state torture scandals become a recruiting tool for armed Islamic fundamentalism among American citizens. Then there are risks to Allied soldiers in the Afghan and Iraqi fields of battle from reprisal attacks sparked by leaks of American mistreatment of detainees. As a comparison, after the tortures, rapes, killings, and every imaginable indecency from U.S. military police and secret agencies within Abu
Ghraib’s Tier Block 1-A made headlines in world media around late 2003, terrorist-recruitment soared. Stanley McChrystal, one of the highest ranking generals to serve in both the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, would admit in his memoir that: “In my experience, we found that nearly every first-time jihadist claimed Abu Ghraib [abuses] had first jolted him into action” (McChrystal 2013: 172). In The Zero, Remy jolts into greater acts of self-destruction with the ghostly return of the detainees that he tortured, broke, or even slew.

Sexual torture does not play a significant role in The Zero, though of course sexual commands and humiliations played a major role at Abu Ghraib. Sexual degradation does strongly figure in a novel that The Zero draws favorable comparisons to, however: Ken Kalfus’s A Disorder Peculiar to the Country (2006). In Kalfus’s narrative, a lawyer who escapes one of the WTC towers on 9/11 finds himself afterwards soon divorced and in despair. Seeking other women as comfort in a period of frenzied terror sex, protagonist Marshall ends up at a party with his children’s preschool teacher, Miss Naomi. What he does not realize is that the party is a thinly disguised re-enactment of the sexual tortures of Abu Ghraib, wherein at a New York apartment, a former Marine / current penitentiary employee named only Nick orders prostitutes to assume positions akin to the infamous “crucifixion” photo of a hooded detainee standing on a box whilst hooked to electrical wires. The next command seems too close to Abu Ghraib violations to be accidental.

Nick orders a hooded prostitute, a boy of only “fourteen or fifteen” years, to masturbate while women revelers -- including the innocent-seeming Miss Naomi are ordered to urge

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52 Its legacy as a house of ghosts is a long one, as well. Before the American occupation, Saddam Hussein ordered executions of 30,000 suspects at Abu Ghraib (Standard Operating Procedure 2008).
him on with their lips. Marshall protests, “Nick, she doesn’t want to,” and earns a look of intense irritation, even disgust from Miss Naomi (Kalfus 2006: 216). All the above seems to reconfigure the infamous photos of naked, black-hooded, exhausted and standing prisoners, who were ordered by military police officer Charles Grainer at Abu Ghraib to masturbate before female officers Sabrina Harman, Lynndie England, and Megan Ambul. Indeed the penalty for stopping the masturbation, in the Iraqi detainees’ minds, was a fatal beating or a shooting. Some continued masturbating for over forty-five minutes. Thus, in *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*, the Homeland seems as corrupted and sexually demeaned as Iraq’s most notorious prison. A conjoining of sexual sadism and threat of death was the foreboding atmosphere of Abu Ghraib, as it is in Kalfus’s novel. While Kalfus’s victim is not an Arab, the humiliating script takes its cues from the Abu Ghraib scandal: “More hoots and ribald remarks were directed at the kid: ... mock praise for his hardness, mock wonder that he hadn’t already ejaculated, disdain for the size of his hard-on. Miss Naomi laughed too, her eyes searching for Nick’s sunglasses. She found them and pointed to the boy’s cock with both hands. She said, ‘Mission accomplished!’” (Kalfus 2006). All these degrading actions and remarks echo the reality of Abu Ghraib where in a photo Officer England is “smoking a cigarette and pointing [along with giving a “mission accomplished” thumb’s up sign] to a prisoner who was being forced to fondle his own genitals with a bag over his head” (*Standard Operating Procedure* 2008). Some of the prisoners afterwards in testimony would share how traumatized they were, giving a glimpse into the darkest pain. One of the naked suspects forced to fondle himself non-stop was Saddam Salah al-Rawi. He remembers in his cell afterwards shouting: “Please come and take me. Please kill me. I am Osama bin Laden, I
was in the plane that hit the World Trade Centre.' ... I wanted to be dead 1,000 times’” (McCarthy 2004). Soon enough, after witnessing this humiliation in the novel, Marshall wishes to be dead as well. Though not a radicalized Muslim, he nevertheless straps on a suicide vest and tries to explode it, not long after sending what appears to be letters with anthrax to the FBI. While The Zero has no women in its torture facilities, its interrogators still ask the detainees questions about women, especially about their sexual knowledge of March Selios. Some of the answers make Remy distraught.

We note that Remy’s gin consumption in the novel increases as the torture sessions intensify, up to the degree that he brings in varieties of gin to the torture chambers -- and later, any alcohol -- during meetings and questionings of both suspects and informants. One of his most telling alcoholic shudders during interrogations involves blood. Human blood trickling across foreheads, spilling down necks, bursting in the eyes, and misting on clothes are constants in The Zero, but perhaps the most revealing moment of blood’s appearance involves none of those. After one interrogation, Remy mutters to no one in particular: “I do these things that make no sense, and people get hurt. I come home with blood on my shoes” (Walter 2006: 224). Indeed, there are four times in the novel where the image of human blood -- not his own -- on Remy’s shoes float towards him. The linkage of nightmare, guilt, trauma, and the ghosts of the past tie to blood on the shoes with frightful economy. Like the Macbethian trope, this blood will not rub out either, and its presence is the consistent indicator of those moments when Remy will become more frantic, disturbed, and distraught. The blood has no other ostensible source than the blood splatter from his torture victims under blows. Not all ghosts who come back are clearly seen, and Remy’s dead-detainee Assan’s return is of course a subtler one than the
disembodied head of Mohamed Atta “bursting with righteousness” that haunts in Shirley Abbot’s 9/11 novel The Future of Love (Abbot 2008: 301), but it is still an effective one. Assan and the trauma of killing him returns to Remy when he sees human blood trickling towards him. Beyond a nod to the folklore custom of blood flow from a cadaver signaling the murderer’s entrance,53 Walter exploits blood to fill in the frequently mentioned “gaps.” Remy is in the room with a bomb suspect, later the suspect is dead, and Remy cannot remember what happened in the interval -- the appearance of blood then becomes a way to count the tortured and killed. The blood cries out for justice, and the blood declares Assan’s innocence. Blood is the silent way that the unsayable traumata speaks. Following Derrida’s notion, it now becomes impossible to tell who is the greater terrorist, the state one, or the non-state ones. The fatally-tortured transform into the ghosts to be, and the torturers are they whom the phantomised Other haunts. Like the unforeseen sweeps of suspects by the CIA, FBI, and ORL, phantoms arrive at unforeseeable moments that only enflame Remy’s PTSD.

Walter’s fellow writer of 9/11 Don DeLillo warns, “Never underestimate the power of the state to act out its own massive fantasies” (DeLillo 2001). In The Zero, we see the greatest two fantasies of the state operating: the blind insistence that people interrogated are guilty (when evidence continues to suggest that they are not), and that the suspects have something to say that can only be cudgeled out of them. Although it is seldom raised, the question should be asked why the U.S. government officials in fiction or in

53 We recall Poe’s suggestion of another’s guilt of murder, in his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Marble Faun, from watching a dead monk bleed as the secret killer approaches. Two hundred years before in Richard III, we remember Lady Anne’s exclamation that blood would flow from “dead Henry’s wounds” when the murderer entered the church.
reality practice or allow torture, if they definitively know it does not reveal valuable intelligence. In fact, a $40 million dollar, four-year U.S. Senate-commissioned landmark report of 6,000 pages completed in 2012, with 525 of its summary-pages declassified for the public in 2014, revealed that torture by the CIA regularly resulted in “fabricated information” from detainees (The Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program 2014). My interpretation regarding these “massive fantasies” of the state in The Zero is that the anti-terror officials are not gathering enough information otherwise and there is an impotent rage, and a kind of revenge seeking, directed at suspects through torture over this information-deficit. Slavoj Žižek takes this much further in his analysis, arguing that the normalization of torture in American fiction and film (in particular Zero Dark Thirty) “is a sign of the moral vacuum we [the world] are gradually approaching” (Žižek 2013b). In an earlier piece just following the Abu Ghraib scandal, Žižek makes the provocative claim that the humiliations were less an abhorrent attack on the dignity of the detainees than they were an “initiation into American culture” (Žižek 2004). Thus, Žižek attests, the American stacking of naked Iraqi detainees into crushing pyramids and connecting of electric wires to a black-hooded prisoner was more akin to Robert Mapplethorpe’s photographs and David Lynch’s films than anything else:

Anyone acquainted with the U.S. way of life will have recognised in the photographs the obscene underside of U.S. popular culture. You can find similar photographs in the U.S. press whenever an initiation rite goes wrong in an army unit or on a high school campus and soldiers or students die or get injured in the course of performing a stunt, assuming a humiliating pose or
undergoing sexual humiliation. (Žižek 2004)

However, such spectacular claims of systemic cultural barbarism in America should demand impressive evidence, rather than anecdotal pieces, and that evidence may be missing. One could daresay Žižek’s reasoning is sadly congruent with the notorious American talk show host Rush Limbaugh’s claim in the same year that the torture was mere Americana. It resembled a “college fraternity prank” and an “emotional release” (Limbaugh 2004). Oddly echoing Žižek’s dubious analogy, in Limbaugh’s mind the torture was largely a harmless imitation of American performance art: “Have you people noticed who the torturers are? Women! The babes! The babes are meting out the torture.... [I]t looks just like anything you'd see Madonna or Britney Spears do on stage” (Limbaugh 2004). To argue that this life-threatening and trauma-inducing torture by U.S. military or intelligence personnel (or their allies) inside a faraway, supposedly sovereign country resembles either “prank” gone awry or a Britney Spears Las Vegas act ignores the fact that its perpetrators have as their standard weapons M9 pistols and that detainees died in their presence.

4.4.1 Interrogating the Ghost

"Death has a tendency to encourage a depressing view of war."

--Donald Rumsfeld, American Secretary of Defense during the Abu Ghraib scandal

Through torture in both The Zero and in Abu Ghraib prison, we enter a world of
ghosts. Certain suspects taken in for interrogations at Abu Ghraib were routinely called “ghost detainees” by officials. The U.S. military police and American OGA (Other Government Agencies) wanted no trace of them for the International Committee of the Red Cross to find (Standard Operating Procedure 2008). Unfiled on the official log, their abuse or deaths were “non-deaths,” invisible for outside human rights groups to monitor. So, too, certain American investigative employees and torturers were “ghost interrogators,” who did not register on entrance logs to avoid later prosecution (Morris, Standard Operating Procedure 2008; Staff of San Francisco Examiner 2004). Walter takes a similar secretive path with some names hidden to the reader. One code name is worth investigating further, pushed by the CIA for use for on a lead informant that the Office of Liberty and Recovery already named “Jaguar.” “Jaguar” should be called “Ice-man,” instead, according to the CIA agent in The Zero named Dave. This should cause unusual dread in alert readers because “Ice-man” is the same name that the actual CIA gave to Manadel al-Jamadi, brought in to Abu Ghraib on 4 November 2003 by U.S. Navy SEALS. Al-Jamadi was under suspicion for exploding a Red Cross facility. For hours, under a burlap sack soaked in hot sauce, the actual CIA interrogated and tortured al-Jamadi. Ironically, whilst interrogators were busily yelling at the very still al-Jamadi for answers and asking the military police to hoist him higher, al-Jamadi had already been dead for one to two hours (Morris, Standard Operating Procedure 2008). Still not realizing this, at least one member of the military police reports congratulating the detainee on his ability to stay quiet, unwittingly talking to his ghost all along. Upon finally discovering his death and fearful of spawning a riot among Abu Ghraib prisoners who would witness a corpse removal post-torture, another military police official put the
dead al-Jamadi on ice packs for a night to give time to birth a plan. The next day military police lifted Al-Jamadi to a stretcher, connected his arm to an IV, and conveyed him from Abu Ghraib under the pretense of a surgical need. This wished-for code name “Ice-Man,” therefore, and the ominous debate by agencies in *The Zero* about Jaguar resemble the early steps in making Jaguar into a “dead man walking,” just as Assan became a dead man once torturers escorted him back into the hold of an interrogation ship. Thus torture taken to its grimmest extreme begets ghosts in *The Zero* as 1) The victim is murdered and the body disguised and hidden, but the victim comes back 2) The ghost forces us to ask distressing and sometimes unknowable questions (not just are they real, but what do they ask or require of me -- what does the ghost want?) 3) The specters rank the witness with their dead. The observer becomes more and more like the ghost in behavior and 4) the torturer in the novel becomes the tortured, which well may be the case in “real” life from the comments from military torturers years after their activities. Some accounts of actual American torturers plagued by their misdeeds, and visited metaphorically or physically by ghosts in Iraq and Afghanistan and in America afterward, include: Eric Fair’s *Consequence: A Memoir* (2016), Douglas Laux and Ralph Pezzullo’s *Left of Boom: How a Young CIA Case Officer Penetrated the Taliban and Al-Qaeda* (2016), Lt. General Ricardo Sanchez Wiser’s *In Battle: A Soldier's Story* (2008), Gary S. Winkler’s authorized biography of torturer Lynndie England (with interviews) *Tortured: Abu Ghraib and the Photographs that Shocked the World* (2009), and Tony Lagouranis and Allen Mikaelian’s *Fear Up Harsh: An Army Interrogator's Dark Journey Through Iraq* (2007). The aforementioned non-fictions are visited by ghosts through sightings, flashbacks, or vivid nightmares. As the dishonorably-discharged Private First Class
Lynndie England, who gained notoriety by walking an Abu Ghraib detainee on a leash as she smoked a cigarette, puts it years afterward: “You can't hear somebody screaming their heads off and not dream about it... Something triggers it and, bam! I'm back there” (England 2009).

Just as people vanished within the walls of Abu Ghraib, the suspects captured, arrested, detained, tortured, and killed vanish in The Zero. They are hidden without ever being officially recorded, entered, logged. They have no trace of processing, confession, exit, or death. The framework Caruth, Felman, van der Kolk and others provide on trauma and memory suggests that victims and some perpetrators are not only incapable of uttering the whole trauma, but incapable of remembering the whole as it has been encoded into the brain in a far different way. This opposes McNally’s model of full memory whose expression depends upon survivors being asked the responsive questions, which we discussed in connection to The Writing on the Wall. The Caruthian model holds well for the interrogator Remy, as never-explained gaps cover vast parts of the novel. Indeed, this book must have gaps for Remy to continue to function as a counter-terrorist agent. If he should fully remember and even express intimately and clearly what he has done, then there is the risk that he could not continue to do it. Trauma sometimes enables or abets evil to go on. Remy works as an interrogator because he does not ask Derrida’s question early enough, namely: what is the ethical difference between state violence (torture and killing for a declared nation) and that of non-state violence (injuring and killing for a cause, for the downtrodden, for a religious or political movement)? They are both abhorrent and beneath the pale of the civilized. If Remy asks this question, and finds there is little difference between his vicious enemy and his vicious self, there would be
little point to his “investigations.” He and his enemy would appear to be all working futilely in the employ of death. We recall Ross Chambers’ argument in *Untimely Interventions* that “culture produces itself as civilized by denying the forms of collective violence and other traumatic experience that it cannot control” (Chambers 2004: eBook). Though Chambers largely investigates the three mass traumas of AIDS, WWI, and the Holocaust, his argument about how a culture’s denied violence erupts as an obscene ghost does echo through the torture chambers of *The Zero*. Repellent and counter to America’s image as the “gift-giver” of democracy to a Middle Eastern dictatorship, the practices of coercion and torture of Iraqis and Afghans would stay hidden save for the ghosts that escape. I do not limit that escape solely to individual ghosts of their bodies, though these bodies do present themselves in both the fictions and non-fictions. Invasion, torture and rape (including that of children of sixteen years of age, according to some U.S. military staff at Abu Ghraib [*Standard Operating Procedure 2008*]), and rampant killing by the occupying forces are horrors so overwhelming they create a social ghost. Like all ghosts, they cannot be identified, yet they cannot be safely ignored. This ghost interrupts torturers like Remy; it haunts soldiers wanting to hear the words “mission accomplished” with its fatal promise of more trauma. With its reminders of state violence, this social ghost haunts the peripheries of every American politician’s glib or positive speech about advancements in peace, successful exports of American democracy, reductions in sectarian violence. This social ghost points its arm at the increased military operations abroad and greater civil rights intrusions at home (including massive surveillance, arrest without warrant, and the extremes of torture heretofore discussed). I have built the case that sometimes neither perpetrators nor victims can fully remember or relate the horrors
generated by 9/11. Yet that destroying of the language of the ordinary, that disabling of
the circuitry that connects perception to symbol, also permits something extraordinary
and alien to appear just as Lacan has argued: the Real may be glimpsed, though neither
understood nor accurately described. As evidence, the most bizarre, unfamiliar, but
beckoning parts of this novel happen at times of the towers falling and the tortures
ensuing: these intense experiences resist and cast away all language, making this text
(and the other novels examined) forbidding yet fascinating. Unencapsulated,
undomesticated, and forever unrecognizable as anything else, such traumatic events can,
as Žižek explained, emerge as a kind of phantom, for the “symbolization [of what we
experience as reality] ultimately always fails, … never succeeds in fully 'covering' the
real, that it always involves some unsettled, unredeemed symbolic debt. This real (the
part of reality that remains non-symbolized) returns in the guise of spectral apparitions”
(Žižek 1994: 26). Certainly these “uncovered areas” of the Real reveal themselves when
Remy takes to bed a ghost lover, becomes a ghost bartender, and hears his own lover
says she is in love with another ghost and can no longer love Remy. No one effectively
exists in the novel with the mechanisms to direct the traumata of the Real into the
symbolic for Remy: his therapist is an appallingly poor listener and distracted
questioner, and eschews psychoanalysis in lieu of writing one more prescription for a
psychotropic drug. The absence of psychoanalysis54 here indicates the enormous role
left for readers: we become, for this novel at least, the de facto psychotherapist,

54 Not only in the novels of 9/11, but in the short stories and novellas of 9/11, trouble surrounds
psychotherapy. In Stephen King’s meditative story “The Things They Left Behind” (2005), the protagonist
tries to find a therapist to help with his 9/11 trauma (and deaths of his co-workers at the WTC), but he never
makes it far enough up on the list to get help. In Patrick McGrath’s memorable novelette, “Ground Zero”
(2005), the opposite happens. The protagonist Dan has a therapist but she is too intrusive and even
reading for fixations, flashes, even sounds, scents, touches and temperatures that Remy
obsesses over, hoping to find what happened to him in that missing twelve hours on
9/11 and why he cannot move forward from the debris.

Following Žižek farther, we find a striking parallel in Mapping Ideology to The
Zero. If we accept Žižek’s contention that “Spectral apparitions emerge in this very gap
that forever separates reality from the real, and on account of which reality has the
character of a (symbolic) fiction: the specter gives body to that which escapes (the
symbolically structured) reality” (Žižek 1994: 21), then an intriguing question arises.
What does the specter either imply or ask that Remy should do? I contend that the shades
Remy encounters concentrate his mind completely on what Žižek notes: the overturning,
escape, freedom, and liberation from the old ways of behaving and perceiving. When
Žižek notes, “Most people are terrified when they encounter freedom, like when they
encounter magic, anything inexplicable, especially the world of spirits,” he captures the
reaction of most characters in The Zero towards change and liberation and resistance
towards a seemingly all-powerful authority represented by the U.S. government -- its
expanding surveillance and civil rights curtailments; its agencies, laws, and lawyers; and
its invading, ultra-technological military. Paradoxically, the least hesitant and most
coherent speech from Remy comes when he escapes from New York City for the West
Coast, and finds himself near the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco buying hippie
clothes. In taking off his dark “spook suits,” he assumes a new identity wholly and

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possessive of his love. She will spy on his lover, make judgments, and give harmful advice. Ultimately, her
analysand wisely abandons her, though she reckons in the last line that he will return to her office and to
their smothering relationship.
comically so. To a Bay City bartender, Remy confides that he is Canadian, and further that his “ghost lover” Maggie (actually April Selios) “makes all our clothes. We eat only roots. In the summer we’re always naked. I have a pet moose” (Walter 2006: 244). The California barkeep apparently has heard this sort of thing before and obligingly nods. Comprising one of the few moments of humor in a most dismal and (literally) ash gray novel, the freedom of the scene intoxicates Remy, who now calls himself “Derek,” then “Dustin,” and finally a name he finds the quintessence of “California cool”: “Steve.” His so-called phantom lover, regarding him in blue shirt with wild cuffs and stone-washed ripped jeans, can only gasp at the transformation that readers themselves can barely recognize: “Wow. We look hot, I kind of want to screw us” (Walter 2006: 241). No one has intimated this sexual charisma before of Remy -- it has been just the opposite with his ex-wife and others, perpetually denying his sexual being and appeal. Remy is transforming, and the two times this happens in the novel both involve escape: the fleeing from a burning tower and the later flight from New York City, the center of world capitalism (and his torture facilities), to the Pacific Coast. Žižek would pointedly ask, “In what precise sense is freedom like a spectre?” (Žižek 1994: 27). In The Zero, the specters of 9/11 usher the option of freedom towards a character, which is sometimes accepted and sometimes rejected. In a remarkable insight for this novel, Žižek contends that: “It is not sufficient to say that we fear the spectre -- the spectre itself already emerges out of a fear, out of our escape from something even more horrifying: freedom …[a moment to] confront the miracle of freedom” (Žižek 1994: 27). When Remy flees from the capitol of American capital to the capitol of America counter-culture, he detaches himself from the brutality of his government post, rejecting his position as a cog in the machine of state-
run terrorism. He seconds his ghost girlfriend when she declares at a bar what might be the baldest indictment of the U.S. in the novel: “Fucking government… We just got so sick of America we couldn’t take it any more. At some point, a place loses enough of itself that you have no choice but to abandon it. And frankly, I think it’s gotten worse” (Walter 2006: 244). The most honest form of apology, here at least, is a total renunciation of his past, what he did, and the lies he plied. Remy is an analog to a draft dodger in his resistance, a reflective citizen in resistance mode. Indeed, the barman even makes a comment to him about the Vietnam War, and Americans wisely defying the political-military-industrial complex pulling strings behind another post-colonial war. What the barkeep cannot know is that this dodger calling himself “Steve,” is one with classified secrets he could leak, and that this could lead to major officials being prosecuted.

What unites the torturer and the tortured is often the fear of what is to come. The torturer fears prosecution under a new regime -- this can be established in recent history by a former clandestine CIA Operations Chief Rodriguez destroying several video tapes of torture at Abu Ghraib. On the other hand, the torture victim fears new and more savage torture strategies and an unmarked grave, as well as attacks or incarcerations of his or her friends or family. Last, American and Allied military operating in terrorist combat zones fear capture and retaliation-torture. These revenge-fears help suggest the unknown horrors to come, which is Derrida's stronger extension of the nature of trauma theory, acknowledging the return of the repressed, but also cognizant of fears of a more explosive cycle of death. Beyond this awful undermining by the U.S.'s own hand in Abu Ghraib and other sites -- “represent[ing] a setback for America's efforts in Iraq,” as the General Stanley McChrystal notes -- it confirms Derrida’s assertion that in fighting terror
it soon becomes impossible to tell who is the greater terrorist. Thus for this disruptive contemporary American history, we have imaginative texts like *The Zero* that are honest in their confusion. They form, through all their chaos and ethical switchbacks, terribly accurate responses to turbulent and terroristic times. Though frequently called inadequate for not capturing the “totality” of disaster by a wave of initial reviewers, the novels of 9/11 still offer counter-stories (to the statist ones) that can register the obscenity of a war without end. Such counter-narratives have the best possibility to let out the ghosts. Ross Chambers comes at the same idea from another angle: “Politicians in these countries [at war] generally seem anxious to lay these ghosts, exhorting people to ‘turn the page’ and ‘move on’.... They themselves forget that the ghosts can't be laid without first allaying the injustices that are the present's legacy” (Chambers 2004: 34). Relieving injustices, Chambers continues, seems “something that nations founded in violence appear constitutively unable to do, so definitional to them are violence and injustice” (Chambers 2004: 34). Evidence suggests that America, whose government has never issued a formal apology for slavery, for the genocide of Native Americans, of for wars of disproportion launched against Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, is such a nation founded in violence. The lack of official shame from the U.S. Government over its legacies of institutionalized violence makes texts like *The Zero* (where the government protagonist is contrite in the end) all the more valuable as they assume the status of an apology that we have never heard.

Before his flight to California, a dread circulates through Remy, whom we thought first was a 9/11 victim, but later became a torturer for the state. And we might even deduce that he has finally filled in the gaps, too: he was in a room with a bomb suspect;
the suspect is now dead; and Remy’s shoes all have blood on them. More and more, it is through their blood that ghosts will cry out in this novel, and it is this experience that links Remy to some of the guilty staff of Abu Ghraib. The murder of Manadel al-Jamadi in U.S. custody between 4 – 5 November 2003, for which no soldier or CIA official has yet served a prison sentence, is still the one case that haunts the interviewed military personnel of Abu Ghraib more than others. It is a case that reveals the common “ghost-grounds” between Iraq War memoir / documentary and 9/11 fiction. In recorded interviews, the American military personnel from the Abu Ghraib scandal rise out of their nearly catatonic expressionlessness (as shown in the documentary Standard Operating Procedure) to a look of being haunted, with a grimace of regret and a desire (for some) to have acted differently in the past -- this is the same look Remy reveals when anyone utters the name of Assan. In recollection, something awful screens before their eyes that “reality” could not cover over, some traumata beyond any words, done by their own hand, a vision akin to the Lacanian Real as Žižek interprets it, that messy, inchoate non-substance that resists and exceeds language / symbolization. The torturers’ reactions to questions also dramatize a paradox, or what Derrida called “the most interesting thing about repression, … what we were not able to repress” (Derrida 2003: eBook).

4.5 Ghost Bars and Familiar Strangers

Before promotion to a counter-terrorist, Brian Remy is, like many members of the NYPD from 9/11, one of the many sent down to the most expansive crime scene in American history to sift debris and find body parts for family identification. These
include such Gothically gruesome parts as “a section of a woman’s scalp -- gray and stiff” (Walter 2006: 12) that Remy picks up, which absurdly receives a whole body bag to house it. In From Landfill to Hallowed Ground: The Largest Crime Scene in America, one of the few hardened and haunted police memoirs of 9/11 (besides the one that Walter ghostwrote for Police Commissioner Kerik), memoirist Detective Frank Marra reports “detectives from seventy-five different bureaus throughout the city were also heavily involved ... from the Public Moral units, to Narcotics, Organized Crime Control, the Gang Unit and more” to sift through debris at WTC and then at the dumping ground for all the debris, the Staten Island Landfill (Marra and Abbate 2015). This memoir raises the very striking fact that in real life people see ghosts in times of terrorist trauma. At first slight in metaphor and poetry and suspense, but long on technical detail, Marra’s account later astounds a reader in its paranormal dimension. Over a dozen of the officers at the Staten Island Landfill, where over 4,500 pieces of human remains surfaced, were seeing the same ghost. An African-American woman in a 1950s Red Cross nurse’s uniform holding a silver tray of sandwiches comes towards the sifters, but always before she gets within fifty yards, she vanishes. On the one hand, Marra discounts the appearances of her: “On many levels, they could be discredited by the workers’ long hours, exhaustion, and the stress and tragedy that surrounded them on a daily basis” (Marra and Abbate 2015). On the other hand, the detective cannot say what he saw was false, either, and “couldn’t get the sight of [her] out of [his] head....” (Marra and Abbate 2015). This is a case of a “real” ghost torturing the eyes of survivors, but also their noses and tongues: “The food [she offered] would have been completely covered with dust before anyone could take a first bite. The thought of eating in that area would be physically nauseating
between the smells of cement, twisted steel, possibly human flesh, everything else mixed into the mud, and methane gas from the decomposing garbage” (Marra and Abbate 2015). And yet, no matter how sickening and sinister, Marra still wanted her to come closer. Most of the police offers were disheartened when she disappeared. She had some missing information they were longing for, and are still longing for.

Just as some characters can be patriots and freedom warriors one moment, but seem dangerous extremists the next, so too some characters seem alive in a memoir but at other times ghostly. None of the officers at the landfill can rationalize the spectral presence of the nurse that offers this “bread of the dead.” Marra can only end his account with a plea: “How many family members’ loved ones are still there, whose remains haven’t been found and identified? How many have had their ashes and remains uprooted and brought to this place? Why isn’t their [ghostly] presence believable?” (Marra and Abbate 2015).

What is especially interesting about this account, and which will be reflected in Walter’s, is that the apparition invites the living to take in, house, or incorporate some of the dead by eating of the loaves coated with human ash, a kind of objectified version of Abraham and Torok’s metaphor of partaking of the beloved dead within ourselves.

Torture-memories and 9/11 ghosts have a nature that often defy the earliest planks in established psychoanalytic theory, along with post-Freudian interpretations and revisions. The key ghost of The Zero is March Selios, but her nature forces me to reformulate some of the better-known concepts on phantoms. Abraham’s often quoted words are important to keep in mind here to demonstrate how successfully the ghost of March Selios resists popular ideas of the ghost’s purpose: “More often than not, the dead do not return to reunite the living with their loved ones but rather to lead them into some
dreadful snare, entrapping them with disastrous consequences. To be sure, all the departed may return, but some are predestined to haunt: the dead who have been shamed during their lifetime or those who took unspeakable secrets to the grave” (Abraham 287). March reverses the spectral tendencies and motivations that Abraham saw. First, the Gothic return of March does not reunite the protagonist to his “loved ones.” At novel’s end, the hatred for Remy by his ex-wife is as thorough as when the novel begins, and the separation from his son and the son’s public “mourning” of his still-alive father grows more flamboyant. But neither does this ghost March entrap Remy with “disastrous consequences.” What evolves is that Remy only becomes aware and close to April through her sister March’s disappearance. His investigation of this lost one leads him to a lover: March’s death and Remy’s investigation ends in lovers meeting. March continues to break with the Abrahamic paradigm: March is not “shamed during [her] lifetime” as centuries’ worth of ghosts would be, but shamed only once she dies and becomes a suspected accomplice in the 9/11 terror. The third toppling of Abraham’s otherwise redoubtable characterization of ghost behaviors (symbolic or real) is that March manages to take no “secrets to the grave.” March, Remy finally discovers, did not escape the burning WTC before it falls. No Al Qaeda accomplice / boyfriend ever warned her of the WTC’s looming destruction by the jets. Instead, she left her office hurriedly to a higher floor, and into great mortal danger, only to be with her married lover for a few final moments. Thus if March and other specters of 9/11 resist the long-held characterizations of ghosts, it should not surprise us that she is also upsetting prevalent psychoanalytic formulations.

Using Freud’s contradictory image of a “familiar stranger,” Remy beds the dead
woman’s sister -- a month later, making some consistent nod to their successive names in the calendric year -- in what would appear a masqueraded, necrothanatopic reaching for March. Walter takes pains to establish Remy into a ghost realm. Remy looks like a ghost as he comes out of the WTC on 9/11, and he is a self-described ghost bartender at a ghost bar later. When he visits his girlfriend April, she says there are ghosts suddenly surrounding her in the apartment, and when the (apparently living) Remy visits his son, the teenager confides: “I’ve been through all the stages of grief... I’ve finally accepted your death” (Walter 2006: 279). But Remy’s understanding of his own taboo secret, that he is as a corpse to the living (especially his family), is not the only thing unbearable for him. Three things are impossible for Remy: proper mourning, true forgiveness, and complete memory. There is an impasse in decoding the secrets of what Remy does on the day of 9/11. Weeks after the disaster, Derrida argued forcefully that encompassing and understanding 9/11 does not happen because we have not the language to articulate it. Moreover, the American masses have not the courage to say that the West is conducting terrorism in itself, Derrida added. *The Zero* becomes the ultimate literary statement of that philosophy, and Remy’s silence (with a few exceptions in San Francisco) stands for the inability to articulate it. But in a novel of so many unresolved doubts, Remy does provide an affirmative answer to the question of whether one can be the villain of one’s own heroic story, the ghost of the tale one was searching for, and the somnambulist that one was all along trying to awaken.
4.6 Conclusion

Contrary to Richard Gray’s highly influential assessment that 9/11 novels fall lamentably short in reflecting how we understand trauma differently after 9/11, Walter shows a character ontologically obsessed, wondering who exists anymore, including whether he himself does. Remy illustrates how the trauma paradigm shifted for survivors after the twin jet attack seen live around the world. Unlike Gray’s complaint that the 9/11 novels only incorporated the WTC fall into their larger “emotional entanglements,” Remy has not simply “assimilated the unfamiliar into familiar structures” or “domesticated” the crisis. He in no way reduces “a turning point in national and international history to little more than a stage in a sentimental education” (Gray 2009: 134). Fractured and never made whole or “healed” through psychoanalysis or other means, our protagonist resists the prevailing negative evaluations of 9/11 fiction by intervening as both the interrogator and the victim, the enemy and (paradoxically) the unacknowledged cadaver.

Terrorism degrounded the WTC towers just as ghosts unsettle the psyche. DeLillo, we recall, imagined ghosts as those one-time living friends who enter one’s body and further split one from one’s family after trauma. Foer presented a ghost-chase that occurs after trauma where the 6th-grader survivor looks for his dead father and meets many along the way who are looking for their dead, as well. Through discoveries from the shared quest and grieving, some empathy with victims develops that comforts survivors and relieves some of the self-contempt and self-blame they feel. Schwartz, for her part, again features a possession ghost entering and giving the protagonist a dismal, indulgent comfort until doppelgängers arise after 9/11, who convinces herself to sacrifice for others.
Rather than the ghost teaching ethics to her, Renata is taught by identifying with the living who are missing those they love, and she returns the waif because of that sympathy for others. Walter shares a protagonist who enters the north tower to rescue, but becomes in need of rescue himself. I would argue, in an attempt to explain all the book’s improbabilities, that Remy is in hospital-bed bound for almost the entire novel. His clandestine anti-terrorism “adventures” for the Mayor of New York City are phantasies sprung from a hospital room as the TV replays the disaster for weeks, all which triggers his thoughts as he listens with eyes closed. The Zero mentions and summons ghosts incessantly, almost effortlessly, and more than any other novel investigated in this thesis, Remy himself seems the chief cipher and prime ghost of the novel. If he is bed-bound, as I propose, nevertheless Remy’s landscape of the mind and his journeys there are no less hazardous or “real” than the still smoldering WTC plaza outside of his mind, and haunt us for a long time after.
5. Conclusion

Few, if any, theorists of trauma have acknowledged the profound overlap between trauma theory and the Gothic, or the ways in which literary representations of trauma frequently resort to some of the most established conventions of the Gothic in order to articulate traumatic excess. Terrorists attack, civilians die, and survivors mourn -- every critic agrees. But invariably in these fictions, as shown in this thesis, apparitions also arise, doppelgängers pass by, and the memories of trauma assume the shape of the impossibly monstrous. To penetrate the strange guises in which memory masquerades its wounds and ask what those semblances may mean is to perform a traumagothic reading. Unhealing ordeals are like the intermittent appearance of masked phantoms, and a traumagothic interpretation pursues and interrogates such specters, finding post-Freudian concepts particularly helpful in its execution. Always in these four novels surveyed, the undeclared remains of the dead feed the unresolved mourning of the living. And the Gothic impulse moves through the survivors’ terror sex and terror-fueled revenge; through the disaster-ghosts that possess the living; through the survivors’ mind-destroying guilt; and through the resultant shame, rage, torture, madness, and soul-sickness exhibited over the sudden live burial of friends, colleagues, and family at Ground Zero.

As this thesis has demonstrated, these four novels speak their “unutterable trauma” -- their abject fear, sublime dread, wounded memory, and shattered world -- often through Gothic utterances, means, figures, and meditations. A traumagothic reading asks how the Gothic mode invests these texts with conspiracies of incest and murder;
occurrences of possession and traumatic re-enactment; flashes of the grotesque; and intimations of evil during nocturnal wanderings past Ground Zero’s exoskeletons of towers that hold both darkness and fire. This “Hole” was where the bodies burned and stank, and the spirits appeared and then brooded. The surveyed novels reveal what Patrick McGrath confided to me about his nocturnal visits to Ground Zero not long after the disaster. In an as yet unpublished interview, McGrath reflects: “It was as if the dead had not figured out what they were supposed to do, or what had befallen them. I had this notion in my mind that the collapse of the Towers would have created a great many disaster-ghosts. And it is perfectly logical to say that if a number of people independently of each other have experienced the same thing, then that thing is there to be perceived” (McGrath 2015: unpublished interview). Following that thinking, a traumagothic reading maintains that by steadily Gothicizing trauma, the terrorism-texts are able to embody in the carnage and aftermath what news commentators on 9/11 merely branded “unspeakable” and “unfaceable.” The Gothic impulse enters these four fictions again and again as stealthily yet constantly as the smoke, ash, and dust of the WTC dead drifted into the residences of the New York City authors composing these narratives. Admittedly, these “traumagothic” novels may show no Gothic nature initially on the first pages, yet through a process of reading that is finely attuned to the Gothic mode, we eventually experience what the texts’ uncountenanced or unstated traumas are. It is true that declarations of the texts’ Gothic manifestations may be invisible from the publishers’ online press kits, dust jacket descriptions, and even authorial interviews -- and yet the Gothic becomes the mode that speaks the psychic stresses and dwells on the greater mysteries after terrorist attack. A traumagothic presence in a terrorism novel can often be
signaled by a recurring apparition. And we have to ask why spirits, again and again, exist in novels that are otherwise described as literary realism interrupted by sudden cataclysm. I determined that the persistence of such ghosts is not just a spectral reminder of the instant vaporization of thousands at the WTC, or the decisions of hundreds from the north tower and then the south tower to take their lives by jumping, sometimes holding hands as they fell. The arrival of ghosts is perhaps the greatest externalized trace to a concealed but corroding vault of traumatic memory. The explosively public 9/11 trauma also summons earlier hidden personal traumas for the texts’ characters (especially Keith Neudecker, Thomas Schell Sr., Renata, and Paul Remy), blurring borders between the nightmare of the present and a past that never finishes.

Confining itself to a three-year-period of unusual richness and abundance in terrorism-texts from America (2005 – 2007), this thesis has argued that four early 9/11 novels mediate the Gothic and trauma, and then meditates on the purpose of ghosts that materialize or even possess the characters. However, a traumagothic analysis might also be applied to other 9/11 texts in order to determine if the same pattern of trauma’s secrets surface with other novels’ ghosts. Other American-born or American-naturalized writers have been dwelling on the same traumas for the New York City survivor. Thus a traumagothic elucidation could focus on, for example, ghosts in Ken Kalfus’s *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006) and the possession of (yet another) living lawyer by a dead terrorist; terror-sex in Jay McInerney’s *The Good Life* (2006) and the revenants that wriggle out of body bags at Ground Zero; a burned and decapitated 9/11 jumper’s head speaking like a god in Hugh Nissenson’s *Days of Awe* (2005), while the Devil in that novel also speaks as a “spirit of self-annihilation”; an unnamed therapist’s growing belief
in supernaturalized evil at the Hole and the corrupting Other luring her client in Patrick McGrath’s story “Ground Zero” (2005); and the mystical transport of objects of the dead that follow and “speak” to the living in Stephen King’s novella "The Things They Left Behind" (2005). Beyond that, a traumagothic approach might also be fruitfully applied to American writers’ novels on torture and the terrorist’s and informant’s point of view from roughly the same period, including, for instance, _Terrorist_ from John Updike (2006) or _The Garden of Last Days_ from Andre Dubus III (2008).

The notion of the traumagothic provides a useful way of approaching a number of fictions written and published within the last five years, too. “Thumbprint” (2007), a story from one of Stephen King’s sons, Joe Hill, makes a transition to a new very contemporary sub-genre whose PTSD and ghosts could be illuminated by a traumagothic interpretation. The movement in American fiction on terrorism in terms of newest book releases is increasingly away from the New York City victim’s unhealable reaction to the loss of the Towers, and towards the perspective of those who serve as U.S. military or private contractors in operations overt and covert within Iraq and Afghanistan, often motivated out of a rage over the loss of both life and symbolic power from the WTC fall. Some of these U.S. personnel at times torture and kill, and are haunted themselves by the trauma-ghosts (frequently vengeful and soul-destroying ones) arising from the destruction that comes of military invasion and occupation. Hill’s story is of a military interrogator, Private First Class Mallory Grennan, and an Iraqi professor of literature haplessly swept up in an American arrest on a Baghdad street. During interrogation, she smashes his broken leg with her rifle butt and then asks “if he’d like the barrel of her gun in his ass” (Hill 2007: 231). In an addition to the ghost story we might expect, Grennan is
not only haunted by the professor, but is stalked and tortured upon returning “Stateside” by a fellow interrogator suffering PTSD and rampant paranoia. The fellow soldier named Carmody (who took part in physical abuses of Ba’athist suspects and now collects human thumbs) is certain she was part of a conspiracy against him and his resulting demotion.

The story leaves her in the midst of traumatic memoires strapped to a bed after being clubbed on the back of the head by Carmody. Whether her interrogator is real or merely a Gothic projection is left up for the reader to decide. David Wellington’s story “Twilight in the Green Zone” (2007) premiering in Exotic Gothic, narrates more lawlessness: the taboo and serial hunger in an American official named Vyner working within the American safe zone in Baghdad. Ironically employed for the U.N., he also seeks a woman to torment and kill. However, after nearly being shot and tortured himself as he drives through Baghdad, Vyner finds the victim-pattern reversed. His intended target will stand above him giving the orders while he will not again be able to raise himself from his knees. She is, if not a purely a Gothic projection on Vyner’s part, a supernatural spirit of ancient vengeance from the desert.

Victimhood, as we discovered in four novels analyzed in the thesis, is not monolithic: its other side is rage and disproportionate violence. Kevin Neudecker beats a man for staring at his paramour for a second too long at a mattress store, and his wife smashes another woman’s face for playing Middle Eastern music too loudly. Oskar Schell (at least symbolically) destroys a bully with a theatre-prop. The twin Renata (surname never known to readers) threatens to kill a perpetrator who was dying in a hospital bed. And Paul Remy tortures suspects (who may be innocent) while they are stowed in hidden detention centers floating just off the U.S. coast. The lust for vengeance
inhabits them all. Likewise, more recent terrorism fictions by American authors follow American citizens who were living far away from Ground Zero to fly abroad and exact their own terror on other nations. From the two such transitional short stories aforementioned by Hill and Wellington, we also notice that the most recent terrorism fictions focus on the retributive violence of a state, beginning with U.S. and Allied troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, causing refugee epidemics as civil wars emerge and engulf parts of Iraq and Afghanistan, and destabilize neighbouring nations. Depicting those characters who embody the sleep of reason and the transformation into monsters, the following list of fiction awaits traumagothic analysis: the stories in Phil Klay’s *Redeployment* (2014), in particular “Bodies,” as well as such novels as J. Robert Lennon’s *Castle* (2009); Ben Fountain’s *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2012); and Kevin Powers’s *The Yellow Birds* (2012). From Klay we observe Mortuary Affairs Marines in the theater of war who “thought the spirits of the dead hung about the bodies. It'd creep them out... [They were] swearing they could feel spirits everywhere … [and] always talked about ghosts” (Klay 2014: 54-55). A similarly eerie involvement of the dead into the business of the living features in Lennon’s novel *Castle*, in which a logistics expert and chief warrant officer in the U.S. Army ends up torturing to death a Baghdad boy named Sufian whilst in detention at Camp Alastor, Iraq. During interrogation, the boy had whistled in answer to one of the narrating officer Eric Loesch’s questions, and after that “strange, frightening whistling,” Loesch suffers a fevered “Tell-Tale Heart” reaction. Loesch utters: “Anything but this -- this whistling, which felt as though it was boring into my head like an auger… I could have recognized it anywhere: it had an identity, a personality” (Lennon 2009: 217-218). This mere whistling invites a traumagothic analysis of the uncanny because it has no melody, no repeated movement, no “theme or phrase,” and yet Loesch knows it
from somewhere and is “painfully tired of it.” Despite that familiarity, it was strange: “It was foreign, far more than this place [Iraq]. It was alien” (Lennon 2009: 218). A mere whistle grows into an intolerable burden, and the narrator insists that sound is a clear and present danger to everyone. In his traumatized state of super-vigilance and heightened-paranoia, Loesch insists that a boy’s tune could “[en]danger the stability of the facility, the morale of the men and women under my command, and the pliability of [Sufian’s] fellow detainees” (Lennon 2009: 219). Therefore, the boy must be killed. To the narrator, who felt he was a victim himself on 9/11, this act was one more unpreventable “casualty of war” and not an abuse of a prisoner (Lennon 2009: 228). A traumagothic reading of this novel seems invited by the text itself when it wonders: “how the tendency of memory [can] twist and reshape itself, especially the memory of dramatic moments.” Loesch (whose last name means “fine leather” in German, and who indeed turns his detainees into mere dead skin) can barely remember how he kills the child, or how Sufian’s last moments looked and sounded. Like a murder in a dungeon from a Gothic novel long ago, there seems to be little help from the living world to prosecute the crime. We must look instead to the ghosts who will come later to plague the interrogator Loesch when he returns to America before we can understand why he killed a child in an Iraqi cell, and what awaits him now. Even greater brutality lurks in Ben Fountain’s *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*, where a Sergeant Dime, like an incarnation of *Apocalypse Now*’s Air Cavalry officer Bill Kilgore, insists to his men: “We like violence, we like going lethal! ... If we didn't like killing people then what's the point [of being in Iraq]?” But after the extremes of violence that the Sergeant’s soldiers commit and are subjected to, the narrator has to ask: ”How much reality can unreality take?... The past is a fog that breathes out ghost after ghost, ... which makes the future the ultimate black hole of futile
speculation (Fountain 2012: 307). A traumagothic reading could help illuminate this black hole and challenge some of the speculations. Last, in one more novel of Middle Eastern tumult and torture, Kevin Powers’s *The Yellow Birds*, the American narrator glumly spends his time “with the same ghosts [that he killed] every night” (Powers 2012: 112). For the works of both Fountain and Powers, a traumagothic approach might assist in finding the unspoken wounds by investigating the nature, pattern of reappearance, and messages that the apparitions impart. As for Lennon’s ominous novel *Castle*, the question that matters is not so much what the narrator asks -- “What should be done with the boy’s body?” (Lennon 2009: 219) -- but rather the one that he never articulates: What should be done with the boy’s reappearing ghost? Here, a traumagothic reading, as we have approached, defined, and formed it in the novels from the first four chapters of this thesis, could be enlightening.

Besides developing the traumagothic interpretations in the thesis, I have attempted a recuperation of 9/11 fiction, against the tide of popular opinion, for more serious consideration. Critics have contended that the 9/11 novels should have been “game-changing,” offering a “new paradigm” and able to “subdue an event that seemed to defy representation,” of larger “scope and harrowing drama” (Kakutani 2011). Instead the novels were in reviewers’ minds often “trivializing,” “mercenary and narcissistic,” “resistant … to artistic treatment,” “flimsy,” “cynical,” and “solipsistic” (Kakutani 2011). From more scholarly quarters, Richard Gray’s retrospective repeatedly found the 9/11 fictions unusually “close minded,” unduly “domestic,” and unable to fully grapple with geopolitical themes (Gray 2008). What these two critical evaluations do not consider (and Kakutani and Gray are emblematic of the whole), however, is what I contend is their greatest success: that the presence of the dead is not merely felt in
terrorism texts, but that *the dead have agency*. With insights on possession by the dead post-disaster through separate studies from the medical psychiatrists Adler and Lindemann, I have established that some of the WTC dead inhabit the living. That is, behavior of the living in these novels -- in terms of newly adopted speech patterns, clothing choices, hobbies, sexual proclivities, and even their change in vocations -- manifest their dead friends’ or relatives’ natures. All of the fictions I have investigated here show this phenomenon to some degree. What is more, by noticing and analyzing the harm inflicted on the self or on others by these fictional figures in the days and months after the terrorist attack, we also see an uncanny mirroring with the self-destructive impulses and duality of many earlier Gothic characters. For in these examined novels, a once-prosperous WTC insurance lawyer rages and strikes people and disappears into smoky gambling dens; a 5th grade boy-inventor assumes the persona of an avenging skull and punishes himself and others physically and mentally; a respected librarian of lost languages arranges her apartment with true-crime stories of murder and devotes herself full-time to “terror sex”; and a police officer who survives the WTC collapse turns into a decorated anti-terror operative, whilst also torturing and murdering suspects along the way.

The question should not be only, as reviewers and scholars have asked, how does the work reflect the chaotic state of the world and threats to Pax Americana? The question to add is how could we establish what texts become canonical in 9/11 literature? Why should we be reading them? How does a 9/11 text fully and intimately register the
haunting of trauma on an individual, in ways that psychologists, psychiatrists, and therapists themselves might find arresting? After all, fiction’s province, in the memorable words of the 9/11 Museum and Memorial Director Alice Greenwald during my interview with her, is to provide “a form of access to interior realities that are not as evident in more documentary forms of expression … a sense of personal investment in the narrative, creating a sense of immediacy and fostering an awareness of the familiar” (Greenwald 2014). If these novels capably depict not only the despair over what has been done to us but the dread for what we are becoming -- with distinctions sometimes disappearing in the divide between terrorist and victim, and narrowing between the dead and the living -- then they have captured an experience remarkable, unexpected, and controversial, a quality which alone makes them worthy of interrogation and wonder.

As this thesis has demonstrated, the most coherent and productive theoretical armature for the reading of traumagothic is one derived from a broad range of cultural, linguistic, and psychological theorists, especially those from post-Freudian interpreters of psychoanalysis, in particular Jacques Derrida. Notions taken from Derrida (typically concentrating on a text’s, ideology’s, or government’s contradictions and unstated, maligned, ironic, and left-out aspects) include: that the terrorist and the victim have an unclear division; that the state’s pre-emptive strikes and torture act as a disabling process like an autoimmunity reaction in a human body; and that television and internet media amplify the power of terror, keeping it an ever-happening attack, and creating the worst terror. As Derrida perceives terrorism, the sense in our imaginations becomes that the worst is not over, that the violence towards us, in fact, will never be over and there is no shelter to find. Further, his concept that “honest” mourning is “impossible,” just as the
complete and disinterested forgiveness of wrongs is impossible in his thinking, assists in the crafting of a more nuanced interpretation of and commentary on characters’ chronic suffering. But the point was to go beyond simply applying parts of another’s theory, however penetrating. I developed traumagothic concepts of my own. In brief, I have demonstrated that these novels imagine that if one can open to another’s pain, and acknowledge what one’s trauma shares with another’s (as do Oskar in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Renata in *The Writing on the Wall*), then one can have a united, if still unfinished mourning with others. Such a character tends to stay in New York City despite all the reminders of loss, and keep his or her roots, maintain contacts, help others, and become one for whom others will someday mourn. If one is not open to others’ pain (as with Keith in *Falling Man* and Remy in *The Zero*), one tends to become physically violent towards others and oneself, leave New York City, and lose family and lovers. Such characters become lost in more ways than one. They become the contradiction of being dead (as both families of Keith and Remy say they actually are) while they still have a pulse.

Beyond shedding light on relationships that might go unnoticed and broadening our understanding of a Gothic phenomenon in contemporary terrorist-realism, this thesis makes a claim about, and criticism of, abuses of political-military power, especially extraordinary rendition, torture, and murder of terror suspects (particularly in *The Zero*). Without meaning to overgeneralize a conclusion, or exaggerate a parallel, or move into political invective, the thesis nevertheless finds some solid connections between these texts and discussions of the U.S. government’s unproductive reaction to 9/11 at home and abroad (via the pathways in thought already cleared by Derrida, Žižek, Baudrillard,
Chomsky, Butler, Faludi, and Punter). The sense, here, is that the U.S. lost a chance to empathize and understand how the rest of the world suffers terrors similar to 9/11. Consequently the U.S.’s disproportionate retributive violence supplanted new American initiatives to understand and resolve the causes of conflict that fuel terrorism. As Susan Faludi notes with much sorrow and perhaps some righteous rage, “There are consequences to living in a dream” (Faludi 2007: 289). I take not waking from the “dream” after the mass atrocity of 9/11 to mean the U.S. squandered chances for greater reflection on terror and more beneficial changes to its international response to violence, risking the provocation of another generation of terrorists. Many of the characters in the four novels are to some degree somnambulists, too, and are not awake to making productive changes in their relationships and destructive behaviors (especially the constant gambler Keith Neudecker and the chronic torturer Brian Remy).

This thesis has explored people’s continued suffering through PTSD and the resulting vexing challenges to mental health professionals stemming from an attack that killed almost 3,000 citizens of 115 countries and which would destabilize world economic stability. I maintain the aforementioned to be vital areas for further research. But I would add that terrorism and trauma comprise a significant research problem because they together affect and involve many academic disciplines, from political science and war studies, to sociology, to psychology and economics. Therefore, to make a reasoned argument about 9/11 texts often involves tapping readings from some or all of these disciplines. What is more, when President George W. Bush successfully plied 9/11 as an incident to change official American policy and institute the use of pre-emptive strikes, he would usher two wars still on-going and worrisome potential conflicts for the
future. Thus 9/11 is at the heart of tragic changes to the lives of millions, from those
displaced in Iraq and Afghanistan and neighboring countries, to those killed in the initial
American wars of Middle East invasion and the subsequent civil wars. The dark journey
of this thesis has found that such innocent dead will be with us, showing their mortal
wounds and inviting us closer, as cinema’s most haunting pair of twins once told me in
an interview, “forever and ever and ever” (Burns and Burns 2015: 447).
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Appendix
A.1 Permission Form to Conduct and Print Interview with the Director Greenwald

RESEARCH APPLICATION
FOR INTERVIEWS/FILMS/RECORDINGS OF 9/11 MEMORIAL & MUSEUM STAFF

Thank you for your interest in conducting research related to the 9/11 Memorial and Museum. Please use this form to provide a brief overview of your research; feel free to include additional pages, if necessary. Please note that you must receive written permission from 9/11 Memorial and Museum staff prior to conducting research.

Researcher/s Name/s: Danel Olson
University/Institution/Organization: University of Stirling, Scotland
Address: Summer: 11418 Timberwild St. The Woodlands, TX 77380
Phone: 832-257-0961 Email: danelolson@gmail.com

Research Purpose: My research is on 9/11 novels and I would like more insight on the Museum’s narrative of 9/11 to understand more deeply the connection between art and reality. I give much more detail on my written proposal.

Logistics

How long will your research take? (Please include date/s and time/s if possible.)

30 minutes The morning of Monday, June 16 would be a time that I am in NYC.
Where will your research take place?

At the Museum itself.

During your research, will you be:

☐ interviewing Memorial/Museum staff? If so, please identify interviewees:
  Director Alice Greenwald

☐ photographing, recording, or filming Memorial/Museum staff? Digital voice recorder (as backup) and movie camera for the interview, so that I can compare the written record to it.

☐ providing materials to Memorial/Museum staff? Please describe:

☐ conducting other activities? Please describe:

Dissemination

How will your research be used or disseminated?

_It would be part of my PhD dissertation, and would be digitally available for researchers after the dissertation is approved._

What is your expected date of completion or publication? _______late 2015-early 2006_______

☐ N/A

If you are planning to publish your research, under whose auspices will it be published?

_______My thesis director is Prof. Dale Townshend, University of Stirling, Scotland. A publisher (often of library reference books) I have published before with is Scarecrow Press,
(Lanham, MD; Plymouth, UK), and they have expressed some interest in publishing a book form of the dissertation.

Additional Requirements

- A written proposal outlining the research and interview questions, if interviews are being conducted.
- Internal Review Board (IRB) (or equivalent) approval or documentation of waiver, if necessary
- A copy of your final product/s to be received within 30 days of completion or publication
- The following statement must be included in your work: “The findings in this study reflect the analysis and sole opinions of the writer, and do not reflect the institutional perspectives of the National September 11 Memorial & Museum.”
- Consent to terms related to release of information (form to follow upon completion of application).

I hereby certify that the above information is complete and correct and agree to all requirements set forth.

Signature

Date 10 June 2014
A.2 Interview at the National September 11 Museum & Memorial, New York City, with 9/11 Museum Director Alice M. Greenwald (16 June 2014)

A month following its official dedication on 15 May 2014, I travelled to New York City to interview the Director of The National September 11 Memorial & Museum, Dr. Alice M. Greenwald, in her office. As the Founding Director, she has had to make, *The New York Times* records, some creative and “contentious decisions.” Namely, she has had to decide “what artifacts the museum will include, what narrative it will present, [and] what kinds of exhibitions and symposiums might be scheduled” (Pogrebin 2006).

Extremely long lines wound before the entrance to the Museum when I arrived, and it was clear that her schedule was full.

The hope for the interview was to gain more light on themes of trauma, mourning, memorialization, the return of what we repress, and the process of narrating catastrophe. What effect the 9/11 dead continue to have on the living was a fascination, as well. As Director Greenwald puts it, in coming to the Museum, “a lot of people” think they “will be descending into Dante’s Inferno” (Bhatia 2015). By the interview’s close, the Director mused on some of the novels featured in this thesis and on some of the novelists herein who have shared their story to the 9/11 Museum.
Danel Olson (DO): Director Greenwald, do you have any questions that I have not asked in my pre-sent file, or any questions that magazines and newspapers have not posed, that you wish someone would ask you?

Alice M. Greenwald (AMG): [Raises eyebrows, smiles, head falls back slightly] Oh no... no [laughs fully]. Oh my god, that’s so funny, No. No questions that I have been waiting to be asked, that’s for sure [rubs eyes slightly; staff shares her grin].

DO: I was struck by the Dedication of the museum’s opening last month where President Obama spoke, as well as the present and the former Mayors of New York City and Governors of New York State. It seemed both non-partisan and not overly patriotic. It was one of the few events ever attended by politicians, that I can recall, where identification, love, and genuine sympathy emerged towards others with sincerity, all unembittered by political rancor. Did it not have an exceptional unity? Could you sum up your reaction to the Dedication?

AMG: It was very positive [looks at staff] -- including from all of us! [laughs slightly]. Not unlike what you wrote me before, people have responded to the Dedication with a sense of gratitude. People were so grateful that it was handled in a way that focused on the stories and on real people. The politicians did not use it as an occasion or platform to espouse points of view or to promote themselves. It was a ceremony in the service of history, and as the Dedication to this institution. I think many people were both surprised and grateful for that. It had a dignity about it; it was humbling. You got a sense that this isn’t about partisanship or political beliefs. It was about something that happened to us as a nation, that happened to human beings, and that needed to be the focus and that was the focus. I haven’t heard anyone say other about it but that they were moved by it deeply.

DO: Artists, including writers, often have an interest in collaborating with museums on new projects. Have you been getting many offers to work with them? Have they been visiting? Have they been contacting you?

AMG: We tend to get less interest from writers, per se -- although I am sure there are plenty of writers who come through the Museum -- than from artists who work with tribute art: quilting, painting, music in tribute to the victims. We have a lot of that
expression displayed in the museum. The communications we tend to get from artists is: “Would you like my piece for the museum? I’d like to present it in the museum.”

Writers we’ve had not so much. But Jonathan Safran Foer, who wrote Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, participated in a tour of the Memorial and a preview of the Museum spaces. And he participated in one of our media installations called “Reflecting on 9/11.” He’s been very engaged.

We’re just now launching our Public Program series, and I think there will be more opportunity for authors (historians, novelists, storytellers, poets) to be more involved. There hasn’t been a mechanism for that until now.

DO: So the Public Program series will be held right here amid the ruins?

AMG: Yes in our auditorium. We’ll have daytime programming, but also evening programming.

DO: I noticed tribute art as I left the end of the main historical exhibit, and I remember that a number of comics were in it. Do you think you will have an exhibit solely of the 9/11 novels, stories, and poems, along with sequential art?

AMG: Sure, but I think the question is this with museums: “What is the nature of the exhibition visually?” True, obviously, the Morgan Library & Museum does this all the time, and they do it very well, so it’s not impossible to have wonderful exhibits that focus on books.

We have not yet started our special exhibition program. When you open an exhibition of 110,000 square feet, there’s a lot for people to see the first time they come [smile followed by laughter]. So we’re putting off down the road, probably to the end of 2015, when we would launch of series of temporary exhibits. And that’s the kind of theme we would look at: the way 9/11 has refracted through contemporary literature, or perhaps film. That’s entirely within the scope of what we do.

DO: It seems a tremendous idea, and I look forward to coming again soon and seeing the temporary exhibitions.

I am curious about how an experience of mass trauma like this registers itself in art: what is put in, what is left out, and why? Also why is it that some New York novelists chose not to write a novel about it, including the prolific Joyce Carol Oates? While we have many 9/11 novels now, nevertheless novelists often remark on their protracted writers’ block over 9/11 -- the long time it took to come around and write of the catastrophe. People who usually would write 2,000 words a day or more suddenly could write no more.

AMG: Trauma can do that to people.

One thing I’ve noticed is that a lot of people come into the Museum, and they’ve not really been in touch with the emotional reality they felt at 9/11, and in the immediate aftermath of the attacks from the days after. We tend to put that stuff away. You don’t want to live in that mind-frame all the time. I think coming into the Museum brings this back in a safe way. It’s here and now, and not there and then. The Museum is in the middle of lower Manhattan and all [the memories are] coming back, but there’s a lot of emotional safety also involved. The Museum gives people that space to re-encounter something very profound, and begin to integrate it in a more coherent manner, not in terms of literature but in terms of peoples’ personal narratives.

DO: Does fiction gives anything we need, in your mind, that photography, journalism, oral history, the display of recovered objects, and academic history might not?

AMG: As a lover of literature, I would say that fiction often provides a form of access to interior realities that are not as evident in more documentary forms of expression. This in turn provides a reader with a sense of personal investment in the narrative, creating a sense of immediacy and fostering an awareness of the familiar.

DO: That is eloquently said. Now are there some 9/11 novels that have moved you, or approached this catastrophe and tragedy with something you have not seen or felt elsewhere, or have defined the 9/11 decade more clearly?

AMG: To be honest, I have tried to avoid reading 9/11 fiction. The reason is simple. Being immersed day after day in this subject matter, when I choose to read on my own
time, I choose non-9/11 subject matter as a form of escape. So my reading of late has been de Waal’s *The Hare with the Amber Eyes*, Hosseini’s *And the Mountains Echoed*, and for non-fiction, Matthiessen’s *The Snow Leopard*. Two 9/11 books I did read were DeLillo’s *Falling Man* and Amy Waldman’s *The Submission*. I thought DeLillo’s book was compelling but also struggling itself to come to terms with the history and so not quite as powerful as his other works. And Waldman’s book was an easy read, with a good storyline and some characterizations of individuals I knew from the Memorial jury process that were quite entertaining. I thought she was able to create a thoughtful commentary about prejudice and politics, using this subject matter.

DO: As you have meditated on how memory works and what memorializing does, I will share what I remember: I was making my one-and-a-half-year-old and three-year-old daughters breakfast when we three saw -- live on television -- the second plane slice through the south tower. They asked me, “What is that? What is going on?”

AMG: Right. And you couldn’t answer them?

DO: It was one of the earliest moments with them where I could not say anything. They just saw my tears. I took them to a carousel in a mall that morning, but nearly no one was there: it was all a bit like the abandoned set of an apocalyptic movie. They had their lonely ride on the gaily-daubed horses, and I held them later as we glumly ate our ice cream in silence on a bench. Sometimes, now fifteen years later, when we three happen to pass that same carousel, an uneasy quietness comes, although I wonder what they could consciously remember. My hope is that when they walk through this Museum later today, it can articulate what then I could not.

AMG: Yes. We’ve thought a lot about that, in particular in our education staff, because we’ve heard this not only from parents especially on its anniversary, about what to say, what not to say -- but also from teachers. It is hard for teachers to teach 9/11, particularly for individuals who lived through it themselves and have their own difficulty with it emotionally.

So early on, several years ago, we produced a set of guidelines for adults on how to talk to their children about 9/11, particularly when September rolls around and it’s all over the news again. We wanted to help parents contextualize what their kids are seeing.
And for teachers we’ve now developed over ninety lesson plans at different grade levels, all to help teachers manage the way into the telling of the story. Tomorrow night we’re kicking off a series of programs where schoolteachers can bring their classes in to participate based on their grade level, using the Museum as a classroom. The Museum becomes a jumping-off point for certain kinds of discussions.

DO: I’m also curious about how the Museum helps people who were physically trapped in either of the towers, who escaped, but could never explain to anyone (friends or family) the horrors they underwent, and how it makes them different now. How might the Museum help them with these unhealable wounds? Do you sense there is something the Museum is able to express, too, that they cannot articulate?

AMG: I’m sure. I mean, it would be a presumption on my part, because I haven’t heard from anyone specifically about this. But there is the fact that you can bring your family in, and in many cases survivors share things in our oral histories project that they haven’t shared before with their families because it’s too painful. Then you’re listening to people in alcoves in the historical exhibition, and we show you where they were in the buildings as they moved down and evacuated. So for some people, I think, there is the experience of hearing the story, in a way, for the first time: in the voice of your parent, or your cousin, or your neighbor, but hearing it in the space of the museum. I’m sure that’s happening.

I also think for people who’ve done oral histories, hearing themselves talk has to be very emotional. We all compartmentalize difficult things in our lives, but when you come into the Museum, you realize that your story is part and parcel of this greater history -- you’ve actually contributed to the historical documentation. I think that is a very profound experience. And for some very difficult because they don’t live in that place all the time.

DO: I know you were affiliated with the National Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., for twenty-two years, and for part of that time were Associate Museum Director for Museum Programs. Do you find that some of the physical structure of that extraordinarily moving museum and its involving ways of narration now appear here at the 9/11 Museum?
AMG: Certainly my experience at the Holocaust Museum trained me to think about the way one constructs an exhibition. I worked closely with Jesaja (Shaike) Weinberg [1918-2000; born in Poland, educated in Germany], who was the Founding Director there, and he was a very interesting individual in the museum world of the 1980s. He had come out of theater. He was the head of the Tel Aviv Municipal Theatre for a number of years [the largest theater in Israel]. He had been very interested in computers early on. And only came to museums serendipitously. He created in Tel Aviv around May 1978 the Beit Hatfutsot (The Museum of the Jewish Diaspora). When it opened, it was a museum without artifacts. It was entirely a theatrical set with computers. You were moving through 4,000 years of Jewish history, and periodically you’d be stopped at a computer monitor, and it would say: “Here you are -- you are in Spain, it’s 1492, it’s the Expulsion, and are you going to convert? Go into hiding?” You would make a choice on the monitor, and the screen would give you the historical consequence of that choice. At the time, it was very innovative and new, but it was not a museum *per se* in the classical sense because there were no artifacts. When Shaike came over to head the National Holocaust Museum, many of us were concerned because here was a man who really didn’t appreciate artifacts and for those of us who classically-trained museum people it sounded…

DO: Like a gamble with history?

AMG: Yes, but what he did was life changing for me (in terms of my understanding about what museums can do). As a theater person, he understood the power of story, and that the museum had to tell a story. He understood perspective visually, and he hired a film documentarian named Martin Smith (who had worked for the BBC, and did the *World at War* series), and Martin was in effect the visual curator of the museum. He was structuring the narrative. They had historians, they had curators with objects, they had all that, but it really was about creating a story-line that the visitor moved through. I think that we in many ways have adapted that modality here at the 9/11 Museum, particularly in the historical exhibition, less so elsewhere in the Museum. We are very self-conscious about creating a structured-narrative and using the artifacts as exemplars of certain moments in the history, rather than as icons themselves as in an art museum where you would look at art for its own merit. In the case of most history museums, and certainly this one and the National Holocaust Museum, the artifacts become a way in to understanding the broader narrative of the historical period. They are both illustrative as
well as expressive of that moment in time, and I think that absolutely came out of my training with Shaike.

DO: The story inside these walls is exceedingly powerful. As I moved through the exhibits, I felt the loss, disappearances, and terror of the day on walls, pedestals, monitors, and large floor spaces, especially from the damaged fire engines, bashed turbines, wrecked radio and television antenna, and the massive twisted steel support beams from the WTC towers. It captures the confusion of that day, and the sense that the world had fallen down upon thousands of helpless people.

AMG: It’s not meant to keep you at a distance, that’s for sure. It’s really meant to bring you in as a witness, as if you were a witness that day. However, it’s not meant to be an immersive recreation of 9/11, at all. And if that was what people were experiencing, I’d be very upset because were not here to traumatize the public at all, obviously. But it is about encountering the history -- as we may encounter it ourselves watching television or walking on the streets of lower Manhattan, or in the tidal basin of Washington, D.C., looking across and watching the Pentagon burning.

DO: You have been designing this Museum for eight years, and have had to look at thousands of photos and objects connected to the deaths of almost three thousand people. How do you face these terrible realities without constantly re-experiencing trauma yourself, and not becoming overwhelmed or incapacitated by grief? In brief, what keeps you and the museum staff able to function, when everyday you look on the things that broke the heart of the world?

AMG: I think there are several answers to that question. One is that there are different layers of engagement with the hardest material on a daily basis. For the most part, I am not that close to it on a day-to-day basis. I would ask this question of our oral historians because they are sitting in that same room day in and day out, hearing these heart-wrenching stories. And I think it’s very difficult, when you are at that close a level to the content, to get a more distant perspective and to move out of it.

For me, I am focused on delivering a product, focused on the work that has to be done. And that work would have to be done whether we were a museum about 9/11 or Van Gogh or the American Civil War. There are steps that have to be taken, decisions that have to be made, designs that have to be reviewed. There’s the work of creating and
running a museum that is *The Work*. So you focus in on that level of your intellect: *Get the Job Done*. Because of the nature of the material, not all that in frequently, there will be moments in the day when you just get stopped in your tracks. Then you have to regroup.

But as often as one is shocked by that kind of content, even more often it’s the stories of people’s generosity, their selflessness, their innate heroism. That’s what stops you. When I cry … it’s generally because of that kind of story.

And there are so many of them, these incredible stories about resilience, about people’s ability to be responsive. And that is what was captured in the Dedication ceremony. It was focused *not* on the evildoers, but it certainly *was* focused on the victims -- and through the lens of the generosity of spirit that was demonstrated. Consider the man with the red bandanna, a perfect example of that.\(^{56}\) Here was a person in that moment who had the wherewithal, emotional stability, and the compassion to respond to the needs of others. That’s what gets you. And it doesn’t depress you: it elevates you to hear these stories. That’s what gives us the motivation to keep working on the Museum. Also, I would say there is a palpable sense of dedication among the staff. This is a very highly dedicated group of people who are emotionally invested in first creating the Museum, now in running it, making sure that people have the right kind of experience, and ensuring that everything is accurate. That is what keeps you going, and that is what we are here to do.

**DO:** I read in the 30 July 2011 *Wall Street Journal* that the original Twin Towers developer Larry Silverstein said: “I suspect that in ten years very few people will remember what Ground Zero was.” I wonder if that is true at all?

**AMG:** Oh, I don’t think that’s true *at all* [laughter]. I think the whole point of the Memorial is so that won’t happen.

\(^{56}\) After United Airlines Flight 175 struck his workplace on 9/11, south tower equities trader Welles Remy Crowther (born 17 May 1977) put out fires at the WTC, administered first aid, and took some of the injured onto his back and down seventeen flights of stairs to safety. Placing a red bandanna (which he always came to work with) over his face to keep out the smoke and fumes, Crowther saved the lives of at least eighteen people. Sifters found his body on 19 March 2002 in the south tower lobby, beside the bones of emergency personal and firefighters crushed by the tower’s fall. In his speech at the 9/11 Museum on 15 May 2014, President Obama dedicated the building to “the Man in the Red Bandanna” (Obama 2014).
I would understand that statement of his a little differently, though. He may have meant: there’s no longer this gaping wound in lower Manhattan. There’s no longer a hole in the ground. We have these fabulous new skyscrapers, and shortly we are to have this fabulous new transportation hub, and we have this Museum and this Memorial. And it doesn’t look at all the way it looked for the first seven or eight years after 9/11 when it was nothing.

But I don’t think people will not remember what happened, Danel, because we’re here to make sure they don’t.

DO: I so appreciate your time today, Director Greenwald.

AMG: It has been wonderful to meet you. Good luck with your work.

Are you yourself a writer?

DO: I write occasionally on contemporary Gothic novels.

AMG: Interesting.

DO: Speaking of the contemporary, I do not think I have ever been to a museum that records such a recent trauma.

AMG: Right, I agree with that. That was part of the challenge. Exactly, I mean, the Holocaust Museum comes half a century after World War II. No, I can’t think of another Museum…

Staff Member: There’s the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum…

AMG: Right, the Oklahoma Museum opens five years after the event, or actually 2001.

But the difference is that for Oklahoma City residents that is a very personal piece of history, yet for the majority of the United States that is not. With 9/11, you’ve got not

57 On 19 April 1995, the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City exploded. Among the 168 dead included nineteen children. A federal trial would find Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols guilty of attacking the building in what became the largest domestic terror case in U.S. history (Hamm 1997: vi).
just Americans but people around the world with a sense of connection to this event that I think is unprecedented as a shared experience. A global moment. And that was not true of Oklahoma City. I happen to remember Oklahoma City vividly, but I don’t think it rose to the level of the JFK assassination or the MLK assassination, where people really do remember where they were when those events happened, as they do with 9/11.

DO: Is the explanation for how the Murrah Building bombing and the WTC destruction scar our memory differently the fact that the New York City violence was seen as an attack on the West, on American military, political, and economic dominance?

AMG: Right, I’m sure. The Oklahoma bombing was horrible -- I remember vividly how shocked I was when I heard about it -- but somehow when you found out it was Timothy McVeigh, the public could say, “Oh, he was off balance. He was one of these crazies, one of these ideological people, one of these sociopaths.” Somehow you could package it and put it away.

Now I think with 9/11 most of the Country and most of the world was not paying attention to Al Qaeda. So you didn’t know who the perpetrator really was. It literally felt like it came out of the blue to so many people around the world.

I think the struggle to make sense of the terror, and to understand the world we live in -- rather than the one that we thought we lived in -- forced the issue of questioning in the way that the Murrah Building bombing did not.

DO: I sense you are right. Thanks so much again for these thoughts.

AMG: Oh, thank you, my pleasure truly, and let us know how your family’s experience in the Museum goes.

DO: My family is inside the Statue of Liberty right now, but they will come to the 9/11 Museum soon.
N.B. To give a fuller idea of the anguish represented by 9/11 and help give context to the literature I was reading, I visited four sites of commemoration and collection in New York City and Washington, D.C., between 2014 and 2015 and studied the ruined artefacts there. This is a sampling of the hundreds of photographs taken with my camera. Uncredited images are those taken by the author.

A3. Fieldwork Photographs from The 9/11 Museum, New York City, June 2014

Image 13: Author at the 9/11 Memorial fountain moments before meeting 9/11 Museum Director Greenwald at her office for an interview. Photographer: Juliana C. Olson.
Image 14: Long lines to see ruins among glistening new buildings in the middle of Lower Manhattan.
Image 15: Inside the vast hollows of what once was underwater foundations of the World Trade Center towers.
Image 16: Ruined NYPD and FDNY vehicles give a sense for the vast weight of ruined material and flame falling onto the streets.
Image 17: The excavated stairs onto Vesey Street that survivors crowded onto to escape the burning towers.

Image 18: Though the FBI Building has suspended tours, its curator has loaned many of its 9/11 objects to other museums, including the Smithsonian, as in the case of these “ghost phones.”
A.5 Fieldwork Photographs from The Newseum, Washington, D.C., October 2014 and June 2015

Image 19: Freelance newsperson Bill Biggart’s bag, coat, and cameras from covering 9/11 in New York City on the morning of disaster from The Newseum, Washington, D.C. Fifteen photographs recovered from his cameras were used in an October 2001 *Newsweek* issue on the disaster. Mr. Biggart was the only journalist killed while covering the attacks.
A.6 Fieldwork Photographs from The Pentagon, Washington, D.C., October 2014 and June 2015

Image 21: Entrance to the Pentagon. Image 22 (below): Four of the 184 benches in memoriam to the 184 lives lost at the Pentagon, all facing the south side of the Pentagon where American Airlines Flight 77 struck the building.
Images 23 and 24: Inside the Pentagon exists a curious mix of spangled, “gung-ho” patriotism and projections of strength (above) alongside bitter heartbreak (below) over what money, military might, and mourning may never bring back.
Recovered children’s clothes that blew out of American Airlines Flight 77 at impact with the Pentagon. All sixty-four people on the aircraft perished, most of them instantly (Pentagon source).