THE OTHER IN THE RECENT AMERICAN AND BRITISH FICTION: TWO CASE STUDIES

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Abstract*: Don DeLillo's* Falling Man*, published in New York in 2007, and Ian McEwan's* Saturday*, published in London in 2005, were both created out of the need to respond to the uneasiness that characterizes the consciousness of twenty-first century citizens who were the witnesses of terrorist events that simply defied representation and understanding within the Western cultural imagination. Set in New York, DeLillo's text presents the American perspective, whereas* Saturday*, set in London, gives shape to the British perspective on the same reality, with the difference between the two being derived from Britain's geographical distance from the actual site of the attacks and its familiarity with terrorist incidents on national soil (IRA) (Cilano 25).*
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America and Britain in the Aftermath of Terror

Terrorism has been commonly identified as one of the key-words of contemporary society. The first decade of the third millennium brought about two terrorist events of extreme significance, i.e. the 9/11 attacks against America (2001) and the 7/7 attacks against Britain (2005).

As expected, the violent intrusion of terrorism in the postmodern individual's life generated a wave of reactions from literature, known for its primary intention of representing reality. In this context, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) was created with the obvious purpose "to examine the psychological trauma experienced by New Yorkers in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11" (Duvall 90). What DeLillo does to great effect in *Falling Man* is to underline the interaction between the physical and the social, material and immaterial dimensions of this 'absolute event' (Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*). His novel reveals the way in which the event is mediated and enacted through narrative and its great impact lies in the fact that it was not intended primarily as a retelling of the 9/11 events (even if its storyline opens on the very day of the attacks, when the shock and terror that are usually associated with this type of event were at their very height). On the other hand, Ian McEwan's *Saturday* revolves around a very small group of individuals living in post 9/11 Britain, but without focusing excessively on the idea of physical violence. McEwan chooses a different approach – he intends to render in a credible manner the consequences terrorist attacks had on the consciousness and routine existence of the survivor.

Don DeLillo must have designed his novel as an exploration of the intersecting narratives of a very few American individuals living in the post 9/11 era, therefore he reconstructs the story through the constant flow of information, data and images that are inseparable from the event. 39-year-old Keith Neudecker walks out of the smoke and debris that had been the North Tower, where he has worked as a corporate lawyer for ten years, to find himself in a New York street covered with dust and glass and holding

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in his hands a briefcase that did not belong to him. When coming out, he thinks to himself:

> "It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night. He was walking north through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads. They had handkerchiefs pressed to their mouths. They had shoes in their hands, a woman with a shoe in each hand, running past him. They ran and fell, some of them, confused and ungainly, with debris coming down around them, and there were people taking shelter under cars." (*Falling Man*, 3).

While getting away from the place of the disaster, Keith cannot escape the actual sound of the buildins' collapse. Having miraculously survived the catastrophe, Keith's first instinct is to depart from the roar of mortality and to return to his wife, Lianne, from whom he has been estranged for a year and half, and to their young son, Justin. He finds himself knocking at their door, entering the house and resuming his family life, but unable to explain *why* he returned; when Lianne openly asks him: "Why did you come here?", Keith answers:

> "It's hard to reconstruct. I don't know how my mind was working. A guy came along in a van, a plumber, I think, and he drove me here. His radio had been stolen and he 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 other tower, or the smoke was. He saw the smoke." (*Falling Man* 21).

Keith's choice of forgetting is mainly founded on his intention of resuming his family life, i.e. continuing to do things just like he would before the plane crashes. Over the following days, Keith searches for the owner of a suitcase he has carried with him from the burning towers, and the owner turns out to be a light-skinned black woman by the name of Florence Givens, who has also survived the disaster. The returning of the suitcase to the right owner marks the beginning of an affair between the two survivors, but the affair has less to do with the clichés of conventional married life than it does with "what they knew together, in the timeless drift of the long spiral down" (*Falling Man,* 137); the closeness between the two is therefore provoked by their witnessing and sharing the same experience, the same narrative in whose remembrance and distance in time they discover a sensation of consolation every time they meet.

Keith's family is alos deeply affected by the terrorist event. Lianne, his wife, is a freelance editor leading a writing group for early-stage Alzheimer's patients at a community centre in East Harlem. In a novel whose main purpose is trying to forget, Lianne's volunteer activity with the Alzheimer patients is literally engaged in the field of learning how to remember. Following the attacks, Lianne finds it hard to let their memory go and develops a kind of hatred for everything that is Mid-Easterner (she gets into a physical conflict with one of her neighbours, who would listen to oriental music in spite of repeated warnings not to). Their son, Justin, undergoes a different sort of forgetting; corrupted by the mass media reports which his parents supposed he had been watching, Justin starts meeting his friends in their bedroom situated on the 27th floor of an apartment building and creating a fictive scenario, in which the towers are not actually destroyed, but in which the terrorist threat still looms in the air. In order to identify it, Justin and his friends constantly scan the skies with Keith's binoculars for more planes, waiting for some kind of a political lightning to strike twice (" (…) they're looking for more planes." "Waiting for it to happen again." (*Falling Man,* 72)), and speak in a monosyllabic code indecipherable to adults. Justin and his friends

"remember" by reconstructing an alternative narrative of events that allows them to reject actual facts and to embrace an alternative reality.

Lianne's mother, Nina Bartos, is a retired art professor who is involved in a relationship with Martin Ridnour, an "art dealer, a collector, an investor perhaps" (*Falling Man*, 42) who challenges Nina to interpret the event and not let herself be dominated by it.

The impression of caesura in the history of a nation, moreover in the history of humanity, is followed by a natural reconstruction of human lives. Several years after the attacks, we find Keith having given up his position and becoming a poker player, with days on row spent in Las Vegas, far away from his family. An extended quote from the novel illustrates how the poker game "enables Keith to compulsively re-enact his accidental survival of September 11, each hand reckoning anew Keith's ability to influence the circumstances that affect him" (Vardalos 171):

> "The cards fell randomly, no assignable cause, but he remained the agent of free choice. Luck, chance, no one knew what these things were. These things were only assumed to affect events. He had a measure of calm, of calculated isolation, and there was a certain logic he might draw on… But the game had structure, guiding principles, sweet and easy interludes of dream logic when the player knows that the card he needs of the card that's sure to fall. Then, always, in the crucial instant ever repeated hand after hand, the choice of yes or no. call or raise, call or fold, the little binary pulse located behind the eyes, the choice that reminds you who you are. It belonged to him, this yes or no" (*Falling Man*, 212).

His growing obsession with poker is to be explained mainly through his belief that it is a "clarifying discipline" (Seed 503) and serves as the means of drifting away from his family.

Though connected at the level of subject matter with the 9/11 attacks, McEwan's *Saturday* does not contain direct representations of the violent acts proper. In fact, as compared to DeLillo's *Falling Man*, the intrusion of terrorist violence and terrorist identity is less poignant in *Saturday*, which revolves around a very small group of individuals living in post 9/11 Britain. The primary intention of McEwan was to follow closely a detailed day in the life of one distinct character, the distinguished neurosurgeon Henry Perowne, but note should be made that the meaning is much larger than the immediate one. The novel is punctuated with symbolic references that are essential when searching for the connections between this particular novel and the phenomenon of terrorist violence. Such a reference is introduced in the title of the novel and punctuated through meaningful reoccurrences throughout the text. To be more specific, the action of the novel is set on one single day (as in James Joyce's *Ulysses* or Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*), which is the first weekend day. However, the Saturday in question is not typical or everyday, but rather "heavy with significance in the capital [London], the centre of the political protest" (Guignery 53); it is 15 February, 2003, the day on which hundreds of thousands would march in the capital of the United Kingdom in protest against the British authorities' decision to support the USA in the 'war on terror'. If *Falling Man* contains interchapters which basically describe the unfolding of the terrorist attacks against America, in *Saturday* the plane crashes are not directly depicted and terrorism has somehow been substituted by the phenomenon of urban violence. However, *Saturday* faithfully reproduces an atmosphere of

psychological distress and trauma, accompanied by the constant fear of experiencing the same kind of shocking experience.

McEwan's novel offers an interesting character study: a respectable man who leads a decent and respectable life. Henry Perowne is a good professional – "he's renowned for his speed, his success rate and his list – he takes over three hundred cases a year" – *Saturday*, 24 –, he is happily married to Rosalind, a corporate lawyer for a newspaper constantly trying "to steer her newspaper away from the courts" (*Saturday*, 29) and the daughter of John Grammaticus, a famous poet; not in the least, he is a proud father – he remarks with satisfaction that "someone has written somewhere that Theo Perowne plays like an angel" (*Saturday*, 26). On a personal level, Perowne's Saturday is close to banality; from the remaining memories of the soon-to-be-closed workweek (it lingers into the weekend) to the usual Saturday routine activities (a squash game, a visit to his mother (who has almost entirely lost her mind)) as well as the errands of this particular day (shopping, cooking, going to hear Theo's band rehearse), McEwan slowly and carefully describes what Perowne does and thinks, and what happens to and around him. His daughter, Daisy, is about to have her first book of poetry published, and is coming home for the first time in six months – the longest she has ever been away. His son, Theo, who abandoned school and has found fulfilment as a blues musician, still lives at home; just like Daisy, he gets along very well with his father. The final guest expected for dinner from France is Rosalind's father, John Grammaticus – the one possibly disruptive presence, a strong personality who put his mark on the personalities of both grandchildren but who has not quite mended a rift with Daisy.

The actual plot of the novel is launched by an accident; Perowne's world is not disturbed by the peace demonstration, but by a particular incident on his way to his weekly squash game with his anaesthetist. Henry is held up at a street junction closed in preparation for the passage of the Anti Iraq War demonstration later that same day. Soon after passing through the junction, his car collides with another, a red BMW, ("a vehicle he associates for no very good reason with criminality, drug dealing" – *Saturday*, 83), causing less damage to his silver S500 Mercedes, but more damage to the red BMW. The two parties involved in the minor crash (Perowne on the one hand, Baxter and two other associates who look and behave like thugs, on the other) have different opinions on how they should settle the incident, and the scene escalates into one of inescapable violence. Aware of his inability to stand a chance if things really turned to physical violence, Perowne uses his expertise to present Baxter with information on his genetic, incurable disease. The man has Huntington's Disease, a cruel, debilitating ailment; Baxter knows that (and knows what awaits him), and when he realises Perowne also knows, he backs off (and has his mates back off too). It is enough for the power balance to incline in Perowne's favour and allow Perowne to escape – though the memory of what happened, and how he acted, haunts him for most of the rest of the day.

The rest of the day is devoted to familial obligations: a visit to his mother (in a suburban nursing home), attendance at Theo's rehearsal at a blues club, and finally preparations for the dinner in honour of Daisy. Once all family is reunited, the celebrations are violently interrupted by Baxter and one of his friends. It seems that Perowne anticipated this new encounter throughout the day, when, at various moments, he thought he saw that same car following him around to his house. And now Baxter was in his house, probably trying to make Perowne pay with a knife at his wife's neck for the humiliation he had provoked to him earlier. The final confrontation between the two men occurs inside the operating theatre, where Perowne is called in to operate on the young man. Having performed the surgery, Perowne comes home and ends his

Saturday meditating on the events set in motion by the car crash earlier that day. He decides to drop the charges against Baxter and even make sure that he receives the proper treatment at the hospital, in spite of his wife's declared hate for the aggressor.

Overall, both *Falling Man* and *Saturday* tell us what happened to American and British individuals after 9/11. On the closest (temporally speaking) level to the events, September 11 was a life-changing experience, and its memory is prolonged into our characters' lives through such minor gestures as being unable to tolerate some Oriental piece of music (as happens to Lianne in *Falling Man*) or the sight of a fire in the sky (as happens to Perowne at the beginning of the day). But, as time goes by, the memory of violence fades. From this point of view, both novels transmit the message that it is possible to face and cope with life "in a political climate that threatens to engender paralysis" (Cilano 36) such is the one installed by the 9/11 attacks on the global scene. The domestic rituals, both at home and at work, are mainly preserved and considered a modality of keeping one's integrity in an altered environment. Lianne Neudecker continues to be a freelance editor, Keith Neudecker decides to resume his family life, with the initiative coming from the subconscious: Keith can never explain why he has come back to his wife, one year and a half after their separation. As the years pass, Justin Neudecker drifts into predictable, conventional teenhood, bearing with him "the deep shadow of his own memories" (*Falling Man*, 218).

Saturday conveys the same message of continuity and recovering from the spiral of both political and personal violence. Two years after the event, Henry Perowne continues to feel at ease in the operating room and rather comforted by the "repetition" (*Saturday*, 40) of domestic rituals, which he performs in a patient and efficient manner. Personally, the main character refuses to consider that the world has fundamentally changed:

> "How foolishly apocalyptic those apprehensions seem by daylight, when the self-evident fact of the streets and the people on them are their own justification, their own insurance. The world has not fundamentally changed. Talk of a hundred-year crisis is indulgence. There are always crises, and Islamic terrorism will settle into place, alongside recent wars, climate change, the politics of international trade, land and fresh water shortages, hunger, poverty and the rest" (*Saturday*, 76-77).

And the city, "grand achievement of the living and all the dead who've ever lived here (…) won't easily allow itself to be destroyed" (*Saturday*, 77). Perowne sees terrorism as part of the picture, and people will have to adapt to its particulars in order to keep on performing their routine activities. Terrorism is not the sole problem of mankind; this conclusion is obvious from a short presentation of Perowne's son reaction to the events. Even if Theo (a 16-year-old blues musician at the time of the attacks) was violently torn apart from this artistic world by the violence of the terrorist attacks ("the September attacks were Theo's induction into international affairs, the moment he accepted that events beyond friends, home and the music scene had bearing on his existence" (*Saturday*, 31)), 18 months after their occurrence he has the capacity to transform what seemed to be an impending catastrophe into a matter of a rather personal nature: when seeing the fire in the sky, the first idea that comes to his mind is a fellow band member who was supposed to travel by plane that night.

How the West Sees the 'Other'

Both *Falling Man* and *Saturday* can be approached from the point of view of the interaction between the Self and the Other: "one cannot be known without the other" (Mihăilă, 2008: 24). The Self/Other relation is accompanied by "the relation of aesthetics and politics" (Duvall 9) which is demonstrated through arguments carried out by a set of both American and British characters. In temporal and moral closeness to the 9/11 plane crashes, the characters from *Falling Man* are more passionate when it comes to debating their cause or the perpetrators' possible motivations and adopt different perspectives on the unfathomable reason and logic of the event as a whole. It should be stated that the American characters from DeLillo's novel feel deliberately flat, under the influence of forces vastly larger and more intricate than they are. The Martin Ridnour / Nina Bartos relationship is particularly employed to illustrate that idea through their introducing the narratives that intersected in the discourses of the day. Nina Bartos organizes her discourse on the attacks on the idea of potentiality and conceives them both as a real event with historical roots (the 1993 WTC explosion) and as a looming menace that is a permanent component of the "dead wars, holy wars': "Nothing is next. There is no next. This was next. Eight years ago they planted a bomb in one of the towers. Nobody said what's next. This was next. The time to be afraid is when there's no reason to be afraid. Too late now" (*Falling Man,* 10). She associates the terrorist event with the *panic* rationale, "It's sheer panic. They attack out of panic." (*Falling Man,* 46) and with the "indiscriminate" (Laqueur, 1999: 14) nature of their killing that, from her point of view, finds no justification in terms of real and attainable political goals: "There are no goals they can hope to achieve. They're not liberating a people or casting out a dictator. Kill the innocent, only that" (*Falling Man,* 46). Here we have an American intellectual who deprives the 9/11 terrorist event of any kind of meaning and finality and conceptualises it as performed solely out of the need to produce harm (obscene *jouissance* –Slavoj Žižek, qtd. in Eagleton, 2005: 3), thus rejecting the "instrumental rationality" that Wieviorka identified as prevailing when it comes to postmodern forms of terrorist violence (Wieviorka, 2007: 95).

Martin, Nina's European lover, on the other hand, believes the reason is fairly straightforward: "One side has the capital, the labour, the technology, the armies, the agencies, the cities, the laws, the police, and the prisons. The other side has a few men willing to die" (*Falling Man,* 47). He explains that they were an attempt to preserve their identity by striking at the heart of the dominant culture: "They strike a blow to this country's dominance. They achieve this, to show how a great power can be vulnerable. A power that interferes, that occupies" (*Falling Man,* 46). Ridnour states his belief that the crashes were the results of the conflict between two cultural patterns, so much different one from the other, in which the technological advancement and sophisticated civilisation of the former (traditionally assimilated to the West) is dangerously counterbalanced by the latter's having a group of individuals (assumed to be the Middle East) willing to die for their community. A man with a mysterious background (DeLillo inserts in the plot hints that lead to his association with a German terrorist figure from earlier decades), Martin Ridnour shares the narrative of 'guilt' that has pervaded the post 9/11 speeches of so many politicians and cultural theorists (take, for instance, the liberal point of view of Noam Chomsky's theory on the decisive role played by America itself and its foreign policy in the actual performing of the event). Nina Bartos opposes the idea and believes that the American nation has nothing to do with the cultural clash between the two worlds and that each nation is responsible for its evolution through history. In front of Ridnour's argument that

> "These are matters of history. This is politics and economics. All the things that shape lives, millions of people, dispossessed, their lives, their consciousness", she angrily replies that "it's not the history of Western interference that pulls down these societies. It's their own history, their mentality. They live in a closed world, of choice, of necessity. They haven't advanced because they haven't wanted to or tried to" (*Falling Man,* 47),

therefore rejecting any kind of Western agency and interference with the disaster.

Nina maintains an emotional distance from the more 'humane' side of the attacks and proposes their pragmatic interpretation through the filter of the religious belief in whose name the terrorists claimed to act and which allows for such violence and blood shedding to take place:

> "(…) we can't forget God. They invoke God constantly. This is their oldest source, their oldest word. Yes, there's something else but it's not history or economics. It's what men feel. It's the thing that happens among men, the blood that happens when an idea begins to travel, whatever's behind it, whatever blind force or blunt force or violent need. How convenient it is to find a system of belief that justifies these feelings and these killings" (*Falling Man,* 112).

When Martin asks her not to deny the hypothesis of the human grievances against the others as the launching factor of "every force of history that places human beings in conflict", Nina replies that, if there really is a 'grievance', than it is of a 'misplaced' nature. The association she operates between the contemporary manifestations of terrorist violence and a "viral infection" (*Falling Man,* 113) that is rapidly spreading and threatening to destroy democracy echoes Baudrillard's approach of the topic: "Terrorism, like virus, is everywhere. Immersed globally, terrorism, like the shadow of any system of domination, is ready everywhere to emerge as a double agent. There is no boundary to define it; it is in the very core of this culture that fights it - and the visible schism (and hatred) that opposes, on a global level, the exploited and the underdeveloped against the Western world, is secretly linked to the internal fracture of the dominant system" (Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*).

The conclusion of the argument between the two characters does not propose a dominant point of view; after all, postmodernity has made us familiar with so many versions of the truth that no one can claim to have reached its absolute form. The argument is rather significant through the comments it formulates on the global dimension of terrorist; in this sense, the former terrorist, Martin Ridnour, states: "But this is not an attack on one country, one or two cities. All of us, we are targets now" (*Falling Man,* 47). The global violence that Ridnour alludes to is both a product and a consequence of globalization (cf. Baudrillard, *The Violence of the Global*).

In *Saturday*, the Self/Other interaction is activated and given further significances by the anti-war demonstration that serves as a background for the story. In concrete and historical terms, the day in question witnessed a coordinated flow of protests in 800 cities around the world against the imminent American invasion of Iraq. London sheltered the biggest demonstration in the city's history, with approximately 750,000 protesters according to police statistics. The novel follows this demonstration and includes some real life details, even though its presence is somehow reduced to television reports or fugitive glimpses to those parts of the street. The first contact that takes place between Perowne and the protest march is (im)mediated by television coverage: "the news comes on as he's grinding the beans. (…) Then a reporter down among an early gathering of demonstrators by the Embankment. All this happiness on display is suspect. Everyone is thrilled to be together out on the streets – people are

hugging themselves, it seems, as well as each other. If they think – and they could be right – that continued torture and summary executions, ethnic cleansing and occasional genocide are preferable to an invasion, they should be sombre in their view" (*Saturday*, 69-70). Later that day, everywhere he turns, the mass of marchers is also a presence – peaceful, yet their enormous size and potential threatening. The plane and the marchers – like the danger in Iraq, both Saddam Hussein's criminal rule and the violent solution that is being considered – are all kept at a distance: the world is close, but does not really intrude: "There, behind him on Gower Street, the march proper has begun. Thousands packed in a single dense column are making for Piccadilly, their banners angled forward heroically, as in a revolutionary poster. From their faces, hands and clothes they emanate the rich colour, almost like warmth, peculiar to compacted humanity. For dramatic effect, they're walking in silence to the funereal beat of the marching drums" (*Saturday*, 84).

The protest favours the demarcation of two types of discourses on the event that was taking place that precise Saturday, February 15th, 2003. Daisy and Henry Perowne have opposing points of view as far as the demonstration and the war on terror itself are concerned. Daisy summarises the political status of the problem by reference to the American presidency's decision to deal with the matter: "You know very well these extremists, the Neo-cons, have taken over America. Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfovitz. Iraq was always their pet project. Nine eleven was their big chance to talk Bush round" (*Saturday*, 190). Daisy's attitude is fuelled by the conviction that, once caught in the spiral of violence, there is little chance to find one's way back; violence generates even more violence, and this is the conclusion she transmits to her father: "And doesn't it ever occur to you that in attacking Iraq we're doing the very thing the New York bombers wanted us to do – lash out, make more enemies in Arab countries and radicalise Islam" (*Saturday*, 191).

Henry does not share his daughter's beliefs and he initially states his opinion that the military intervention in Iraq is a method of defending the contemporary technocratic society: "The genocide and torture, the mass graves, the security apparatus, the criminal totalitarian state – the iPod generation doesn't want to know. Let nothing come between them and their ecstasy clubbing and cheap flights and reality TV. But it will, if we do nothing" (*Saturday*, 191). Radical Islam, Perowne states, hates the Westerners' "freedom" (*Saturday*, 191) and democracy. But things are not as clear-cut as he claims in the fragment above. The truth is that Henry Perowne oscillates between the two conflicting positions activated by the anti-war demonstration. The reason for which he does not join the peace march is not necessarily connected to his supporting the war, but rather with the awareness of the fact that participating in the demonstration would express a more uncomplicated view of events than he actually holds. He looks, with hindsight, at the ideologies of the previous century:

> "Now we think we do see, how do things stand? After the ruinous experiments of the lately deceased century, after so much vile behaviour, so many deaths, a queasy agnosticism has settled around these matters of justice and redistributed wealth. No more big ideas. The world must improve, if at all, by tiny steps. People mostly take an existential view – having to sweep the streets for a living looks like simple bad luck. It's not a visionary age. The streets need to be clean. Let the unlucky enlist" (*Saturday*, 74).

Things are as clear as crystal for an American in the novel, Jay Strauss, who openly welcomes the US initiative to engage in an anti Iraq war: "Iraq is a rotten state, a natural ally of terrorists, bound to cause mischief at some point and maw as well be

taken out now while the US military is feeling perky after Afghanistan. And by taken out, he insists he means liberated and democratised" (*Saturday*, 100). The war is also supported by an Iraqi intellectual, who provides the reader with an insider's knowledge of the matter. Miri Taleb had been subjected to a painful process of 'raping' (cf. Surdulescu 2006) his physical and moral integrity by the Iraqi regime for no known reason, other than his refusal to get involved in the political scene of the day and join the Ba'ath Party. Having survived the trauma and returned to the United Kingdom, Taleb relates what had happened to him in Iraq: "the torture was routine (…) Beatings, electrocution, anal rape, near-drowning, thrashing the soles of the feet. Everyone, from top officials to street sweepers, lived in a state of anxiety, constant fear" (*Saturday*, 64). Violence was nation-wide: "they were mostly very ordinary people, held for not showing a car licence plate, or because they got into an argument with a man who turned out to be a Party official, or because their children were coaxed at school into reporting their parents' unappreciative remarks at the dinner table about Saddam. Or because they refused to join the Party during one of the many recruitment drives. Another common crime was to have a family member accused of deserting from the army" (*Saturday*, 63-64). The remembering of the physical violence he and many others had been subjected to makes him identify the mechanism that held Saddam in power with terror: "You see, it's only terror that holds the nation together, the whole system runs on fear and no one knows how to stop it" (*Saturday*, 64). The coming invasion may have positive consequences from the point of view of an Iraqi living in Britain: "Now the Americans are coming, perhaps for bad reasons. But Saddam and the Ba'athists will go. And then, my doctor friend, I will buy you a meal in a good Iraqi restaurant in London" (*Saturday*, 64).

As a consequence of being caught somewhere in the middle, Perowne is unable to form his own, decisive attitude toward the issue. McEwan tells us that the neurosurgeon "has had ambivalent or confused and shifting ideas about this coming invasion" (*Saturday*, 62), oscillating between moral condemnation of the Iraqis and peaceful resolution of the problem. It is this ambivalent attitude that spiritually paralysed so many individuals in the aftermath of the attacks.

How the 'Other' Sees the West

Each of the three sections of DeLillo's *Falling Man* concludes with a presentation of a terrorist, by the name of Hammad, who is presented during his training to be a terrorist, his growth as a terrorist inside Western culture and his developing radical views against the world that was nurturing him. At first, Hammad is described as an outsider (he has to "fight against being normal," to continually "struggle against himself"), overweight and really not that certain of his devotion to Islam, fond of take-out food and filled with lustful thoughts. He is troubled at the prospect of killing so many innocent people, and he has doubts as regards the righteousness of the cause; it is these doubts that initially humanize him, but there is no room for humane behaviour in the company of Amir, who has gained respect due to his ability to think "clearly, in straight lines, direct and systematic" (*Falling Man*, 175). A conversation with Amir reveals a few solid facts about what seems to be the terrorist philosophy of the group to which the two men belonged:

> "But what about this, Hammad thought. Never mind the man who takes his own life in this situation. What about the lives of others he takes with him?

> He was not eager to bring this up with Amir but did finally, the two of them alone in the house.
>
> What about the others, those who will die?
>
> Amir was impatient. He said they'd talked about such matters in principle when they were in Hamburg, in the mosque and in the flat.
>
> What about the others?
>
> Amir said simply there are no others. The others exist only to the degree that they fulfil the role we have designed for them. This is their function as others. Those who will die have no claim to their lives outside the useful fact of their dying.Hammad was impressed by this. It sounded like philosophy" (*Falling Man*, 176).

DeLillo's terrorist is first presented in Hamburg, Germany, before the September 11 plane crashes and involved in a process of preparation for a supreme event. A "bulky, clumsy" (*Falling Man*, 79) man, Hammad has a history of involvement in the infliction of violence and fighting in the holy war: "He was a rifleman in the Shatt al Arab, fifteen years ago, watching them come across the mudflats, thousands of shouting boys. Some carried rifles, many did not, and the weapons nearly overwhelmed the smaller boys, Kalashnikovs, too heavy to be carried very far. He was a soldier in Saddam's army and they were the martyrs of the Ayatollah, here to fall and die" (*Falling Man*, 77). In Germany, his group is portrayed as "praying in mosques, growing beards", pursuing "technical educations" and speaking about the need to oppose the "corrupt and hypocrite" (*Falling Man*, 79) West.

In the initial stages of the process, his involvement is confined to listening attentively to other young men who gather to discuss political and religious issues. The passive role that he assumes has to do with his incomplete adherence to the ideology of the group; even if there are moments when Hammad feels highly uncertain as to the rightness of their cause, as time passes and the doctrine of necessary action is inculcated to him, the terrorist starts to pay very much attention to the theories of Amir, the vocal leader in Hamburg, who states that "the time is coming, our truth, our shame, and each man becomes the other, and the other still another, and then there is no separation" (*Falling Man*, 80). To the Muslim terrorist and his group, other people aren't other *people*, but they are simply the Other, instruments in the jihadist narrative he has learned by heart, existing, as the fictional replica of Mohammed Atta explains to him, "only to the degree that they fill the role we have designed for them. This is their function as others. Those who will die have no claim to their lives outside the useful fact of their dying" (*Falling Man*, 176).

In the same manner, *Saturday* depicts a society that is traumatised by war: at the beginning of the novel, a plane on fire evokes thoughts of terrorism and reactualises the trauma. This means that, in the post 9/11 Western consciousness, "the plane has become synonymous with looming danger" (Guignery 53) and the metropolises have grown vulnerable to the threat of international terrorism. But, beyond these highly symbolic elements, the British novelist does not make direct reference to actual, physical terrorist violence. There are no concrete instances of terrorist plots or attacks against the Western system of values and dominant ideology; what the novel proposes instead is the idea of *terrorism* as a form of intrusion into the mind and the home of the twenty-first-century individual who is forced to resume his/her existence in the aftermath of a highly traumatic event. The sole moments that could be classified as violent represent a manifestation of the so-called 'urban violence' and intervene in the development of the actions when Baxter is around: while Baxter is a representation of

intruding violence, Perowne is a representation of culture, of civilization and rationality. He is a respected neurosurgeon, he has a decent life, he reads a lot and loves his family. He invests a lot of time in his game of squash, but this particular game, just like the smallest details of his existence, are jeopardised by the feeling of an imminent disaster. Baxter, on the other hand, is a violent young man of "sinister aspect" (Bradford 22) who suffers from Huntington's disease and can be easily identified as an agent of disorder and chaos.

Even though both the physician Perowne and the violent man Baxter are British, in the metaphoric universe of the novel there is an undeniable difference between them: In *Saturday*, this juxtaposition of violence with empathy is highly visible in the encounter between Henry and Baxter: while, on the one hand, Henry is initiated into the practice of empathy, thanks to his profession, Baxter is totally devoted to violent interventions. A thing which does not prevent Henry from trying to help Baxter, when the case occurs.

Unable to formulate firm and clear-cut opinions on the issue of global terrorism, Perowne finds himself forced to confront with a manifestation of violence when Baxter enters his house and holds his entire family hostage, an action that turns him into an agent of urban violence and invites the reader to monitor the behaviour and try to understand the ones who resort to such acts. Managing to get rid of "three stout Banham locks, two black iron bolts, two steel security chains" (*Saturday*, 37), and the alarm system of the house, all of which are useless, Baxter enters the house by holding a knife at Perowne's wife as she gets home from work. According to Cara Cilano, the scene enacts "the uneven power dynamics of class stratification in Britain" (Cilano 40), making an elitist, upper-class intellectual interact in a crisis situation with a lower-class individual suffering from a neurological disease; perhaps it is exactly this elitism the factor that could explain the West's inability to understand global terrorism. It is in this elitism (fuelled by such domestic rituals as driving his pricey Mercedes car, his squash game and the expensive seafood and champagne he is going to serve for dinner) that gives him the sense of control in a highly unstable world threatened by terrorism. But the final pages of the novel demonstrate the fact that his sense of control is very fragile and leads to his being, for the second time along one single day, helpless and unable to act in front of a violent act. He watches Baxter threatening his family, his wife and daughter, and the sight prevents him from fulfilling the ethical imperative of treating the other as a human being, since he finds his own self (of husband and father) is being violated. Violence does not advance because the thug has positive reactions to the hearing of a poem written by Matthew Arnold and read by Daisy – the process could mean that art has preserved its power to alter the consciousness of the individual and brings instances when the two men (Perowne and Baxter) resonate. The scene of the hostage-taking does not end with other victims but the aggressor himself; Perowne and Theo overpower Baxter and push him down the stairs so that he is injured and has to be transported to a hospital. Having escaped the crisis, Perowne finds it hard to preserve any kind of sympathy for Baxter, and initiates the process of *othering* him as a criminal to the degree of starting "to regret the care he routinely gave Baxter after his fall" (*Saturday*, 239). The best response to such a traumatic act seems to be the attempt to continue the evening as if nothing happened; this proves their trial to "survive" their "fear" (*Saturday*, 242), as well as a reconsolidation of their position of elitist power and privilege. Perowne regains control when asked to perform the life-saving surgery on Baxter. The novel ends, concentrically, with the same image of Henry looking out of the window to an airplane crossing the sky of London. But, this time, there seems to be no

problem with the engines and no association with nine eleven is present. However, as the character himself confessed, the attacks changed one's perception of aircrafts, which are never to be perceived as mere jets transporting innocent individuals to their destination.

Conclusion

It can be easily deduced from the considerations above that 21st-century society has been deeply marked by the phenomenon of terrorist violence. What is more important, after the catastrophe has been produced, solutions started to be sought for. And the solution both novels propose to the alternative of terrorist violence is human communion and communication, which would construct in both cases a firmer sense of self and security. Keith Neudecker returns to his family once having survived the attacks, and Henry Perowne feels the need to protect his family in front of violence. By transmitting this kind of message, these two novels "strive to restore hope in the possibility of action and human solidarity, trying to keep alive humanity in each of us" (Mihăilă, 2008: 25).

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